

**Unwrapping the Enigma: Russia in the Works of  
Wyndham Lewis, T.S. Eliot, and D.H. Lawrence, 1912-1939**

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### Abstract

In the history of intercultural relationships, no country has exercised so great an influence on the English geographical imagination as Russia. From its humble beginnings as the kingdom of Muscovy, to the sprawling expanse of the U.S.S.R., Winston Churchill's famous "riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma" both captivated and repulsed English audiences. Cartographically split between Europe and Asia, the ambiguous nature of Russian culture not only undermined absolute "Orientalist" binaries separating East from West, but also contributed, through the epoch-making *fin de siècle* influx of Slavic aesthetic forms, to the birth of English modernism. The idea of "Russianess," for pre-war audiences, proved crucial to unsettling received notions of art, ideology, and identity. This destabilizing effect is especially evident in the work of Wyndham Lewis, T.S. Eliot, and D.H. Lawrence. Despite having largely been dismissed as "reactionary" and "xenophobic" in their political stances, the complex and variegated way in which each author engages with Russia, as this study demonstrates, suggests an underlying ambivalence in their writing. Rather than reflecting a geographic reality, Slavic society, in their hands, appears as a collective fantasy, an external manifestation of their own internal doubts, anxieties, and pre-occupations concerning "Englishness," which serves to elucidate the conflicted and uncertain politics of twentieth-century *avant-garde* art.

### **Introduction: 1912 Overture**

*“Rus, whither art thou racing? Give an answer. She gives no answer.”*

Nikolai Gogol, *Dead Souls*.

While some social phenomenon can take years or even decades to gestate and come to fruition, Russian culture arrived on English shores with a distinctive roar. “On or about December 1910,” as Virginia Woolf famously asserted, “human nature changed” (“Character in Fiction” 38). This epoch making shift in religion, politics, and literature – now known as the birth of European modernism – was a result of radical new approaches to art and society, including the translation of Sigmund Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams*, Henri Bergson’s public lecture series on the concept of “Duree,” and Roger Fry’s infamous first Post-Impressionist exhibition. But it was also, to a greater or lesser extent, a product of English interest in the idea of “Russianness.”

Following the widely influential 1907 Anglo-Russian accord, which ended decades of Middle-Eastern imperial competition in the “Great Game” and paved the way for military alliance in the impending “Great War,” English society was gripped by a wave of what has variously been termed “Russomania,” “Russian fever,” and the “Russian Craze.”<sup>1</sup> A passion for all things Slavic, as Somerset Maugham retrospectively noted, “seized upon Europe with the virulence of an epidemic of influenza”: “everyone was reading the Russian novelists, the Russian dancers captivated the civilized world, and the Russian composers set shivering the sensibility of persons who were beginning to want a change from Wagner” (265). Almost overnight, “the Russian” became in vogue. Exotic, Slavic themed parties, held by socialites such as Edith Sitwell, began to spring up all over London; Katherine Mansfield, following popular fashion, took to alternating between the

Russianized monikers “Boris Pestrovsky” and “Yekaterina” in her publications and letters to friends; Sir Bernard Pares, renowned English historian and academic, famously instituted the first English “School of Slavonic Studies” at the University of Liverpool; while Lady Ottoline Morrell, in perhaps the most extravagant gesture of devotion, was frequently observed wandering around her estate at Garsington wearing a full peasant kaftan, replete with red boots and an Astrakhan fez. The Russian bear, it seemed, had become well and truly ensconced within the English lion’s den.

Although complex and multifarious, the causes behind this sudden whirlwind romance with Russia culture were, at least partly, bound up in a widespread belief that the edifice of Victorian liberalism was collapsing. Overburdened by the weight of corpses littering the poppy fields of Flanders and Ypres, an entire generation had, as Woolf put it, become “sharply cut off” from their predecessors, and now sought new models of living untouched by the horrors of modern industrialism. Within this context, a general fascination arose in English society with the heroic barbarism of primitive cultures – evident in Ezra Pound’s cheerful theft of the phrase “Make it New!” from the side of an ancient Chinese emperor’s bath tub – of which Russia became the example *par excellence*.

Far from appearing in its traditional guise as an international “bugbear of nations,” Russia now represented a liberating *élan vital*, capable of setting society free from the shackles of Edwardian cultural decay.<sup>2</sup> Socially, economically, and geographically close enough to be accessible, yet distant and exotic enough to seem alien, Russia became an important touchstone in modernist enthusiasms over the cultural “other.” At the second post-Impressionist exhibition, for instance, English audiences were overawed by the “religious and fantastical spirit,” “mystical passions,” and “emotional feeling of the prehistoric Slavonic Pagans,” apparent in the folk-styled ikon painting of Russian artists such as Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova (Von Anrep 357-358). Meanwhile, Sergei Diaghilev’s “Ballets Russes” theatre company – led by impresarios such as Fyodor

Chaliapin and Vaslav Nijinsky – performed to sold-out London audiences, enthralled by the productions’ archaic elegance and “rich décor, so bold and at times so bizarre, the triumphs of its strangeness and its beauty, the unfamiliar rhythms of its musical contributions” (Swinerton 283). Many English men and women, in fact, were so besotted with this vision of Russian atavism that they even joined Slavic-inspired religious communities, such as J.C. Kenworthy’s Tolstoyan village founded at Purleigh in Essex, and George Gurdjieff’s Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man, set up near Fontainebleau on the outskirts of Paris. Russian culture, as Rupert Brooke put it, seemed for a time the one force that could “redeem our civilization” (75).

Perhaps the single most important Russian contribution to the development of English modernism, however, was in the field of literature. Beginning with the first mid-nineteenth-century renditions of Gogol and Lermontov, by the end of the Jazz age a tiny coterie of dedicated amateurs and professionals had translated almost the entire oeuvre of classic Slavic letters into English.<sup>3</sup> Like their visual and kinetic counterparts, Russia authors, although stylistically varied, were almost universally received as an artistic breath of fresh air. For instance, while Turgenev, the consummate artistic craftsman, struck Henry James as “a spirit so human that we almost wonder at his control of his matter” (52), Tolstoy, temperamentally his diametric opposite, nevertheless appeared, in his expansive and uplifting prose, to Havelock Ellis as a “colossal and eternal child, the symbol of Russia herself” (Bulgakova 215). Whereas Chekhov, a perennial favourite of the English stage, seemed in Arnold Bennett’s eyes to “have achieved a perfect realism” through his delicate understatement and careful economy (Phelps 190), Dostoevsky, the “enfant terrible” of Russian art, also impressed John Middleton Murry with his “vision of the timeless world made apparent in that which is time,” to the extent that the Englishman described Constance Garnett’s 1912 publication of *The Brothers Karamazov* as one of the “most epoch-making translations of the past, one to be compared with North's Plutarch”

(Jefferson 166). If contemporary European art was, as Mansfield declared, a “sick person,” then Russian literature was “something of what that sick person need[ed] to be well again” (341).

This cross-cultural exchange was not a one way street, however, but rather a dialogic love affair, in which English authors both sent and received Russian missives. Between Joseph Conrad’s alienated portrait of the conflicted Russian Student Razumov in *Under Western Eyes* (1911), and Stephen Spender’s horrific vision in *The Trial Judge* (1938) of communist “Soldiers marching towards the boundaries, / Our men's faces in uniforms all one face,” while “aerial vultures fly / Over the deserts which were cities” crying “Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill!” (115), the course of English modernism was indelibly printed with the stamp of Russian cultural enthusiasm. It was impossible, as Woolf put it, to read *Crime and Punishment* and still “believe in ‘characters’ as the Victorians had painted them” (34). A taste for the exoticism of Slavic art itself became important to modernist identity formations, functioning as a marker difference from stolid nineteenth-century realism. Although overstating the case somewhat, D.S. Mirsky perhaps summed up the situation best when he observed that Russia had “wakened the intellectual class to consciousness and provided it with a name” (1935: 8-9).<sup>4</sup>

The honeymoon period was not to last, however. Despite a war time surge in patriotic feeling for their Slavic allies – which led *The Times* to publish an open letter in December 1914, signed by thirty-four English writers, proclaiming to “our colleagues in Russia” what an “inspiration Englishmen of the last two generations have found in your literature” (10) – the era of intense Anglo-Russian infatuation soon came to an end. Its death knell rang to the sound of Bolshevik gunshots in the Winter Palace. Hugh Walpole succinctly captured the English change of heart: “For more than three years we had been pretending that a week's sentiment and a hurriedly proclaimed idealism could bridge a separation which centuries of magic and blood and bones had gone to build ... we tricked

ourselves and in the space of a night our trick was exposed” (361). Nevertheless, not only did English attitudes remain ambiguous, but in many ways, though for very different reasons, post-revolutionary Russia was just as important to the English intellectual elite as its pre-revolutionary counterpart. Although many on the political right, such as English diplomat Owen O’Malley, sought to vilify the newly formed communist state as a “spiritual gas-chamber, a sinister, unnatural and unholy place” (Neilson 36), others on the left, including Bertrand Russell, could not help, in spite of their reservations, describing the advent of the U.S.S.R. as “one of the great heroic events of the world’s history,” one which had done “more to change daily life and the structure of society” than any other political event before it (9).

With time, this division over the nature of Soviet Russia only deepened. “The sons and daughters of the European bourgeoisie,” as Arthur Koestler put it, in an attempt to “escape from the collapsing world of their parents,” were increasingly becoming “rebels of the left and right: Fascists and Communists” (319). Bolshevism was soon the ideological point around which the inter-war period developed its unique political and artistic schisms. Conservative authors, such as Pound, staked out their positions by decrying Russia as an uncivilized nation with only “a few cultivated persons perched near its apex” (158) – just as Yeats, writing to similar effect, had painted an apocalyptic portrait of the Bolshevik revolution when he famously announced that “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, / The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere / The ceremony of innocence is drowned” (158).<sup>5</sup> Liberal and communist-leaning writers, by contrast, often sought to defend the new emperors of Moscow. George Bernard Shaw, for instance, pointed out that the Soviet practice of “weeding the garden,” as he euphemistically termed Stalinist political repression, was in reality no worse than imperialist attempts to “sacrifice and kill soldiers by the million under various pretexts, mostly hypocritical” (73). Even on the left though, many remained ambivalent. Aldous

Huxley, for one, famously expressed doubts as to whether he was writing a “satire, a prophecy, or a blue print,” when parodying the U.S.S.R. in *Brave New World* (1931).<sup>6</sup>

While for many the “Bolshevik experiment” appeared as a genuinely utopian ideal rising from the ashes of a failed modernity, for others it remained an eternal mystery.

It was into this fascinated, yet fundamentally divided, environment of Anglo-Russian interaction that Wyndham Lewis, T.S. Eliot, and D.H. Lawrence first critically emerged. Like many of their generation, each author was deeply, though not unproblematically, influenced by the post-fin-de-siècle influx of Slavic civilization. Eliot, for example, saw in the Russian ballet a “simplification of current life into something rich and strange,” which, he hoped, would allow contemporary theatre to avoid degenerating into a populist ““super-cinema”” (“London Letter, July 1921” 184). Lawrence, moreover, declared that, in the philosopher V.V. Rozanov, he had found, for the first time, a thinker who had “more or less recovered the genuine pagan vision” of life he so admired (*Phoenix* 367). Lewis, meanwhile, in addition to the frequently noted artistic similarities between his own Vorticist movement and the Russian Futurism of Vladimir Mayakovsky and Vasily Kamensky,<sup>7</sup> argued that “by scrutinizing contemporary Russia ... we today can see where we shall be some years hence” (*The Art of Being Ruled* 89).

In spite of their clear attraction however, the political positions of Lewis, Eliot, and Lawrence also placed them at the centre of post-revolutionary divisions concerning Russia. Jointly designated “reactionary modernists,” each author has been accused, either during their careers or since, of espousing precisely the kind of illiberal and ethnocentric ideals most closely associated with conservative anti-communism. Frederic Jameson, for instance, argues that Lewis’s writing is filled with “the most extreme restatements of grotesque traditional myths and attitudes” (4), while Anthony Lane, in his *New Yorker* article “Writing Wrongs,” similarly asserts that the “coolness and distance” of Eliot’s verse is merely a “front for emotional torment and the hiss of racial spite” (Dean 43). Allen

Guttman has even suggested that Lawrence's fiction contains numerous elements consistent with fascist ideology, including "the rejection of individual liberty in favour of 'organic' liberty within the established institutions of the state," "the repudiation of political equality in favour of an elite and a hierarchical order of rulers and ruled," and lastly "a concentration upon fraternity – *Das Volk, Hispanidad*, etc. – as the basis of *national* life" (152).

In truth, neither label – modernist radical or mordant retrogressive – fully encapsulates the depth and complexity of each author's interaction with Russia. Their attitudes, as this study aims to demonstrate, eschew the conventional and binarized love-hate logic so frequently applied to discussions of "Slavicness," instead treading a middle path comprised of equal parts admiration and abhorrence. Yet if the idiosyncratic *content* expressed by Lewis, Eliot, and Lawrence often defies unidirectional accounts of their political and racial doctrines, the underlying *language* they use, by contrast, draws from a pre-existing body of expectations, preconceptions, and impressions concerning the idea of Slavic identity.

Consequently, this investigation will begin by analysing the interpretative strategies and inherited strands – ranging from medieval interaction with the Kievan Rus to modern enmity towards Marxist-Leninism – which became interwoven to produce the rich tapestry of beliefs underlying "reactionary modernist" accounts of Russia. On the most general level, this analysis will proceed in terms of what Manfred Beller and Joseph Leersen have termed "Imagology": the systematic attempt to "demythologize" the way in which one culture represents another by studying "explicit statements about a foreign individual, group, or topographical object," "pictures or literary texts," "generalizations, transfer-by-analogy," and, most importantly, the "attribution of characteristics, convictions, and ideas, expressed through an *image*" (13). More specifically however, the broad history of Anglo-Russian discursive relations, which both delimited and also structured modern

representations of Slavdom, will also be considered through the lens of Edward Said's theorization concerning "Orientalist" East/West opposition. In this framework, Russia – which up until the pre-war *entente* triple alliance was alternately described as "*l'Europe orientale* (Eastern Europe) and *l'Orient europeen* (the European Orient)" in French scholarship<sup>8</sup> – can be seen to have been demarcated through tropes drawn from a geographical and ethnically "Eastern" typology. Indeed, many of the specific imaginative motifs Said ascribes to "Orientalism" – including backwardness, barbarism, squalor, religious fervour, sensuality, femininity, and timelessness – appear in constructions of Russia. In spite of the clear similarities between "Orientalist" and "Slavicist" academic discourses, however, there are also good reasons to avoid uncritically mapping the intellectual landscape of the former onto the latter. In its trans-continental topography, Russia resisted categorical attempts to divide Occident from Orient, in a way that indicates both the strengths, and also weaknesses, of conventional Saidist theory. Slavic culture, as E.J. Dillon observed, combined that "Asiatic spirit of the old and unchanging Tsardom with the economic necessities and ethical tendencies of the new epoch" (260).

Having established the narrative context these writers emerged from, I will then proceed to delineate the ways in which, and the extent to which, this apparently homogenous group of conservative modernists produced a heterogeneous series of responses to the idea of "Russianness." Beginning, firstly, with Wyndham Lewis, I will argue that, despite early advocacy of both Slavic and Bolshevik cultural forms (what he termed his "muscovite spell") the better part of his career was spent conducting an increasingly vitriolic series of Russophobic depictions. In his image of "parasitic" white Russian émigrés and his comparison between the "Red Revolution" and the notion of coupling notorious murderers Richard "Loeb with a female shark" and Nathan "Leopold with a female octopus," Lewis's depictions of Slavic civilization are largely consistent with the notion of a racialized "grotesque" (*The Diabolical Principle and the Dithyrambic*

*Spectator* 60). Ultimately though, in his self-styled public persona as “the Enemy,” I will suggest that Lewis came to revise and deconstruct even this extreme opposition.

Secondly, and in stark contrast to Lewis, I will then turn to the less acerbic, though considerably more uniform, criticism of T.S. Eliot. While largely rejecting Soviet communism for its failure to cohere with the European “idea of a Christian society” – a narrative he conceives in strikingly similar terms to Gayatri Spivak’s concept of the voiceless “subaltern” – his vision of the “Ballet Russes,” I would contend, combines a modern musical spirit with an ancient form of dance, in a way that presents the possibility of a cultural bridge connecting the two disparate world views (“London Letter, September 1921” 189). Insofar as this redeeming vision of Russia is predicated on a European sense of “tradition,” however, it is also evident that Eliot’s work continues to be marred by its commitment to a basically “Orientalist” paradigm.

Finally, this investigation will conclude by analysing the first attempts to self-consciously move beyond such self/other racial divisions, apparent in the work of D.H. Lawrence. Although, as I will demonstrate, he often censures Slavic culture for its apparent commitment to Occidental rationalism – what he calls, in a letter to his long-time friend Samuel Koteliansky, the “wars and lies and foulnesses” of an industrial-mechanical-wage idea (*Letters II* 498) – Lawrence also defends the necessity of such worldliness as a counterbalance to the vestiges of ante-diluvian sensuality Russia retained. He advocates, rather than either extreme, an intermediate zone of what Homi Bhaba calls cultural “hybridity.” In Lawrence, as in Lewis and Eliot, it is possible to see a discursive multiplicity which underlies their seemingly uniform and conservative constructions of Russian culture.

Perhaps most vital for the purposes of this investigation, however, is not simply what these writers *say*, but the *way* in which they say it. Analysis of the various rhetorical strategies and stylistic methods each uses in their engagement with Slavic society, enables

a re-evaluation, not only of their critical reputations as ideological conservatives, or the limits of Orientalist theory, but also the specific concept of “Englishness.” This discourse of national identity – itself constituted by a nexus of ideas concerning “heritage,” “empire,” “ethnicity,” “self,” and “other” – I will argue, was in part shaped through engagement with Russia. For each author, “Russianness” came to represent an unsettling force on the imaginative landscapes, which destabilized and reformed conventional English beliefs surrounding politics, race, and most importantly art. By re-reading their work through “Russian eyes” – to paraphrase Conrad – it is possible to see how each author achieved their status as bastions of the English literary canon by bringing the “outside” in, their writing functioning not only as a creation of the new, but also as a *recreation* of primeval, peripheral, and exotic elements through a complex series of engagements with “Holy Rus.”

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Anthony Cross, *The Russian Theme in English Literature From the Sixteenth Century to 1980: An Introductory Survey and Bibliography* (11); Dorothy Brewster, *East-West Passage: A Study in Literary Relations* (110); and Gilbert Phelps, *The Russian Novel in English Fiction* (11).

<sup>2</sup> Lea Honigwachs points out that, by contrast to “Victorian scientism and materialism ... The British enthusiasm for Russian spirituality as expressed in Russian religion, literature and philosophy demonstrated the extent of the British desire to reassert the validity of the soul and metaphysics in human life” (5).

<sup>3</sup> For an excellent discussion the history and development of Anglo-Russian translations, see chapter 10 “The Russian Influence: Novel, Short Story, and Play” in Dorothea Brewster, *East-West Passage: A Study in Literary Relations*.

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, this epoch making fascination with Russia, while distinctive, was also part of a wider intercultural trend in which, as Richard Begam and Michael Moses note, the mere “experience of a European consciousness confronting an alien culture,” in itself, “played a crucial role in generating formal modernism” (8-9).

<sup>5</sup> Jon Stallworthy has persuasively argued that, although left implicit in the final version, the earliest drafts of “The Second Coming” indicate that Yeats had originally intended his poem as an overt attack on the violence and desolation of the October revolution (17-24).

<sup>6</sup> Although *Brave New World* clearly also has much wider concerns, there is considerable evidence to suggest that Huxley was, at least in part, specifically referring to the Soviet Union in his satire, not least the fact that the novel itself is widely accepted to have been based on Yevgeny Zamyatin’s Bolshevik parody *We*. See Patrick Parinder, “Imagining the Future: Zamyatin and Wells” (17).

<sup>7</sup> David Ohana points out that, although independent, both Vorticism and Russian Futurism, particularly the Moscow based “Hylaea” circle, evolved simultaneously as a critical response to the ideological proselytizing of Filippo Marinetti’s original Italian Futurist movement (91-93).

<sup>8</sup> Maria Todorova also notes that even in the medieval period, a clear “opposition between Catholicism and Orthodoxy” – including the Russian church – emerged out of the Diocletian division of the Roman Empire into Eastern and Western provinces (11).

### From Russia with Interest: Said, Hall, and the Anglo-Slavic Past

“... nations themselves are narrations.”

Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*.

“Historical analysis,” as Michel Foucault influentially proclaimed, ought not to be considered a “search for silent beginnings, and the never-ending tracing-back to original precursors,” but rather a struggle to unearth the “phenomena of rupture, of discontinuity” (*The Archaeology of Knowledge* 4). While true of almost all forms of cultural genealogy, this idea of structural progression-through-multiplicity is particularly apparent in the fractured lineage of English interactions with Russia. Right from the earliest, medieval beginnings of Anglo-Russian relations, cartographers had consistently set the customary border between Orient and Occident within Muscovite kingdoms – alternatively along the River Don, the Volga, or the Ural mountains. This geographical plasticity led to a situation in which, as Larry Wolff points out, through a paradoxical sense of inclusion and exclusion, Russia was demarcated as “Europe but not Europe” (7). Centuries on, little had changed. Even at the height of pre-war Russophilic interest, English publications such as *The Times* were still given to speculation over whether Occidental order or “the wild Asiatic instinct for the spasmodic and monstrous” would prevail within Russia (Buchanan 138). From beginning to end, English conceptions of Russia were marked by motifs of uncertainty, ambivalence, and conflict.

Despite, or perhaps even because of, this inherently indeterminate image however, there has also been a prevailing tendency within Anglophone audiences to conceive of “Slavicness” through motifs of unfamiliarity and alienation. American author Henry Adams, for instance, suggested that Russia, in its uncertain existence, was

impenetrable, to the extent that “years of study would not make the thing any clearer” (277). Halford Mackinder, meanwhile, in his monumental geopolitical treatise *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, argued that the ancient struggle between East and West – land empire and sea empire – which stretched back as far as the Greco-Persian Wars, had been inherited in its modern form by Russia, “in command of the [central Asian] heartland,” and “opposed by the sea-power of Britain” (98). In the antinomy between knowable “self” and unknown “other,” Slavic society often appeared as a polar opposite to the sanity and method of English civilization.

In many respects, this construction of “Russianness” in terms of ambivalence and alienation is consistent with the notion of “Orientalism” posited by Edward Said. “In short,” Said summarizes, “Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” through aesthetic, scholarly, and philosophical texts (3). Not only does this literary reification turn various Eastern realities into a controllable and limited signifier designated “the East,” but it also helps create the rigid system of mythology he defines as the “Four Dogmas of Orientalism”: (1) “the absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior,” (2) the sense “that abstractions about the Orient” are “always preferable to direct evidence drawn from Oriental realities,” (3) the idea “that the Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself,” and (4) the pervasive belief “that the Orient is at bottom something to be feared” (300-301).

Within this context, Slavic culture was similarly constructed as a variety of backwards, textually imagined, inarticulate, and Eastern threat – the ferocious and dehumanized land of wild “buffs, bears, and black wolves” as English explorer Richard Chancellor put it (22). Even those who sought to defend Russia often presented their

praise through tropes of exoticism and opposition. Edward Everett, for example, in reviewing the *Russian Tales* of Xavier de Maistre, argued that “something of Oriental adventure attaches itself to whatever is Russian” (188). Accordingly, while there seem to be differences at the level of style and substance between each writer’s presentation of Russia – what Said terms the variations in “*manifest* Orientalism” – such diversity belies a deeper, though unconscious, commitment to the unchanging ur-script of “*latent* Orientalism” (206). Indeed, English audiences tended to conflate various ethnic and political facets of Muscovite society in a way suggestive of “Orientalist” tendencies to see “the East” as faceless and interchangeable. “Slavicness,” for instance, became synonymous with “Russianness”, while post-revolutionary “Russianness,” similarly, became inseparable from “communism,” despite the existence of non-Slavic Russians, non-Russian Slavs, non-Russian communists, and non-communist Russians. If “the average Western European,” as early Russophile Maurice Baring put it, was “inclined to class the Slav with Mongols, Tartars, and, in general, with barbarous Asiatics,” then, at least *prima facie*, historical narratives of Russian culture appear to have been constructed as a variation on the general theme of “Orientalism” (228).

Although, in theory, there is considerable overlap between these two representational structures, several difficulties arise, in practice, when attempting to subsume one within the other. In the first place, the power dynamic between Russia and England was never one of oppressor and oppressed, but rather an imaginative encounter between socio-political equals.<sup>1</sup> Although initially subjugated by the Tartar Khanate of Kazan, Muscovy soon became a colonial superpower in its own right, capable, as John Bowring put it, of directing the “fate of nations” at will (81). In fact, Said himself – despite contending that “the traditional Orient as well as Russia” became lumped together as an Eastern “danger and threat” in Cold War narratives (26) – largely

associates Slavic culture with traditional imperial powers such as the English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese (3). Furthermore, despite attempts to categorize it as a fundamentally “oriental soul,” Russia, in its Eurasian vastness, was largely regarded by English audiences as a transcontinental entity, resistant to such sociological divides. It ultimately harboured, as Joseph Conrad put it, “no spirit either of the East or the West” (283). Accordingly, in its basic intransigence to Colonizer/Colonized and East/West divisions, Russia seems to resist the bifurcated strictures of Saidist theorization.

In spite of its semi-western and imperialist nature, “Orientalism” remained a powerful and recurring theme within the discourse of “Russianness.” Even during the Khrushchev Thaw, renowned sinologists such as Karl Augustus Wittfogel could still declare that Russia, at bottom, was an “Oriental Despotism” (1). Interestingly, this use of traditionally imperial *representation* structures, in the absence of actual imperial *power* structures, can be read as a challenge to the basic premises of Said’s argument. Rather than arising out of a narrow intention to exercise imperial dominion, “Orientalist” constructions of Russia often emerged from an overlapping and assorted variety of factors. Firstly, and at its most basic level, Russia was often “Orientalized” simply because it *was*, in part, oriental. Given its semi “Eastern” geography and the fact that objectively, for much of its history, Russia was industrially, financially, and technologically inferior to England, descriptions of “Asian backwardness,” while unsympathetic, were not wholly unjustified. Secondly, and as a hostile colonial competitor to the British Empire, Russia also became the target of more conventional forms of political propaganda. Like the German “Hun,” or the “effeminate” French, depictions of a savage, lawless, and inscrutable Russia often stemmed from fears of a dangerous foreign competitor, rather than contempt for an exploitable colonial vassal. Finally, in a more general sense, ethnocentricity and racial discrimination, far from

being the sole province of European powers, are also observable in almost all forms of cultural interaction. Tropes of Russian “otherness,” in this context, appear to emanate from a more basic cultural desire to demarcate “self” from “other.”

