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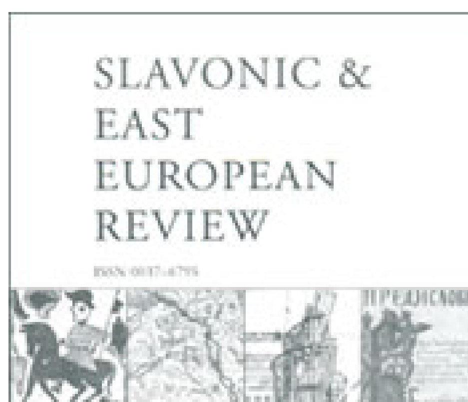

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Bears in the Lion's Den: The Figure of the Russian Revolutionary Emigrant in English Fiction, 1880–1914

JOHN SLATTER

DURING the course of the nineteenth century, the century of revolutions, a succession of political events in continental Europe drove waves of revolutionary exiles to Britain, attracted by Britain's attitude of liberal tolerance and societal equanimity towards foreign residents.[1] French, German, Italian, Polish and Russian refugees[2] came to Britain, turning up on its shores in waves whose timing has everything to do with the vicissitudes of continental politics: the landmark dates are 1821, 1830, 1848, 1871, 1881 and 1878–90, dates which have relatively little resonance in terms of British politics but are the climactic points of that century of mainland European revolutions, be they nationalist, liberal or socialist.[3] Victorian Britain, with its relative political stability and contempt for the opinion of foreign dictators, was an indifferent haven to the oppressed of all countries.

But whereas the Italians, French, Germans and others were able to return home sooner or later, the subjects of the Russian Tsar, that 'jailor of nations', were not easily able to do so until the beginning of the twentieth century. Russians, Poles, Finns and Jews who left the Russian Empire from political motives were not welcome back until the Empire itself ceased to exist. Not, that is, if they wanted to continue their political opposition to tsarism — and it may be as well to remind ourselves that the opponents of tsarism, the so-called 'revolutionaries', came from every area of the political spectrum, from moderate

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[1] See Bernard Porter, *The Refugee Question in Mid-Victorian Politics*, London, 1979.

[2] See Cicely Mackworth, *English Interludes: Mallarmé, Verlaine, Paul Valéry, Valery Larbaud in England 1860–1912*, London, 1974; Rosemary Ashton, *Little Germany*, London, 1982; Margaret Wickes, *Italian Emigrés in England 1816–1848*, Manchester, 1937; John Slatter (ed.), *From The Other Shore*, London, 1984.

[3] As just one distinguished introduction to this subject, see Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolutions*, London, 1962. The dates listed above are, respectively, those of the repression of Italian nationalist revolts, of the suppression of a first Polish nationalist revolt, of the 'Spring of Nations' throughout Europe, of the Paris Commune and the assassination of Alexander II in Russia and of the period of Bismarck's ban on the socialists respectively.

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nationalists and constitutionalist liberals to anarchists and social-democrats. While Russian liberals tended to be in Britain to study the constitutional arrangements here rather than to propagandize their own ideas, the political menu on offer from the other groups included not only varieties of socialism and Marxism, but also anarchism, Tolstoianism and Zionism, and mixtures of these in varying proportions.

The emigrants were above all here to continue the struggle which they had begun in Russia. They selected the term 'emigrants' as a self-description in order to assert this fact. For them it was a *willed* fate, not merely banishment, but the continuation of revolutionary politics by other means. So Russian political emigrants were above all politically active Russians, and their activities were directed in the first instance at other Russians, both those present here and also in other emigrant centres, but also those still engaged in the struggle within Russia. This description did not apply to all of the Russians living in Britain between 1853 and 1917, many of whom were unnaturalized immigrants here in order to make a living denied them in their homeland. The category of Russian political emigrants in Britain at this period also included figures like Plekhanov (the 'father of Russian Marxism'),[4] Vera Zasulich,[5] Iulii Martov,[6] and Lenin.[7] Although all these (from the Russian point of view) major figures were in Britain at various times — often on several occasions — in the period under examination, none stayed long enough to exert any real influence specifically here.

The audience for their menu of ideas, however, extended beyond the relatively small audience of Russians living in Britain: at various times, to varying degrees, the wider British public also took notice of the activities of its Russian guests. Among Gertsen's activities in his first months in London was to attempt to enlist British supporters for his opposition to tsarism,[8] although printing the brochure in Russian was perhaps not the best way to reach a wide audience in Britain. None the less, Gertsen did become known in certain intellectual circles here, writing on Russia in English for Newcastle newspapers owned by the

[4] Samuel Baron, *Plekhanov: The Father of Russian Marxism*, London, 1963.

[5] Wolfgang Geierhos, *Vera Zasulic und die russische revolutionäre Bewegung*, Munich, 1977.

[6] Israel Getzler, *Martov: A Political Biography*, London, 1967.

[7] Robert Service, *Lenin: A Political Biography*, 3 vols, London, 1985–93: see also L. L. Murav'eva and I. I. Sivolap-Kaftanova, *Lenin v Londone*, Moscow, 1981.

[8] *Narodnyi skhod v pamiati perevorota 1848 g. v San Martins Kholl v Londone*, published in London by Gertsen's Free Russian Press in 1855. This leaflet was produced by Gertsen on a press bought with his own very considerable resources: the tsarist government had allowed him to take most of his property, or the proceeds from the sale of it, abroad in 1847. It was not a mistake that they were to repeat. The Free Russian Press continued to produce anti-tsarist propaganda and *samizdat* publications in Russian throughout the 1850s and early 1860s, laying the foundation for that flood of publications which was to be entirely typical of the Russian emigration.

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Radical MP Joseph Cowen.[9] But these writings did not interest the British public as a whole, neither did the issue of tsarism and its opponents. The British in the 1850s were still in their post-Chartist slumbers, a state which would last until the end of the 1870s. Foreigners living in their midst were almost universally regarded as a nuisance which could be tolerated as long as they were quiet and inactive, or could be ignored. So, although Gertsen made a huge impact on Russian opinion from his London exile (even the Winter Palace was said to subscribe to his journals such as *Kolokol* [The Bell], and India paper editions of his publications were smuggled into Russia in very large numbers — a million a year, according to one estimate), none the less his effect on British opinion was negligible. The next wave of emigration, the cohort of the 1870s, was still less concerned than Gertsen had been to make contact with its British hosts. P. L. Lavrov's tiny press managed to turn out two journals and a handful of brochures in Russian while he was here, but made little impact on British public opinion. Britain was still politically asleep, as far as the impact of radical continental ideas was concerned. It was the next generation, the exiles of the 1880s and 1890s, who were to make the decisive breakthrough into affecting British public opinion directly, and they did so in an atmosphere markedly more receptive to radical political ideas of all kinds. The contrast between the turn of the decade and its middle was well noted by Kropotkin:

> The year that I then [in 1881–82] passed in London was one of real exile. For one who held advanced socialist opinions, there was no atmosphere to breathe in. There was no sign of that animated socialist movement which I found so largely developed on my return in 1886 [. . .] The only active and outspoken representatives of the socialist movements were Mr and Mrs Hyndman [. . .] They had held in the autumn of 1881 a small congress, and we used to say jokingly — but it was very nearly true — that Mrs Hyndman had received all the congress in her house [. . .] Chaikovsky was then in London, and, as in years past, we began a socialist propaganda amongst the workers [. . .] We had ridiculously small audiences, seldom consisting of more than a dozen men. Occasionally some grey-bearded Chartist would rise from the audience and tell us that all we were saying had been said forty years before, and was greeted then with enthusiasm by crowds of workers, but that now all was dead, and there was no hope of reviving it.[10]

[9] Monica Partridge, 'Alexander Herzen and the Younger Joseph Cowen MP: Some Unpublished Materials', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 41, 1962, pp. 50–63. Correspondence between P. A. Kropotkin and Cowen can be inspected at the County Records Office in Newcastle.