Consequently, “Orientalist” depictions of Russia emerge, not necessarily out of specific economic or political oppression – though these factors should by no means be discounted out of hand – but rather from an interlocking series of images and ideas. Like Gulliver in Lilliput, it is the multiplicity of smaller analytic strands, rather than any larger narrative, which holds English conceptions of Russia in place. Although, to some extent, analysing the “Eastern” image of Slavic culture as a result of various and historically conditional discursive structures, rather than the simple power effects of Occidental subjection, would seem to deprive “Orientalism” of its initial revolutionary impact, it nevertheless still allows for the possibility, even if a tentative one, of answering the fundamental question Said poses, namely: “How does one represent other cultures?”

(325).

Given this fundamental objective, I will argue that, although there have been numerous interlocking themes over the course of Anglo-Slavic history, no single or univocal narrative of “Russianness” has eclipsed all others. Russian selfhood, I will suggest, instead functions as what Stuart Hall has termed a “floating signifier.” According to his analysis, efforts to codify racial characteristics as a “natural and permanent, rather than arbitrary and contingent,” set of values invariably fail, as such seemingly stable ideals are “always open to being deferred, staggered, serialised” (“Cultural Identity and Diaspora” 397-399). This is especially evident in the case of Russia. In its culturally and cartographically split position between East and West, the

multiform history of Slavic society upsets any mythologized notions of a politically, culturally, or biologically deterministic set of traits.

Inside of this wider variety however, there are also several identifiable threads running through English depictions of Russia. In contrast to Said's quartet of "Orientalist" dogmas, I will designate "Three Strategies of Slaviness": (1) Russia as a backwards or barbaric social "other," (2) Russia as equal to, or in fact more advanced than, Europe, and (3) Russia as a basically conflicted or hybrid social form. Although these divisions, I would contend, are themselves arbitrary "cuts" in the polysemous trajectory of Anglo-Russian narratives, provided they are understood as conditional predilections, rather than immutable essences, such taxonomies are the necessary fictions involved in both contextualizing the work of Lewis, Eliot, and Lawrence, and also giving meaning to what Hall calls the "nasty down below" of reported history ("Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies" 1785).

### **Russia, Land of the Tsars**

Like the Biblical creation, English engagements with Russia began in darkness. Although there is considerable evidence of prior classical engagement – such as Aeschylus's Caucasian setting in *Prometheus Bound* (c. 480-410 BCE) and Herodotus's descriptions of Scythia in *The Histories* (c. 450-420 BCE) – the earliest specifically English allusions to Slavdom appear primarily during the so-called medieval "Dark Ages," and are, for the largest part, marked by tropes of remoteness and unknowability. In popular Arthurian legend, for example, the "Easterly bounds" of the Kingdom of Camelot were, as Patrick Waddington notes, supposedly set "even into Russia" (1). Likewise, in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (c. 1340-1370), which contains some of the first known references to Slavic territories, there are descriptions of both a

mythical “kyng that werryed Russye” (5), and also a knight who had “reysed” even in the far-off land of “Ruce” (510).<sup>2</sup> Like the Cimmerian tribes of the Crimea who have become synonymous with darkness, Russia was, at least initially, viewed in terms of distance-enforced ignorance and shadow.

The birth of Anglo-Russian relations proper, however, came during the luminous cultural rebirth of the English Renaissance. Soon after Richard Chancellor’s formation of the “Muscovy Company,” and his momentous discovery of a route from London to Archangel via the White Sea, formal diplomatic and trade relations were established for the first time. This initial engagement sparked off a wave of popular travelogues set within Slavic lands – including Sir Jerome Horsey’s *Travels*, Giles Fletcher’s *Of the Russe Commonwealth* (1591), and even a chapter, relating Sir Jerome Bowes’ embassy to Ivan IV, in Richard Hakluyt’s celebrated *Principle Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589).<sup>3</sup> Though generally well received, most English journeymen came back with negative impressions of both the country and its inhabitants. Russians were regarded as unsophisticated drunkards of questionable morality, and excessive religious fervour. Hakluyt, for one, lapsed into doggerel when expressing his disdain for Russia: “The cold is rare, the people rude, the prince so full of pride: / The realm so stored with monks and nunnes, and priests on every side. / The maners are so Turkeylike, the men so full of guile; / The women wanton, temples stuf with idols that defile” (Barrow 124).<sup>4</sup> Others, though, were less intent on condemning the nascent Slavic nation. Captain John Smith, for instance, several years prior to his encounter with Pocahontas, described Russia as a country to be pitied rather than censured, and was both impressed and baffled by the size of a landscape “so large and spacious, few or none could ever perfectly describe it” (Neuman 68). Even Queen Elizabeth I, though she saw it as in some ways vulgar, was impressed enough by the

copious and elegant nature of the Russian language to learn the rudimentary elements of it (Fletcher 264). From the point of first contact, English responses to their new Northern neighbour multiplied, in John Donne's phrase, as "plenteously / As [the] Russian Marchants['']" goods they traded in (175-176). Already, the meaning of "Russianness" had become contested in English cultural vocabularies.

Although political relations broke off during the interregnum, with the crowning of Peter the Great this variegated Anglo-Russian cultural exchange soon resumed, though in a very different form. The new Tsar was regarded by many in England as a scion of Enlightenment values. In his personal visit with the "Great Embassy" to London in 1698, for instance, Peter impressed the anonymous author of *The Northern Heroes* (1748) as a leader who desired to "range the World, and find out ev'ry Art / That can improve the Mind, or mend the Heart" (Cross 11).<sup>5</sup> Not only did he move his capital to the new and westward looking city of St. Petersburg, but he also imported English engineers as part of his modernizing public works programs, a move which both drew the two countries together and also suggested to English audiences, for the first time, a distinctly European strand within the hitherto Eastern seeming Muscovite nation.<sup>6</sup> Many English writers, moreover, were enamoured with his warlike intent and efforts to push the heathen Ottoman Turks back from the Balkans. The poet Aaron Hill, for example, wrote in glowing terms:

Shall we behold earth's long-sustained disgrace  
 Revenged in arms on Osman's haughty race?  
 Shall Christian Greece shake off a captive's shame,  
 And look unblushing at her pagan fame?  
 'Twil be. Prophetic Delphos claims her own,  
 Hails her new Caesars on the Russian throne. (Brewster 25)

This territorial and commercial expansion, however, was a double-edge blade, as it also awakened hitherto non-existent fears of Slavic military aggression. “If once they happen to get footing in the Western parts of Europe,” Oliver Goldsmith opined, “it is not the feeble efforts of the sons of effeminacy and dissension that can serve to remove them” (356). In its combination of natural brutality, numerical superiority, and newfound mechanization, Russia appeared – much like in the work of Wyndham Lewis – as a hybrid form of Eastern savagery *and* Western civilization, poised to sweep England into the sea.

While the late eighteenth century saw some of the earliest renditions of Slavic letters, including the works of A.P. Sumarokov, M.V. Lomonosov, and N.M. Karamzin, such newfound familiarity did little to resolve longstanding ambivalences over the cultural signification of “Russianness.” According to Montesquieu, it was unclear whether Russia really had emerged as a “European Monarchy,” or still remained an archetypal “Oriental Despotism.”<sup>7</sup> As was the case with Peter, these uncertainties largely came to be embodied in the new Tsarina Catherine II. For some, such as Jeremy Bentham, she deserved praise for her proclamation of the progressive *Nakaz (New Code of Laws)*, which appeared as the work of a philosophical and far-sighted legislator (Everett 152). Others, however, believed that she was responsible for the gruesome murder of her husband Peter III, and that, as in Walter Landor’s *Imaginary Conversations* (1821-1853), she had even derived vicarious pleasure from listening at the door to the “bubbling and gurgling” as he bled on their matrimonial bed (Brewster 27). In fact, it was between these sheets that Catherine earned her most enduring reputation – one which, as we see in T.S. Eliot’s poem “Whispers of Immortality,” adhered to visions of Russia femininity more widely – for lascivious sexuality. In Byron’s *Don Juan*, for instance, the mighty empress behaves “no better than a common

sempstress” in seducing the eponymous hero (283). Indeed, it was Catherine’s legacy, in the long run, which helped entrench “Orientalist” gendering of “Slavicness” in terms of this female sexuality.

While Peter represented rational “Westernness,” and Catherine sensual “Easternness,” at the beginning of the nineteenth century the “floating signification” of Russia again became apparent. Following the humiliating defeat of Napoleon's *Grande Armée* during its retreat towards Paris, Muscovy and its new emperor Alexander I became – as in the “Russian Craze” a century later – an international *cause célèbre*. By contrast to former expressions of Russian depravity, both minor poetasters and well known poets alike clamoured to proclaim the glory of “brave Kutosoff” and his men. Yet while some, such as Poet Laureate Robert Southey, produced paeans specifically to the Russian leadership – particularly “the Great, the Good, the Glorious, [and] the Beneficent” Tsar (506) – others, including his titular successor William Wordsworth, ascribed the victory to a combination of divine retribution and the forces of nature:

But now did the Most High  
 Exalt his still small voice;—to quell that [Napoleonic] Host  
 Gathered his power, a manifest ally;  
 He, whose heaped waves confounded the proud boast  
 Of Pharaoh, said to Famine, Snow, and Frost,  
 ‘Finish the strife by deadliest victory!’ (247)

Even in praise, it would seem, and during the most jubilant period of Anglo-Russian relations yet, the fundamentally conflicted image of Slavic identity could still become dehumanized as a basically primal and pantheistic force.

Despite its seeming primitivism, however, English views of Russia soon shifted again, as the latter came under attack for its European cultural expansionism. To the

English, with their “habit of judging other nations by their political institutions,” as Rebecca West put it (19), subsequent Russian anti-revolutionary political actions – particularly within Poland<sup>8</sup> – could not be tolerated. Shelly, for instance, decried the Russian non-intervention on behalf of their religious brethren in the Greco-Turkish conflict as a situation similar to an eagle hovering “within a cloud, near which a kite and crane / Hang tangled in inextricable fight / [Poised ready] to stoop upon the victor;—for she fears / The name of Freedom” (170). This rejection of Russian repression was not universal however. As Olga Novikov, one of the few pro-Tsarist émigrés to Great Britain in the Victorian era, rather acerbically pointed out, “Russia had as little excuse for conquering Poland as England for conquering Ireland” (Szamuely 58). Indeed, while reluctant to accept Anglo-Russian affinities, English writers nonetheless had a long history of comparing Russia to Ireland, dating back as far as Edmund Spencer’s suggestion that the “Wilde Irish are as civill as the Russies in their kinde” (Brewster 14). Like Muscovy, the Isle of “Eire” was, in Said’s terminology, a “White colony,” “lesser, inferior, dependant, [and] subject,” though not as categorically debased as “non-white” populations (*Culture and Imperialism* 350).<sup>9</sup> Both countries were constructed, in Hegel’s phrase, as “intermediate nationalit[ies],” embodying an ambivalent and unstable place on the European landscape (350).

In the shifting semantics of Russian “meaning” within English society, however, it was as imperial victor rather than victim about which observers soon became concerned with Muscovy. The *casus belli* behind the Crimean War arose, first and foremost, out of Tsar Nicholas’s attempts to establish dominion within, and English Foreign Minister Lord Clarendon’s refusal to confer a right of protection over, the Turkish “Porte” of Constantinople (Marriot 92). Peace protestations were swept largely aside as jingoist intellectuals, such as Charles Lefevre, argued for the need to “punish

the arrogance and check the encroachments of Russia” (213). Tennyson in particular – whose own father had been forced to flee Russia on foot after making injudicious remarks concerning the assassination of Tsar Paul<sup>10</sup> – was outspoken, if not unambiguous, in his Russophobia. While whole heartedly convinced that it was “Northern sin / Which made a selfish war begin,” he was also acutely aware of the appalling waste of human life involved in the conflict (161). Even at the height anti-Russian sentiment, though, support for Slavic imperial practices came from unlikely places. Thomas Carlyle, for instance, as part of his proto-fascist philosophy of “Hero Worship,” praised the Russian talent for obedience, and claimed that this skill, above all, distinguished “man from beast and beast from machine” (409). Accordingly, in a seemingly paradoxical twist, indicative of the fluctuating signification methods involved in Anglo-Russian relations, it could also be the vestiges of Eastern tyranny, rather than Western cultivation, which humanized the idea of “Russianness” in English minds.

Despite the cessation of hostilities at the Congress of Paris (1856), this fundamentally unstable conception of Russia continued. While the crowning of a new and more progressive “Tsar-Liberator” in Alexander II eased tensions between the two nations,<sup>11</sup> imperial friction throughout the Middle-East and particularly the Sub-Continent remained. “The colossus of the North,” as *Pall Mall Gazette* Editor W.T. Stead noted, seemed particularly to regard the “conquest of India as the great objective of its traditional policy” (454).<sup>12</sup> In Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*, for example – published in 1901, but largely representative of the anxieties of a previous generation – we see a highly unscrupulous Russian spy attempting to scan suitable locations in preparation for an invasion of India (215). Interestingly however, in this imperial capacity Russia no longer appears as a categorically alien “other,” but rather, in the affinity Kipling’s

Slavic agent claims with the native Hurree Babu, a “monstrous hybridism of East and West” (228). “In-betweeness,” by this stage, had already become a recurring theme in fluctuating English narratives of “Russianness.” Such negative depictions, though, did not go unchallenged. For instance, in seeking to intervene on behalf of their “pan-Slavic” brethren throughout Bulgaria, during the Second Russo-Turkish conflict, the Russian populace, in William Gladstone’s view, had proven themselves “capable of as noble sentiments as any people in Europe” (Waddington 181). Ultimately, as his comments would seem to suggest, it was not so much a case of *who* Russia went to war with, but *how* such strife was framed that mattered within the capricious sphere of English public opinion regarding the Northern giant.

Despite such numerous and changeable pronouncements on the state of Russia, up until the late-Victorian era very few English had ever actually experienced Slavic culture first hand. Following the assassination of Alexander at the hands of the revolutionary organization *Narodnaya Volya* (“The People’s Will”) in 1881 though, the Russian population in Great Britain spiked from 3,789 to 61,789.<sup>13</sup> England, as one of the few countries to accept political exiles,<sup>14</sup> became a safe haven for both Semitic and ideological refugees in the wake of widespread repression. Local reactions to this immigration were mixed. George Keenan, for one, described the so-called political “Nihilists” as “sullen and more or less incomprehensible ‘cranks’” (174), while the *Jewish Chronicle* pointed out that Russia appeared, for many, as an “inexhaustible factory of Jewish paupers which she vomits up annually into the bleak world of America and the East End of London, to live or die” (14). However, there was also an undercurrent of support for Russia, contributed to, in no small part, by the publications of these same exiles. Numerous high profile revolutionaries, most notably Sergei “Stepniak” Kravchinsky and Prince Pyotr Kropotkin, set up societies and printing

presses – such as *The Anglo-Russian* and *Free Russia* – dedicated to demonstrating that the Russian leader had deserved to die in their fight for political liberation (Hughes 265). Their efforts to modernize Russia clearly had an impact. During this same period, the number of books on Russian extremism increased exponentially,<sup>15</sup> with even serious writers – including Oscar Wilde in *Vera; or, The Nihilist* (1880) and Henry James in *The Princess Cassamassima* (1886) – caught up in the interest surrounding these visitors. Because of close cultural ties and a similar timing of arrival, though, the Jewish immigrant community also became associated with this idea of revolutionary violence. According to Bernard Pares, politically motivated murders were predominantly committed by Judaic populations, and were even specifically a “sign of Jewish pluck” (508). Eastern Semitism became almost synonymous with Russian terror, in a way that further “Orientalized” visions of the country.

While literary representations of nihilism were increasing, so too was interest in Slavic writing. “A country new to literature, or at any rate unregarded, till lately, by the general public,” as Matthew Arnold announced, had emerged: “it is the novel of Russia. The Russian novel has now the vogue, and deserves to have it” (105).

The first writer to achieve popularity in England was Ivan Turgenev. Often regarded, in Henry James’s phrase, as “the novelists’ novelist” (Phelps 88), his reputation for a cultivated writing style, and the well-publicized fact that he spent much of his adult life living in France with his mistress Madamn Viardot,<sup>16</sup> led many critics tended to see Turgenev as a Europeanized Russian, rather than a true native of his country (15). In many instances though, this cultivated sophistication was considered a virtue rather than a vice. Conrad, for example, suggested that, by comparison to his more genuinely Slavic compatriots, Turgenev was like “Antinous himself in a booth of the world’s fair” to a grotesque “Double-headed Nightingale” such as Dostoevsky (30).

Several of Turgenev's admirers, including Ford Maddox Ford, argued that he really was an “authentic Russian,” but he only presented only a restricted, squirearchical portion, rather a “representative picture of the whole of Russian life” (Gettman 182). For better or worse, Turgenev represented, for English audiences, of the Occidental aspect of Slavic identity.

The next author to attain significant acclaim in England was Leo Tolstoy. Unlike Turgenev, the latter was more highly esteemed as a religious leader than an author in the strictest sense. It was as if, one writer for *The Academy* noted, Tolstoy had said: “the novel pure and simple I have lost heart to write; the sermon pure and simple you have no interest in reading; you shall have the two inextricably mixed” (Decker 130). Besides the Tolstoyan communes – which became a “mecca for socialists,” including future Bolsheviks such as Lenin, Stalin, Zinoviev, and Gorky (Armytage 150) – pamphlets such as *What is to be Done* and *The Kingdom of God is Within You* became so popular that his country estate at Yasnaya Polyana itself became a pilgrimage destination among English followers.<sup>17</sup> English opinion, though, was divided over the extent of Tolstoy’s “Russianness.” While some, such as R.E. Crozier Long, regarded him as possessing a “Tartar ferocity” and an essentially “Slavophile stance” (Christian 201-203), others, including, Rebecca West, saw him as an aristocrat who had “never made anything more of the people than a beloved hobby” (19). In fact, in many instances, and much like broader English beliefs concerning Russian hybridity and “in-betweenness,” he was regarded as transcending national character altogether, his readers left feeling “neither English or Russian, but [only as] human being[s]” (Phelps 139).

If Turgenev was Western, and Tolstoy uncertain, then it was in Dostoevsky – and “through him alone,” as Percy Lubbock suggested in *The Times* – that one could truly “hope to understand the Russian soul” in its most backwards and “Oriental” form (269).

Following Constance Garnett's monumental translations in the early years of the twentieth century, an unmistakable "cult" surrounding Dostoevsky arose in English society. While inherently a complex intellectual phenomenon, Helen Muchnic, one of the earliest commentators on the fad, observed that it came about partly out of "war-time sympathies, partly of mysticism, partly of a new interest in abnormal psychology and in the revelations of psychoanalysis, [and] partly of an absorbed concern with artistic experimentation" (Brewster 162). The coalescing of these forces produced often feverish results. Thomas Seecombe, for instance, writing for *The New Witness*, claimed that Dostoevsky was "beatified, canonized, sainted," and had something vaguely prophetic about his work (436). Even those who despised Dostoevsky were inclined to see him as a quintessential product of his country. Joseph Conrad, for example, wrote that *The Brothers Karamazov* sounded like some "fierce mouthings from prehistoric ages," and in that respect was too Russian for his taste (Howe 506). In many respects, the "Dostoevsky Craze" was essentially an enthusiasm for the seemingly "authentic" and "primitive" aspects of Russian society.

Just as the Bolshevik revolution spelled the end of general English infatuation with Russia, so too did it signal the last days of the Dostoevsky cult. The vacuum left by his decline, however, was soon filled by the work of Anton Chekhov. Virginia Woolf, for example, argued that his method, which "at first seemed so casual, inconclusive, and occupied with trifles, now appears the result of an exquisitely original and fastidious taste" (*The Common Reader* 177). Chekhov was not without his detractors however. One reviewer for *The Times* found a theatrical performance of *The Cherry Orchard* to be "queer, outlandish, even silly," and, above all, simply "not entertaining" (Le Fleming 55). Interestingly, however, while both critics and fans regarded his work as ambivalent, difficult, and anti-heroic – a far cry from the demonstrative enthusiasm of Dostoevsky –

Chekhov's work was similarly seen as epitomizing Russian values. Shaw, for example, noted that most English readers viewed him as the “bard of 'twilight Russia” and reacted to his work with cries of “How Russian!” (Obraztsova 44-45). Evidently, the essence of “Russianness” could mean multiple different things in relation to various different writers, seamlessly shifting within English imaginative structures according to both individual viewer and also the object of cultural analysis itself.

This ambivalent and unstable construction of Slavic art was captured in English attitudes towards the Russian Ballet. Although a company led by Anna Pavlova had travelled extensively throughout Britain in 1909, far and away the most important theatrical event during this period, which signalled the full-fledged emergence of English “Russomania” in all its diverse forms, was the opening of Sergei Diaghilev’s “Ballets Russes” at Convent Garden in 1912. *The Saturday Review*, for instance, declared that ““Russia, the land we for so long misnamed barbarian, that hotbed of creeds, beautiful as an ikon, has been sending us its dancers, its musicians, its poets, has been electrifying our exhausted world with its new strength, its half-awakened, pristine emanations of genius”” (Honigwachs 277). In this context, Russia appeared as an instance of the “Noble Savage” mythology, its social atavism appearing capable of redeeming modern industrial civilization.<sup>18</sup> Attendance became almost mandatory for this very reason, as the English “intelligentsia” – a word imported from Russian during the period – flocked to see what *The Times* described as new art form which “extended the realm of beauty for us, discovered a new continent, revealed new faculties and means of salvation in ourselves” (Herzinger 45). Vaslav Nijinsky, especially – much like in T.S. Eliot’s *Poems Written in Early Youth* – became an “image of sexual heterodoxy,” as Bloomsbury intellectuals such as John Maynard Keynes and Lytton Strachey took to fantasizing about his legs and sending him bouquets of “magnissime”

flowers (Garafola 323).<sup>19</sup> Perhaps because of this openly anti-normative discourse formation though, even at the height of its popularity many remained ambivalent. Ezra Pound, for instance, with an implied jab at such Bloomsbury pretension and effiteness, derided those who attended the Russian ballet as “mauve and greenish souls,” lying “along the upper seats like so many unused boas” (41). For him, as for so many of his generation, Slavic art became a battle ground in the shifting conflicts over art, sex, and cultural signification which characterized the era

While aesthetic endeavours remained central, there were also a growing number of efforts to codify this fluid idea of “Russianness” through scientific methodologies, particularly anthropology. Titles like *The Soul of Russia* (1916), *The Russian Soul* (1916), and *The Russians and Their Language* (1916) proliferated, as authors attempted to reduce the heterogeneous diaspora of Russian society to a finite set of attributes. Jane Harrison, for instance, set out in her treatise *Russia and the Russian Verb* (1915) to demonstrate that both Slavic language and culture more generally were “Congregationalized,” displaying a primitive tendency to ascribe little importance to the separateness of persons.<sup>20</sup> Maurice Baring, moreover, drew up in *The Russian People* (1911) a comprehensive taxonomy of posited Russian personality traits, which he divided between “Positive” (“Co-operative energy,” “Spasmodic energy,” and “Liberty of thought and of *moeurs*”) and “Negative” (“Lack of Individuality,” “Fear of Responsibility,” and “Indulgence and Laxity”) (242). What is important about such examples is that they not only construct the archetypal Russian as an alternately good or bad “Orientalist” savage, but also attempt to systematize such judgements within a rigid and quasi-empirical discourse structure. By laying claim to scientific rigour, such sociological stereotyping – unlike the work of Lewis, Eliot, and Lawrence – strives to

classify the variegated concept of “Slavicness” into an immutable, and seemingly irrefutable, set of ideas.

Despite this form of often negative form of imaginative reductionism, English preconceptions of Russia once again shifted with a warming of political relations. “Nothing short of a war or a revolution,” as Royal Gettmann pointed out, “could induce the English to read Russian fiction” (36). Soon there were both. Although initially the two nations again found themselves at loggerheads – first over the Boer conflict, then the Russo-Japanese War<sup>21</sup> – with the rise of German militarism, Russia became an increasingly palatable, if uncertain, ally, particularly as the tentative camaraderie engendered by entente was solidified during the First World War. Instead of its conventional brutality, the Slavic armed forces were reconstructed as a noble and patriotic partner-in-arms, with the “Russian soldier, himself a member of Christ’s army,” boldly marching into battle for king and country (Peretts 181). Although difficult to pin-point exactly, wider English enthusiasms surrounding the “Russian Soul” often stemmed from precisely such efforts, usually lead by Slavophilic writers with ties to the English military-diplomatic regime, to advance the public perception of England’s military partner.<sup>22</sup> The fashion for Russian literature especially, in the words of Heinemann’s wartime advertisement, was as much as anything else a fashion for “The Literature of our Great Ally” (Beasley 26). In this sense, by contrast to “Orientalist” accounts of Colonial oppression, it was largely conventional government propaganda, rather than material domination, which played the most decisive role in determining Russia’s oscillating public perception within England.

Nevertheless, in another seeming paradox, Russia was often lauded precisely *because* of its “Eastern” backwardness. “The simple fact,” Charles Sarolea asserted, “is that Russia cannot be beaten. She is not vulnerable, in the sense that a highly complex

industrial state is vulnerable. She can no more be wounded to-day in any vital point than she could be in 1812” (250). Evidently, fundamental English divisions over the true nature of “Slavicness” remained. Even after centuries of interaction, Russia was still, as the Marquis de Custine remarked, a “huge, dark, uncomfortable secret on the frontiers of Europe” (869). In many ways, English ambassador Sir George Buchanan best captured this basic imaginative fragmentation. With the hitherto invincible Russian army teetered on the brink of collapse and whispers of insurrection circling Moscow and St. Petersburg, he set an ultimatum before Nicholas II: “You have, Sir, come to the parting of two ways, and you have now to choose between two paths. The one will lead you to victory and a glorious peace – the other to revolution and disaster” (Keeble 13-14). For English observers, the idea of “Russianness,” as always, was poised on a knife-edge, perpetually split between East and West. By the following year, however, Russia had taken its first tentative steps towards full blown civil war and a new, similarly ambivalent era of Anglo-Slavic exchange.