[10] Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, ed. Colin Ward, London, 1978, pp. 299–300. The Chaikovsky referred to is N. V. Chaikovskii (1850–1927), one of Kropotkin's fellow emigrants involved in the SFRF (see below, note 19, on this organization).

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For over sixty years before the Great War, then, there was a sizeable contingent of Russian intellectuals in Britain, producing a number of ideas and participating in numerous undertakings in the country.[11] But it was not until the second half of this period, when British intellectuals were themselves in a state of political ferment, that the Russian exiles could turn outward from absorption with their own affairs and hope to affect the native population. What was the effect of all of this on the British public? One way of measuring this is to look at some British fiction of this period and examine the presence in it of Russian exiles described in British society, the treatment of those characters and the change in the view taken of Russians over the period as a whole as exhibited there. But fiction is of course not merely a *symptom* of society, as some Marxist critics used to have it: it is also itself a formant of social opinion, sometimes powerfully and directly (as in the famous case of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), most often subtly and indirectly (in this period one could cite the role in advocating political stability and tradition — at a time of radicalism and social discontent — of, for instance, the Sherlock Holmes stories). In addition, fiction writers have sometimes attempted to substantiate their claims to authenticity by extensive research into their subject and, in the case of a subject as removed from everyday experience as Russia and the Russians, British writers have often been careful to do this research too.

Russia was not a subject which British writers had been unwilling to tackle previously, as a bibliography of the subject demonstrates.[12] However, it is clear that the aspects of Russia examined in British fiction before 1880 were of certain strictly limited types. Often these were of the historical fiction category, based on well-known and even stereotyped Russian figures such as Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, all viewed as essentially, and exclusively, oppressive. Other fiction depended on topical references. Any event in Russia allowing the exploitation of the 'prison of nations' theme, again permitting the portrayal of Russians as oppressors, was used. For example, shortly after the Polish rebellion of 1830–31, there was a mini-boom of novels relating to Russian oppression of Polish nationalism. During the 1830s, paralleling Russian writers' interest in the Caucasus, just then being brought finally under Russian control after a guerrilla war lasting decades, British authors too undertook thrillers on the subject. Siberia and its prisons and exiles was another theme attracting many British authors. When we recall the Russophobic

[11] See John Slatter, 'The Russian Émigré Press in London, 1850–1917', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 73, 1995, pp. 716–47.
[12] Anthony G. Cross, *The Russian Theme in English Literature from the Sixteenth Century to 1980*, Oxford (hereafter *The Russian Theme*), 1985.

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campaigns of David Urquhart in the 1830s and 1840s,[13] the origins of this emphasis on Russian inhumanity are clear. But Russians were not seen as cruel and oppressive only to non-Russians in their midst. Many Russians were also victims of Russian oppression, and the serfdom theme became quite popular from the late 1840s onwards. The translation of Turgenev's *Zapiski okhotnika* (Sportsman's Sketches) (published in 1847 and the first work in Russian literature to treat the subject of serfdom, albeit without mentioning the word itself) brought forth a rash of British imitators. Even as distinguished a *littérateur* as Robert Browning paid his tribute to the Russian in *Ivan Ivanovich*,[14] and for once Russians could be seen as victims in addition to being oppressors. The Crimean War, the first and last in Europe in which Britain and Russia found themselves on opposing sides, brought forth a wave of literary battles in which the military events were fought once again from the perspective of the winning side. The wars in which Russia subsequently engaged — the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05, the Great War — also were re-fought on paper, as was the 1905 revolution.

Given that, in the case of Russia, so much of the attention of British fiction writers focused on its being an oppressive state, it is interesting that when they portrayed the principal enemies of the Russian state those authors for a long time scarcely flinched from portraying them as scoundrels equal to their adversaries, the Tsar's functionaries. As the railway porter Perks says in *The Railway Children* (London, 1906), 'You can never be sure with foreigners. My own belief is they're all tarred with the same brush'. The 'nihilists', as they rapidly became known in Britain (the English adopting Turgenev's coinage), were generally portrayed as being as undeserving of sympathy as their victims the Russian ruling caste, the former being simultaneously underhand and effective, the latter repressive and inefficient. There were exceptions to this rule: for example, Algernon Charles Swinburne, who on several occasions fulminated against Russia's rulers in print, praising and encouraging those who might assassinate them,[15] and Oscar Wilde, whose early work, the play *Vera: or, the Nihilists* (1880), took a sympathetic view of the revolutionaries; these views were not typical of British opinion before the 1880s. The general view taken in mid-Victorian Britain, inheriting the Russophobia of the second quarter of

[13] John Howard Gleason, *The Genesis of Russophobia in Great Britain: A Study of the Interaction of Policy and Opinion*, Cambridge, MA, 1950.
[14] One of his *Dramatic Idylls*, London, 1879.
[15] For example, 'The Launch of the Livadia', 'On the Russian Persecution of the Jews', 'Russia: an Ode'. See Swinburne's *Complete Works: Poetical Works*, London, 1925, respectively IV, pp. 314–15, V, p. 120 and VI, pp. 274–77.

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the nineteenth century, was that Russia and the Russians, whichever political side they happened to be on, were equally unpleasant.

This attitude changed radically, to a much less simple and more nuanced one, in the course of the following quarter-century from the late 1880s to the outbreak of the Great War. The change can be registered by one simple fact: between 1880 and 1914, more fictional books were published in Britain with Russia and/or the Russians as a theme than were published in the preceding two hundred years.[16] This was related partly, of course, to the spread of education and literacy in the late nineteenth century, to the increase in leisure time brought about by mature industrialization, and to the resultant boom in reading matter of all sorts: the period was one which saw a great increase in the number of book and newspaper publishers and in the overall number of publications.[17] However, the increase is disproportionate to the mere economic factors involved. From the moment that Stepniak landed in Britain in 1884, he was the object of considerable interest on the part of radical British intellectuals, the future members of the Fabians, ILP, Labour Party and Social Democrats. It was they who put pressure on him to form an organization in Britain to support the Russian revolutionaries in their struggle against tsarism.[18] This first attempt, in 1885, failed through Stepniak's understandable hesitation to commit himself to action in a country which he as yet did not know well. But by 1890 he had established himself in Britain well enough to propose, jointly with N. V. Chaikovskii, F. V. Volkhovskii and P. A. Kropotkin, the setting up of just such an organization under the title 'Society of Friends of Russian Freedom' (SFRF). The Society, by its propaganda and publications,[19] was to wield a great influence over British public opinion for the next quarter-century, as were the individual Russian founders by their lecture tours of Britain and their own works. The society also recruited British members, many of whom were to become acknowledged experts on Russia and to be influential in their own right: the journalist G. H. Perris,[20] the Tolstoian Aylmer Maude, who

[16] *The Russian Theme.*

[17] On this theme, see Stephen Koss's *The Rise And Fall of the Political Press in Britain. Volume I, The Nineteenth Century*, London, 1981 and *Volume 2. The Twentieth Century*, London, 1984.

[18] On this, see John Slatter, 'Stepniak and the Friends of Russia', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 81, 1983, pp. 33–49. Among those British intellectuals were William Morris and a number of future members of the Fabian Society, including Bernard Shaw.

[19] Among these were a monthly magazine, *Free Russia*, and a book containing translations of a number of their articles published under the title *Nihilism as It Is*, London, 1894. On the SFRF, see Barry Hollingsworth, 'The Society of Friends of Russian Freedom: English Liberals and Russian Socialists, 1890–1917', *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, new series, 3, 1970, pp. 45–64, and Ron Grant, 'The Society of Friends of Russian Freedom (1890–1914): A Case Study in Internationalism', *Journal of the Scottish Labour History Society*, November 1970, 3, pp. 3–24.

[20] Author of, *inter alia*, *The Life and Teaching of Leo Tolstoy*, London, 1904, and *Russia in Revolution*, London, 1905.

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had spent his youth in Russia, the prominent Newcastle Liberal, Robert Spence Watson, and numerous others. As can be seen from the membership of the SFRF, between the first unsuccessful attempt to found a society in the 1880s and the successful organization of the 1890s, a far wider swathe of British public opinion was now interested in influencing the struggle for freedom in Russia. Not only radicals, but liberals and even Tories had been swayed by the rhetoric of the Russian refugees. The argument which they frequently put forward was that terrorism and conspiracy were certainly repugnant and not morally justified in Britain where the government was elected, obeyed the laws which it had made and did not act above and beyond them: but in Russia, where the government was not elected and did not obey its own laws but acted above and beyond them, they were the only political choices left open to the people and morally justified by the iniquity of the government. As the Tory W. Earl Hodgson concluded in his account of his *Night with a Nihilist* (the nihilist in question was Stepniak), if he had been born in Russia, he too would be a nihilist![21] The influence of the SFRF Russians extended beyond politics alone: through their British contacts, they ushered in a heightened awareness of Russian culture generally.

The period from 1890 to 1914 saw the greater part of Constance Garnett's mammoth effort to translate the works of classical and contemporary Russian literature into English:[22] the influence and urging behind Constance's work was Stepniak, who fascinated her and with whom she was half in love,[23] and Volkhovskii, who taught her Russian, a language then only rarely studied in British universities.[24] Constance's husband Edward was also instrumental in the discovery of Russia which was going on. A publisher's reader for Fisher Unwin, Heinemann's, Duckworth's and other quality publishing houses in this period, Edward's preference for realistic novels (or those with a realistic surface) and on writers who wrote from experience, led him to champion the works of Russian authors and to make them fashionable.[25] Along with the Russian novel, other Russian arts also began to travel to Britain: Russian plays (with the discovery of Chekhov),[26] opera and ballet (with the *Ballets Russes*' tours abroad from 1907

[21] W. Earl Hodgson, *A Night with a Nihilist*, Cupar (Fife), 1886.

[22] On her, see Richard Garnett, *Constance Garnett: A Heroic Life*, London, 1991.

[23] On this set of relations, see Barry C. Johnson, *Tea and Anarchy!: The Bloomsbury Diary of Olive Garnett 1890–1893*, Birmingham, 1991; and *Olive and Stepniak: The Bloomsbury Diary of Olive Garnett 1893–1895*, ed. Barry C. Johnson, Birmingham, 1993.

[24] The first university department of Russian was established at Liverpool University in 1911 by Bernard Pares.

[25] See George Jefferson, *Edward Garnett: A Life in Literature*, London, 1982, *passim*.

[26] See Stephen Le Fleming, 'Coping with the Outlandish: The English Response to Chekhov's Plays, 1911–1926' in *Chekhov on the British Stage*, ed. Patrick Miles, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 54–64.

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onwards). Not only had Russia become fashionable, however: there was much more informed comment on Russian events in the press[27] and much more contact, including trade and investment, between Britain and Russia than in previous or subsequent periods.

This period also saw the emergence as an intellectual force in Britain of Tolstoianism, that rejection of the world as it is in favour of ideals of pacifism, vegetarianism, self-sufficiency and renunciation of sex, which can best be realized in a small commune. The first seed of organized Tolstoianism in Britain was sown by Tolstoi's literary amanuensis, V. G. Chertkov. Chertkov was, like Kropotkin, of high and wealthy aristocratic social status, all of which he renounced in order to live and work with Tolstoi. After the accession of Nicholas II the Russian Orthodox Church went on an ideological offensive, in effect increasing its persecution of sectarians such as Tolstoians. Chertkov came to Britain in 1897 and set up a Russian Tolstoian colony, first at Purleigh in Essex and then at Christchurch in Hampshire.[28] This colony was visited by English Tolstoians[29] who then set up their own experiments in communal living: the direct descendants of the Chertkov colonies are those at Whiteway, Clousden Hill and elsewhere where those impelled to deny the values of the outside world have been able to construct alternative communities. Intellectually speaking, then, the quarter-century preceding the Great War was a time of greatly increased interest in and knowledge about Russia which it would not be an exaggeration to call 'Russomania'.

Since Russia and Russians were now fashionable, there was of course an even greater incentive than in the early nineteenth century to add a pinch of Russian to any potboiler so as to give it an additional spice. Thus, authors like George Manville Fenn in *Princess Fédor's Pledge* (London, 1891), Edgar Jepson in *The Girl's Head* (London, 1910) and J. A. T. Lloyd in *The Three Destinies* (London, 1912) featured Russian characters for decorative effect in novels which did not essentially need them. Jepson and Manville Fenn were writing mystery stories in the

[27] On this, see W. Harrison, 'Mackenzie Wallace's View of the Russian Revolution of 1905–7', *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, new series, 4, 1971, pp. 73–82 (Donald Mackenzie Wallace was the *Times*' correspondent in Russia for much of the pre-war period); *idem*, 'The British Press and the Russian Revolution of 1905–7', *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, new series, 7, 1974, pp. 75–95; and *idem*, 'British Attitudes to Russia at the Time of the Entente, 1907–14', *Journal of Russian Studies*, 30, 1975, pp. 3–13.

[28] On the first Tolstoian colonies, see Alexander Fodor, *A Quest for a Non-Violent Russia: The Partnership of Leo Tolstoy and Vladimir Chertkov*, London, 1989, especially pp. 71–116; and Michael Holman, 'The Purleigh Colony: Tolstoyan Togetherness in the Late 1890s' in *New Essays on Tolstoy*, ed. Malcolm Jones, Cambridge, 1978, pp. 194–222.

[29] One of the first of these was John Coleman Kenworthy (1863–1948), a British idealist who, from being a follower of Ruskin's anti-industrial ideas, turned in the mid-1890s to the more radical ideas of Tolstoi. In 1894 he founded the first Brotherhood Church, in Croydon, and then the Croydon colony of Tolstoians. The colony had disbanded by the end of the decade.

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popular mode best exploited by Arthur Conan Doyle in the Sherlock Holmes stories: take an apparently insoluble mystery and, after still more mystification, produce the answer. *Princess Fédor's Pledge* poses the mystery of how a diamond can disappear from a locked room with its owner present; Jepson's *The Girl's Head* opens with a baronet receiving a parcel containing a girl's head in the post (which he assumes has been sent to him by the Russian secret police), attempting to solve the mystery of who sent it to him, and witnessing the horrifying sight of a girl with the same head, very much alive, at dead of night in Romney Marshes. Both stories are told in the first person and therefore lack the fascination of Dr Watson's prosaic observation of Conan Doyle's central character; the solution is in both cases hardly very surprising. The Russian political emigrant characters in both are uninteresting and unnecessary, clearly present because a 'modern' story requires this injection of the exotic. Indeed, these two novels clearly need an injection of something or other in any case. It is interesting that Conan Doyle does not seem to have employed Russians in any of the Sherlock Holmes stories, although his fondness for exotic characters induced him to deploy characters from most other countries and climes. Moreover, when Conan Doyle does introduce characters from exotic parts of the world, he has generally done his research and presents them in a manner which is well researched and necessary to the plot.

Lloyd's *The Three Destinies* is a work that aims rather higher than those of Jepson and Manville Fenn. It is the story of Eustace Longwood's emotional development through his involvement with three women whom he meets in the British Museum. One, Katya, is a Russian political emigrant, and Longwood feels immediately that she has:

> brought something new and troubled into his life [. . .] he knew that there were wonderful things in those eyes, if only they would speak to him openly; that the dark face held secrets of beauty, of mystery, of all those dim, vague fantasies against which his father [a rational but irascible ex-soldier] so constantly protested.[30]

The trouble is that Katya then disappears from the narrative until the very last pages, as Longwood experiments with relationships with the other girls. When she re-appears, right at the end, as the solution to Longwood's problems, we have to remind ourselves of who she was in the first place. About the only 'Russian' thing about this novel is its repetitive insistence, in a sub-Dostoevskian manner, on Longwood's 'fate' as the motive force behind the story.