### **Russia, Land of the Commissars**

If the point of first contact with Russia began in darkness, then the dawning of its great revolutionary age came in a blaze of conflagration. Upon returning from vacation abroad, Buchanan was dismayed to discover large numbers of workers marching on St. Petersburg amid bread riots, a general strike, and the muzzle-flash of “weapons distributed to the public” by radical insurgents (Hughes *Inside the Enigma* 84). In spite of this initial shock and previously strong relations with the imperial authorities, many in England, such as Andrew Bonar Law, were prepared to defend the March Revolution as a move that would lead to a greater efficiency in Russian prosecutions of the war effort (Northedge and Wells 25). Further, with the abdication of

the Romanov monarchy, and the creation of an emergency democratic government, the English House of Representatives was even moved to officially extend to the “Russian people its heartiest congratulations upon the establishment among them of free institutions” (Vickers 64). It soon became clear to Buchanan himself, however, that Alexander Kerensky’s ineffectual administration was “of words and not action”: “he was always going to strike but never struck; he thought more of saving the revolution than of saving his country, and ended by losing both” (216). Only months later, as Leon Trotsky noted, “the moods of a new explosion” – considerably more violent and long-lasting than the previous – were to once again erupt within the heart of Russia, leaving English audiences even more uncertain and divided than ever (29).

Initial English reactions to the October 1917 uprising were largely split. On the one side, for instance, in a progressively worsening state of civil anarchy, Robert Wilton argued “the Bolshevik-Soviet coup [was] not only a logical development of the Revolutionary process ... but the best thing that could happen in Russia right now,” as Lenin’s tight-knit nucleus of communist radicals appeared to be the one force capable of uniting the nation (Szamuely 179). On the other side, though, there was also opposition. While in politically conservative quarters, Sir Percy Loraine declared that “the whole political system and creed of Soviet Russia was the work of Satan” (Keeble 126), it was the leftist trade union movement which was often most vociferous in its criticism. Labour party M.P. John Clynes, for instance, dismissed Bolshevism as a “vicious, unjust, tyrannical and dictatorial” doctrine (Graubard 69). Frequently, however, observers were not just divided over the morality of the revolution, but even as to whether it actually represented a significant change *at all*. Although some, such as Pyotr Ouspensky, contended that “the Russia that existed before is gone, and gone long ago” (18), others, including Joseph Conrad – echoing “Orientalist” arguments

concerning the changelessness of the East – suggested that “the oppressors and the oppressed are all Russians together; and the world is brought once more face to face with the truth of the saying that the tiger cannot change his stripes” (*Under Western Eyes* 8).<sup>23</sup> Indeed, as if in a microcosm of English uncertainties concerning the new regime, the English government decided first to extend, and then subsequently to deny, asylum to the Tsar and his family – eventually settling on a policy of official non-involvement, even as individual members of parliament, in the words of *The Times*, saw “as execrable a crime of its sort as history records” in their eventual execution (Graves and Hodge 22). Russia was once more a dangerous and unknown political cipher, to be handled with caution.

Initially, the single biggest English concern with this enigmatic and unpredictable new Bolshevik regime was over its commitment to the war effort. With mounting losses on the Eastern front, and Trotsky announcing that without “an army of 100,000 men who will not tremble before the enemy” a ceasefire was inevitable, Russia reluctantly agreed to peace with Germany at the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918 (Toland 137). The Western powers were predictably outraged. “In my judgement,” American ambassador David Francis declared, “terms of peace make Russia a German province with good prospects of becoming an ally. I renew my recommendation for immediate possession of Vladivostok, Murmansk, and Archangel” (Strakhovsky 52). He was soon to have his wish. In the summer of 1918, a combined force of over 23,000 English, American, French, and Czech troops landed throughout Russia in support of the various counter-revolutionary “White” armies.<sup>24</sup> Although most English observers were prepared to countenance this intervention as part of an attempt to defeat the Prussian menace, after Armistice Day many became war weary. The syndicalist leaning *Herald*, for instance, extended its sympathies to “our comrades” in Russia, noting that

“the blow struck at your heart strikes at our heart too” and promising that English Labour “dare not stand by without protest” (Keeble 51). Nor did they. Between the “Hands Off Russia” movement and murmurings of a general strike, the English government soon lost its appetite for bloodshed and consequently withdrew (MacFarlane 145). For the first, though certainly not the last, time, a grass-roots socialist movement had significantly articulated its voice within the polyphonic English discourse of “Russianness.”

With the end of hostilities, English audiences finally had an opportunity to stop and soberly evaluate the importance of this rapidly shifting series of events. Again, however, there was an almost overwhelming variety of responses. To some, such as H.G. Wells, the revolution and its leadership represented a fundamental withdrawal of Russia back into its Eastern roots – physiognomically evident, for instance, in Lenin’s “Tartar type of a face” (75).<sup>25</sup> For others, though, including Lewis and Eliot, the great danger of Slavic Bolshevism lay in its potential to spread revolt throughout Europe. In the view of Prime Minister Lloyd George, Russia was much like a volcano: “it is still in fierce eruption, and the best you can do is to provide security for those who are dwelling on its remotest slopes, and arrest the devastating flow of lava so that it shall not scorch other lands” (Kinvig 164). Above all though, it was motifs of inscrutability and variegated ambivalence, as in Walpole’s *The Secret City* (1925), which once again came to dominant the visage of Russia: “[they were] the kindest, the naïvest, the cruellest, the most friendly, the most human, the most savage, the most Eastern, the most Western [people] in the World” (367). “In-betweeness” and uncertain signification, once more, became inseparable from the notion of “Slavicness.”

While often constructed as ontologically various in this manner, post-war political conceptions of Russia broadly fell into two categories: conservative and

radical. Between the two factions, the right was generally the more unanimous in its attitudes towards the U.S.S.R. “Of all the tyrannies in history,” Churchill declared “the Bolshevik tyranny is the worst, the most destructive, the most degrading” (Somin 45). This observation was largely representative of his milieu.<sup>26</sup> For example, a contributor to the T.S. Eliot’s otherwise predominantly neutral *Criterion* magazine described the new Russia as a “dreary picture of Montessori schools, playing fields, plasticene, [and] club-houses,” only enlivened by elements of violence, rape, and the occasional outbreak of plague (Brewster 183). Within such conservative English discursive constructions of Russia, however – as in the case of Lewis, Eliot, and Lawrence – there was also room to manoeuvre. For instance, one Foreign Office memorandum, under the conservative backed National government, called for moderation:

From being a pre-war enigma, Russia has become a post-war obsession. So long as

one section of opinion, even if a small one, hitches its wagon to the Soviet star, and

another longs for nothing so much as the star’s eclipse, the task of reducing Anglo-

Soviet relations to normal remains hopeless. (Woodward 744)

For the most part though, conservative opinion was adamantly opposed to anything with even a hint of Bolshevik sympathy – to the extent that the term “Bolshie” itself became a byword for insubordination or rebellion (Lucas 30). This abhorrence was further solidified by the so-called “Zinoviev Letter” – a forged telegram supposedly from Moscow calling for English insurrection<sup>27</sup> – and the later 1926 General Strike, partly financed by Russian trade unions, which, as *The Times* rather understatedly put it, did not “conduce to the friendly settlement the Soviet Government profess[ed] to

desire” (Eudin and Fisher 341). Moreover, the subsequent “Arcos Raid” on the Soviet trade embassy in London (which, though turning up little evidence, led to accusations of espionage and the first serious diplomatic break since Cromwell)<sup>28</sup> suggested the sheer extent of anti-Russian prejudice. Despite its repeated disavowal of association with communism, even the Labour party, as Ramsay MacDonald pointed out, came to represent a “Red Terror’ to the minds of large masses of people who knew little about it” (Sinclair 23).

By contrast to reactionary attitudes, Liberal factions were much more deeply divided in their approaches to Bolshevism. Predictably, many were joyous about its rise to power. American journalist and Communist Party member John Reed, for example, in his now famous *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1919) described a moment, amidst celebrations in Moscow's Red Square, when dawned upon him that the Soviet Union had begun to build on earth a “kingdom more bright than any heaven had to offer” (218). Further, with rapid *de facto* and then *de jure* recognition of the U.S.S.R. under David Lloyd George and Ramsay MacDonald, and with Labour MP George Lansbury arguing that “no men and women responsible for a revolution of the magnitude of the Russian revolution ever made fewer mistakes” (Graubard 213),<sup>29</sup> Russia was even celebrated, though cautiously, in mainstream progressive circles. Other left-leaning authors however, were less overawed. Bertrand Russell, for example, in *The Theory and Practice of Bolshevism*, claimed that “when a Russian Communist speaks of dictatorship, he means the word literally, but when he speaks of the proletariat, he means the word in a Pickwickian sense ... He includes people by no means proletarian (such as Lenin and Chicherin) who have the right opinions, and he excludes such wage earners as have not the right opinions” (26). Soviet Moscow, for him, was no workers’ paradise, but rather a despotic autocracy by another name. Anarchist theoretician Emma

Goldman went even further, providing anecdotal evidence, in the form of first-hand testimony, of widespread political murder: ““After the October Revolution [one guard recounted] the *intelligentsia* filled this prison. From here they were taken out and shot, or were loaded on barges never to return”” (128). For the English left, Soviet identity functioned as part of what Hall terms a wider “politics without guarantees” (“Race, the Floating Signifier” 10). Even ideological allegiance was no assurance of individual position regarding the shifting idea of “Russianness”

Although there were many key differences, there were also several issues on which conservative and liberal opinion converged regarding Bolshevism, many of which suggested the enduring “Orientalization” of Russia. The first of these was the widely publicized atheism of the Communist Party. ““They’ve quite done away with religion,”” recorded E.M. Delafield in her semi-autobiographical *Provincial Lady in Russia* (1937), adding that, although she never went to church herself, both she and her travelling party were abhorred at the thought of children being raised as Godless heathens (218-219). Even defenders of the Soviet Union, such as Sidney and Beatrice Webb, acknowledged the occurrence of various “popular excesses against the Church and its priests,” as well as the publication of violently sacrilegious newspapers such as “*Bezboznik* (The Godless)” (810).<sup>30</sup> In spite of their sceptical fervour however, many English observers also saw Bolshevism as itself a kind of religion. Not only had the Soviet leadership effectively replaced the former Orthodox saints as figures of secular worship – a “portrait of Stalin hanging on the wall, no doubt where the ikon used to be,” as Andre Gide noted (45) – but the doctrine itself was also, according to Keynes, structurally comparable to ecclesiastical organizations: “Like other new religions, it persecutes without justice or pity those who actively resist it. Like other new religions, it is unscrupulous. Like other new religions, it is filled with missionary ardour and

oecumenical ambitions” (12).<sup>31</sup> Soviet spiritual practices, in this context, appeared as a continuation of pre-revolutionary “Orientalist” religiosity.<sup>32</sup> Because of this anti-Christian outlook, and alongside the Jewish heritage of many of its leaders, Bolshevik radicalism was also seen by many in England – including Wyndham Lewis – as a specifically Semitic plot. In support of this theory, numerous writers argued, falsely as it later turned out, that upon seizing power, Jewish Bolsheviks such as Lenin and Trotsky had set out to undermine Christian Priests and Churches, while failing to similarly displace Rabbis and Synagogues (Kadish 40). Soviet Russia, once again, became associated with the imputed backwardness of Eastern Semitism.

The second point of political concurrence between left and right concerned Soviet art. Even prior to the October revolt, Russian aesthetics had been largely associated with the lowest and most primitive social strata. Besides “Orientalist” enthusiasm about Dostoevsky and the “Ballets Russes,” Slavic painting schools – such as Ilya Repin’s *Peredvizhniki* (“The Wanderers”) – set out to represent the social conditions surrounding the working poor (Duzs 182). After the revolution though, this connection between Russian art and *déclassé* degeneration took a more sinister turn. The Comintern, in attempting to stamp out non-proletarian art, drew particular scorn in English intellectual circles. William Empson, for instance, objected that “Politics and economics,” do not “provide an aesthetic theory”; creativity itself, he suggested, was impossible “unless it work[ed] for readers with opinions different from the author’s” (3).<sup>33</sup> This tendentiousness was particularly evident in English reactions to the Soviet “kinema.” Huntley Carter, for instance, described it as nothing more than a piece of “propaganda machinery of the State and people,” which imitated previous art forms rather than creating anew (288). Bolshevik film, however, did have lasting effects on minority, Socialist-leaning sections of the English movie industry. Although often

banned, screenings of Russian motion pictures by Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Vertov appeared sporadically at the London Film Society often to rapturous applause:

Communist theatre, as Ralph Bond put it, while often rejected, could also be used as “weapon of the class struggle” (Feigel 18).

Perhaps the biggest problem for English audiences concerning Russia, though, was the issue of sex. Upon assuming power, the communist government had moved to legalize abortion, provide free contraception, and recognize unmarried *de facto* couples.<sup>34</sup> For many in England, such conditions appeared tantamount to state-licensed prostitution. Royal Baker, for example, claimed in *The Menace of Bolshevism* (1919) that this policy rendered women “public property for all Bolshevik Government citizens,” adding that “even the lowest form of savages who indulge in the wildest spirit of cannibalism is far superior to such barbarism” (Carleton 9). This vision of Slavic sexual excess was not only consistent with previous images concerning Russian lechery – evident, for English audiences, in Catherine the Great – but it was also in accord “Orientalist” depictions of the “unlimited sensuality” which characterized Eastern femininity (207). Even in its attempted political liberation, it would appear, Russia could not shake its pre-revolutionary image of wanton sexualization.

Notwithstanding English accord over “Orientalist” rejections of Bolshevik art and religious policy, with time the inherently polyvalent nature of narratives concerning “Russianness” soon resumed. Although diplomatic relations recommenced under the second MacDonald Government, Anglo-Soviet exchange was again disrupted by a triumvirate of catastrophes: firstly, the onset of world-wide depression following “Black Tuesday”; secondly, the crushing defeat of Labour in 1931, leaving them out of power until after V-E day; and finally, the “Metro-Vickers Crisis,” during which the Privy Council imposed a trade embargo in response to the arrest of twenty-five English

engineers within the Soviet Union on charges of industrial espionage.<sup>35</sup> In the wake of such disasters, the new Tory coalition sought to proceed through a cautious policy of distance and isolation, particularly as they suspected the Bolsheviks, as new leader Neville Chamberlin put it, of “stealthily and cunningly pulling the strings behind the scenes to get us involved in war” with Nazi Germany (Bolloten 186). Many on the far-right, however, not only saw such a conflict as inevitable, but in fact welcomed it. Sir Oswald Mosley and his “British Union of Fascists” (BUF), for instance, had long argued that “blackshirt” violence was a necessary antidote to “red terrorism,” given that “National Socialism provided the one apparently solid barrier in the path of this Asiatic doctrine” (Weale 134). Indeed, the Third Reich itself, as Hannah Arendt pointed out, was at bottom defined by its anti-Bolshevik stance (261).

Although the centre-right held institutional power, Depression era English attitudes towards Russia were as variegated as ever. In fact, Despite being politically disenfranchised, radical leftist values became so popular and influential that the era itself has rightly been labelled the “Pink Decade.” “In 1930,” Virginia Woolf claimed, “it was impossible – if you were young, sensitive, and imaginative – not to be interested in politics” (“The Leaning Tower” 77). Within this context, Russian communism became the overwhelming ideological choice of the blossoming post-war generation. It was increasingly normal during this period, according to Orwell, “to hear that so-and-so had 'joined' [the CPGB] as it had been a few years earlier, when Roman Catholicism was fashionable, to hear that so-and-so had 'been received'” (*Collected Essays* 141). Between 1931 and 1937, card-carrying membership grew from 2,500 to 12,000, while circulations of newly set up newspapers – such as *The Daily Worker*, *The New Leader*, and *The Left Review* – likewise soared.<sup>36</sup> Interest transcended class. As Lewis repeatedly pointed out, Bolshevism was often most popular among educated young

bohemian intellectuals, who saw revolution as a bastion of aesthetic rebellion (Watson 66). Twenty years on from the enthusiasm over the “Russian Soul,” and already there was a new “cult of Russia” (Zwerdling 70).

Again though, there was often a complex variety of causes behind this widespread sympathy. Initially, many idolized the U.S.S.R. for economic reasons. “While the capitalist world seemed,” as Harold Macmillan put it, “in decay if not mortal agony, the Bolsheviks had apparently consolidated their power and stability,” primarily through a series of industrializing “Five Year Plans” which bucked the trend of international fiscal downturn (295).<sup>37</sup> Later, after the resurgence of German nationalism, Russia was apotheosized as England’s logical ally in a leftist “Popular Front.” A policy of neutrality “between the two massing powers,” in the view of Cecil Day Lewis, was becoming an increasingly untenable position (184). Therefore, as objectionable as communism may have been to some, under the circumstances it was clearly the lesser evil of two evils. Once again, Arthur Koestler summed up the situation best: “the Western world, convulsed by the aftermath of war, scourged by inflation, depression, unemployment and the absence of faith to live for, was [through communism] at last going to ‘clear from the head the masses of impressive rubbish – Rally the lost and trembling forces of the will – ... till they construct at last a human justice’” (30). Despite the multiplicity of reasons for their admiration, the left was, at least for the time being, largely unified over the redemptive potential of Soviet Russia.

These enthusiasms concerning the U.S.S.R. were also coupled with another shift in the English beliefs concerning Russia. Especially as a result of Bolshevik modernization, Russia was now perceived, not as a backwards and “Oriental” nation, but rather as having become possessed, in Julian Huxley’s words, by “the spirit of science introduced into politics and industry” (60). Consequently, and instead of what

the English often saw as its habitual primitiveness, numerous observers, including Lewis and Lawrence, began to conflate communism with mechanization itself. Indeed, unlike the industrial advances under Peter the Great, which suggested mere technological *equality*, this Bolshevik modernizing strand indicated that, in Stalin's phrase, that Russia would in fact soon "catch up and *overtake*" its European neighbours.<sup>38</sup>

This momentous *volta* in attitudes towards Russia was further manifest in changing English conceptions of Bolshevism's ethical credentials. In contrast to its previous reputation for disease, the new and improved Russia appeared as a paragon of public hygiene. On a superficial level, Soviet authorities seemed fixated on the idea of physical health, requiring daily exercises, which, according to the Webbs, were "urged every morning throughout the land by the innumerable loud speakers" (909). On a deeper level though, moral hygiene also became paramount. George Bernard Shaw, for instance, applauded activities such as "volunteer holiday labour," designed to promote public good-will (*Shaw: An Autobiography* 194).<sup>39</sup> This sense of community spirit, in turn, led to a widespread mythology of Russian social harmony. "Communism," as Philip Larkin retrospectively noted, "meant the village pub" for English audiences (286), while Auden similarly described the Soviet Union as being "run on scout lines, with packs and leaders" (Carpenter 142). In general Russia had become for the liberal post-war English youth, a hybrid creation. To borrow George Orwell's phraseology, it was a strange combination of mechanization ("Socialism – progress – machinery – Russia – tractor – hygiene – machinery – progress") and rustic harmony ("fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, 'Nature Cure' quack, pacifist, and feminist").<sup>40</sup> In the complex historical nexus of ideas concerning "Russianness," Bolshevism itself appeared as a diverse and heterogenous phenomenon.

In the multiform history of Anglo-Russian relations, however, support could collapse as quickly as it formed. Just as English Russophobia had peaked and then declined in response to the Crimean conflict, so too did this more modern strain of Russophilia rise and fall during the Spanish Civil War. Initially, the outbreak of hostilities between Royalist forces, and the Republican government, aided by Russia, seemed, as Spender put it, to offer the “twentieth century an 1848” (Carpenter 206). Accordingly, numerous left wing youths joined Socialist “International Brigades” throughout Iberia, fighting, and often – in the case of poets such as Ralph Fox and Julian Bell – dying alongside their ideological brethren.<sup>41</sup> As the struggle progressed, however, and with atrocities committed on both sides, even those still devoted to the struggle became less certain of its righteousness. Auden, for example, referred to the war in “Spain 1937” as a “conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder” and a “suicide pact” which entailed only romantic death (2425-2426). The actual experience of interacting with communist forces left many disenchanted with the U.S.S.R. George Orwell, for instance, a one time member of the Trotskyist “POUM” militia fighting near Barcelona, broke with Bolshevism after Soviet agents began “liquidating” his regiment as supposed Fascist conspirators during the Spanish Civil War (*Homage to Catalonia* 153). Although there were some in England who remained committed to the Soviet cause, such actions in led many to suspect, as Cecil Day-Lewis did, that Russia was “going in the wrong direction” (Day-Lewis, *C. Day-Lewis: An English Literary Life* 115). If the idea of Russian identity functioned as a language, constituted by what Hall calls the “shifting relations of difference,” then by the late 1930s the conversation concerning communism in England had recognizably changed (“Race, the Floating Signifier” 8).

The other major event during this period which turned public opinion against Bolshevism was the “Great Purge” of 1936. In particular, the well-publicized “Moscow Show Trials” – which saw the spectacular public prosecution of many high ranking Comintern leaders, ostensibly in response to the assassination of Stalin’s nemesis Sergei Kirov – proved pivotal. Right up until Kirov was murdered, as Spender pointed out, it seemed likely that Russia was “on the verge of attaining an increased intellectual liberty” (“Stephen Spender” 243). After the trials, however, such illusions were impossible. While the English right was predictably scathing, much of the hitherto largely supportive left was equally indignant. *The Daily Herald*, for instance, saw the trials as a pitiless and nationwide purge: “It is, too clearly, a crushing of opposition, a warning to all in Russia that Stalin is its master and that to oppose him is the worst of crimes” (Corthorn 186). Above all, the most common response was incredulity and confusion. The latest set of trials, Edward Francis Williams argued, defied reasonable explanation: “Belief in the charges, the evidence, the confession is impossible to a sane mind. Yet blind belief provides no reasonable interpretation either ... Understanding is impossible” (Deli 267). Once again, Russia had become a distant and impenetrable mystery.

This enigmatic image was ultimately confirmed by the signing of the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact in 1939. More than internal repression, such rapprochement between the two powers – who for almost a decade had represented diametrically opposed ends of the political spectrum – seemed the ultimate act of Slavic incomprehensibility. Labour MP John Strachey, for one, professed to being “shattered” and “staggered” by the event; like the rest of his generation, he felt he needed to “reconsider everything” (Newman 79). Indeed, with the invasion of Poland later that year, Russia and England found themselves once again on opposite sides of the

battlefield, cleft along the same moral, political, and epistemic lines – good vs. bad, known vs. unknown – which had made up the entire lineage of their interactions. Nevertheless, even at the extremity of crisis, Russia was still both different *and* the same. In W.H. Auden’s famous phrase, christening the advent of hostilities in “September 1, 1939,” “What mad Nijinsky wrote / About Diaghilev / Is true of the normal heart”: the Russian, as the English, craved “not universal love / But to be loved alone” (2433-2434). In the final analysis, the relationship between England and Russia was defined by a narrative of simultaneous exclusion and inclusion.

### **Conclusion**

In this respect, then, the history of Anglo-Russian discursive constructions had come full circle. What began in ignorance of Muscovites, ended in Soviet unknowability. In both pre-revolutionary conflicts over imperialism, emigration, and art, and post-revolutionary debates concerning authoritarianism, industrialization, and internal repression, the meaning of “Russianness” became a contested point within English cultural semiotics. Despite this seeming open-endedness, Stuart Hall points out that it is necessary make an “arbitrary closure” in the field of language, in order to meaningfully understand concepts such as society, ethnicity, and, in this case, Russian identity (“Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies” 1785). Such an expedient segmentation is evident in the tripartite structure of English visions concerning Russia. In the industrializing impulses of Peter the Great and Joseph Stalin, for instance, Russia represents both the positive and negative aspects of a fantasized Western hyper-modernity; in the Janus-like East-West facing visage noted by Hegel and Hugh Walpole, meanwhile, Slavic self-hood appears as a geographically split and hybrid formation; and, finally, in the savage excesses of Russian literature, spirituality, and

politics, it is possible to see the ever present, though never omnipotent, spectre of “Orientalism.” While there was always a diverse plurality of voices discussing Russia, they often harmonized in the same key.

To a certain extent, the failure of any one narrative – whether “Western,” “Eastern,” or “in-between” – to supersede all others in capturing Anglo-Slavic relations, suggests a more cautious approach to both “Imagological” theorization generally, and the totalizing claims of “Orientalism” in particular. In many ways, the culturally ambivalent position of Russia within England challenges conventional “Orientalist” narratives. Despite Said’s arguments to the contrary, the socio-geographical “in-betweenness” of Russia indicates the extent to which boundaries separating East from West were not as rigidly policed as “Orientalist” theorization would suggest. Further, and again in contrast to Said’s claims, typically “Eastern” tropes often arose independent of strictly colonial interests in repression. Even as war time allies, or imperial opponents, Russia consistently appeared as “Oriental” other.

Nevertheless, while flawed, “Orientalism” remains a useful framework for analysing English discursive constructions of Russia. Even in the process of being destabilized or reversed, the basic conceptual opposition between Orient and Occident Said describes often underlay English visions of Russia. Further, Said’s contention that all works on the East arise, not from a cultural vacuum, but rather as a “*topos*, a set of references” created in constant dialogue with previous quotations, texts, and even entire oeuvres, is evident in the way certain discursive themes – including savagery, impenetrability, and sensuality – are constantly re-worked and rewoven over the course of Anglo-Russian narrative history (177). Indeed, it is this intertwined, dialogic lineage of English paradigms concerning Russia which becomes important to contextualizing the intellectual assumptions inherent in Lewis, Eliot, and Lawrence.

Instead of treating it as an all-encompassing fact, then, “Orientalism” can, perhaps circumspectly, be seen as a *tendency* among English audiences. Rather than a purely textual construct, it may be understood as a linguistic *mediation* of tangible Asian realities. And in place of a uniquely European phenomenon, it can be regarded, more properly, as a *subset* of universal trends towards cross-cultural stereotyping. This reduction of “Orientalism” to a local strand, rather than a comprehensive truth, would seem to resolve many of its manifest theoretical issues, both generally, and also in specific relation to English visions of Slavic society. In fact, as we shall see, it is the work of those theorists who have been significantly influenced by, yet remained critical of, the Saidist legacy – such as Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhaba – which serve as the most useful conceptual apparatus for addressing Russia in the modernist imagination. “Russianness,” as this study aims to show, was important precisely because, in the same way as these writers, it destabilized seemingly fixed divisions between “East/West” and “Self/Other.” First, however, we will turn to the work of Wyndham Lewis, and particularly the way in which he approaches these shifting and indeterminate ideas of Russia through a framework of grotesque liminality.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For much of its history Russia was regarded as possessing an armed force of equal or superior capacity to its English equivalent, and while never the economic equivalent of Great Britain, by the end of the Victorian era it had increasingly become a major exporter of several key products. For instance, between 1900 and 1904 Russia exported nearly 77 million poods (approximately 1.26 billion kilograms) of petroleum, and accounted for almost half of the world's total output of oil. See Margaret Miller, *Economic Development of Russia, 1905-1914* (267).