But stories like these three, where the Russian element is a purely decorative one which owes its presence to fashion rather than to

[30] J. A. T. Lloyd, *The Three Destinies*, London, 1912, p. 10.

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necessity, were fortunately in a minority; most authors writing stories involving a Russian political emigrant at this time seem at least to have understood the necessity of making him a central part of the plot and of accommodating the story to him rather than the other way round. As a result, Russian political emigrants featuring in the dozen or so stories discussed in the rest of this article may not be in literarily superior contexts, but they certainly are in contexts where they are more needed, more central to the plot. Moreover, these works deploy the Russian political refugee in certain quite distinct ways, using distinct 'images' of their characters. These images illustrate in important ways the range of attitudes taken to the Russians in Britain, whether as victims of oppression, ideological 'missionaries' or morally ambivalent adventurer-heroes.

The least common image of the Russian revolutionary refugee in British fiction at this time is, strangely, that of the victim. It is to be found in E. Nesbit's *The Railway Children*. The author E. Nesbit, wife of the Fabian Hubert Bland, was a member of the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom. In the course of the story the children find an unknown, unidentifiable foreigner dressed in rags and very ill, unable to speak English and very frightened, on the platform of their local station. They take pity on him, even though the aforementioned Perks is sceptical, call their mother and get her to invite the Russian (for so he turns out to be) to stay at their house until he is well again. Mother and the Russian are able to communicate in French: he is a well-known dissident author who, after much suffering, has escaped from a prison in Siberia to rejoin his wife and children in Western Europe. He is unable to speak much English, however long he stays with them, and therefore remains an undifferentiated, uncomplicated object of pity:

> 'Why, Mother', [says the eldest child], 'how very sorry you seem to be for him!'
>
> Mother didn't answer for a minute. Then she just said 'Yes', and then she seemed to be thinking. The children were quiet.
>
> Presently she said, 'Dears, when you say your prayers, I think you might ask God to show His pity upon all prisoners and captives.'[31]

A more common image of Russian political emigrants in British fiction of this time is of the ideological missionary or *Kulturträger* who comes into the life of some ideologically naïve British citizen, bringing with him *the* set of ideas which will enlighten the life of the benighted Britisher. Naturally, the literary genre which this image best fits is the *Bildungsroman*. Four novels which illustrate this image of the Russian political emigrant are *A Girl among the Anarchists* (London, 1903), by Isabel Meredith; E. L. Voynich's *Olive Latham* (London, 1904); *Belinda*

[31] End of chapter 5, 'Prisoners and Captives', pp. 245–73.

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the Backward (London, 1905), by Salome Hocking, the pseudonym of Margaret Fifield, the wife of the manager of the Tolstoian colony's press; and *From the Stage to the Cross*, begun by Annabel Gray and taken up — and finished — by Jaakoff Prelooker in his journal *The Anglo-Russian* between 1897 and 1902.

Isabel Meredith was, in fact, the pseudonym of the sisters Olivia and Elena Rossetti, the two daughters of William Michael Rossetti. W. M. Rossetti was a Bloomsbury neighbour of the internationalist Garnett family. The Rossetti sisters may be considered as 'insiders' as far as experience of the London Russians is concerned. They had a background of anarchist ideas in their teenage years, having published an anarchist journal, *The Torch*, from their father's respectable Bloomsbury address in the 1890s.[32] (W. M. Rossetti was at the time a long-serving official of the Customs and Excise.) *A Girl among the Anarchists* is told from the viewpoint of Isabel Meredith herself. She is a young girl left alone, in the family house, after her father's death. She becomes interested in politics and, after some experimenting with various ideas, she meets a Russian emigrant, Nekrovich, then living in Chiswick (as Stepniak did), and is invited to a soirée at his house, events which Stepniak was well known for holding on Sunday evenings. The description of this occasion is worth quoting at length for its revelation of first-hand experience and evocation of the atmosphere in the intellectual London circles in which the Rossettis and the London Russians moved:

> The company was always of a very mixed cosmopolitan character — Russian nihilists and exiles, English liberals who sympathised with the Russian constitutional movement, Socialists and Fabians, Anarchists of all nationalities, journalists and literary men whose political views were immaterial, the pseudo-Bohemian who professes interest in 'the queer side of life', all manner of faddists, rising and impecunious musicians and artists — all were made welcome, and all were irresistibly attracted towards the great Russian Nihilist.[33]

She meets there a Count Voratin, 'who had sacrificed wealth and high position and family ties for his principles with less fuss than another rich man would make in giving a donation to a hospital' (p. 34), clearly a reference to P. A. Kropotkin. Another guest is the enigmatic, apparently misogynistic Russian, Kosinski, also an international anarchist who fascinates Isabel Meredith just as, she eventually discovers, she fascinates him. He refuses to give up his cause for her,

[32] See Appendix A, 'The Rossettis and the torch', in *Olive and Stepniak*, ed. Barry C. Johnson.
[33] Isabel Meredith, *A Girl Among the Anarchists*, London, 1903, p. 29.

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and Isabel is gradually drawn into his circle of anarchists who publish from a house in the East End of London a newspaper called *The Bomb* (later the title is changed to *The Tocsin*). She attends anarchist meetings, one of which is to commemorate the victims of an incident in an unnamed London park in which an anarchist is killed by the bomb he is carrying. This event occurred in reality in 1894 in Greenwich Park,[34] and the incident was later used by Joseph Conrad in his 1907 novel *The Secret Agent.* The group is exploited by various peripheral characters, including a lazy 'workman' who dosses down on their premises. The East End house is raided by the police a couple of times, and the second half of the book is enlivened by the appearance of the Communarde, Véra Marcel (a literary disguise for Louise Michel, the Communarde who did indeed spend much time in exile in London after 1871) and some Italian anarchists. Of the British characters, one is a Christian anarchist always ready to turn the other cheek, and one a doctor in a charity hospital in the East End eventually becomes eccentric and adopts vegetarianism and 'rational dress', which seems to involve principally the wearing of sandals. Kosinski remains the central character in the book as far as ideas are concerned, for, although Isabel becomes disillusioned with all the others after a while, it is he who, even at the end, remains her principal reason for staying with the group. However, she has no chance of lasting happiness with him, for he returns to Russia for the cause once again, and Isabel returns home after the second police raid on the anarchists: 'I walked forth into the London street a sadder if a wiser woman'.[35]

In modern times, this novel has been re-interpreted as a feminist story in which Isabel discovers her ability to lead an independent life, without male sponsorship. The main support for this view is the uselessness of most (though not all) of the male characters:[36] even Kosinski, who turns out to be a courageous, wise revolutionary, abandons her for his cause. There is another plot as well though: the discovery by Isabel that she cannot live by politics alone, and that she needs a personal emotional life too. Both these interpretations, however, are to some extent undercut by the fact that Isabel's character is hardly developed in the novel after the first few chapters and it has therefore lost most of its impetus by half way through, and by the nature of the ending which is flat and incomplete. This may leave Isabel sadder and wiser, but not the reader.

[34] For an account of this see John Quail's history of British anarchism, *The Slow Burning Fuse*, London, 1979, pp. 62–69. See also Norman Sherry, *Conrad's Western World*, London, 1971.
[35] Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, London, 1907, p. 302.
[36] See the introduction to a 1992 reprint by the University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln.

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E. L. Voynich's novel *Olive Latham* also shows the benefit of personal experience of the London Russian circles of the 1890s. Ethel Lilian Voynich was the author of several books, probably the best-known of which, in Russia if not in Britain, is *The Gadfly*, the story of an Italian revolutionary of the 1860s. She was the daughter of the mathematician George Boole, and in 1896 married the Pole W. M. Woynicz (the name 'Voynich' is an attempt to approximate the pronunciation of this name in English spelling). W. M. Woynicz was a member of the Free Russian Press Fund (an organization attached to the SFRF which published books and pamphlets in Russian). E. L. Voinich too can therefore be considered an 'insider' as far as the London Russians are concerned. Olive Latham is the daughter of a teacher in a 'ragged school' in an industrial city. Like her idealistic father, Olive early in life accepts the idea of service of those less fortunate than oneself and becomes a nurse in a slum district. Secretly, she becomes engaged to Vladimir Damarov, a Russian nihilist; as she says to explain this term, 'in Russia nowadays it simply means a person who has the wrong opinions'.[37] Damarov has to return to Russia and shortly afterwards Olive receives a message that he is ill: she goes to Russia and finds with him a Pole, Karol Slavinski, the brother of Damarov's former fiancée. All three go to Damarov's country estate, where for the first time, and to her great shock, Olive encounters the conditions of life of the Russian peasantry: poverty, drunkenness, powerlessness and official corruption. She notes that these make life for the poor much worse than in the London slums. But Olive is not personally affected by all this: as Voynich remarks of her, she has the 'pitying, assured aloofness of the practical philanthropist, who has seen all the failures and temptations of mankind, and suffered none of them'.[38] They return to St Petersburg where Damarov is arrested and dies in prison. Olive then returns to Britain a broken woman and is looked after by her family. A year later, Karol Slavinski arrives and is welcomed by Olive, though her family hate him for his association with her breakdown. Although Olive had always criticized Damarov for his advocacy of violence in the pursuit of the revolutionary cause, she now resolves to return to St Petersburg and kill (by stabbing) the police chief who arrested Damarov: Slavinski persuades her not to take the risk, but returns to Russia and kills the man himself. In doing so, Slavinski is wounded and, hearing of this, Olive returns to Russia to look after him. When he is well, they return to Britain already in love. Like the Rossetti sisters' novel, the ending of

[37] E. L. Voynich, *Olive Latham*, London, 1904, p. 31.
[38] Ibid., p. 94.

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Olive Latham is ambiguous: we do not know whether the new couple enter a lasting relationship or whether they decide on some more 'advanced' solution. All we are told is that they now have personal happiness, which is certainly a change from the impersonality of Olive's previous attitude to the world.

Once again, as in *A Girl among the Anarchists*, Voynich's novel *Olive Latham* presents us with a female central character whose life is decisively changed by her encounter with a Russian political emigrant. But for Olive, the decisive lesson she learns from her experience of life and love with a Russian is an emotional one: the ability to care for an individual deeply and personally as well as for a district, or even a class, in an impersonal way. It is worth noting that, although Olive in the end loves a Pole, it is a Russian who teaches her the emotional message on which the book finishes. Where Slavinski is dutiful, Damarov is generous and inspired as well. Olive responds to this, but only after her loss is she able to understand it and to change in the appropriate way. The way in which Slavinski proves himself, by returning to St Petersburg and stabbing the police chief, contains an echo of the life of Stepniak who did exactly that in the 1870s before his final flight to Western Europe. We know that Stepniak, though happily married, fascinated a number of women. Among these were Constance Garnett and her sister-in-law Olive Garnett — is the coincidence of first names with the fictional heroine purely coincidental? — and perhaps the list should include Ethel Lilian Voynich too.

Belinda the Backward: A Romance of Modern Idealism was written by Margaret Fifield, the wife of the manager of the press run by the Russian Tolstoians in Britain between Chertkov's arrival in London in 1897 and his return to Russia in 1907. This, the *Svobodnoe slovo* (Free Word) press, was the most successful in numbers of publications of all the Russian-language presses in Britain, and was associated with the Free Age Press which published Tolstoi's works in English and continued to publish them right up to 1917. The Tolstoians, though essentially a religious group, were classed with the political revolutionaries in that they opposed the tsarist system, tended to take unorthodox religious positions at a time when Orthodoxy was being strenuously promoted as the state religion, and refused to do military service. The novel deals with life on various colonies in England. Following her parents' death, the heroine, Belinda Tremayne, lodges with her uncle and aunt, who run a shop and observe the conventional outward forms of religion. She is revolted by the commercial greed and religious hypocrisy of the couple, whose main concern seems to be to get the most work out of their niece. When it is obvious that she is unhappy, her aunt sends Belinda to a half-sister, who is half-Russian and has a Russian husband exiled for his religious beliefs:

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'He has some queer notions about giving up property and living by the work of his hands, I believe!'
'A la Tolstoy, I suppose'.[39]

Belinda now meets her aunt Vera and her husband Michael Kovalevsky, a couple whom she finds much more congenial than her other relatives. 'Children of a younger civilisation, they had not learned to control their feelings as those of older races. They were more emotional and less self-contained'.[40] The Kovalevskys live in the Tolstoian colony at Seadown House (the real-life equivalent at Christchurch, Hampshire, was called Tuckton House), and for a while Belinda finds it impossible to accept the values of the colony — it is in this period that she receives the nickname which gives the book its title. But eventually she accepts them: as she says, 'The only free people are those who are masters of themselves. The people who have conquered their own passions and desires can be free under any government.'[41] The colony works to publish pamphlets of the works of Tolstoi to be circulated in Russia. Belinda's idyll is disturbed by the arrival of a strangely attractive but mysterious Russian woman, who may be a police spy and upsets Belinda's increasing acceptance of Tolstoian ideals. Belinda attends meetings of various religious groups (the Salvationists, Theosophists and Unitarians) before returning to the Tolstoians with relief. As she says:

> 'In my estimation, the Russians are by nature more gay, more easily moved to mirth than are English people. I think the reason perhaps is that the standard of living with the majority of Russians is not so luxurious as with us, and so being able to do with less creature comforts, life is not so strenuous, and not taken so seriously.'[42]

Belinda then finds that her job of performing English secretarial work for the Russian head of the colony is taken over by a British male, and she is free to join the Strangeways Colony. Here the colonists support themselves by manual work on the land and by menial work shared between them in their houses: 'By freeing ourselves from the shackles of custom and convention, by eating and wearing only what is necessary for health and warmth, we leave ourselves time to cultivate our souls.'[43] A note of realism intrudes at the end when a woman colonist, to the shock of all, leaves her husband for a male colonist. The women decide to set up a colony for women only, a project in which

[39] Margaret Fifield, *Belinda the Backward: A Romance of Modern Idealism*, London, 1905 (hereafter *Belinda the Backward*), p. 19.
[40] Ibid., p. 24.
[41] Ibid., p. 51.
[42] Ibid., p. 97.
[43] Ibid., p. 115.

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Belinda takes enthusiastic part. The novel breaks off somewhat unexpectedly at this point.

Belinda the Backward, although it has its entertaining moments, is as literature much inferior to the other two *Bildungsromane* cited. Its plot is predictable, a mere device to move the heroine from one setting to another, and the characters, Belinda herself included, are walking characteristics rather than lifelike creations. It may be considered as propaganda for Tolstoian ideals. However, the novel also has an interest on the level of Anglo-Russian relations: if we assume that the reflections on 'the Russian soul' (a topic much discussed in this period) are the author's own, then they show a different version from that held to by most authors at this time. Margaret Fifield is prone to view Russians as the 'Latins of the North', that is as happy-go-lucky, lively people quite content to live in poverty because they lack the material benefits taken for granted by Westerners. Most British views of 'the Russian soul'[44] at this period are influenced more by Russian literature, which was being translated systematically by Constance Garnett throughout the quarter-century preceding the Great War, than by personal contact, which tended to be restricted to the intellectual coteries of the capital. This view of 'the Russian soul' is epitomized by Chekhov's Mme Ranevskaia. 'The Russian soul' emphasizes its irrationality and changeability, and its proneness to temperamental extremes — not so much Gogolesque 'laughter through tears' as 'laughter simultaneously with tears', the extreme emotional states following one another with no warning and little intermediate evolution. None the less, there is in Hocking's reflections on the Russian character an internal contradiction between the impulsive emotionalism which she stresses — 'they had not learned to control their feelings', as she puts it — and the control over one's destiny — 'master[y] of one's soul [. . .] conque[st] of their own passions and desires' — which Tolstoianism is said to confer.[45]