<sup>2</sup> While conflicting, there is also evidence to suggest that the family of Saxon King Harold, following his defeat at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, had fled to the Ukraine, and possibly married into the royal family of Iaroslavl the Wise of Kiev. See Curtis Keeble, *Britain, The Soviet Union and Russia* (2).

<sup>3</sup> For the work of Fletcher and Horsey, see *Rude and Barbarous Kingdoms: Russia in the Accounts of Sixteenth-Century English Voyagers*; an excellent analysis of Hakluyt's work on Russia can be found in Robert M. Croskey, "Hakluyt's Account of Sir Jerome Bowes' Embassy to Ivan IV."

<sup>4</sup> This vision of Arctic savagery was not restricted to factual works, but extended into fiction of the period, such as the anonymous manuscript the *History of Adophus, Prince of Russia; and the Princess of Happiness*, which similarly described Russia as an "extream cold climate, the Trees and Mountains are for the most part hidden in Frost and Snow ... The principal Pastime of the Men of Quality is Hunting of certain Bears, all Milk white, a terrible Beast, and a dangerous diversion it is" (Cross 6-7).

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted however, that not everyone was so impressed with the Russian Tsar's "civilization." John Evelyn, for instance, who hosted Peter for part of his stay, was distressed to discover after the monarch left that he had destroyed much of his house and garden, largely through his drunken parties and carousing (Waddington 11).

<sup>6</sup> See Michael Hughes, "The English Slavophile: W. J. Birkbeck and Russia."

<sup>7</sup> For an excellent discussion of international conceptions concerning Russia and its relationship with Montesquieu's theory of government during the reign of Catherine, see Harsha Ram, "Russian Poetry and the Imperial Sublime." *Russian Subjects: Empire, Nation, and the Culture of the Golden Age*.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Malia notes that in addition to invading Poland in 1830 to help crush the "November Uprising," Russia also urged intervention against constitutional revolutions throughout Spain, Portugal, Piedmont, and Naples, even while denying aid to Eastern Orthodox rebellions within the Ottoman Empire (91-92).

<sup>9</sup> As Said points out, colonies such as "Ireland and Australia too were considered made up of inferior humans ... Each of these lesser subjects was classified and placed in a scheme of peoples guaranteed by scholars and scientists like Georges Cuvier, Charles Darwin, and Robert Knox" (*Culture and Imperialism* 134).

<sup>10</sup> See "Chapter 2" in Patrick Waddington. *From The Russian Fugitive to The Ballad of Bulgaria: Episodes in English Literary Attitudes to Russia from Wordsworth to Swinburne*.

<sup>11</sup> Alexander was perhaps best known for his progressive repeal of Serfdom in 1861. See Martin Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum* (199).

<sup>12</sup> With recent acquisitions of the Khanates of "Turkistan" in Central Asia, all that separated Russian forces from India – the "Jewel in the Crown" of the British Empire – was the unallied and unruly province of Afghanistan, which English forces repeatedly, though largely unsuccessfully, attempted to subdue against Slavic influence through invasions in 1838 and 1878. J.A.R. Marriot. *Anglo-Russian Relations, 1689-1943*.

<sup>13</sup> See Philip Ross Bullock, *Rosa Newmarch and Russian Music in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century England* (24).

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<sup>14</sup> Unlike most other European nations, England neither had extradition treaties with Russia, nor was prepared to work with their “Okhrana” secret police in prosecuting Russian political criminals on English soil. See Helen Szamuely, “British Attitudes to Russia 1880-1918.”

<sup>15</sup> Anthony Cross provides a good catalogue of this explosion in interest in *The Russian Theme in English Literature From the Sixteenth Century to 1980: An Introductory Survey and Bibliography* (50-53).

<sup>16</sup> See Clarence Decker, “Victorian Comment on Russian Realism.”

<sup>17</sup> See Christian, R. F. “The Road to Yasnaya Polyana: Some Pilgrims from Britain and Their Reminiscences.”

<sup>18</sup> Michael Taussig, for instance, argues that the “Good savage” is “representative of unsullied Origin, a sort of Eden before the Fall where harmony prevailed,” in contrast to the “Bad savage,” which becomes a “sign of the permanent wound inflicted by history, the sign of waste, degeneracy, and thwarted narrative” (142).

<sup>19</sup> Ramsay Burt has made the interesting case that the figure of the male Russian dancer presented an uncertain and destabilizing force within English aesthetics. On the one hand, as a “semi-Asiatic and semi-European people” they were believed to be free of the Victorian disease of “degeneracy and decadence,” yet on the other, and particularly following Nijinsky, there emerged an “association of homosexuality with ballet,” and an attendant assumption of effeminacy and emasculation (61-62).

<sup>20</sup> Marilyn Schwin-Smith provides a good analysis on Harrison’s “totemic” understanding of Russian culture, and its relationship with her wider engagement with Henri Bergson’s philosophy of time in “Bergsonian Poetics’ and the Beast: Jane Harrison’s Translations from the Russian.”

<sup>21</sup> In the former instance, hundreds of young Russians, acting with tacit assent from the government, joined volunteer regiments fighting on the Boer side throughout the Transvaal, while in the later, Britain provided economic, though not direct military, assistance to the Japanese navy, culminating in the crushing defeat of Russia sea forces at the Battle of Tsushima. See, respectively, Apollon Davidson and Irina Filitova, *Russians and the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*; and J. A. R. Marriot. *Anglo-Russian Relations 1689-1943*.

<sup>22</sup> Although producing “not propaganda in the traditional sense,” Michael Hughes notes that many of the most influential pro-Russian commentators of the era – such as Sarolea, Mackail, and Winifred Stephens – nevertheless consistently had “ties to what can loosely be termed the political and cultural ‘Establishment.’” “Searching For the Soul of Russia: British Perceptions of Russia During the First World War.” (198-226).

<sup>23</sup> In an interesting passage, both prophetic in itself and largely representative of longstanding English attitudes towards Russia, William Gerhardie further suggested that “Russia will not change. There will arise some new Peter the Great, who will conceive a new plan, let us say, for electrifying the whole of Russia, with a stroke of the pen . . . . And the contractors will duly bribe the authorities and supply rotten material, get rich, and the plan will be crippled at birth” (ix-x).

<sup>24</sup> Along with thousands of tonnes of weapons and ammunition, the allies also attempted to supply clothing and equipment to the scattered armies of General Denikin in the Caucasus, General Yudenich in the North, and particularly the recognized leader Admiral Kolchak operating out of Siberia. See J.A.R. Marriot, *Anglo-Russian Relations, 1689-1943*.

<sup>25</sup> George Bernard Shaw, likewise, suggested that such wide-reaching reform was unlikely in a more developed industrial state than Russia “because of the absolute dependence of the people on a complicated machinery which they do not understand” – a difficulty which, in his view, did not occur in such a “backward agricultural country cultivated by peasants” (*The Rationalization of Russia* 56).

<sup>26</sup> Lloyd George, after a particularly fierce debate with Churchill, himself admitted that “To the majority of British citizens Bolshevism was a hideous and a terrifying monster. The action of [his] British

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Government in attempting to deal with it was represented as tendering a friendly hand to murder whilst it was reeking with the blood of its victims” (378).

<sup>27</sup> Although not known at the time, the letter – supposedly delivered from the Comintern itself to the Communist Party of Great Britain – was later shown to have been a fake, though the exact details, as Keith Neilson notes, remain sketchy and controversial (49).

<sup>28</sup> See chapter 2 “Living With a Revolution” in Northedge and Wells, *Britain and Soviet Communism: The Impact of a Revolution* for an in depth discussion of the events surrounding the “Arcos Raid.”

<sup>29</sup> H.G. Wells went further, even suggesting that revolutionary violence within Russia was solely a product of “counter-revolutionaries,” “looters,” and “brigands,” as well as the subversive actions of the capitalist West (34).

<sup>30</sup> George Bernard Shaw, somewhat bemusedly, also described the spectacle of an anti-religion museum he visits during his trip to Moscow, which was designed to illustrate the “abuses of priestcraft and the horrors of religious persecution” (*Shaw: An Autobiography 1898-1950* 198).

<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, Bolshevism was also frequently compared, in its puritanical self-denial and messianic zeal, to Roman Catholicism, which similarly experienced a post-war upsurge in popularity, partly because both doctrines appeared to provide stability and a sense of community in a seemingly chaotic age Arthur Koestler, for instance, argued that: “The Communist novice, subjecting his soul to the canon law of the Kremlin, felt something of the release which Catholicism also brings to the intellectual wearied and worried by the privilege of freedom” (12).

<sup>32</sup> Said points out that even professional scholars, such as Duncan Macdonald, often exhibited a belief that the non-physical realm was ““much more immediate and real to the Oriental than to western peoples”” (276).

<sup>33</sup> Fedor Panferov’s novel *Bruski*, for instance, while immensely popular in Russia – selling over 600,000 copies – was nevertheless derided in Britain as product of politico-aesthetic favouritism, and itself nothing more than “a collection of crude sketches, ill constructed and written in the most primitive naturalistic manner” (Struve 91-92).

<sup>34</sup> See “Marriage and Family Law” in Ferdinand Feldebrugge’s *Russian Law: The End of the Soviet System and the Role of Law*.

<sup>35</sup> G.L. Owen points out that this event was, in some ways, “a crisis more profound than appearances at the time suggested,” as it not only precipitated the initial break, but also an economic war of attrition that ultimately engendered mistrust and played into the hands of Nazi Germany’s expansionist ambitions. “The Metro-Vickers Crisis: Anglo-Soviet Relations Between Trade Agreements, 1932-1934.” *The Slavonic and East European Review*. 49. 114. (1971) 92-93. Print.

<sup>36</sup> Bill Jones, for instance, estimates that at the height of its popularity, the *Daily Worker* was selling around 70,000 copies a day, and that even more than actual membership, was the uncounted legions who “temporarily at least, identified themselves with the communist position” (14).

<sup>37</sup> Over the course of the five years, the production of almost all raw materials, such as coal, oil, iron and steel, nearly doubled, while the output of some manufactured goods, including automobiles and tractors, increased by as much as 8000 per cent (Davis 77-78).

<sup>38</sup> In some areas of research however, Bolshevism was also seen as deeply opposed to scientific advance. Psychoanalysis, in particular, had been all but outlawed within Russia as “hostile to [the Soviet] system,” while Freud, for his part, equally had little time for Bolshevism, which he regarded as “the end of intellectual work” and a regression within Russia “back to barbarism.” See Miller, “Freudian Theory under Bolshevik Rule: The Theoretical Controversy during the 1920s” (641-642), and Rice (226).

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<sup>39</sup> Others, such as John Reed, also noted the restrained and ascetic qualities which, at least initially, characterized the communist hierarchy, such as Lenin's "Unimpressive" appearance, frequently appearing in public in "shabby clothes, his trousers too long for him" (104).

<sup>40</sup> See, respectively, "Science and Socialism." *Green History: A Reader in Environmental Literature, Philosophy, and Politics* (148); and *The Road to Wigan Pier* (174).

<sup>41</sup> In addition to Fox and Bell, many prominent literary figures either observed – as was the case with Auden and Spender, who was told by CPGB head Harry Pollitt to "go and get killed; we need a martyr" – or saw action – Orwell was famously shot through the neck while fighting near Siétamo – over the course of hostilities. See Hugo Garcia, *The Truth About Spain!: Mobilizing British Public Opinion, 1936-1939* (171).

## All Roads Lead To Moscow: Wyndham Lewis and the Russian Grotesque

*“The Spectacular violence of the reds or communists attracts our eye like a fiercely gesticulating puppet”*

Wyndham Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled*

Of all the major authors within the Modernist canon, the relationship between Percy Wyndham Lewis and the idea of “Slavicness” has been among the most widely studied and the least understood. Particularly in more recent scholarship, previous attempts at a simple “procrustean fitting of Lewis into the mould of right-wing extremism,” carried out in such authoritative works as Geoffrey Wagner's *Wyndham Lewis: A Portrait of the Artist as the Enemy*, have been increasingly complicated by an understanding of the author's extensive engagement with Soviet Bolshevism (Hegarty 336). For instance, as Frederic Jameson points out, although Lewis's actual relationship with fascist politics involved little more than a brief and unaffiliated “flirtation with Nazism,” the way in which his “implacable critique of the various middle class ideologies” morphs into a violent attack on “Marxism” as the “fundamental enemy,” indicates a wider variety of philosophical “protofascism,” whereby Communism occupies the central position of antagonism within his intellectual scheme (15). Several critics have even gone so far as to suggest that Lewis was “opposed [to] Communism even to the point of praising Fascist movements that tried to destroy Russian influence,” his right-wing sympathies merely a peripheral consequence of his more essential anti-Soviet dogma (Materer 114). This perceived rejection of communist doctrine was significant, both within Lewis's life-time and after, to the development of his public persona as “The Enemy.” By championing “Fascist dictatorships as a bulwark against the evil of Communism,” as Paul Edwards notes, Lewis set himself apart as an outsider and social pariah within the polarized milieu of post-war society, fundamentally opposed to the majority of his generation who came to espouse “Russian Communism as a bulwark against the spread of the evil Fascism” (Edwards “Introduction” 3-4). Then, as

now, it was Lewis's virulent rejection of Bolshevism, more than anything else, which marked him out among litterateurs as what W.H. Auden famously described as "That lonely old volcano of the right" (Smith 221).

Although there is a very real sense in which Lewis defined his personal identity and political outlook in terms of an oppositional stance towards communism, these kinds of narrowly Russophobic interpretation often fail to fully account for the complexity inherent in his interactions with Soviet art, ideas and society. Despite his later antithetical reputation, at the dawning of his career Lewis was perceived, by both popular fiat and published review, as the English heir apparent to cultural Russophilia. Rebecca West, for example, praised his novel *Tarr* as "a beautiful and serious work of art that reminds one of Dostoevsky only because it is too inquisitive about the soul, and because it contains one figure of vast moral significance which is worthy to stand beside Stavrogin" (Foshay 161), while Ford Maddox Hueffer, upon his first shock encounter with Lewis in an ill-lit hallway, described how "he seemed to be a Russian": "He was very dark in the shadows of the staircase. He wore an immense steeple-crowned hat. Long black locks fell from it. His coat was one of those Russian looking coats that have no revers. He had also an ample black cape of the type that villains in transpontine melodrama throw over their shoulders when they say 'Haha!'" (Peppis, *Literature, Politics, and the English Avant-Garde* 20). In contrast to his frequent anti-Russian invective, there are also passages, even in Lewis's subsequent work, which imply not only passive toleration, but also an active willingness to engage with Bolshevik doctrine in a judicious and bipartisan manner. When asked to comment on his ideological stance in a questionnaire published by *New Verse*, for instance, Lewis responded that "politically I take my stand midway between the Bolshevik and the fascist – the gentleman on the left I shake with my left hand, the gentleman on the right with my right hand" (Sherry 103). His intellectual principles, on the whole, involved a conflicting mix which was "partly communist and partly fascist, with a distinct streak of monarchism

in my marxism, but at bottom anarchist with a healthy passion for order” (*The Diabolical Principle and the Dithyrambic Spectator* 126).<sup>1</sup> Consequently, despite, or even because of this facetious humour and tongue-in-cheek contrarianism, Lewis's views on Russia, much like wider English narratives, express a sense of discursive ambivalence which, to some extent, undermines strictly conservative accounts of his ideological scheme.

In addition to the political equivocation apparent in his doctrine, the manner in which Lewis contributes to the on-going narrative of Russian cultural identity is further complicated by the deliberate and studied ambivalence he brings to the idea of individual personality. Rejecting the notion of a stable and coherent self, Lewis suggests, on numerous occasions, that the essence of human consciousness involves an emptiness or absence, a “centre of Nothing,” which lies “at the root of true philosophy” (*Snooty Baronet* 244). Accordingly, Lewis argues, by recognizing this lack of a metaphysical absolute and becoming liberated from the shackles of restrictive singularity, the enlightened artist or thinker is absolutely free to reimagine and recreate their own image as they please, to develop “side by side, [their] six most constant indications of different personalities”: “You will then acquire the potentiality of six men. Leave your front door one day as B.: the next march down the street as E. A variety of clothes, hats especially, are of help in this wider dramatization of yourself. *Never* fall into the vulgarity of being or assuming yourself to be one ego” (“The Code of a Herdsman” 4).

This plastic notion of selfhood is crucial to understanding Lewis's engagement with Russia. Not only did it forestall, to some extent, the *need* for doctrinal consistency throughout his political endeavours, but it also allowed him to distinguish between the Nietzschean “ubermensch,” who was constituted by a state of self-transgression and will-to-power<sup>2</sup> – the “outcast Enemy / Outcasted for refusing to conform / To the phases of this artificial storm,” as he puts it in *One Way Song* – and the overwhelming majority of men, the “masse mensch” who desired nothing more than a leader to “take all responsibility off

their shoulders and tell them what to do” (*Left Wings Over Europe* 294). Within the context of Lewis’s incessant and often debilitating suspicions,<sup>3</sup> this “us-and-them” division between the artist and the “average man” proved highly significant to his relationship with Soviet doctrine. Following his infamous spat with Roger Fry and his Bloomsbury cohorts,<sup>4</sup> Lewis came to suspect the existence of a vast and anti-intellectual conspiracy among the so-called English left-wing intelligentsia. He describes Bolshevism, for instance, as a salvationist racket put across by a combination of “money kings,” “young gentlemen at Oxford and Cambridge,” and “riff-raff of the dispossessed aristocracy in the pocket of the stock-and-share tipster” (*Left Wings Over Europe* 320-322). This “Malefic Cabal,” as he terms it, was united by a celebration of the “*homme moyen sensuel*,” the conventional, unimaginative, and aesthetically uninspired human quotidian. Viewed through the lens of Lewis’s characteristically Cartesian “dichotomy of mind and body,”<sup>5</sup> these “Revolutionary Simpleton[s]” embody, both literally and metaphorically, the superficial physicality and marionette-like inhumanity of a merely corporeal, as opposed to intellectual, existence. In a similar fashion to the “Tyros,” his sinister, leering, half-man-half-robots painted following the war,<sup>6</sup> Lewis’s pseudo-revolutionary cretins appear to be nothing more than absurd “puppets” and “*mechanical men*,” who, much like the “insect communis[ts]” in *The Wild Body*, are simply physical bodies pretending to be human (158). Indeed, it was primarily this deceitful act of being one thing but pretending to be another which lay at the heart of what Lewis abhorred in the radical leftist and faux-intellectual conspirators.

Despite his clear anti-Bolshevik attempt to clean up what Ezra Pound described as the “great lot of rubbish, cultural, Bohemian, romantico-Tennysonian, arty, societish, gutterish” aesthetics apparent in the Bloomsbury set (Ardis 98), aspects of Lewis’s work also indicate, if tangentially, a contrasting attraction towards precisely these communist qualities. For instance, although he critiques the absurdity of the animal body, Lewis also comments that anything overtly hideous is a thing not to be missed: “Stupidity has always

been exquisite and ugliness fine” (*Blast I* 145). And while he derided the masses of society for their automaton mindlessness, Lewis also simultaneously exalts in the advent of a mechanistic and hyper-modern universe, in that it enables the enlightened human being to see “life itself as something *imperfect*, like a machine to be superseded,” inspiring even greater feats of personal endeavour (*The Art of Being Ruled* 23). Whereas the “average man” may be a machine striving to be human, paradoxically, the “superman” is defined as a human who desires to become machine.

It is this logical circularity and eternally shifting doctrinal inconsistency, I would suggest, that ultimately characterises Lewis’s textual relationship with the idea of Russia. Within the framework of his paranoid reasoning, I will argue that although Lewis’s earlier works evince a largely redemptive and carnivalesque attitude towards Russian culture, with the passage of time this socio-political imagination becomes increasingly oppositional towards what he perceived to be the monstrous, “Oriental,” and finally conspiratorial, encroachment of Soviet ideology. Nevertheless, even inside of this seemingly linear progression, it is also possible to observe a number of caveats and incongruities in Lewis’s construction of Bolshevism, which function to undermine unidirectional accounts of his politics. One must, as he put it, “contradict [oneself] in order to live” (*The Ideal Giant* 36). Indeed, as we will see, this insistently self-questioning attitude itself operates as part of a more general approach to the concept of alienation and otherness, one which is crucially indebted to the poetics of “grotesqueness.”

### **Lewis and the Russian Carnival**

Although there has been general critical consensus that Lewis’s work exhibits a consistent tendency to endow his subject matter with a “grotesque otherness”<sup>7</sup> – what Michael Meyer describes as the rapid, chiaroscuro-like oscillation between such paradoxical opposites as “fear and laughter, aggression and playfulness, and the merging of

fantastical/macabre carnival atmospheres with rational and logical reality” (2) – there has been little agreement as to exactly *how* his use of such alienating imagery ought to be interpreted.

On the one hand, writers such as Ana Gabriela Macedo have argued that Lewis’s fictional works, such as *The Wild Body*, can be seen as partaking of the “ambivalence studied by Bakhtin and the medieval popular tradition,” in that his emphasis on the aberrant, yet regenerative power of laughter, challenges conventional ideals of a static world order, emphasizing rather a process of change and becoming (82-83). Following this Bakhtinian understanding, Lewis’s use of surreal and uncanny motifs occurs as a celebration of the human body when it “transgresses its own confines, ceases to be itself. The limits between the body and the world are erased, leading to the fusion of the one with the other and with surrounding objects” (*Rabelais and His World* 310). Within the bounds of this carnivalesque atmosphere, the lower bodily stratum appears as base *and* regenerative, evolving through a melee of ““Bloodshed, dismemberment, burning, death, beatings, blows, curses and abuses”” which creates even as it destroys, in a way consistent with Lewis’s notion of perpetual self-reinvention (Munton 143-144).

On the other hand though, observers such as Kelly Anspaugh have contested this reading, suggesting that unlike Bakhtin’s “genial, playful, Horatian satirist,” Lewis’s work displays the outlook of an “indignant, paranoid, Juvenalian satirist,” and is consequently much closer to the vision of alienation and inhumanity offered in Wolfgang Kayser’s influential account *The Grottesque in Art and Literature* (132). In this interpretation, grotesqueness and abnormality are associated with attempts to invoke and subdue those absurd and other-worldly elements which “contradic[t] the very laws which rule our familiar world” – arising, in other words, in an attempt to defend against a transgression of realms and maintain a sense of ontological purity (31). Indeed, as Leonard Cassuto points out, this degenerative and “monstrous” form of grotesque often occurs as part of a racial

narrative in which “one group tries to objectify the other,” rendering them inhuman or “not-human” in response to a perceived invasion of an exotic alienness into the domain of polite society (xv). Accordingly, and in contrast to the regenerative qualities inherent in carnivalesque and saturnalian modes of representation, this use of monstrous imagery is quintessentially concerned with the maintenance, rather than break-down, of borders between civilized and savage, mind and body.

In many ways however, the critical distinction drawn between these two forms of grotesque is a false dichotomy. Particularly in terms of his depiction of Bolshevism, there is no straight-forward sense in which Lewis entirely commits himself to either representational structure. Instead, his complex relationship with the Soviet uncanny follows much the same trajectory as his broader interactions with Russian society as a whole, in that, not only can his work be loosely divided, as Alan Munton argues, into the positive and carnivalesque “early comedy” and the negative and Monstrous “later satire,” but there is also considerable space, even inside this seemingly stable analytic scheme, for uncertainty and playful equivocation (144).

In contrast to his later works, Lewis’s earliest writing presents a clearly mapped connection between Russian culture and the redemptive dissolution of established orders. In addition to attending a conference to “help get Gorki out of prison” and a number of “remarkable” new Russian dances during his Parisian stay in 1905 (*Letters* 17), Lewis further came to argue that it was only the “heroic crowd,” such as was evident in Russian society, that could produce a luminary such as Lenin capable of “contradict[ing] all the principles presiding at its conjunction” (*Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change* 122). Even from its inception, the Bolshevik revolution, which gave rise to Marxist-Leninism, embodied for Lewis precisely the kind of rebellious and tempestuously conflicted principles he had himself espoused in the Vorticist manifesto.<sup>8</sup> For instance, in *The Art of Being Ruled*, he declares that the ancient “‘democratic’ european idea is one that is

undoubtedly being strangled off the stage,” replaced by a Bolshevik principle of dictatorship (70). Even communist art was in a transitional phase. The theatre in particular, he suggests, was an environment, in stark contrast to the intellectual deadness of English drama, characterised by “wilfully created chaos” and a barrage of “new, fluid material” (*The Art of Being Ruled* 158).

Unlike pre-revolutionary Russian culture, which had largely, though not exclusively,<sup>9</sup> been peopled by ““introspective, doubting, hesitating, diffident,”” and, in short, “average people,” Lenin and his associates, for Lewis, had seized authority through a sheer appetite for power (*The Art of Being Ruled* 90). In an interesting reversal of what he elsewhere calls the “traditional obliquity and subterranean methods of the Orient,” the Bolshevik leadership appear as frankly avowed representatives of his idealized Nietzsche-cum-Machiavellian “ubermensch,” particularly in their unscrupulous desire simply to rule the conventional human being with an iron fisted authority:

The present rulers of Russia ... are imbued with a ‘creative,’ compassionate emotion for the human being. But they are intelligent enough to perceive, it seems, that he is a very helpless child ... Some one or other has to assume responsibility for the ignorant millions. And their expression of their willingness and determination to assume power, even to wrest power from those who abuse it, where necessary, is the personal announcement on the part of the Russian rulers.

(*The Art of Being Ruled* 89)

The Soviet authorities were representative, in Lewis’s view, of the ideally free man who was “*least* clamped into a system” of conventional morality, and although brutal, what they had managed to achieve in such a short space of time by assuming authority in the name of the enlightened few – as opposed to the degraded multitude – ought nevertheless, in his view, to be the admiration of humankind (*The Art of Being Ruled* 151).