Incidentally, only one novel in this period seems to have treated the Russian political emigrant as a teacher figure as such, in spite of the fact that so much of the emigrants' energies seem to have gone into lecturing and 'propagandizing' among the Western public. That novel is *From the Stage and the Cross*, started by Annabel Gray in the journal *The Anglo-Russian*, but taken over after three chapters had appeared, and

[44] On the 'Russian soul' school of thought, see John Slatter, 'Learning from Russia', *Labour History Review*, 61, 1996, 1, pp. 5–29. On Western attitudes to Russia more generally, see Bruno Naarden, *Socialist Europe and Revolutionary Russia*, Cambridge, 1992.
[45] *Belinda the Backward.*

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completed many episodes later, by the editor and publisher of this obscure journal, Jaakoff Prelooker.[46]

This novel opens with two young actresses, Rosalind Montgomery and Maude Carrington, taking a constitutional in the course of which, for amusement, they get in conversation with a Russian sandwichman who turns out to be a Russian-born Scotsman, John M'Gregor, who works for the anti-Tsarist cause and persuades them to drop in on a lecture on Russian prisons, given by a noble Russian emigrant, Count Andrey Vasilievich Serebryanni-Terpigoreff. Count Andrey has escaped from hard labour in Siberia and makes propaganda against the Tsarist government in Britain. This, of course, was exactly what the Russian refugees used to do, Prelooker among them, and the description of Count Andrey's speech, which the two heroines hear spellbound, can therefore lay claim to some authenticity as far as atmosphere goes:

> 'You yourselves, the freest and noblest nation on earth, are hesitating and fearing to raise a loud voice against murderers who try to conceal their crimes under the cover of a law made by themselves, who decimate the noblest element of the population, who tear away sucklings from the breast of their mothers, and brides from the nuptial altar! Are you, too, sons and daughters of England, becoming cowards, not daring to show your sympathy with the victims of a tyrant in a foreign land? Have you ceased to be Britons, to be yourselves?'
>
> Loud cries followed from all parts of the hall:
>
> 'No! No! No! We have been and will be Britons, away with despotism and slavery! Down with tyrants!'.[47]

The girls, previously of a somewhat frivolous and materialistic nature, take up the cause of Russian freedom to the consternation of their friends and relatives. Maude's father visits Count Andrey the following day in order to remonstrate with him and is himself converted to the cause, as indeed are all who come into contact with him (apart, that is, from the fiancés of the girls who resent their conversion to a more serious way of life). One begins to wonder why, since the British are mostly so susceptible to his charm, the Russian authorities seem by contrast to be able to resist it so completely. As Prelooker puts it:

> Count Andrey, no doubt, possessed the divine fire and could not help communicating it to others.[48]

[46] Jaakoff Prelooker (1861–1935) was a Jewish apostate who converted to Christianity and in 1891 emigrated to Britain where he made a comfortable living from lecturing and writing about Russia up to 1914, but also wrote on a variety of other topics — for women's suffrage, against militarism, for internationalism, against anti-semitism. On him, see a chapter in John Slatter's book, 'Jaakoff Prelooker and *The Anglo-Russian*', *From the Other Shore* (note 2), pp. 49–67.

[47] *The Anglo-Russian*, vol. 1, 1898, p. 94.

[48] Ibid., p. 142.

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Eventually Rosalind agrees to go to Russia to help in the work of undermining the Tsarist authorities and makes a great success in Russian society as well as in the more secret services she performs for the cause. Maude's fiancé is so jealous of Count Andrey that he attempts to assassinate him in Green Park, London, though unsuccessfully. Rosalind agrees to take part in the assassination of the head of the Russian secret police, whose very deputy is a nihilist: however, the latter is shot by the Tsar. The nihilists hold a conference, presided over by John M'Gregor, at which they agree to split into 'Revolutionaries' and 'Constitutionalists'. Eventually Rosalind is informed on, arrested and dies in detention. Maude then decides to go to Russia to continue her work. At this point, tired of his tale and wishing to change his cause from the promotion of religious rather than political reform in Russia, Prelooker cuts the story short, only exhorting:

> All Rosalinds and Maudes, [. . .] tired of an aimless and selfish, pleasure-seeking world, and longing for a nobler activity and higher object in life [. . .] Don't ignore the vast field of Russia.[49]

The next issue of *The Anglo-Russian* carried a new serial, *Rabbi Shalom*, which advocated the conversion of Russian Jews to Christianity as Prelooker himself had done.

One frequently used image for portraying Russian political emigrants in British fiction was that of the adventurer-hero, who is not, however, necessarily the central character of the story. Take for instance Oscar Wilde's novella, *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime* (London, 1891): Lord Arthur Savile wishes (for reasons which need not detain us) to murder someone and, having failed using poison, resorts to explosives. What more natural than that he should consult his acquaintance Count Rouvaloff, 'a young Russian of very revolutionary tendencies' living in London and suspected of being a Nihilist, as an expert in the matter? There is an amusing misunderstanding at this point when Rouvaloff assumes that Lord Arthur's need for chemical assistance implies that he has acquired an interest in politics. Lord Arthur's inbred gentlemanly modesty will not allow him to boast or lie, however, and he has to admit, to Rouvaloff's amazement, that he is still not interested in 'social questions' but requires the advice for purely private reasons. For Wilde, Rouvaloff is clearly not a villain: could they exist in his amoral invented world? He is merely an expert in bomb-throwing, an art among many others.

The device — for such it is — of the adventurer-hero is often used to convey a more ambivalent attitude to the central character, sometimes in the absence of real depth in characterization. The adventurer-hero

[49] Ibid., vol. 4, p. 427.

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can have a certain positive character, combining courage with a drive to act in the pursuit of the good. On the lower slopes of literary endeavour, typical positive adventurer-heroes are provided in the work of William Le Queux, *A Secret Service: Strange Tales of a Nihilist* (London, 1896) and the novel *Julian Reval* by Philip Lawrence Oliphant (London, 1907). Le Queux wrote a large number of novels and stories using Russia or Russians in their theme. *A Secret Service* features Russian political emigrants in Britain. Le Queux introduces the book by saying that he has had a previous novel banned by the Russian Government which 'sent one of its emissaries to my house in London to inform me of the fact. This, I believe, is a personal attention received by no other English author!' (p. 7). As if this were not enough to ensure our confidence in his authenticity, he quotes in English, accurately, two documents then only recently made available in English translation: the letter of the *Narodnaia volia* (People's Will) group's Executive Committee to the new Tsar Alexander III following its assassination of his father in 1881, and the manifesto of the *Narodnoe pravo* (People's Right) party. The source of these is an anthology published two years earlier by Russians associated with the SFRF.[50] The story or stories (although the same characters feature in them, the narratives constitute distinct 'adventures') feature one Anton Prehznev [*sic* — the typesetter seems to have had a certain difficulty with the spelling of the transliterated Russian names], a Jew and member of the People's Will party. He has arrived in London after a gruelling escape from Siberia via Japan and Canada to London — the escape has its historical origins in F. V. Volkhovskii's escape in 1890 — and is assigned to murder an informer, a Russian princess, living in that city. Naturally, they fall in love and he confesses his murderous mission to her. Three days later, she is found murdered with her face disfigured. Some days later, Anton is astonished to meet the princess in the street: it turns out that the body discovered by the police was that of her maid who resembled her in build. They agree to leave, separately, for France but, before he can join her there Anton is ordered by his Executive Committee to take dynamite to France and hand it over to someone who will take it on to St Petersburg where it will be used in an attempt on the Tsar's life. Although followed by the British and Russian police, and despite being betrayed by villainous fishermen who agree to take him to France in secret and then try to rob him, Anton arrives in Paris and hands over the dynamite to a woman revolutionary who takes it to Russia but is caught and kills herself. After some further adventures, Anton is

[50] Both may be found in an anthology published in London in 1894 by Stepniak and F. V. Volkhovsky, *Nihilism as It Is*. The *Narodnaia volia* document is at pp. 81–90: the *Narodnoe pravo* one at pp. 118–21. The translation included by Le Queux does not differ from that offered in *Nihilism as It Is*.