This intellectually emancipated and carnivalesque vision of Soviet society is apparent, not only in the riotous vision of Soviet politics Lewis presents in *The Art of Being Ruled*, but also, through the anti-essentialist manner in which Russian identity is depicted in his earliest, and in many respects most radical, full-length fictional endeavour *Tarr*. Published serially in *The Egoist* between April 1916 and September 1917, the orthodox approach to this novel has been, as Paul Peppis notes, to regard it as essentially a story of “national allegory,” in which the actions of each character are determined by, and contribute to, a univocal understanding of their various socio-historical backgrounds (Peppis “Anti-Individualism and the Fictions of National Character in Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr*” 226-227). A closer and more focused investigation of the specifically Slavic characters within this work, however, suggests that such a reductive account of cultural psyche is too simplistic, especially for understanding the dialectical division which emerges between the standardized and restrictively singular “*homme moyen sensuel*” personality, and the more subversive and anarchic idea of Russian self-hood.

The first example of this is Anastasya Vasek. In her outsider status as an émigré within the Parisian salon society, Anastasya initially appears in the stereotypical guise of an exotic, alien, and sensualised Slavic “other.” When first arriving at Fraulein Liepman's party, for instance, she enters like an “aristocratic concubine of the household of Peter the Great, jangling and rumbling like a savage raree show through abashed capitals” (114). Within the wider sexual discourse structure of the novel – in which physical intimacy is depicted as “just the opposite of art” – she is further reduced to the status of a physical and anti-intellectual body: “Anastasya Vasek, alleged bastard of a Grand Duke, a beautiful and challengingly original Modern Girl, arrives, bespangled and replete with childish self-confidence, upon the scene of her (Bertha's) simple little life – her plain blunt womanhood contrasted with this pretentious super-sex” (162). This excessive and “Orientalist” carnality renders Anastasya implicitly grotesque. Kreisler, for instance, suspects that his implacable

need to “*possess her*” is driven by something inherently demonic in her personality: “he must get his mouth on hers he told himself juicily and fiercely; he must revel in the laugh, where it grew! She was a fatal woman: she was in fact evidently *the Devil*” (137). And when Anastasya laughs at his awkward and socially inept advances, the sanctum of Kreisler's inner life becomes tainted by her monstrous essence, causing him to similarly take on satanic properties and disappear “as Mephistopheles might sink with suddenness into the floor at the receipt of some affront” (135). Her common and visceral sexuality seems, at least on the surface, to be in keeping with both a monological conception of individuality, and also, more generally, Lewis’s posited rejection of the horrible and encroaching Russian body.

In contrast to this apparently regressive and typecast depiction however, as the narrative develops Anastasya’s identity – much like that of Ursula Brangwen in Lawrence’s *The Rainbow* – reveals itself to be in actuality much closer to the paradigm of limitless and Bakhtinian self-reinvention. In terms of social inheritance, for instance, we discover that she is not even, strictly speaking, a Russian, but rather what might loosely be called a “citizen of the world.” Although both her parents are of Russian descent, Anastasya herself was born in Berlin and brought up in America, before moving to Vienna, and then finally Paris (181). Even Anastasya’s excessive sexuality is revealed to be an artificial construct. She is not the “*grande amoureuse*” most believe her to be, but has only had sexual relations with an old Russian and a Japanese man (268). Her exotic and risqué appearance, she reveals, is merely a “show,’ menfolk of course being the audience,” in which she plays the role of “Pantomime” puppet or “*Can-Can* exhibitionist” as the occasion requires (257). She simply *assumes* the standardised image of Eastern sensuality – her own, genuine personality nested inside a multitude of social masks like so many Matryoshka dolls – in order that she may “go anywhere and pass [herself] off as a most lovely creature” (268).

Underneath this carefully constructed social disguise, and like Tarr himself,<sup>10</sup> Anastasya is in reality an artist and an intellectual, a “high-brow girl” who must necessarily disguise her cerebral bona fides in order to avoid threatening the fragile egos of her male companions, which, she suggests, would cause them to “become impotent within a month at the outside.” This public deception, however, fails to fully mask her underlying personal dignity:

Anastasya regarded her woman's beauty as the bright dress of a harlot; she was only beautiful for that, so why humbug? Her splendid and bedizened state was assumed with shades of humility: even her tenderness and peculiar heart appeared beneath the common infection and almost disgrace of that state. (114)

In its multifarious intellectual, cultural, as well as sexual dimensions, her personality partakes of both the lowly body *and* the exalted mind. Because of her individual strength and integrity however, and despite his obvious respect, Tarr decides that “Anastasya was in every way too big; she was too big physically, she was mentally outsize: in the sex department, she was a Juggernaut” (278). Accordingly, “such successful people as Anastasya and himself were by themselves: it was impossible to combine or *wed* them as to compound the genius of two great artists” (278). The amalgamation of such titanic personalities, far from adding to or complimenting one another would, artistically, only detract from its opposite. The aberrant “abomination” of her multiple and shifting personas must either exist in isolation or fall prey to the “slavish pretence” and absurdity of the mundane “Mob-talent” which characterizes Lewis’s account of contemporary society.<sup>11</sup>

This transgressive understanding of Russian identity is apparent, not only in Anastasya, but almost all of the Slavic characters who haunt the studios and cafes of Montmartre, to the extent that heterogeneity and anti-stereotypical identity formations *themselves* seem to constitute a Russian stereotype. Louis Soltyk, for instance, much like his compatriot, is similarly endowed with a natural gift for accommodating himself to

numerous different social settings. He habitually surprises “one anglo-saxon partner after another with his wonderful english – unnecessarily like the real thing,” while also pretending to a superficial melancholy and passion in order to give his female companions the romantic impression of a soul that was “marked with little delicate wounds and wistfulness” (131). Likewise, both of the Russian “seconds” in his ill fate duel have personalities just as fluid and diverse as his. Bitzenko, for example – a fiery and “excitable bourgeois of Petrograd” – is described as having, during the 1905 Socialist uprising, switched class allegiances numerous times, first helping the peasants burn down his own house (“purely for the fun of the thing”) before promptly turning around and offering to assist the police investigating the crime (234). Jan Pochinsky, moreover, while drastically different from his compatriots in many ways, also appears as the epitome of personal ineffability and mystery: “Jan was silent: his judicial calm and immobility imposed so much upon the astonished Bitzenko and the perplexed Tarr that they found themselves spellbound until this Sphinx should give utterance to his thoughts” (225). Despite their superficial differences, each of these Russian characters can be seen as sharing a higher order unity of identity, purely, and ironically, by virtue of their collective opposition to the very idea of personal singularity.

Nevertheless, and even acknowledging the collective family resemblance inherent in Lewis’s depiction, this anti-stereotypical form of Russian stereotyping is itself portrayed in affirmative terms within the philosophical narrative of *Tarr*. Indeed, these pluralistic Slavic characters appear in stark contrast to the Aryan singularity evident in Otto Kreisler, whose stolid and straight-forward Rhenish heritage leads to a constant “thirst for conventional figures” (131). The implicit opposition between this fluid Russian world-view and a restrictive German concept of self finally becomes explicit through the duel the “true bismarkian Prussian” conducts with Louis Soltyk. Frustrated by an inability to pin down the motives and intentions of his Slavic counterpart, Kreisler unconsciously

sublimates his jealousy over the latter's financial relationship with former benefactor Ernst Vokt into a belief that the Russian had prejudiced his amorous pursuit of Anastasya. He gives, in other words, a "false picture of the situation in which the heart was substituted for the purse" (219). Further, and having first berated him into accepting this "farcical" challenge – which Soltyk, in a gesture of *fin de siècle* ennui, finds all "too boring" – the German then offers to call off proceedings if his opposite will grant him a kiss:

‘I am willing to forgo the duel at once on one condition. Otherwise it must go on!’ he barked fiercely. ‘If Herr Soltyk will give me a kiss I will forgo the duel!’ ... Kreisler thrust his mouth forward amorously, his body in the attitude of the Eighteenth-Century gallant, right toe advanced and pointed, as though Soltyk had been a woman. (238)

Although this gesture is clearly intended to demean his enemy and reinstate Kreisler's own one-dimensional self-conception in terms of a traditional Teutonic chivalry, it also suggests an attempt to confirm in his mind the purely heterosexual and competitive basis of their conflict. In doing so, he represses the clearly financial and homosexual aspects of Kreisler's motives ("Na ja! It was a sort of passion he had for him!") thereby denying the possibility of multiple conflicting urges existing within his own psyche. Soltyk, however, refuses both the humiliating gesture and this univocal interpretation of their quarrel. Instead he symbolically turns "red and white by turns" – his chameleon like outer adaptability manifesting itself – before leaping at his opponent's throat as the whole event descends into a riot of absurd violence.

Despite the physical outcome of the ensuing circus-like melee – in which Kreisler accidentally murders his opponent, before fleeing as an "unsatisfactory" coward – it is the Russian's fluid personal beliefs which achieve a moral victory. Even in his death, he appears as a kind of joyous martyr, bemused by the spectacle which surrounds him: "The tall young Russian stood in a twisted attitude, a gargoyle Apollo: his mask of peasant

tragedy had broken into a slight and very simple smile” (241). In a similar fashion to his Soviet successors, with their unique self-awareness and capacity to rise above historical circumstance, Soltyk is prepared to accept, even on pain of death, the violent and carnivalesque dissolution of traditional morality and identity. In fact, as Lewis himself argues in the preface to his 1918 edition of *Tarr*, there was “much to be said” for this kind of grotesquely celebratory “eruption of greedy, fleshy, frantic strength,” which Soltyk and his cohort represented, especially in its potential to rejuvenate an intellectually stultified Europe (286). And whereas nations such as Germany and England were not capable of benefiting from such “power and passion,” Lewis came to hope, especially in the wake of the Bolshevik revolution, that “Russia will.”

### **Lewis and the Russian Monster**

Despite the clear enthusiasm apparent in Lewis’s earliest engagements with this transgressive vision of Russian culture, his initial optimism was soon to evaporate in the most drastic manner possible. As Charles Ferrall notes, although Lewis never directly addresses how it affected him, his increasingly outspoken opposition, particularly during the mid-1920s, to the “romantic primitivism” of communist doctrine appears to have arisen out of the working class violence he witnessed during the 1926 General Strike (148). What these turbulent May events, appear to have revealed to Lewis, was not only the extent to which, as he later put it in his auto-biographical *Blasting and Bombardiering*, everything was “getting bogged down” in politics, but also the inherent potential for communist revolution to be exploited by the mentally degenerate and deceitful *masse mensch*. Prior to the revolt, for instance, Lenin had seemed to him “the first great theorist, proving triumphantly in action what he had arrived at speculatively beforehand” (*The Art of Being Ruled* 70). Yet less than two years later Lewis believed that “Russian Communism not only should not, but cannot, become the creed of the Western peoples,” having witnessed himself the gap between vaunted theory and debased practice (“How to ‘Defend the West’”

XXX). The Russian “idea,” as Lewis retrospectively admitted, had already become popularised to the point of vulgarity among exactly the kind of pseudo-sophisticated Bloomsbury intellectuals he detested most. It was a cultural phenomenon that, in his view, descended with the speed and ferocity of an implacable barbarian horde, threatening the sanctity of those most English of virtues: aesthetic decency, social privilege, and racial purity.

On the subject of literature, Lewis quotes Elliot Paul's assertion that “For a decade preceding the war, English literature and particularly American literature was pervaded by the influence of the Russians, Dostoeffski, Chekhov, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Gogol, Gorki, Andreyev,” while the English social scene itself was swarming with fake “Ivans,” “Dmitris,” and “Alyoshas,” eager to don the superficial accoutrements of cultural savvy (*The Diabolical Principle and the Dithyrambic Spectator* 105). Similarly, the “Ballets Russes” had, according to Lewis, become both an indispensable part of, and faithful mirror to, the English “High-Bohemia,” fulfilling the same sensational function as the theatre of Racine and Moliere during the heyday of French culture (*Time and Western Man* 47). The ballet's principle attraction, Lewis argued, lay in the way that it pandered to the lowest instincts in the English socialite, particularly their taste for orientalism, primitivism, nostalgic charm, and the spectacular, which, although it appeared radical, had “nothing whatever to do with any artistic experiment specifically of the modern period” (*Time and Western Man* 49). It created, in other words, the illusion of rebellious excitement without providing any of the actual substance or risk.

Hand in hand with this aesthetic influx was the ascent of Russian political concerns within English society. Soviet communism had become an overnight phenomenon for intellectuals, giving rise to the unedifying spectacle of what Lewis termed the “revolutionary rich,” a group of imitation militant communists, who nevertheless dressed in twenty guinea evening suits, a situation he considered little short of a logical

monstrosity (*The Diabolical Principle and the Dithyrambic Spectator* 36). Indeed, the English intelligentsia was soon overrun by pretend Bolshevik sentiment, so much so that Lewis thought it unnecessary to even prove the overwhelming “*Leftish* colouration of so much of the newest poetry, of the majority of intelligent periodicals” or the suffering of writers and painters due to their non-adherence to communism (*Letters* 226). By 1932 Lewis was convinced that Muscovite influence within the English socialist movement had become so pervasive that there was no longer any “‘Youth Group’ in existence in England today whose numbers are not *communizing* if not communist” already, and that consequently a dualistic political situation had arisen in which there were only two choices: “(1) the *status quo* (namely, just not ever to think politically at all), or else (2) Russian Communism (*i.e.* Marxism)” (*Doom of Youth* 140). Even more so than its pre-revolutionary aesthetic counterpart, political Russophilia had become the increasingly ubiquitous, though often insincere, default position for much of elite English society.

In addition to this inundation of Russian cultural and political influences, the European intellectual scene was also, according to Lewis, in the process of being overrun by Slavic aesthetic pretenders. In his 1927 short-fiction collection *The Wild Body*, for instance, Lewis engages in an almost taxonomical delineation of a specific variety of Russian exile he discovered in Brittany, which he terms the “Polonais.” These middle-class men and women, he argues, had “made ‘art’ the excuse for a never-ending holiday” by decamping from their homes in various parts of the Russian Empire to one of the numerous “Pension[s] de Famille” situated throughout the continent, where they would pay three months’ rent then simply fail to leave after their allotted time was up – living for free because their hosts were too superstitious to turn out these strange creatures (70-71). They were, as Lewis put it, “slav parasite[s],” who, much like Russian culture itself, had become an invasive and on the whole fraudulent presence throughout the West.

In literary terms, these three themes – art, class, and ethnicity – which in many ways provided the animating force behind Lewis’s later engagement with the concept of “Russianness,” find fictional expression in his short-story entitled “Beau Sejour.” Originally published in 1909 by *The English Review* as “The Pole,” before being substantially revised to appear in *The Wild Body* under its current title,<sup>12</sup> this often neglected work importantly delineates the transitional point Lewis had reached in his movement away from Bakhtinian fluidity and towards Kayserian monstrosity.

The contest between personal liberation and static, deceitful obscenity in “Beau Sejour” is particularly evident in the character of Zoborov. At least initially, and in a comparable fashion to the Slavic characters within *Tarr*, Mademoiselle Peronnette’s enigmatic Russian lodger appears as regressive and stereotypical “*dirty moujik*,” possessing the “racy savagery that only a Cossack could convey” (63). With time however, he turns out to be considerably more complex. The narrator Kerr-Orr, for instance, is not even sure that Zoborov is his real name, as he never sees it written down, and is doubtful that, in the form he records it, any “russian eye would recognize it” (49). And while he convincingly fulfils the role, there are several indications that this characteristically “Polonais” appearance is also a form of disguise. For instance, although he succeeds in “conveying the correct sensation at the time,” Zoborov leaves a lasting impression on many people, when they think about it later, that his appearance is nothing more than a cleverly devised disguise (50).

Despite seeming to be an eternally shifting Bakhtinian individual, Zoborov's own unstable identity, unlike his previous fictional compatriots, is textually problematized and even to some extent rejected. In the first place, the beguiling appearance he adopts, rather than being part of a principled objection to reductionist theories of self, is revealed to be simply a form of deception, part of his villainous plan to rob his simple-minded boarding mistress of fifteen-thousand francs and become himself “le proprietaire” of the hotel.<sup>13</sup>

Secondly, and more importantly however, Zoborov's elusive sense of self is shown to be less an attempt to *redefine* Russianness, and more a *flight from* his national identity. Having departed with his ill-gotten gains, for instance, he distances himself completely from all things Slavic, employing only three Russians at his new establishment (all in menial jobs) claiming, in an ironic gesture indicative of his guilt, to have “no wish to go bankrupt like Mademoiselle Peronette” by ever trusting one of his countrymen again (70). Instead, he transforms his identity into that of a Breton peasant, dressing completely in “black cloth a half-inch thick,” and surrounding himself entirely in native company (69). Far from a ceaseless state of self-reinvention, Zoborov has simply swapped one restrictive national stereotype for another, a fact which makes him hideous rather than redemptive:

He rocked from side to side, stumbling at any largish cobble, chest up and out, a double chin descending spoon-shaped and hard beneath upon his short neck, formed as a consequence of the muscular arrangements for the production of his deep bass. His mouth protruded like the mouths of stone masks used for fountains. (68)

By falling into the vulgarity of assuming himself to be “one ego,” Zoborov is rendered static and monstrously inanimate, his human malleability replaced by the machine-like reification “of an obese doll or gigantic barber's block” (69). He has essentially shunned the personal liberation which characterises artists and intellectuals in favour of the automated singularity which typifies the visceral average human.<sup>14</sup>

If “Beau Sejour” can be read, somewhat obliquely, as Lewis’s initial narrative attempt to diagnose the malady of a mindless and duplicitous Russian invasion, *The Apes of God* – a work which, when it first appeared in 1931, so offended certain sections of English high-society that it caused a barrage of anti-Lewis hate-mail<sup>15</sup> – appears as his first avowed counter-blast to this obscene cultural phenomenon. Specifically, the conception of Russianness Lewis depicts in *The Apes of God* is symbolic of what he terms “the

diabolical principle”): a negative and demonic ideal of revolt “defined by the incorporation of the *dream-aesthetic* of the Super-realists into a body already reeking with 'romance' – indeed putrid with the excessive decomposition of that condition” (*The Diabolical Principle and the Dithyrambic Spectator* 64). No longer cool-headed rationalists, these Slavic and Bolshevik characters are inseparable from the idiotic masses and their gruesome attempts to counterfeit the appearance of sophistication.

The basic mechanism through which this pretence operates within the novel is, as the disembodied Pierpoint contends in his “Encyclical,”<sup>16</sup> through the attempts of the “idlest rich” – a class of bohemian cultural amateurs every bit as vulgar and tasteless as their “*nouveau riche* first cousins” – to engage in an “immense and costly *aping*” of the life of the true artist (120). Although these bohemian Jacks-(and Jills)-of-all-trades are publically identified with art and the intellect, in actual fact their vast “influence is brought to bear invariably in the propagation of the second-rate – for that does not challenge their conceit, and it fraternizes with the fundamental vulgarity with which they have not parted” (120-121). Despite the widespread prevalence of this shameful impersonation throughout the English intelligentsia, as *The Apes of God* lavishly attests through the ceaseless and multi-ethnic parade of such human “mannequins,” Lewis nevertheless also consistently presents this deceit as being specifically a Russian inspired phenomenon. “The dream of the economist-utopist [i.e. Marxist],” he suggests, is to make widespread and universal what had been already realized throughout London bohemia: a society in which “everyman possessed of leisure and means [can] enjoy the delectations of art” (118). Soviet aesthetic theory was, as Lewis argues in the *Diabolical Principle and the Dithyrambic Spectator*, the highest embodiment of this democratic drive towards abolishing the divide between “audience and performer, stage and auditorium,” a motivation which, in his view, would only lead to a dilution of the reality enjoyed by *genuine* art (69). Indeed, Russian culture is repeatedly presented throughout *The Apes of God* as exactly this kind of degenerate, and

often hideous, manifestation of the low cultural body. We see this, for example, when, during “Lord Osmund's Lenten Party,” the Jazz-band Zulus are described as “rejoicing in gross proletarian nigger-bumps,” producing a style of music as bad as, or worse than, the “idiotic mass-sound of the marxist music” (443). Not only is the influence of Russian culture absurd and debasing however, it is also portrayed by Lewis as inherently dishonest. This is clearly evident in Isabel's description of Turgenev's eponymous hero Dmitri Rudin:

he is always turning up in new places – as soon as they find him out in one, he moves on to some other part of the world, and begins all over again.

Wherever he is, he is always regarded as a *genius* – somebody who is 'going to do something' someday. He never does anything, of course. He just goes on talking and talking ... It is a very Russian figure” (290).

Slavic personality, according to Lewis, is essentially one in which empty and artificial gesture triumphs over real action.

Besides metaphorically expressing the dissembling values associated with a debased human average, Soviet society is also pictured by Lewis in conjunction with a literal excess of corpulent physicality. For instance, the “Russian Jew” David Novitsky is portrayed as “a man, 'swelled and twisted” to the point of explosion by his sense of self-importance and overflowing vitality, who for almost an entire chapter is absurdly depicted engaging in a barely intelligible Jeremiad during which his “hysterical trumpeting in broken english” is almost completely ignored by the rest of the assembled company (212). Similarly, in the figure of Michael, the “Russian *drug-pimp*” and “bolshevist,” we see character whose Dorian Gray-like youthful looks belie his true decrepit age, lending him the aura of a repulsive “Russian fugitive” out of some popular nihilist thriller (115). Indeed, although Michael is literally depicted holding the leash of his “de rigueur” pet dog “Bromo or Bluff,” he is, in actual fact, the “Slave of [his] Dog – like the Slave of the Lamp,” symbolically chained to his animalistic sexual and narcotic desires in a way that, in

addition to the description of his “lotus-land ... quietism, or indolence,” further connotes a stereotypically Oriental bestial and bodily existence (115-116).

This trope of the grotesque Soviet body imitating mind reaches its zenith in the person of Julius Ratner, who, although not actually of Slavic descent, is repeatedly described throughout *The Apes of God* in overtly Russian terms. When we first meet Ratner, for instance, he is described as a “sham Ratnerskolnikov” who only lacks the “glamour of poverty of the Russian” (143), while several pages later he similarly appears as an overt, if pretentious, Bolshevik sympathizer, the proud owner of a “compass used to ascertain the direction of the prophetic shrine [which] swivelled so as to place the holy city at Moscow instead of Mecca” (153). Ratner's essentially Russianized identity is further suggested through the way in which, like Michael, *The Apes of God* constructs his (homo)sexuality as fundamentally obscene and deviant. Despite Lewis's protestations in *Hitler* that he considered the “sex-moralist” to be a bore, and issues such as the “Bank ... more important than the backside,” the language in which he depicts such instances of transvestism suggests both a dissembling abomination and a threatening violation of the masculine/feminine boundary: “These Junos-gone-wrong, bare-shouldered and braceleted (as statuesque as feminine showgirl gardees) after a drink or two, will whisper to the outlandish sightseer that they are *men* ... The 'feminine' will never be quite the same for him [the sightseer] again ... The sex-absolute will to some extent have been disintegrated for him by this brief encounter” (24-26).<sup>17</sup> Descriptions of Ratner within the novel also participate in this construction of homosexuality as obscene and liminal body, as he is repeatedly depicted in overtly feminized terms. When he stares at himself in the mirror, for instance it is with a “steely, glittering, feminine eye. It was the scrutiny of a rival, woman against woman. And it said 'hag!’” (154). Further, after appearing on stage at the Sitwell's party, he adopts a flirtatious and feminized pride over

*his* body oh yes – of that favourite of his – Julius. And the overpowering

coyness – the discreet, the respectful humbleness – the circumspection in all the well studied movements of the accommodating body – limbs that were raised or dropped, in passive abandon, to suggest an act of love ... then afterwards, in coy retreat, hand-in-hand with Horace, that *bald bashfulness* of the yellow grin, of foot-lit suet, fanged with a fierce peep of rabbit-teeth. (587-588)

Unlike Nazi distaste for the “public orgasms of nigh-life *bankleute*,” Bolshevism is fundamentally associated in Lewis’s literary imagery with sensual impurity.

In addition to his sexual identity, Ratner’s artistic persona is also constructed as a location of deceit. Unable to produce anything but a sickening series of open ended questions under his own creative steam, he instead becomes an “eternal imitation-person,” counterfeiting the appearance of credibility by “burgling all the books of Western romance to steal their heroes' expensive outfits for his musty shop” (144). This ersatz creative impulse culminates in his “Barin Mutum” costume, which, in addition to the bestial and Orientalist connotations of its various horrific decorations – such as the Anguinum “egg composed of saliva from the jaws and froth from the bodies of snakes” – is an outfit that only covers half of the body, giving the impression that he is a “half-man,” rendered less than fully human by his imitative instincts (334).<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, the macabre chicanery Ratner embodies is associated by Lewis, not only with an aesthetic failing, but also with his Jewish racial origins. Much like the Hebrew God, for instance, he is accused of keeping his “real name up his sleeve ... afraid to leave that lying about where anyone could get hold of it,” alternatively appropriating someone else's title: “Ratner is not your real *name* at all I suppose – any more than Julius, which you have stolen from Caesar” (342). This Semitic underhandedness further Bolshevizes Ratner’s image, not least in light of Lewis’s own argument in the *Left Wings Over Europe* that “the rulers of Russia to-day – the real men of power – have all got Jewish blood in them” (138). On a symbolic level, Ratner represents the Lewisian apogee of an invasively fraudulent threat, consisting of a racial,

aesthetic, sexual, and, at its most basic level, metaphysical sense of monstrous Russian “otherness.”

### **Lewis and the Russian Conspiracy**

Although he often depicted himself as being persecuted, and indeed surrounded, by this “Malefic Cabal” of Russianized faux-radicals – who had, as he told his friend John Rothenstein, “ruined his life” with their “sneer[s] of hatred” and “sly Bloomsbury *sniff*[s]” (Meyers 50) – such an observation, while suggestive, does not necessarily demonstrate that Lewis believed Russia *in itself* to be inherently treacherous. In fact, even in his later writing, he often reiterates his view that Bolshevism was simply “a doctrine like any other,” having both pros and cons, but to which, on the whole, he remained neutral (*The Diabolical Principle and the Dithyrambic Spectator* 18). Where he does take the second, and much larger, step towards presenting a physically threatening image of this post-war “Cult of Russia,” however, is in his observation that such pseudo-communist dilettantes were in the process of being replaced by *authentic* Soviet communists, who were in every way more violent, deceitful, and treacherous than their forebears.

These genuine Soviet revolutionaries had, in Lewis’s view, increasingly started to flow forth across the continent, particularly after the “conspiracy of silence” concerning political matters broke some time “about 1926-27,” like hideous “waves of bolshevist revolution,” terrifying the hitherto devout bohemian pinks:

Instead of arriving like benevolent pilgrims, a sort of Magi, from the Russian East, as the naïf expected ... the messiahs began to spring out of the ground at our feet – up out of some fourth-dimensional trapdoor in the parisian pavement – clothed from head to foot in melodramatic *red* (equally the colour of conventional Hell and Communist revolt) with pitchfork and cloven hoof, spitting hatred, with bomb and poison cup. (*The Diabolical*

*Principle and the Dithyrambic Spectator* 114-115)

This changing of the left-wing guard is dramatized by Lewis in the final chapter of *The Apes of God*, in which, far from greeting the long awaited arrival of socialist rebellion with applause or fanfare, Lewis's weekend Bolsheviks appear frankly appalled by the prospect of real Marxist revolt. Upon hearing news of nationwide industrial action, for instance, Mrs. Bosun, the whole-hearted communist maid servant who had never missed her "bit of propaganda" in the evenings listening to the Moscow radio station U.S.S.R.B.C., topples over in an apoplectic fit of indignation (381). Horace Zagreus, meanwhile, who similarly professes himself to be a "communist ... down on the rich," likewise apocalyptically predicts that the nation is about to witness the rising of "flood-tide that is blood-red" and a "massacre civil and military" (386). When push came to shove, it would seem, Lewis's imitative "revolutionary rich" shied away from the Bolshevism they otherwise claimed – a case, as he saw it, of all style and no substance.

Although initially amused by the disappointment and "*scandal*" this political unmasking caused, Lewis himself soon joined the ranks of those dismayed by the trend towards Russian ideological expansionism. Whereas these Savile Row reds had, despite their loathsomeness, represented a largely passive, or at least narrowly artistic and intellectual, sense of social encirclement, Lewis increasingly came to believe that this new manifestation of Soviet culture was actively engaged in a brutal military plot to destroy the privileges of "Western Man."

Perhaps the single biggest shift in Lewis's conception of Soviet politics is manifest through the reversal of his attitude towards liberty. Unlike in *The Art of Being Ruled*, in which he advocates both Lenin's internationalist "suppression of nationality" in the name of global unity (366), Lewis soon came to renounce this monolithic Russian state for having granted dictatorial power to the "human average." This Soviet assault on liberty operated on two separate levels. In the first place, Lewis argues, communism was

fundamentally opposed to *personal* freedom. He cites as evidence for this the fact that Bolshevik forces were in the process of attempting to stamp out individual autonomy through a campaign of terror. For instance, within the U.S.S.R. they had “lock[ed] up all Russians within Soviet frontiers,” “goug[ed] out eyes” as a “corrective for political dissent,” and set up “penal institutions which far out[did] the Tsarist penitentiaries” (*Left Wings Over Europe* 130). Abroad in Germany, moreover, “literally thousands of [unarmed] Nationalsocialists had been killed or wounded” by Marxist “*Rollcommando*[s]” (*Hitler* 18). The Leninist, far more than the Nazi, was for Lewis the true opponent of unfettered action.

Secondly, and more importantly though, Lewis also accuses the Kremlin of mounting a secretive attack on the principle of *national* liberty. This assault, he suggests, was largely conducted through a covert infiltration and manipulation of the newly formed League of Nations, an organization whose principle aim was to “make the world safe for Centralized Government” by “destroy[ing] the principle of the Sovereign State” (*Left Wings Over Europe* 16). Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Litvinov in particular – a man described as “plotting away to his heart's content” in Geneva – appeared to Lewis the the principle architect behind this philosophy of “centralization”: “*Indivisibility*, is the master key to all this complex situation. 'Peace is indivisible,' says [Litvinov]: and war, of course, the same. And of course, if it comes to that, everything else would be *indivisible*, too. All that would remain to be decided is *who should control this one and indivisible* human society” (*Left Wings over Europe* 22). Indeed, Lewis believed that the entire institution was designed from its inception to protect Bolshevik interests. For example, the Covenant of the League of Nations, intended to prevent international conflict from devolving into war, was in his view nothing more than a sequel to the Russian revolution, which “made Europe 'safe' for the bolshevist newcomer” (*Left Wings Over Europe* 170). The idea of collective security, in effect, was nothing more than an extension of Soviet foreign policy, a fact

which suggested to Lewis that the even the heart of European diplomacy had been overrun by dangerously pro-Soviet sentiments.

The real threat that this Russian cultural imperialism posed, however, was not only a function of way it deprived nations of their sovereign liberty, but also the manner in which it paved the way for future war. According to Lewis, communist provocateurs, acting under the implicit protection of the League, were actively working throughout Europe to instigate outlandish feats of violence, on the assumption that this would expedite the progress of international revolution. People like Sir. Walter Citrine, the General Secretary of the British Trade Unions Congress, were “making the world safe for communism” by publically claiming, during the Italian Invasion of Ethiopia, that the English public should be “defending Soviet Russia in defending Abyssinia” (*Left Wings Over Europe* 246). “Such a war as *that*,” Lewis argued, “would be the first step in world-revolution.” This rebellion-causing-war, far from paving the way for a socialist paradise, however, would necessarily precipitate the “*collapse of civilization, as we know it*” and a “return to primitive conditions – to *really* primitive conditions; the *tabula rasa* which is the desideratum of the marxist” (*Left Wings Over Europe* 47). The motive for this destructive urge, Lewis suggested, was not only political, but also ethnic, in that Russian Bolshevism was intent upon undermining the racial privilege of “the White Man.” He quotes for instance, a passage from Dean Inge, a writer whose views he claims to share entirely, in which the author notes the menace to Europe from the awakening ambitions of Asia, particularly apparent in the post-revolutionary rise of an expansionist and increasingly eastward-looking Soviet state: “Russia as an asiatic nation entirely alters the balance of power between the two continents. . . . Russia has not ceased to be imperialist and aggressive under Communism” (*Paleface* 259). Bolshevism was, essentially, an “open conspiracy” of race, responsible, to Lewis's mind, for nothing less than the immanent racial

and cultural “overthrow [of] that 'ancient system of the aryan world'” (*Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change* 138).

As a direct result of this view concerning Soviet opposition to European culture, Lewis also came to conceive of Russian society as quintessentially embodying the weak, primitive, anti-cerebral, bodily, and mechanical “*homme moyen sensuel*.” He points out, for instance, the intellectually regressive “methods of extreme 'un-European' barbarity by means of which [the Comintern] established itself,” including the use of the guillotine and the firing-squad, particularly when attempting to suppress the intellectual class (*Left Wings over Europe* 65). He even makes the well-worn allegation that the Russian people were possessed by an overweening and irrational mysticism, suggesting that despite the changes attendant upon the Bolshevik uprising, Russia was still at heart a “hallucinated ascetic” (*The Mysterious Mr. Bull* 235). In keeping with his understanding of the bodily-as-machine, the overwhelming Lewisian image of Communist doctrine, like many of his generation, is one of inherent and encroaching grotesque mechanicalness. On a superficial level, this is apparent in the Soviet authorities' propaganda efforts to industrialize the Russian working class: “in Moscow it is a matter of daily routine to stick up gigantic posters of power-plants under the nose of the gaping moujik ... and scream at him, over and over again – 'LOOK at the great big powerful MACHINE, you idiot tiller of the stupid soil, you animal sod!’” (*Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change* 191). On a deeper level however, Lewis also criticizes the way in which communism reduced human life to the level of automatization by rejecting the value of free-thinking and rational individuals: “The Marxist, or Communist, is a fanatically dehumanizing doctrine. Its injunctions are very rigidly erected against the continuance of 'the person.' In the place of 'the person' the Communist would put the thing – quantity in place of quality” (*Hitler* 182-183). For Lewis, Russian communism appeared as a kind of robotic “league-high Moloch” striding forth across Europe (*Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change* (240).

The final objection that Lewis poses towards this obscene Bolshevik plotting – one which T.S. Eliot also makes in *Notes towards a Definition of Culture* – is on the grounds that such an absence of liberty, excessive modernization, and ideological indoctrination, inevitably stifle artistic expression. Even prior to the communist revolt, he argues, Russian writers, particularly the great novelists of the nineteenth century, had tended to incorporate political didacticism into their work. Their attempts to incorporate politics into art, though, struck Lewis as both an “impropriety” (*Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change* 220) and also a form of “philistinism,” which rendered the creative act a “purely utilitarian activity and nothing more” (*The Diabolical Principle and the Dithyrambic Spectator* 122). This boorish politicization of aesthetics not only laid the foundation of the Soviet Revolution, but also acted as the founding artistic principle of the new regime. Bolshevik critics, he argues, were obsessed with the social function of art, to the extent that they shunned sophisticated works that lacked obvious educational value: “A difficult author – Mallarme, Henry James or Hopkins – would be no hero in Russia today. Indeed it should be self-evident that 'difficulty' (that is, highly individual expression) must be regarded not only as anti-popular, but, since useless for purposes of propaganda, a sort of affront like an idle man” (*Letters* 235). As a result of this aesthetic dumbing-down, and in a similar fashion to Julius Ratner, Russian artists simply reused and “degraded all the splendid material of artistic invention” from previous generations (*Time and Western Man* 48). The Soviet Union was, for Lewis, a giant and mindless machine, mechanically assembling cultural artefacts out the input materials like a “Ford Plant Wagnerized” (*Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change* 234). Even minimal gestures of artistic license within Bolshevik society merely flattered to deceive. Lewis singles out, for instance, the grotesque buffooneries of puppet clowns Bim and Bom, who despite superficially being allowed to “mock, criticize and deride the rulers,” nevertheless appeared as the “chief supporters of the Bolshevik regime,” insofar as their antics allowed widespread social

unrest to be forgotten in harmless mirth (*Paleface* 267). A noble image, effectively, gave lie to the cold and unpalatable fact of Soviet power. The essence of Russian culture, according to Lewis, was one of deceit, falsification, and emptiness, in which popular appearance rarely corresponded with brute fact: “The caricaturist still depicts the 'Russian' as a booted and bearded moujik of a *ballet russe* whereas in fact a Hatton Garden Merchant or a Hollywood film-magnate would be nearer the mark” (*Left Wings Over Europe* 208). It was never certain, in the case of Bolshevism where truth “ended and the play began” (*Paleface* 118).

The clearest depiction of this monstrous Russian breakdown between reality and non-reality comes in *The Revenge for Love*. Although there are no authentically Slavic characters within the novel, Lewis nonetheless uses the text primarily as a vehicle for satirizing Spanish Civil War era Russophilia and its monstrously deceptive nature.<sup>19</sup> For instance, at a party thrown by the dwarfish Irishman Sean O'Hara – a self-professed “Russian patriot,” clearly modelled, in terms of nationality, political affiliations, and explicit quotations, on George Bernard Shaw – Lewis meticulously catalogues the extent of pro-Soviet sympathy, including: “Oxford and Cambridge 'pinks'; a subdued socialist-leaguer; the usual marxist don; the son of a Privy Councillor (who had *tovarish* painted all over him) ... [and] three sturdy 'independents' ('friends of Russia') from the headquarter-staff of the Book Racket” (149). These “Moscoutaire[s]” are explicitly depicted as self-delusive and monstrous. Not only do they reprove Jack Cruze for telling “fairy-stories about Russia,” when only moments earlier they had murmured in assent when he appeared to be talking about Spain (113), but they are also represented, in their empty rhetoric, as yet another set of wind-up marionettes:

They were not so much 'human persons,' ... as big portentous wax-dolls,  
mysteriously doped up with some impenetrable nonsense, out of a  
Caligari's drug cabinet, and wound up with wicked fingers to jerk about in

a threatening way ... It all seemed to register *nothing* – or just nonsense.

They recited to each other, with the foolish conceit of children, lessons out

of text books by professors with thick tongues in their treacherous cheeks. (165)

There are numerous instances, moreover, of Communist misrepresentation. Victor Stamp, for instance, is driven by poverty to work at a fake-masterpiece manufacturing plant, counterfeiting Van Goghs and Rembrandts to sell for astronomical profits – despite being told that it is “merely a 'share-the-wealth' proceeding – performed, of course, at the expense of the capitalist enemy” (261). After quitting in disgust, however, he is again deceived, and subsequently betrayed, by these same “salon reds” – by means of a forged document signed in his hand – while smuggling guns into Spain. In the terminal gesture of treachery, even the gun-running car itself turns out to be empty, leading Margot to finally realize the ludicrousness of Bolshevik machinations: “And at last she laughed outright at the absurdity of it. She laughed loudly and without restraint. A false bottom – a false bottom on wheels; but all full of nothing at all, except packing-paper and bricks!” (374). In a world devoid of moral or metaphysical absolutes, it is the perverted chicanery of communism, according to Lewis, which most successfully applied the dictates of power politics.

In the context of his equivocal and constantly shifting philosophical scheme, however, even this seeming finality was not Lewis’s final word on Russia. While *The Revenge for Love* does exemplify, in some ways, his wider conspiratorial attitudes towards the U.S.S.R., it also, if subtly, undermines them. This is particularly evident in Percy Hardcaster. Initially, the self-styled man from “the foster-land of Karl Marx” appears as an unambiguous and hypocritical puppet of the Soviet Union. Imprisoned on the Iberian Peninsula, he looks down with scorn on his fellow working-class inmates, refusing all offers to “drink, join them at cards, or sit down and commune” (40). He even talks the cynical and materialist talk of one living in the pay of “Red Russian gold,” informing his

jailor Don Pedro that “*All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient*” (8). It soon becomes clear, however, that Percy is different from the common mould of Muscovite sympathizers. Unlike them, he *realizes* the emptiness of his doctrine. His previous tales of corrupt ex-Civil Guards and inhuman nursing sisters, as he openly acknowledges to the incredulous upper-class revolutionary Gillian, are merely atrocity propaganda:

We Communist prefer to see things *as they are*, Jill. If you don't mind my saying so, there are still some bourgeois prejudices you have to get rid of.

*Heroes* is one. We of the working-class, who've always been up against it, have the advantage over you there .... We are given a raw deal and a *plain* deal.

You still feel lost without your little bit of sentiment. (209-210).

While his brand of communism is, once again, based on outward dishonesty, Percy never engages in *self*-deceit. He is, as Gillian admits, a “real communist, in all his authentic reality” – in contrast to her sham communism (214). It is this veracity which ultimately humanizes the vision Lewis presents of Bolshevism in *The Revenge for Love*. Although Percy attempts to maintain “the mask of THE INJURED PARTY (model for militant agents in distress)” in his Spanish prison cell, this façade of outer indifference momentarily slips (380). He hears the dead voice of Margot, and is moved by her plight, as “down the front of the mask rolled a sudden tear, which fell upon the dirty floor of the prison” (380). His inner personal integrity, in effect, allows him to cross party lines and recognize injustice in the demise of such a basically redeeming and compassionate individual. In fact, Lewis himself argues that the division between “pro-communist” and “anti-communist” is a false dilemma: “when the novelist sits down to write he does not listen to the harsh impunities of *Pro* and *Anti*. The biologist looks at life dispassionately: if what he discovers is unpleasant, he does not prettify his report. The novelist is, in part, a biologist” (*Rude Assignment* 230). In the final twist in this tale of “Russianness,” Percy – both character and

author – demonstrates that it is impossible to definitively proclaim communism itself good or bad, only individual communists.

### Conclusion

Because of this ambivalence, the interaction between Lewis and Russian society can be seen as a function of his anti-dogmatic meta-philosophy. A self-proclaimed “Tory Bolshevik,” his comments on Russia, much like English attitudes in general, are frequently contradictory and ambivalent. It is for this reason that the idea of interstitial grotesqueness becomes so important within his work. While Lewis’s earliest depictions of Slavic culture in *Tarr* and *The Art of Being Ruled* involve a largely positive and carnivalesque sense of mixed identity, his later portraits, evident in “Beau Sejour,” *The Apes of God*, and particularly *Left Wings over Europe*, present this liminal position through tropes of conspiracy, mechanical sensuality, and invasive monstrosity. However, in *The Revenge for Love* his conception of Russia alters again. In this, his final pre-war novel, he presents a humane, if flawed, vision of international communism, which again demonstrates his commitment to a constant re-evaluation of received opinion, a position largely at odds with straightforward accounts of his ideological scheme and also symptomatic of a wider modernist commitment to socio-aesthetic innovation.

Interestingly, this division between his early and late career approaches to the transgressive Russian body also largely mirrors the conflict between Sigmund Freud and Herbert Marcuse played out in *Eros and Civilization*. In moving from an *avant-garde* defence of individual liberation, to an *après-garde* attack on “in-betweenness,” Lewis shifts from a basically Marcusean position, in which freedom of corporeal desire or action offers the possibility of a “non-repressive civilization” (5), to an essentially Freudian stand-point, whereby social progression itself requires “the permanent subjugation of the human instincts” (3). Lewis’s late-career attitude toward Russia, in this context, is also consistent

with psychoanalytic theories of Slavic identity. Jung, for example, comments on the predilection of one of his Russian patients, Sabina Spielrein, for “making me the object of sexual fantasies” and kicking up a “vile scandal solely because I denied myself the pleasure of giving her a child,” while Freud himself similarly observes an “uninhibited polygamous instinct” in his Russian born colleague Max Eitingon (Rice 70-76). “Russianness,” for both Lewis and these psychoanalytic theorists, often functions as a marker of excessive bodily passion. Accordingly, despite his overt rejection of Freud as representative of “the *Lunatic*, or the *Demented*, and the *Child[ish]*” average human, Lewis’s vision of Slavic culture, in another twist indicative of his conflicted political outlook, was not so different from that of his despised “*homme moyen sensuel*” (*The Art of Being Ruled* 350).

Nevertheless, in his *soi-disant* role as the public “Enemy,” Lewis’s position on Russia was constructed, more often than not, in diametrical opposition to such popular opinion. His initial support for communism, for instance, can be read in contrast to the early rejection of Bolshevism among both English liberals and conservatives. Likewise, his later repudiation, and subsequent re-evaluation, of the U.S.S.R., appears antithetical to the enthusiasms, and latter disenchantment, of the post-war generation of Russophiles. In contrast to Edward Said’s argument, it was not so much the status of Anglo-Slavic *power* relations, but rather the complex relationship between individual belief and wider discursive strands, which created the idiosyncratic vision of Russia we see in Lewis. Although much of his work does utilize “Orientalist” motifs – evident in the inscrutability of Jan Pochinsky, or the duplicity of Zoborov – these narrative constructions are similarly ambivalent. On several occasions overtly “Occidental” characters, such as Otto Kreisler, appear far less attractive than their apparently “Asiatic” counterparts. In his position as the “panurgic-pessimist, drunken with the laughing-gas of the Abyss ... gaz[ing] upon the

squalor and idiocy” of his fellow human being, as Tarr puts it, Lewis was an equal opportunities critic of East *and* West (*Tarr* 13).

Consequently, although Lewis’s vision of Russia is “reactionary,” in the narrow sense of arising from a negative definition against progressive thought, in contrast to more conventionally “conservative” English observers his belief system was not uniformly hostile, but rather contingent and fluctuating. In reply to his self-posed question “why try and give the impression of a consistent and indivisible personality?,” Lewis’s answer, at least in the case of constructing “Russianness,” seems to be “one shouldn’t” (Meyers 108). His variegated work, as long-time admirer T.S. Eliot put it, was distinguished by a shifting commitment that incorporated both the “thought of the modern and the energy of the caveman” (*Blasting and Bombardiering* 88). Indeed, in a similar sense to Lewis, Eliot himself also came to imagine the underlying narrative of “Russianness” in such conflicted terms. In his case though, as we will see, Slavic culture was largely constructed through a discourse of “tradition.”

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> As we see in *Count Your Dead: They Are Alive!*, Lewis's mouthpiece Ned also paradoxically presents himself as a kind of "Tory-Bolshevik" or "Bolsho-Tory," despite maintaining all the while he is entirely "anti-Russian" in his outlook (13-14).

<sup>2</sup> Alastair Davies points out that Lewis was well read in, and deeply influenced by, the work of Nietzsche, particularly his argument in *The Gay Science* that "Only the aristocrat of the spirit, who was free from the self-torture of herd morality, and who, consequently, combined great instinctual energies with great creative energies, had the potential for true freedom" (110).

<sup>3</sup> For instance, as David Ayers notes, Lewis habitually insisted upon meeting friends in "public places," and even then only if he could sit "in restaurants with his back always to the wall" (136).

<sup>4</sup> The so-called "Omega Incident," occurred after Lewis publicly accused Fry, rightly as it later emerged, of having intentionally swindled him out of a lucrative painting commission for the Omega Workshop's Ideal Home Exhibition, an allegation Fry responded to by using his considerable influence to shift public opinion against Lewis and prevent him from acquiring wealthy patronage, variously labelling him "vain", "vulgar", "provincial" and "insane" (Meyers 44).

<sup>5</sup> The clearest evidence for this categorical distinction between rationality and sensuality comes in Lewis's short play "The Enemy of the Stars", in which we witness the death struggle between Arghol, the principle of a "live mind" endowed with philosophical awareness, and Hanp, the principle of "dead mind," whose senseless physical strength aligns him with an indifferent and "lumpish, savage clown" existence (67).

<sup>6</sup> First appearing in his short-lived magazine *The Tyro*, Lewis described these hideous creations as "a new type of human animal" whose "death mask" faces conveyed a vitality which was "immense but purposeless ... he is an animated, but artificial puppet" (Holloway 6).

<sup>7</sup> Bernard Lafourcade, for instance, describes the way in which Lewis's work is filled with "barbarian clown[s]," "Brobdingnag[ian]" giants, and more generally an absurdist "sense of alienation, which causes a fissure to appear in reality" (80).

<sup>8</sup> Among the proclamations made, Lewis and his co-authors proudly defend their right to assume contrasting and counter-intuitive positions: "I.1. Beyond Action and Reaction we would establish ourselves. I.2. We start from opposite statements of a chosen world. Set up violent structure of adolescent clearness between two extremes. I.3. We discharge ourselves on both sides. I.4. We fight first on one side, then on the other, but always for the SAME cause, which is neither side or both sides and ours" (*Blast I* 30).

<sup>9</sup> Although Lewis suggests that "Russian society for fifty years before the revolution was painfully confused, dragged this way and that by its liberalism and mysticism," and particularly singles out the Siberian Chukchee Indians as examples of a ritualised and degraded homosexual sensuality, who appear as "shy, nervous, romantic voluptuary[ies] of the tundras and steppes" (*The Art of Being Ruled* 259), his arguments concerning the "heroic crowd" which gave rise to Lenin, his early Russophilic sympathies, and, as we will see, the sympathetic manner in which he treats many of the Russian characters within *Tarr*, all suggest a more complex attitude even towards the Tsarist state.

<sup>10</sup> Timothy Materer points out that Tarr not only understands himself as one of the spiritually enlightened elite, but also specifically as a "kind of Nietzschean 'superman,'" in whom the "emotionality normally absorbed by sex is so strong that it claims a newer and more exclusive field of deployment. – Its first creations is *the Artist* himself, a new sort of person; the creative man" (57).

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that although he celebrates the self-conscious and continually evolving individual, as Robert Henkle notes, Lewis does not endorse the radical dissolution of "Bergsonian, Jamesian 'stream of consciousness,' as, for him, the intelligent person is one who, while acknowledging "the erratic course of the mind, and the way it disgorges great shreds of indistinctive, associative matter," asserts their own personality *in spite* of this flux (102).

<sup>12</sup> Robert Chapman points out that although Lewis regarded it as his "first success of a practical nature," the initial version of "The Pole" – partly included in the notes to "Beau Sejour" – was little more than a perfunctory sociological investigation, lacking either the plot development or character analysis present in the

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later work, and consequently of less overall interest to the analysis of Lewis's narrative interaction with Russia (48).

<sup>13</sup> Timothy Materer has further made the point that, much like the "revolutionary rich" of London bohemia, Zoborov's deceit is further depicted through his appearance as a "parasitic pseudo-artist," in that, although we never see him doing any work, he is, at least nominally, meant to be one of 'Polonais' class of exile painters (31).

<sup>14</sup> Lewis himself stated that almost all of his characters within *The Wild Body* appeared to him as this kind of lower person: "The subject was people obsessed, as it were religiously, with small, isolated (and therefore unreal) things, like a fishing boat, some athletic interest ... It was the absurdity of their [existence] ... that drew up my attention" (Lafourcade 78).

<sup>15</sup> Sarah Bradford, for instance, points out that, after their character assassination in *The Apes of God*, the Sitwell's conducted a "sustained attack of anonymous telegrams, postcards and parcels designed to work on Lewis's persecution mania" (Bradford et. al. 100).

<sup>16</sup> Vincent Sherry has suggested that the figure of Pierpoint, although never physically present within the novel, can clearly be "identified with the absent author" Wyndham Lewis: "Pierpoint recalls, not only Percy Wyndham Lewis, but the name he nicked into his early letters – 'Pierce-eye' – as ominous token of his later, aggressively pointed optical philosophy" (110).

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Hewitt interestingly argues that Lewis's monstrous cross-dresser can be seen as "lift[ing] femininity out of the realm of biology and into the realm of politics," a process which "denatures and politicizes not only the category of the feminine, but the very modality of representation itself" – an observation suggestive of the ontological, rather than merely superficial, substance of Russian deceit apparent in *The Apes of God* (530).

<sup>18</sup> As Paul Edwards notes, such absurd and excessive pageantry lends the whole novel an aura of surreality, or hyper-reality, a world "created by Art—Fiction, Drama, Poetry etc." so divorced from ordinary life, as Horace Zagreus puts it, that "no character from the one [reality] could under any circumstances enter the other ... without the anomaly being apparent at once" ("The Apes of God": Form and Meaning" 142).

<sup>19</sup> In *Count Your Dead!*, for instance, Lewis's opposition to Communist intervention in the Spanish Civil war is clearly evident. As Launcelot Nidwit puts it, "Marxism is making a new man of the Spaniard. His 'rugged individualism' will be a thing of the past in twelve months' time. All the 'individualists' will be killed off ... and the rest, under a good stiff Red Terror, will toe the line." (Bridson 176).