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extradited back to Britain on a false charge of having stolen a diamond found on him during a police search. The book continues with stories involving other Russians living in London. From a historical point of view, perhaps the most interesting is 'The Judas-Kiss' which features a Russian socialite who uses her entrée into London society in order to propagandize for Tsarism: the fictional character, Mme Vera Kovalski, is based on Mme Ol′ga Novikova, the so-called 'MP for Russia',[51] who lived in London for a number of years in the 1880s and 1890s, and was a constant thorn in the side of the SFRF Russians by contradicting them in the British press.

Julian Reval is another adventure novel with a Russian living in Britain as its central character. A mysterious Russian, calling himself Julian Reval, arrives in London aboard a ship skippered by Captain Hector McBain. The two strike up a friendship and Reval hands over to McBain a packet of documents for safe keeping. Somehow McBain loses them, without realizing it, and leaves for his next sea voyage. He retrieves them in the nick of time and stops them from being handed over to the Russian government. Reval, meanwhile, has been living in London, befriending an embittered portrait painter, a woman, who falls in love with him. He has also been moving in London circles which, unknown to him, are close to the Russian government. He publishes a bestseller on Russia and becomes a well-known author, but then meets Mme Tchernaya, a socialite who is also a Russian government informer (the real-life original was also Madame Ol′ga Novikova). She recognizes Reval as a member of the Russian royal family, the son of the liberal Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich (in history, Konstantin Nikolaevich was indeed a reform-minded member of the Russian royal family who played a large part in the emancipation of the serfs and other reforms of the 1850s and 1860s). She conspires with the painter to ruin Reval and retrieve the papers from him. Reval starts to feel more and more unwell. McBain tries to rescue him from the women's clutches, but too late: Reval dies, but the papers are safe with McBain. Reval and McBain are a contrasting character study with, no doubt, considerable symbolic significance as far as their 'national characters' are concerned. As Oliphant puts it:

> They appeared to have nothing in common. Julian Reval, fiery, impulsive, unstable, a man of dreams and rash endeavours; Hector McBain, cool-headed and firm of purpose, giving an impression of self-reliance and strength. And yet each confessed to the attraction which the other's personality exercised over him: Julian with unstinted admiration of his friend's good qualities; Hector with grudging reserve.[52]

[51] See the biographical work on her under this title by W. T. Stead, London, 1909.
[52] Philip Lawrence Oliphant, *Julian Reval*, London, 1907, p. 226.

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Along with the positive, virtuous adventurer-hero, we also find in the characterization of the Russian political emigrant in Britain a kind of negative equivalent: the traitor and self-seeker, often a double agent, of which the real history of the Russian revolutionary movement includes many examples. Such anti-heroes can be found in H. S. Merriman's *Young Mistley* (London, 1888), Annabel Gray's *Comrades* (London, 1896), Fred Whishaw's *A Russian Vagabond* (London, 1898) and C. De Lone's *Petrovich's Revenge* (London, 1909).

Comrades, which preceded Mrs Gray's work on *From the Stage to the Cross* by a couple of years, has as its central character a kind of Russian Falstaff, Leon Jowsky. He introduces himself towards the beginning of the novel as 'the Vice-Chairman of the Red Cap Clan Social and Radical Club and at heart a goot, thorough, god-dam, rosbif Englishman',[53] and promptly disavows any ideological motivation:

> 'I've read Marx and Kropotkine, oh yees, but it's all talk, talk, and no do. Dey not perceive de vickedness, de cruelty, de cowardice of human nature — I not like to be ruled by die Anarchists, ah no! dey vould tyrannize vurse dan all die otares ven vunce placed in authority over us'.[54]

Following this we cannot complain that we are short-changed for plot in the novel. Among a plethora of events, which involve characters from the heights of British society and from its depths, we encounter an aristocratic MP who turns out to be a member of the American branch of the Red Cap Clan, Jowsky discovers his long-lost mother, a workman is wrongly convicted for Jowsky's assault on a policeman and everyone discovers that they are related to someone else in the story, usually the least likely candidate. At the end Jowsky, who has been manipulating everyone high and low, leaves and the story ends: it seems indeed the only way to call a halt to this chaotic plot. The author does not seem to have much time for Russians: Jowsky is described at one point as 'a trained spy, nothing — not a sound escaped him; he had all the fine, highly-strung sensibilities of a keen, intellectual Russian — wily, false, unscrupulous.[55]. Although Jowsky is very much at the centre of the novel, Annabel Gray's attitude towards him seems strangely ambivalent: sometimes she condemns him outright, as in this instance; at other times he is clearly used all out for comic effect. Caricature is present all the time, and Gray's ambiguity enriches the portrayal of the character, yet diminishes the novel overall since in the attempt to convey that ambiguity the plot becomes incomprehensible.

H. S. Merriman's *Young Mistley* has as its author one of the leading boys' adventure story writers of his period, and the work is his earliest

[53] Annabel Gray, *Comrades*, London, 1896, p. 63.
[54] Ibid., p. 72.
[55] Ibid., p. 116.

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to be listed in the British Library catalogue. The novel takes place against the background of the so-called 'Great Game', that is, the Anglo-Russian rivalry for influence in the East, in particular over the Indian sub-continent via Afghanistan. Young Mistley returns from India to a nation grateful for his expertise in saving India from the Russians for Britain. Unfortunately, young Merriman seems to have got his Russian politics a little mixed up, for the villainous Russians who soon turn up, living in Lewisham and waiting to assassinate him for the Russian government, are Nihilists. The plot sends all to the north-east of England, Merriman's native haunts. The female terrorist shoots at him while out on the fells, then falls over, and Mistley being a total gentleman helps her to her feet. He is then sent by his government to Russia (!), where apparently his Russian is good enough to enable him to pass himself off as a hat-seller. After many adventures, young Mistley is left for dead at Bokhara in Russian Central Asia. He turns up in England again after some months, though, and marries his boss's daughter. We get little insight into the Russian political emigrant in this novel, unfortunately, for Merriman's only aim is to show us what a splendid chap young Mistley is (we knew it from the beginning anyway, or were told so); the basic political mistake of having its enemies work on behalf of the Russian government makes it impossible to suspend disbelief or raise interest.

The Anglo-Russian Fred Whishaw (born and raised in St Petersburg of an English family) produced a great number of novels featuring Russian characters and background, but *A Russian Vagabond* seems to be the only one which involves Russian 'politicals' in Britain. The Russian background of the hero, Paul Orloff, is traced with some care — Whishaw's upbringing in Russia enables him to do this — as he enters the Academy of Cadets in St Petersburg, is expelled, wins a lottery prize, in celebrating drunkenly tells scurrilous anecdotes about the Tsar and Royal Family and is expelled from Russia. He arrives in London destitute, lives among Russian and Polish emigrants — 'dregs of the societies of most of the capitals of Europe',[56] we are told — and meets an attractive girl who tries to recruit him as a police spy for the Russian government. He refuses, she returns to Russia and is replaced by another woman spy who tells him that he is the spitting image of the Chief of Secret Police. Orloff is persuaded to return to Russia, where he has various adventures which involve him impersonating the Chief of Police, whose illegitimate son he discovers himself to be. Eventually things get too hot for Orloff and he leaves for Britain finally, never to return. Whishaw is clearly no friend of the Russian political emigrants in Britain and his portrayal of them lacks conviction: it is not a milieu

[56] Fred Whishaw, *A Russian Vagabond*, London, 1909, p. 27.