### Conversing With Spectres: Tradition and the Russian Subaltern in T.S. Eliot

*“The official [Bolshevik] doctrine is one of complete racial equality —an appearance easier for Russia to preserve in Asia, because of the oriental cast of the Russian mind...”*

(T.S. Eliot's *Christianity and Culture*)

Perhaps the most important concept in evaluating the interaction between T.S. Eliot and the politics of “Russianness” is the notion of history. “Historical sense,” as Eliot announces in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” “compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order” (4). Consequently, to speak at all, according to his formulation, is not to *express* a personality or individual essence, but to *recreate*, in a novel manner, the various interwoven beliefs, histories, and linguistic forms inherent in the collective “mind of Europe.” In spite of the ostensibly apolitical direction of this argument however, Eliot’s commitment to cultural continuity has often rendered his work a subject of critical opposition. Michael Beehler, for instance, notes that it has become “increasingly fashionable and politically correct to dismiss Eliot” for “essentialism, formalistic aestheticism, and so forth” (75). Indeed, as one contemporary, writing in the *Monthly Review*, put it, the lovable image of “Old Possum” was nothing more than the façade of a “wilting metaphysical amorphophallus, that grotesque specimen of medieval ecclesiastical horticulture set up in the fascist hot-house. Semetic Paraclete's anti-Semitic vicar, conducting poetical services in a celestial men's room. Heil, Father, Son, Holy Ghost and Hitler” (Thompson 166). By advocating a unity of Western “heritage,” these accounts suggest, Eliot was committed to a negation of those “others” excluded by such conventional discourse structures.

Within the framework of this synthesized Occidental awareness, Eliot's depiction of Russia occupies a highly ambiguous and bifurcated spatial location. On the one side,

Slavic culture often appears as an integral part of the European tradition. Beginning with his election as the “champion of Russia” on a boyhood trans-Atlantic crossing, Eliot maintained a life-long interest in Slavic art forms (*Letters I* 39). He was especially fascinated by the ballet, and either attended or otherwise becoming intimately acquainted with a number of productions, including *Narcisse*, *Le Martyr de St. Sebastien*, *Le Spectre de la Rose*, *Carnaval*, *The Firebird*, *The Good-Humoured Ladies*, *The Three-Cornered Hat*, *Papillons*, *Prince Igor*, *Parade*, *Petrushka*, and *The Rite of Spring*.<sup>1</sup> Especially with the advent of Sergei Diaghilev's “Ballets Russes,” Eliot heralded the dawn of a theatre which was simultaneously sophisticated yet simple, a new form which, in its ancient lineage, was “as strict as any old one, perhaps stricter” (“London Letter, July 1921” 184-185). He singled out Diaghilev's latest impresario, Leonid Massine, for particular praise, referring to him as the “greatest mimetic dancer in the world,” and wrote to Mary Hutchinson: “I hope your news of Massine at the Coliseum is true, as I have been to see him and thought him more brilliant and beautiful than ever – if what you said is sincere it is I consider a great compliment, as I (having never been so close before) quite fell in love with him. I want to meet him more than ever, and he is a genius” (*Letters II* 666-667). Such was his devotion to the Russian ballet (those “ritualistic dances of antiquity” as he once put it) that Eliot even confessed to being attracted to Vivien Haigh-Wood – herself a trained amateur who once famously announced “I think I can do what [Tamara] Karsavina does at that moment,” before performing a brisk arabesque inside a public drug store – largely because she was a “very good” dancer (Hargrove “T.S. Eliot and the Dance” 78).

While in Paris during his sojourn at the College de France, Eliot also watched a dramatic adaptation of *The Brothers Karamazov*, an incident which, in part, sparked off his other lifelong Slavophilic interest: Russian literature. Over time he read numerous works, including the plays of Anton Chekhov, several critical compositions by Maxim Gorky and Leo Tolstoy (such as “Tolstoy on Shakespeare”) and a number of pieces, including A

*House of Gentlefolk* and the *Sportsman's Sketches*, by Ivan Turgenev, whom he claimed to admire “as much as any novelist” (*Letters I* 217).<sup>2</sup> Further, through his editorial position at *The Criterion*, Eliot attempted to incorporate Slavic letters into the magazine's vision of a socially unified “Europe of the mind – above politics, in spite of all politics” – by publishing selections of Russian prose, including “A Few Extracts from Letters Exchanged Between Leo Nicolayevich Tolstoy and N.N. Strakhov” in the January 1925 volume, and “Plan of a Novel” by Fyodor Dostoevsky in the journal's inaugural October 1922 edition, which also contained the first printing of *The Wasteland* (Harding *The Criterion* 207). This appearance of Dostoevsky alongside Eliot's canonical work, far from being coincidental, is indicative of the latter's longstanding interest. Following his theatrical introduction, Eliot undertook an in-depth study, under the guidance of his French tutor Henri-Alban Fournier, of *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*, three novels which he described as having made a “very profound impression on me” (Hargrove “T.S. Eliot and the Parisian Theatre World” 18). The young Eliot marvelled at the “kind of tranquility which Dostoevsky *must* ... have known when he was writing his masterpieces at top-speed to keep from starving” (*Letters I* 43). Indeed, such was the depth of the Russian's impact that Eliot even later characterized his entire life as a “Dostoevsky novel written by Middleton Murry” (Pinion 1).

In spite of such repeated attestations to its inherent continuity however, Eliot also conceives, on multiple occasions, of Russian culture as not only failing to cohere within, but actually contributing, through the advent of Bolshevik Communism, to the dissolution of, the pan-Occidental community: “The most important event of the War was the Russian Revolution. For the Russian Revolution has made men conscious of the position of Western Europe as (in Valery's words) a small and isolated cape on the Western side of the Asiatic continent” (*Criterion* 6 98). The rise of Soviet politics, according to him, led to a divisive culture-consciousness that ruptured the previous state of European unity. In fact, it

was Dostoevsky's work itself which foreshadowed the Russian state of "Orientalist" dissolution. For instance, Eliot endorses Hermann Hesse's description of "the ideal of Karamazov, primeval, Asiatic, and occult" that was already starting to encompass the European soul (*Letters II* 230). Nevertheless, in his view, it was also Dostoevsky who crucially recognized this "doubleness" within Russia's position: "[In his work] there are everywhere two planes of reality... The characters themselves are partially aware of this division, aware of the grotesque futility of their visible lives, always seem[ing] to be listening for other voices and to be conducting a conversation with spectres" (*Letters II* 546).

This notion of communicating with "other voices" is central to Eliot's bifurcated understanding of the Russian place within Europe as a community. Not only does his idea of tradition act as an aesthetic and political ideal, but it also functions as the foundation of *meaning*. Only by "adjusting our behaviour to that of others and in cooperating with them," he argues, can we arrive at a pragmatic consensus over intentional states and semantic content: "[Reality's] persistence depends upon our recognition of the community of meaning ... and this community of meaning is ultimately practical" (*Knowledge and Experience* 161). The significance of any utterance, according to Eliot, derives not from any immediate or intuitive experience of a connection between signifier and signified, but because of a pre-existing and culturally dependant set of conventions which connect the two.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone" (*Selected Essays* 4). It is only by virtue of being situated within a communal linguistic heritage that meaningful assertion is possible, via what Ferdinand Saussure describes as the negative "contrast with other items in the same system" (115).

For this reason, the ambiguous position of Russia within the vast canvas of Western social history can be seen, in Eliot's oeuvre, as bound up in the notion of *silence*. In his non-fictional engagement with revolutionary Bolshevism, I will argue, he situates Russian

culture outside the European cultural and linguistic community. In doing so, Eliot pictures “Slavicness” in terms of muteness and incommunicability. Even in this inarticulateness, however, I will also suggest that through its continued participation in the world of continental art, he leaves open the possibility of Anglo-Slavic dialogue, in a way that undermines claims his work displays a uniformly xenophobic outlook. Particularly in his poetry, Eliot dramatizes this geographical division, representing Russia, in a similar sense to wider English discursive presentations, as a point of “in-betweenness” which simultaneously exists on both sides of the “Orientalist” East/West split.

### **Russian Heresy in *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture***

“The attitudes and beliefs of liberalism,” as Eliot asserts in *The Idea of a Christian Society*, “are destined to disappear, [and] are already disappearing” (14). Values such as freedom, democracy, and economic capitalism now “belong to an age of free exploitation which has passed,” leaving in its wake only the fruits of disorder and social disintegration which plague contemporary civilization. Out of this wreckage, Eliot’s “thesis” is that English culture had reached a point of crisis, from which “a liberalised or negative condition of society must either proceed into a gradual decline of which we can see no end, or (whether as a result of catastrophe or not) reform itself into a positive shape” (*The Idea of a Christian Society* 20). In practice, this positive shape necessitates a choice between two alternatives – the great leap backward to Catholic ecclesiasticism and the great leap forward to pagan Bolshevism.

There are, in Eliot’s view, “two and only two finally tenable hypotheses about life: the Catholic and the materialistic ... It is quite possible that the future may bring nothing but chaos or torpor. In that event, I am not interested in the future; I am only interested in [these] two alternatives which seem to me worthy of interest (*Selected Essays* 458-459).

Given this condition of disorder and hollowness, the sole remedy is a philosophy which, in the breadth and totality of its metaphysical ambitions, possesses a sufficiently unified vision to command universal assent. Such a virtue is uniquely apparent in the weltanschauung of Christianity and communism: “The great merit of Communism is the same as one merit of the Catholic church, that there is something in it which minds on every level can grasp. Marx may not be intelligible but Communism is. Communism has what is now called a 'myth'” (*Criterion* 12 644). Eliot suggests that both doctrines are fundamentally similar in their mythological and religious attempts to instil a higher purpose in the life of their laity. The Soviet leadership, for instance, were in the process of attempting to “educate the young in the tenets of that religion” in much the same manner as a church: “As only the Catholic and the communist know, *all* education must be ultimately religious education. I do not mean that education should be confined to postulates for the priesthood or for the higher ranks of Soviet bureaucracy; I mean that the hierarchy of education should be a religious hierarchy” (*Selected Essays* 459). It is through the “Lenins, Trotskys, Gorkys and Stalins” of the world, as much as religious leaders such as Lancelot Andrewes or John Bramhall, that Eliot foresees the reintroduction of “common fundamental assumption[s]” to social life.

Despite their similarities, Christian spiritualism and communist materialism remain mutually exclusive world views – “If you will not have God,” Eliot suggests, “(and He is a jealous God) you should pay your respects to Hitler or Stalin” – only one of which can claim ultimate dominion (*The Idea of a Christian Society* 50). There are, nevertheless, a number of points to recommend Soviet totalitarianism in Eliot's view. It is, as he repeatedly points out, a doctrine characterized by “materialistic efficiency,” which provides the foundation for a functioning pagan society, in which science and industrialism flourish (*The Idea of a Christian Society* 16). In an age of apathy and ennui, communism is, according to Eliot, “to be applauded for wanting something” at all, rather than simply

accepting the perceived injustices of the world as a necessary conditions of existence (*Selected Essays* 458). Far from engaging in a categorical rejection, Eliot pictures Bolshevik ideology as, at least partly, a plausible and praise-worthy dogma.

Even in his most appreciative moments however – when he goes so far as to acknowledge a deep sympathy with communists – Eliot refuses to entirely side with Soviet doctrine for one very clear reason: “My only objection is the same as my objection to the cult of the Golden calf. It is better to worship a golden calf than to worship nothing; but that, after all, is not, in the circumstances, an adequate excuse. My objection is that it just happens to be mistaken” (“Commentary” 473). The problem, as he points out in *After Strange Gods*,<sup>4</sup> is that the worst examples of fallacious divergence from the lineage of tradition are precisely this – *partly*, but *only partly*, correct: “the essential of any important heresy is not simply that it is wrong: it is that it is partly right. It is characteristic of the more interesting heretics, in the context in which I use the term, that they have an exceptionally acute perception, or profound insight, of some part of the truth” (7). It is by mistaking part of reality for the whole of reality, by taking a truth and insisting upon it until the point of falsehood, that heterodox deviations occur. In the case of Russian Communism, this heresy springs from an obsessive and excessive devotion to the central “myths” of homogeneity and material progress.

Although Eliot defends the return to a more synthesised culture, he also argues in favour of a constantly evolving living tradition, through which the relationship between past and present, the whole and its constitutive parts, is in a state of continual flux. A people, he argues, “should be neither too united nor too divided, if its culture is to flourish. Excess of unity may be due to barbarism and may lead to tyranny; excess of division may be due to decadence and may also lead to tyranny: either excess will prevent further development of culture” (*Notes Towards a Definition of Culture* 123). In the case of Eliot’s Russia, the barbaric humour is clearly in the ascendancy. Life within such a totalitarian

dictatorship is characterised by an intolerable degree of absolutist singularity and an overabundance of stasis. There is, according to Eliot, nothing but “regimentation and conformity, without respect for the needs of the individual soul; the puritanism of a hygienic morality in the interest of efficiency; uniformity of opinion through propaganda, and art only encouraged when it flatters the official doctrines of the time” (*The Idea of a Christian Society* 18). Even pre-war Slavic culture, where spirituality is concerned, exhibited symptoms of this excessive uniformity. By instituting an “Erastian” amalgamation of Orthodox religion and Tsarist authority, the Russian populace was led to identify Church and State, and consequently to suspect that it was an “instrument of oligarchy or class,” which, in turn, sowed the seeds of iconoclastic paganism that bore fruit as Marxist-Leninism (*The Idea of a Christian Society* 41).

The limited nature of Soviet communism, besides its monolithic cultural edifice, was ultimately confirmed for Eliot in Russian aesthetics. Through various political, ideological and social channels, Bolshevism was, in his view, attempting to dispense with centuries of educational and literary material which did not serve a strictly empirical and utilitarian purpose. “*Radicalism*,” as he terms it, “pronounces Latin and Greek to be subjects of little import,” while proudly proclaiming that “*knowledge* means ‘primarily scientific knowledge of the world about us and of ourselves’” (*Selected Essays* 457-458). Similarly, in its commitment to “art-as-propaganda,” Soviet literature, blind to the larger world of formal dictates and stylistic niceties, is, in Eliot’s view, just plain bad. Although he admits to being largely ignorant of modern Russian authors, and agrees, at least in principle, that the Bolshevik index of “prohibited books” is a palatable idea, he nevertheless suspects that within the flock of communist letters most of the “swans are geese,” and that it will be a “long time before Soviet society could afford to approve a Villon, if one arose,” as almost all contemporary writing is limited to political panegyrics (*The Use of Poetry* 135-136).

It is this one sided emphasis on the heretical half-truth of social unity and scientific empiricism that allows Eliot to position communist Russia as a cultural aberration. Such insistence on the absolute primacy of these values, he suggests, is symptomatic of an Oriental, rather than Occidental, civilization. The Soviet tendency, for instance, to grant local republics the illusion of independence, while maintaining an absolutist and iron fisted grasp on the reins of real power from Moscow, is symptomatic of the “oriental cast of the Russian mind” (*Notes Towards a Definition of Society* 168). By limiting art to the expression of intellectually uniform Bolshevik paeans, Eliot believes that “Russian literature will become increasingly unintelligible, increasingly meaningless, to the peoples of Western Europe unless they develop in the same direction as Russia,” similarly participating in the movement towards an all-encompassing cultural materialism (*The Use of Poetry* 136). Indeed, as Peter Dale Scott points out, in publishing such anti-Asiatic writings as Henri Massis' “The Defence of the West” in *The Criterion*, Eliot implicitly endorses the Slavophobic sentiments contained therein, including the Frenchman's assertion that “Russian people have made almost no contribution to general civilization” (64). Bolshevism, in short, is, for Eliot, the logical culmination of Russia's historical isolation from the European social legacy.

**Russian Silence in *The Inventions of the March Hare*, *Poems Written in Early Youth*, and *Poems 1920*.**

Through an unquestioning uniformity, aesthetic philistinism, and vulgar industrialism, then, Bolshevism bore witness to the anti-European triumph of what Eliot, in a similar fashion to Lewis, describes as the “standard man.” Despite his use of the masculine pronoun in this instance, numerous critics have pointed out that within Eliot's

work this idea of a threatening and invasive popular crowd, which reaches its apogee in the Soviet Union, is overwhelmingly gendered as feminine. Rachel Potter, for example, has made the case that the 1928 “Representation of People Act,” which extended female suffrage to citizens over twenty-one, led Eliot to believe that “British democracy ha[d] been destroyed by mass enfranchisement, ha[d] been ‘watered down to nothing’” (229).<sup>5</sup> It is not only women who are silenced within the Eliotic canon however. Even “[homo]sexually ambiguous youths,” as Tim Dean notes, partake of a “closet logic” which is centred around such hiddenness and inarticulation (45). Because of the ambiguous and incomprehensible nature of femininity, and feminized males, such voices, much like Russia itself, tend to become dissociated from traditional and high-cultural modes of masculine articulation, and are consequently pushed to the textual margins, or muted altogether, as part of what Eliot describes as his struggle to keep “writing as much as possible in Male hands, as I distrust the Feminine in literature” (*Letters I* 204). In the same manner as the Soviet Union, then, femininity is excluded from Eliot’s Euro/Phallogocentric realm of tradition, and made a target of textual elision.

This common silencing of the feminine and Russian ethnic other in Eliot’s work is not coincidental. As Gayatri Spivak argues in her influential study “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” the process of intercultural exchange frequently evolves through instances of “epistemic violence,” whereby whole cultural and intellectual formations are dismissed as “naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy” of acceptable structures of cognition (320-321). The people victimised by such examples of discursive subjugation are, for Spivak, almost always excluded from prevailing power structures, particularly those “Subalterns” who exist as female racial minorities within the urban proletariat.<sup>6</sup> “Clearly,” she suggests, “if you are poor, black, and female you get it in three ways” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 328). The voice of females and ethnic aliens is particularly susceptible to being ignored and silenced, as neither has a stake in dominant Patriarchal or

Occidental discourse structures, which define their ways of knowing as obsolete or inferior.

According to Spivak, Eliot himself was guilty of such silencing and restrictive cultural stereotyping. For instance, in the final lines of *The Wasteland*, he reduces India to the “grandeur of the ecumenical Upanishads” through his concluding use of the formal “Shantih” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 336). On the surface, then, Eliot's depictions of mass femininity and Soviet communism in terms of a dumb exclusion from the discourse of tradition, can be seen as part of this wider cultural tendency to silence racial and sexual otherness by excluding it from governing knowledge structures. As we shall see however, while there is, in his poetry, a tendency to portray “Russianness” in terms of this feminized, inarticulate alterity, Eliot also grants Slavic culture a covert means of expression within the European tradition, via one of history's “cunning passages”: the Ballets Russes.

As Tony Pinkney points out, the ballet dancer, as a cultural motif, frequently appears as *the* defining symbol of feminine ambiguity within the poetics of modernism. The “vicissitudes the dancer undergoes in the more decadent phases of the tradition,” he suggests, “are an index of the precariousness of the recovery of potential space” for the maternal body, an emblematic manifestation of both female marginalisation, and the attempt to overcome such marginalisation (63). In Eliot's work itself, the ballet fulfils exactly this role as an allegorical representative of Russo-Feminine attempts at expression from beyond the prevailing discursive community. This articulation through muteness, as Eliot suggests in *Four Quartets*, is made possible by means of non-verbal, aesthetic modes of representation: “Words, after speech, reach / Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern, / Can words or music reach / The stillness” (*Collected Poems* 180).<sup>7</sup> Russian dance, according to Eliot, was the one modern art capable, in its dedication to form over content, stylistic over lexical, modes of communication, of accessing this transcendent stillness and communicating on a truly artistic level. When the “Ballets Russes” first appeared in London, for instance, Eliot proclaimed himself delighted: “Here seemed to be

everything that we wanted in drama, except the poetry. It did not teach any 'lesson,' but it had form. It seemed to revive the formal element in drama for which we craved ... The ballet is valuable because it has, unconsciously concerned itself with a permanent form” (*Selected Essays* 33-34). Indeed, his particular affection for Massine, in part, was driven by the fact that Eliot saw him as “the most completely unhuman, impersonal, abstract” performer of the contemporary era, whose acting style, in proto-Brechtian fashion, eschewed the “*express*[ion] of emotion,” in favour of merely “*symbolis*[ing] emotion” (“*Dramatis Personae*” 305). Through their choreographical expertise, such impressarios, in Eliot’s view, were capable of articulating themselves on an entirely artistic level.

Although never slavish in his devotion,<sup>8</sup> the Russian dance impressed Eliot, unlike Ezra Pound, not only as an “escape from personality,” but also as the result of an ancient and highly cohesive artistic heritage, one which was deeply and fundamentally connected with the European sense of tradition:

A ballet is apparently a thing which exists only as acted and would appear to be a creation much more of the dancer than the choreographer. This is not quite true. It is a development of several centuries into a strict form. In the ballet only that is left to the actor which is properly the actor’s part. The general movements are set for him ... He is not called upon for his personality. (*Selected Essays* 95)

In order to understand the spirit of the dance, including its highest forms such as ballet, one must, he argues, “begin by a close study of dancing amongst primitive peoples” – such as the native peoples of Australia, Tibet and Java – so as to properly comprehend the remote origins of its ritualistic technique (“*The Ballet*” 441). It is, he suggests, an archaic “tradition, a training, an askesis,” which can be traced back for several centuries to not only Russian, but also Italian and French origins, suggesting the implicit pan-European quality of it as an aesthetic medium (*Selected Essays* 34). In fact, the ballet is so

completely international in Eliot's view, that attempts such as Cecil Sharp's to erect a nationalist "*native* ballet" founded on "folk dance technique" must inevitably collapse, as they commit a protectionist fallacy, which fails to comprehend the intrinsic interrelatedness of all continental styles of choreography ("The Ballet" 442). And yet, far from being a sterile or derivative imitation of past cultural forms, Eliot sees the modern Russian ballet as also offering numerous innovations which promise to enrich and expand the Western theatrical lineage. For example, unlike Nineteenth-Century French and Italian casts, which were almost exclusively female,<sup>9</sup> Diaghilev's "Ballets Russes" company reinstated the use of male dancers, a move of which Eliot clearly approves (Mester 117). In this sense, Russian dance was not only a part of the Occidental heritage, but, through the influence of its dedicated formalism on contemporary English drama, was in the process of talking back to the tradition within which it had been muted.

This conception of the dance in terms of feminine silence is first apparent in *Inventions of the March Hare* and *Poems Written in Early Youth*.<sup>10</sup> Within these volumes, two poems in particular stand out: "The Love Song of St. Sebastian" and "The Death of St. Narcissus." Both works, besides ostensibly concerning martyred saints, are also about feminised and homosexual young men, whose personas, much like Eliot's women, appear through tropes of concealment and silence.<sup>11</sup> More importantly though, both poems are also based, for much of their source material, on performances by the Ballets Russes. In the former instance, Eliot's poem is almost certainly the result of seeing ex-prima ballerina Ida Rubenstein perform a transvestite lead role in Gabriele d'Annunzio's *Le Martyre de Saint Sebastien* while in Paris in 1911 (Hargrove "T.S. Eliot and the Parisian Theatre World" 32-33). The inherent sensuality and ambiguity of the Russian play, in which love and pain are interwoven through the iconography of the arrows which pierce the hero ("the one who wounds me the most deeply loves me the most deeply" Sebastian proclaims) is replicated in Eliot's work, in which the narrative voice assumes the role of the martyred hero, and his

lover the part of St. Irene. In “The Love Song of St. Sebastian,” this reworking of d’Annunzio’s material adds an element of horrific sexual violence and aural constraint, which can be explained in terms of Eliot’s silencing and feminised understanding of Russianness. For instance, in his version the classical image of Diocletian’s deadly archers is replaced by a gruesome and Gothic portrait of self-flagellation, in which the protagonist, dressed in a “shirt of hair,” flogs himself “after hour on hour of prayer / And torture and delight / Until [his] blood should ring the lamp / And glisten in the light” (78). Whereas in the original myth Irene chastely nurses Sebastien back to health after his near fatal ordeal, in Eliot’s work she takes his hideous body “in to [her] bed without shame / Because [he] should be dead,” waking the next morning with his head between her breasts (78). At this point, Eliot’s version takes an even more sado-masochistic turn, in which Sebastien bends Irene’s head back awkwardly between his knees, making her “ears curl back in a certain way,” before finally fantasizing about strangling her, so that “there would not be one word to say.” The Slavic body, through Eliot’s appropriation, has been figuratively transformed into a sight of brutal suppression (78-79).

This debased reimagination of Russian culture we see in “The Love Song of St. Sebastian” is also apparent in Eliot’s later poem. While clearly also modelled, in part, on *Le Martyre de Saint Sebastien* (especially the lines in which the hero “danced on the hot sand / Until the arrows came”) this poem has additional origins in the Ballets Russes production of *Narcisse*, which Eliot is similarly thought to have witnessed during his time in Paris (Hargrove “T.S. Eliot and the Dance” 75). Indeed, David Bernstein has argued that “The Death of St. Narcissus” is largely based on the tragic story of the ballet’s lead dancer Vaslav Nijinsky. He notes, for example, that there are numerous commonalities between the Russian and Eliot’s Greek protagonist, including Nijinsky’s striking oriental looking eyes, catatonic mental break-down, and torrid romantic relationship with Sergei Diaghilev, and Narcissus’ similar “pointed corner[ed] eyes,” vegetative “green, dry and stained” state,

and apparent homosexual inclinations (Mester 118). Although, as James Edwin Miller rightly points out, many of the comparisons with Nijinsky's later life are impossible given that the poem has consistently been dated to around 1915, well before the Russian dancer's psychic collapse, the sheer number of affinities between the two are sufficient to suggest the probability, if not certainty, of a causal relationship with his early career (250-251). Consequently, it is possible to read in "The Death of St. Narcissus," much like "The Love Song of St. Sebastian," a re-enactment of Eliot's violent, feminised, and muted treatment of his Russian ur-text. For example, when we first see Narcissus he appears "*stifled*" by his own rhythm, struck down, as he gazes at his reflection in the water by the knowledge that, while male, he is unable to "live men's ways" (28-29). As a mechanism for coping with this speechless exclusion from the world of masculinity, he then attempts to "render the human/animal frontier acceptably indeterminate," as Spivak puts it, by imagining himself, first as a tree, and then, significantly, as a fish, "with slippery white belly held tight in its own fingers" (29). Even then however, he is unable to escape the realm of male violence, as, in his final mutation, he becomes a "young girl," and pictures himself being caught and raped "in the woods by a drunken old man / Knowing at the end the taste of his own whiteness," his mouth becoming metaphorically stopped with masculine cruelty, adding to, rather than detracting from, his gagged sense of self-expression (30). Despite then becoming a "dancer to God / Because his flesh was in love with the burning arrows" – a highly complex passage which makes explicit, not only the poem's debt to the Ballet Russe, but also its specific origins in the life of Vaslav Nijinsky, who similarly described himself as a "dancer to God" (Mester 118) – the poem ends with Narcissus' death, not, as traditionally, through drowning, but with the shadow of a parched gray rock "in his mouth," as if his face had been crushed beneath some enormous desiccated object, symbolically destroying his ability to speak (30). In both "The Love Song of St. Sebastian" and "The Death of St. Narcissus," accordingly, it is possible to recognise an adaptive

reworking of Eliot's Ballet Russe intertexts which reinterprets "Russianness" in a violent and speechless manner.