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he knows personally, and his strength comes rather from the portrayal of Russia, which he knows much better. The action in this novel, which is intense for most of its length, drives it along and persuades us, at least temporarily, to accept much that is improbable or dubious. As an example, at the end of the book Orloff returns to Britain to his love, a girl called Nona whom he has known for some time (she was the female agent who tried to recruit him): yet in Russia he made the discovery that Nona is his half-sister.

C. De Lone's *Petrovich's Revenge: An Awful Experience*,[57] has the unique interest in this company of featuring as its central character an English workman dissatisfied with his job and his station in life. Henry Bolton attends an anarchist meeting addressed by the Russian aristocrat Petrovich and meets him afterwards. Although Bolton admires Petrovich's ideas, he and the Russian hate one another personally, and Bolton takes a fancy to Petrovich's girlfriend. Bolton goes to work for Petrovich in Paris, managing an anarchist press. Here he has the opportunity to get to know Petrovich better. The Russian talks of liberty and equality, yet runs his political group like a dictatorship and exploits those, like Bolton, whom it employs worse than capitalists. After a fight with the French police, Bolton escapes back to Britain. A rival anarchist informs to a policeman about Petrovich, who thinks the informant was Henry Bolton. He has Bolton 'arrested', 'tried' and 'condemned' before a party court and punished by being placed in a locked room with a bomb ticking away. He is saved by a French comrade, who later finds him stabbed. Knowing who has done this, the French girl finds Petrovich and takes her revenge on him with a bomb, being blown up herself in the incident.

Petrovich is clearly, of all the Russian 'politicals' and anti-heroes discussed here, the most monstrous and villainous. We are told this at the outset by the author, and events in the novel only bear out this statement. Petrovich is cold, ruthless, selfish, exploitative, hypocritical and so on. In his appearance — he is fat and repulsive — and in his fondness for plotting and secrecy, there is something of Mikhail Bakunin in him. The element lacking in Petrovich which Bakunin had in abundance is charm: charm explains how Bakunin was able to form group after group based on conspiracy, and not run out of followers. Petrovich lacks it entirely — his monstrosity is unalloyed — and ultimately his characterization suffers from it.

Perhaps, though, De Lone's inspiration came, not from a historical source but from a fictional one. Just two years before the publication of *Petrovich's Revenge*, a novel came out which is far and away the best of

[57] Could this be a Russian name? It is very much like the Russian transliteration of Delaunay. However, this is the only entry under this name in the British Library catalogue.

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those dealing with the Russian political emigrant in Britain at this period. It is Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. Conrad's book is superior to the others for a variety of literary reasons, but I will suggest here one which is non-literary: that he knew intimately both the Eastern world from which his characters came, and the Western world in which they landed up. He based the plot on the Greenwich Park explosion of 1894, in which a French anarchist was blown up unintentionally while carrying a bomb through the London park. However, this accidental event is given a much more sinister tinge in *The Secret Agent*, where the instigation for the action is provided by the minister of a foreign embassy, a mysterious Mr Vladimir; the person blown up is a mentally retarded and innocent youth related to a minor conspirator; and the revolutionaries are shown as essentially and inescapably morally defective. To be quite fair, it should also be pointed out that Conrad portrays the authorities as moral defectives too; both the London embassies and the Metropolitan Police are shown as conspiring amorally against the revolutionaries and even against one another in a kind of suppressed underground chess game.

However, it is Conrad's attitude to the emigrants, who are both the dupes of Vladimir's plot and the cause of the innocent death which stems from it, which is of interest here. He was certainly not sympathetic to the characters of the revolutionaries whom he describes in this book, any more than he was sympathetic to the Russian student revolutionaries in Switzerland of *Under Western Eyes*. Neither was he sympathetic to the ideas of the emigrants in *The Secret Agent*, as the dialogues between them clearly show: Michaelis, the 'ticket-of-leave apostle', resembles Peter Kropotkin in that he puts forward ideas of a somewhat historically deterministic nature, lives in a country cottage in Kent and is writing an autobiography called *Autobiography of a Prisoner*;[58] Karl Yundt is clearly a follower of Mikhail Bakunin in his insistence on the need for imminent popular revolt; while Alexander Oppidon, who is both a womanizer and an inveterate and ideologically motivated conspiratorialist, perhaps fits best P. N. Tkachev, the Russian Jacobin, as his biographer called him.[59] What with Michaelis's historical determinism, Yundt's fervent support of instant revolution and Oppidon's addiction to secret, authoritarian parties, the plotters are a disparate group indeed. The likelihood of such a contrasted trio forming a group and cohering together, or even having a calm conversation as they are shown having in chapter 3, would be extremely low in terms of historical reality. On the contrary, the historical record shows these

[58] This work is clearly a conflation of Kropotkin's *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, London, 1899 and his *In Russian and French Prisons*, London, 1887.
[59] Deborah Hardy, *P. N. Tkachev: The Critic as Jacobin*, Seattle, 1997.

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tendencies within Russian socialism as being openly opposed to each other.

What Conrad demonstrates is a truth not at the historical level, but at the psychological level. He shows the contrast between, on the one hand, the sleazy, tattered world which the revolutionaries inhabit in their emigration (this is certainly historically true since the Russian emigrants, Kropotkin and Stepniak apart, were unable to do more than scratch a poor living in Britain) and, on the other hand, the exalted ideas in which they trade. He also shows a second psychological contrast, that between the ideas which the emigrants profess, in the name of which they conspire against authority, and the result of their machinations, the death of an innocent boy. They talk of a new life and of how to bring it about: they cannot even prevent the death which results from their acts. This may not be an objective historical truth of the Russian political emigration: we should not forget Conrad's enmity, as a Pole, to Russians in general, nor should we ignore his enmity, as a conservative, to revolutionaries with their 'half-crazy pose as of a brazen cheat exploiting the poignant miseries and passionate credulities of a mankind always so tragically eager for self-destruction', as he says in his preface to the novel (p. 8, Penguin edition, Harmondsworth, 1979). But the contrast between highflown, passionately expressed ideals and a compromised, dirty reality is a psychological truth about many political movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and Conrad is one of the first to note it, the first possibly to make it the centre of a novel. Certainly, as the comparison with other works dealing with the Russian pre-1917 political emigration in Britain shows, Conrad's work in confronting and incarnating this idea reaches a uniquely other, more profound level beyond the ideals and the dirt.

For British fiction writers around the turn of the nineteenth century, fashionable Russomania enabled them to add a pinch of Russian to any potboiler and increase its prospects of success through this ingredient of the exotic. However, the ready availability of live examples of Russian political emigrants in literary London, if not elsewhere in British society, gave inspiration to more thoughtful and talented British fiction writers too. The images of the Russian 'political' in British social contexts which they left in their work differ greatly and reflect different aspects of Anglo-Russian relations. The *fin-de-siècle* British sought a variety of solaces and solutions in their Russian guests. Russian political refugees in Britain were seen as the passive victims of a horrible tyranny; as ideological missionaries or *Kulturträger*; as adventurer-heroes, Indiana Ivanovs; and as a kind of negative mirror-image of the adventurer-hero, the traitor and self-seeker, often a double agent. All these images are conveyed with greater or lesser skill by more or less knowledgeable authors: knowledge and experience of Russian

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life, both in the Empire and in emigration, are major factors determining the success of the portrayals of the Russians and hence, frequently, of the stories. At their best, they enable British authors, or authors like Joseph Conrad writing within that tradition, to write of and embody political and other ideas with a directness and realism unachievable elsewhere in Victorian society, where politics and religion were among the unmentionables. In those senses, the real-life Russian political exiles acted as ideological missionaries for many a member of the British intelligentsia, bringing them a new frankness in discussing political and religious ideas. In a British society where intellectuals' unease at the status quo was widespread, Russian political midwives helped at the birth of many new movements and facilitated the expression of new ideas. For this alone, their position in British fiction in the quarter-century before the Great War was well deserved.

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