On the surface, Eliot's further depiction of Slavic identity in *Poems 1920* appears little different. As will become apparent however, while at first glance "Whispers of Immortality" and "Sweeney Among the Nightingales," the two key texts within the volume which deal overtly with the topic of Russianness, seem to repeat the central themes associating Slavic society with femininity, sensuality, deceit, cruelty and silence, a closer reading of both poems, which takes into account its place within the realm of tradition, will suggest the emerging possibility of a Russian voice inside Eliot's canon.

Although chronologically the later of the poems, Eliot's treatment of Russianness in "Whispers of Immortality" comes across as the less enlightened of the two. Numerous commentators have contended, with good reason, that Grishkin (a character based on former Ballets Russes starlet Serafima Astafieva)<sup>12</sup> is presented as the quintessential embodiment of Eliot's abhorrent misogyny, in contrast to the dry and intellectual figures of Webster and Donne. She appears, for instance, in the guise of a high class prostitute, as a stereotypical example of Slavic female hyper-sexuality: "her Russian eye / Is underlined for emphasis; / Uncorseted, her friendly bust / Gives promise of pneumatic bliss" (*Collected Poems* 45). Further, much like Narcissus, Grishkin is conceived in terms of an animalism which evokes images of hiddenness and silence, her demi-monde indolence transmuted into the appearance of a "couched Brazilian jaguar / Compel[ing] the scampering marmoset," while distilling a "rank feline smell" from her position of "arboreal gloom" (*Collected Poems* 45-46).

Despite this unflattering depiction, there is more to Eliot's dancer than just surface sensuality. For example, Grishkin not only possess a "subtle effluence," suggesting an unstable yet fluid identity, but also owns a "maisonette," a style of split levelled half-house which, although again indicative of the unhygienic modern overcrowding which led to

such space saving housing measures, also symbolically suggests a similar kind of internal division within her character, in which the outer appearance fails to correspond with an inner complexity. The formal patterns of repetition which structure the poem indicate that there is an underlying connection between the ballerina and her spiritually yearning Jacobean counterparts. Webster's "breastless creatures" and "Daffodil bulbs instead of balls / Star[ing] from the sockets," for instance, are transformed into Grishkin's welcoming breast and heavily mascaraed eye (*Collected Poems* 45). Although it is possible to conceive of this passage as an instance of Eliot's frequently noted tendency to trivialise the present by juxtaposing it with a mythical and heroic past, it is equally plausible to construe such comparisons as effectively uplifting contemporary Russian culture by placing it alongside such high-cultural forms.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, as it turns out, it is Grishkin, rather than the poets, who finally attains control of this artistic metaphysics, when the "Abstract Entities," apparently taking their cue from her own pirouetting, balletic sense, come to "circumambulate her charm" (*Collected Poems* 46). By locating Grishkin within the same intellectual heritage as Donne and Webster, therefore, Eliot grants Russian cultural identity a form of validity which subverts the misogynistic and xenophobic logic ostensibly governing the poem.

This engagement with Slavic culture, centred on the contrast between silent degradation and communicative legitimisation, continues in "Sweeney Among the Nightingales," this time in the figure "Rachel *nee* Rabinovitch." Although not a dancer, Rachel, as a prostitute, similarly appears through motifs of licentiousness and duplicity. She is similarly depicted, for instance, in bestial terms, firstly as a kind of wild cat "tear[ing] at the grapes with murderous paws" in her Uruguayan brothel, and then, through a transformation comparable to that of Narcissus, as a nightingale – a slang appellative for her trade – "singing near / The Convent of the Sacred Heart" (*Collected Poems* 50). As Anthony Julius notes, the way Eliot italicizes Rachel's Russian Ashkenazi maiden name "*nee* Rabinovitch" also suggests that she has deceitfully attempted to conceal her Hebrew

heritage (91). Her duplicitous nature is further evident in the poem's mythic and epigraphic reference to the *Oresteia* – “Alas, I am struck deep with a mortal blow” – through which the “murderous paw[ed]” Rachel appears as a modern equivalent of the bloodthirsty wife Clytemnestra, just as “the silent man in mocha brown,” who sprawls in the narrative background, serves as her “treacherous, if languid” lover Aegisthus.

This superficial depravity apparent in the Russian female, however, is again undone by the manner in which it is referentially located within the European tradition. Although via the adaptation of one Greek tragedy Rachel appears to be a paragon of violence and deception, through another set of literary appropriations, this time from Philomela's rape at the hands of King Tereus in the *Metamorphoses*,<sup>14</sup> her savagery appears as a justified, and in fact logical, response to male victimisation. Whereas in the former text Clytemnestra is presented as the archetype of “murderous, rapacious, and insubordinate” womanhood (Hall 51), in the latter work, the heroine, in retaliating to her own violation through the slaying of Prince Itys, appears more as a victim than a perpetrator, her actions depicted as a “just reproach to vindicate her wrong” (196). Further, while femininity in *The Oresteia* is understood as murderous – and in the case of the unheeded prophet Cassandra, specifically *voiceless* – in the *Metamorphoses* Philomela is able to communicate despite being silenced, through the excising of her tongue, conveying the abuse she suffers to her sister Procne by means of a woven “Phrygian” tapestry. Finally, she turns into a nightingale which, unlike the soundless swallow her sister becomes, is capable of voicing her tale of woe via song. Consequently, by reading “Sweeney Among the Nightingales” through this Ovidian, rather than Aeschylean, intertext, it is possible to see Rachel's avian transformation, not as an instance of inarticulate animality, but instead as a form of mythical expression which draws inspiration and authority from its Romaic antecedent. When Rachel sings “within the bloody wood / When Agamemnon cried aloud,” therefore, she can be understood as repeating the heroine's protest lament against male violence, her

song an example of a kind of artistic formalism which reconnects the female Russian voice with the lineage of classical European tradition.

### **Russian Silence in *The Wasteland*, *The Hollow Men* and *Four Quartets***

Although both “Whispers of Immortality” and “Sweeney Among the Nightingales” referentially situate Russia within an Occidental social heritage in this manner, the sense of articulation allowed is, as yet, only partial and incomplete. While Grishkin and Rachel do emerge within the European literary canon, such characterisations exist alongside, and in some ways beneath, the continuing narrative of cultural chauvinism first apparent in “The Love Song of St. Sebastian” and “The Death of St. Narcissus.” Nevertheless, in the multitude of references to Russian culture within *The Wasteland*, it is possible to see a reworking of these visions, which re-inscribes Slavic femininity as a liquid antidote to the spiritual drought, cultural barrenness, and impoverished politics of modern society.

This vision of cultural renewal in *The Wasteland* operates through the textual adaptation of Igor Stravinsky's infamous atonal arrangement *The Rite of Spring*. Despite being pulled from production after only three performances at the London Prince's Theatre in May 1921, due to widespread audience outcry over its revolutionary aesthetic form, Eliot apparently both attended, and was also among the few viewers to appreciate the artistic merits of, the work during its brief run. He recalled, for instance, his efforts to defend the ballet against “the mirth of his neighbours in a 'family house' which seemed united to deride Sokalova at her best in the *Sacre de Printemps* [sic],” and even went so far as to praise the composer himself as “one of the greatest musicians” of all time (*Criterion* 3 5). Many years later the two artists were, in fact, to strike up a close professional relationship after meeting for tea at the Savoy Hotel in 1956. Not only did the English poet contribute ideas and literary material to a number of his counterpart's musical

arrangements – including *The Flood* and *The Cambridge Hymnal* – but the Russian, in a gesture indicative of their mutual affection, likewise constructed a four-minute elegy, entitled *Introitus: In Memoriam T.S. Eliot*, to commemorate the death of his “unforgettable” acquaintance, in February 1965 (Dickinson 92-94).<sup>15</sup>

Besides their personal ties, there is also considerable evidence to suggest that *The Wasteland* was deeply indebted, both stylistically and substantially, to *The Rite of Spring*. In the first place, the language and thematic concerns he applies to both works are more or less identical. For instance, in his “London Letter, September 1921,” he describes Stravinsky’s ballet as a concerted effort to combine the ancient and the *avant-garde*:

The spirit of the music was modern, and the spirit of the ballet was primitive ceremony. The Vegetation Rite upon which the ballet is founded remained, in spite of the music, a pageant of primitive culture ... it seem[ed] to transform the rhythm of the steppes into the scream of the motor horn, the rattle of machinery, the grind of wheels, the beating of iron and steel, the roar of the underground railway, and the other barbaric cries of modern life. (189)

Similarly, in his endnotes to *The Wasteland*, Eliot points out that own his poem was inundated with such references to “vegetation ceremonies,” and that the reader ought to acquaint themselves with the origins of these ideas, as they would “elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can” (*Collected Letters* 70). Indeed, in many ways the most fascinating, if possibly coincidental, piece of evidence to suggest a connection between the two works is the fact that, prior to work-shopping *The Rite of Spring*, set designer Nikolai Roerich had suggested the production of a different work, called “A Game of Chess” (later remade, in a significantly altered form, as *Jeu de Cartes*), the title of which appears, word for word, as the heading to the second section of *The Wasteland*.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to contextual evidence, there is also a wealth of internal corroboration to suggest the influence of *The Rite of Spring* on *The Wasteland*. Perhaps the most important proof is the similarity of subject matter uniting the two works. While ostensibly concerning the demise of an innocent pagan girl on the ancient steppe, at their most basic level both *The Wasteland* and *The Rite of Spring* are symbolic representations of muted Russian femininity and its willing sacrifice, not only in order to appease the vernal deities and bring the renewal of spring rain, but also to achieve self-expression.

Right from the very beginning, Eliot's poem is about a return of the repressed and forgotten Russian subaltern. In the opening chapter "The Burial of the Dead," for instance, we meet an enigmatic hyacinth girl named Marie. Despite the fact that her real life equivalent, the Austrian Countess and auto-biographer Marie Larisch, was born and bred in Southern Bavaria, this fictional equivalent is mysteriously, and altogether inexplicably, quoted as exclaiming "Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch" ("I am not Russian at all, I come from Lithuania, pure German") (*Collected Poems* 53).<sup>17</sup> While it is plausible to explain this disembodied textual fragment, as James Miller does, in terms of either the literary "medley of mingled voices," or a "voice that the poet's memory has conjured from the past," on a purely textual level it also suggests an attempt to disavow or deny the possibility of a specifically Slavic voice (*T.S. Eliot's Personal Wasteland* 66). By announcing that she is not Russian, the poem also implicitly suggests that Marie cannot *speak* Russian. This emphasis on the hyacinth girl's muteness is further reinforced by her appearance in a neglected state of physical extremity, "neither / Living nor dead," "know[ing] nothing, / Looking into the heart of light, the silence" (*Collected Poems* 53). Similarly, this muting of the Russian subaltern can be seen in the person of Madame Sosostri. Although the character of the famous clairvoyant has usually been attributed to a synonymous fortune teller in Aldous Huxley's *Chrome Yellow*, the name also phonetically echoes the name of the ballerina "Madame Sokolova," who danced the lead role in *The*

*Rite of Spring* when Eliot saw the ballet again in 1921. She too suffers from a semantic silencing. Appearing with a “bad cold,” which similarly impedes her vocal capacities, her warning to “fear death by drowning” is metaphorically ignored by the host of characters who meet a watery end throughout the rest of the poem (*Collected Poems* 53-54).

Although this connection may seem tenuous, its validity is reinforced by the way in which “The Burial of the Dead” thematically adapts *The Rite of Spring*. Not only do both begin with a comparable depiction of a dry and infertile vernal landscape, in which, as Eliot puts it, “April is the cruellest month,” but they are also united through the image of “crowds of people, walking round in a ring,” a pictorial reflection of the circulating village elders at the ballet's climax (*Collected Poems* 53). Further, in the figure of the “Hanged Man” – which Eliot associates with “the Hanged God of Frazer” in the primitive fertility rites, who is symbolically murdered in order to appease the spring deities and bring rain – it is possible to see a textual reverberation of Stravinsky's sacrificial virgin, similarly offered up as a form of customary atonement (*Collected Poems* 54). In this sense, Eliot's mythical reworking of *The Rite of Spring* constructs Russian femininity, once again, as the voiceless figurant in a form of ritual violence.

Despite the fact that these figures of Slavic “femaleness” are mutely sacrificed to the Gods of water, as in *The Rite of Spring* their suffering also allows an artistic and musical expression through this liquid symbolism. This is particularly evident in the way *The Wasteland* reimagines the rape of Philomela in “Sweeney Among the Nightingales.” Unlike in Eliot's earlier verse, where the Greek protagonist (and, implicitly, the Russian Rachel) appears largely as a vicious animal, in the later poem she is unambiguously presented as an example of female victimization. She too is able to communicate her woe through song: “The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king / So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale / Filled all the desert with inviolable voice / And still she cried, and still the world pursues” (*Collected Poems* 56). By revisiting the *Metamorphoses* in this way, it is

clear that Eliot is retrospectively revising his conception of Philomela/Rachel in a positive light, giving voice to her perspective through the chorus she sings of “Twit twit twit / Jug jug jug jug jug jug.” In this sense, *The Wasteland* not only talks back to Eliot’s previous poem, but also allows the vision of “Russianness” referentially represented to *itself* talk back to the European tradition from which it had been hitherto excluded.

Besides the character of Rachel in *Poems 1920*, *The Wasteland* also revisits Eliot’s his earliest fictional engagement with Russian culture in “The Death of St. Narcissus.” In the first place, as Nancy Comley argues, the latter replaces the “hermaphroditism of Narcissus,” and by extension Nijinsky, with the “more powerful figure of Tiresias” (286), a similarly transgendered pre-Hellenic figure who likewise suffers sexual abuse (*Collected Poems* 62). Nevertheless, Tiresias, unlike his forebear, is clearly allowed to speak within *The Wasteland*. Not only is he, as Eliot points out, the focal point in the narrative where the two sexes meet, bridging the gap between female and male, silence and articulation, but even in his contextual existence he serves, in the original source of Euripides’ *Oedipus Rex*, as the prophetic voice – revealing to the hero that he himself murdered his father King Laius (*Collected Poems* 72). Far from his former muteness, therefore, the transformed figure of Narcissus/Nijinsky becomes the one person who “*sees* ... the substance of the poem” (*Collected Poems* 72)

In addition to invoking this Greco-Russian character, *The Wasteland* also reworks several of the original lines to “The Death of St. Narcissus.” For example, the passage in the former where the reader is invited to “Come in under the shadow of this gray rock” becomes a request in the latter to “(Come in under the shadow of this red rock)” (*Collected Poems* 53-53). Indeed, whereas the Russian influence lurking behind the arid landscape of “The Death of St. Narcissus” is largely implicit and contextual, in the closing chapter of *The Wasteland* this barren symbolism is explicitly connected to Soviet society. For instance, in addition to the depiction of baby-faced bats “crawl[ing] head downward down

a blackened wall” – a reference to the scene in Bram Stoker's Russo-Romanian border novel *Dracula* where Jonathan Harker witnesses the Count “emerge from [a] window and begin to crawl down the castle wall over that dreadful abyss, *face down*, with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings” (35) – the poem also associates the final apocalyptic panorama of Dead mountain[s]” and “rock without water” with the ominous image of a social dissolution spreading from the East:

Who are those hooded hordes swarming  
 Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth  
 Ringed by the flat horizon only  
 What is the city over the mountains  
 Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air  
 Falling towers  
 Jerusalem Athens Alexandria  
 Vienna London  
 Unreal. (*Collected Poems* 67)

According to Eliot, this section was specifically used in allusion to Hermann Hesse's description of the Bolshevik Revolution in *Glimpse into Chaos*, which argues that “Half of Europe, half of Eastern Europe at least, is already on its way into chaos, reeling drunkenly in sacred madness along the edge of the abyss” (*Collected Poems* 75). In a socio-political twist within Eliot's seemingly ahistorical work, the desolate landscape of the steppe we see in *The Rite of Spring* is transformed into the arid anti-culture of modern Bolshevism.

Despite the apparent triumph of this dead and empty Bolshevik civilization, we are also presented with the contrasting motif of rebirth through liquidity/music (adumbrated by the mournful cries of “If there were the sound of water only”), derived from *The Rite of Spring*. Although at the beginning of “What the Thunder Said”, there is “no water,” and the examples of feminine expression appear subdued and desolate (from the “Murmurs of

maternal lamentation” to the “voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells”) suddenly there is “a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust / Bringing rain,” followed by the booming monosyllabic “DA,” through which the Hindu storm deity speaks (Malamud 111). Far from being in vain, the female libations throughout *The Wasteland* have finally been heeded, their womanly suffering a necessary step towards the granting of both water and voice. Even Ovid's tuneless swallow figure Procne – redolent of the lady in the cape “thought to be in league” with Rachel in “Sweeney Among the Nightengales” – is transformed by this ritual process. For instance, Eliot's quotation, this time from the *Pervigilium Veneris*, in which the speaker questions “When will my spring come? When shall I be as the Swallow, that I shall cease to be silent?,” seems to suggest that when, as now, the vernal downpours finally come, the hitherto silenced Russian figures are able to find a form of peace and musical expression inherent in the concluding, drum-like chant of “Shantih shantih shantih” (Ward 139). In this throw-back to the “primitive ceremony” of *The Rite of Spring*, it is possible, finally, to see a dramatized victory of the transcendent balletic “form” and “pattern,” over an impoverished Communist aesthetic, in Eliot's engagement with Russia.

The final, and perhaps most important, engagement with this idea of “Russianness” within Eliot's opus comes in *Four Quartets*. This interlocking series of poems is not only deeply indebted to musical theory in general, but specifically to Diaghilev's ballet *Le Spectre de la Rose*. When writing to his friend John Hayward, for instance, Eliot suggested that the line from “Little Gidding” which proclaims that “it is not to ring the bell backward / Nor is it an incantation / To summon the spectre of a Rose” was a reminiscence, during which he was “thinking of the Ballet” (Hargrove “T.S. Eliot and the Dance” 74). This was not even the first time Eliot had made reference to *Le Spectre de la Rose* during the course of his literary career. In “A Cooking Egg” we see “supported on the mantelpiece / An *Invitation to the Dance*,” a Theophile Gautier poem originally used as the ballet's libretto

(*Collected Poems* 36). Published in *Poems 1920*, this verse was in many ways thematically in keeping with Eliot's earlier, ambiguous treatment of his Slavic source material. On the one hand, the allusion to Gautier's work, and by extension Diaghilev's ballet, serves as the proximate cause for a fantastic reverie about an egalitarian heaven where the apparently vocal Madame Blavatsky instructs the speaker, alongside canonical figures such as Sir Phillip Sidney. When this sequence concludes, however, we are then presented with a contrapuntal vision of negative and silent "Russianness," in this case indicated by the banal, yet inhuman, depiction of "red-eyed scavengers ... creeping / From Kentish Town," famously the London residence of Karl Marx, to "Golder's Green," similarly renowned for its burgeoning population of Russian expatriates, including Anna Pavlova (*Collected Poems* 36-37). Much like Rachel Rabinovitch and Grishkin, the vision of Slavic culture presented within "A Cooking Egg" appears simultaneously articulately traditional and uncommunicatively alien.

In *Four Quartets* by contrast, and in a gesture indicative of how far his attitude towards Russian social identity had changed, Eliot's appropriation of *Le Spectre de la Rose* reverses the direction of this narrative. Here he suggests, in the last analysis, that the formal qualities inherent in Russian ballet are capable of granting expression *beyond* the physical. In the first place, Nijinsky's composition is repeatedly invoked throughout the poem via the use of imagery surrounding flowers and dancing. For instance, within "Burnt Norton" a set of roses are depicted as guests who move in a choreographical "formal pattern" beside their viewers, while in "East Coker," the "Late roses" are depicted as the accompaniment to a group who engage "In daunsinge" and "Keeping time, / Keeping the rhythm in their dancing / As in their living the living seasons" (*Collected Poems* 183). More significantly however, the Russian ballet is also portrayed by Eliot as symbolically akin to the structural formation, or *logos*, which orders reality:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;

Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,

But neither arrest nor movement. (*Collected Poems* 177)

Like the Aristotelian “unmoved mover,” in this instance the dance is associated with a form of static, yet mobile, metaphysical transcendence. Despite Eliot's claims that ordinary words often “strain, / Crack and sometimes break, under the burden” placed upon them, there is also an attendant sense that the formal and stylistic features of the Ballets Russes can help reach past this silence and apprehend meaning. For example, it becomes clear that Eliot's ideal variety of expression occurs when the two opposites – the divine form of ballet, and the mundane demotics of worldly speech – operate in complete harmony: “The common word exact without vulgarity / The formal word precise but not pedantic / The complete consort dancing togethe[r] / Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning” (*Collected Poems* 208). In this instance, the Russian ballet functions as an abstract model for the formal and syntactical features of the way language itself operates, its perfect harmony and balance allowing the formation of meaningful expression. Finally, this sense in which the eternal form of Slavic dance exists within, and is hence capable of communicating with, Occidental society, is captured in the concluding lines of “Little Gidding.” In the image of “tongues of flame” – simultaneously evocative of both the Christian Pentecostal feast and the flux of Heraclitan flame<sup>18</sup> – “the fire and the rose” become one, suggesting a metaphoric merger between the symbolism surrounding Russian dance and the world of Christian/Classical heritage (*Collected Poems* 209). By including roseate imagery drawn from *Le Spectre de le Rose* within his general socio-spiritual project in this way, Eliot's vision of Russian culture emerges within the European community. In its unique and non-vocal form of expression it was able, as he puts it in the concluding stanza of *Four Quartets*, to be “heard, half-heard, in the stillness” (*Collected Poems* 209).

## Conclusion

For Eliot, Russia exists as both social insider *and* outsider. Whereas his construction of Bolshevism in *Christianity and Culture* and *The Idea of a Christian Society* largely pictures Slavic culture as a silent “Asiatic” or “Oriental” threat to Western social order, his use of the Russian ballet – particularly in *Poems 1920*, *The Wasteland*, *The Hollow Men*, and *Four Quartets* – conversely locates Slavic spatial identity within the lineage of Occidental community. Crucially though, it is not simply Eliot’s overt depictions which “Occidentalize” Russia in this manner. Even in his most negative adaptations, such as the intertextual appropriation of Nijinsky’s homoeroticized body within “The Love Song of St. Sebastian” and “The Death of St. Narcissus,” the *mere act* of situating such Slavic figures alongside canonically “Western” characters serves to connect Russia with heritage of European “tradition.” The great artist, as Eliot argues, is not one who expresses his or her own individual ideals, but rather one who “re-twines as many straying strands of tradition as possible” – in this case, reconnecting the U.S.S.R. with Western civilization (*The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* 85).

Importantly, the way Eliot interweaves this idea of “Russianness” with European culture also bears considerable similarities with more recent accounts of textual adaptation. In particular, his commitment to historically oriented reading prefigures what Julia Kristeva calls the notion of “Intertextuality”: a theory of signification in which all literary production evolves from “the absorption and transformation” of previous writing (Orr 21). By constructing Russian aesthetic forms in a dialogue with both past and present works of art, Eliot similarly displays a commitment to radical models of literary creation, largely at odds with his imputed “essentialism” and “formalism.” Further, as Linda Hutcheon points out, this variety of intercultural adaptation, by its very nature, also “deemphasize any national, regional, or historic specificities,” reinforcing instead a global

sense of connectedness (147). Consequently, Eliot's intertextual use of Russia suggests an underlying stylistic adherence to internationalist literary forms, largely incommensurate with the elements of ethnocentricity attributed to his work.

Nevertheless, conventional accounts of Eliot's work as fundamentally ethnocentric do have a degree of validity. Although he allows Russian culture expression within the Occidental community, this ability to communicate as a "subaltern" is dependent on its continued participation in the specifically European heritage of Ballet. "Russianness," in effect, can only "speak" through the language of Western aesthetic discourses, never on its own terms. Accordingly, while his views on Russia cannot be construed as uniformly chauvinistic, Eliot does re-inscribe some of the more insidious qualities of "Orientalism." In particular, his emphasis on Occidental expression suggests an implicit assumption, as Said puts it, that "Europe is powerful and articulate; Asia is defeated and distant" (57). In engaging with idiosyncratically Russian modes of being, such as Soviet Bolshevism, therefore, Eliot appears, as he puts it in *Four Quartets*, to have "had the experience but missed the meaning" (*Collected Poems* 194).

Despite his apparently conservative ideology, then, Eliot's attitude toward Russia suggests a deeper socio-political uncertainty. In a similar sense to wider English narratives, his vision of "Slavicness" is split between East and West. Nevertheless, throughout his writing Eliot is also committed to the position that, unless a common social background is assumed, the linguistic and experiential divisions between self and other could be overwhelming. "My experience," as he claimed in an early draft to *The Wasteland*, "falls within my own circle, a circle closed to the outside" (*Facsimile and Transcript* 149). Russian culture, in its unique, *sui generis* existence, frequently fell outside this circle. Consequently, it remained to yet another post-modern inflected conservative – this time D.H. Lawrence – to present Russia in equal and balanced terms, through his ideal of Anglo-Slavic "hybridity."

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Terri Mester “Dance”, Nancy D. Hargrove “T.S. Eliot and the Dance” and “T.S. Eliot and the Parisian Theatre world, 1910-1911”, and Herbert Howard *Notes on Some Figures Behind T.S. Eliot*.

<sup>2</sup> For Eliot's relationship with each author see 'To Sydney Shiff' 24 March 1920 in *Letters I*, 'To John Middleton Murry' 12 May 1925 in *Letters II*, 'From His Mother' August 1920 in *Letters I*, and 'To Eleanor Hinkley' 1 April 1918 in *Letters I*.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Materer points out, for example, that Eliot's famous line in *Four Quartets* “We had the experience but missed the meaning” expresses a sense that “no experience is 'real' nor any 'fact' valid unless it fits into a pattern or system of relations that gives it a meaning” (50-51).

<sup>4</sup> Published in 1934 as the transcript to his University of Virginia lecture series of the same name, Eliot later repudiated and attempted to suppress *After Strange Gods*, owing largely to its controversial and reactionary content (Ricks 77). The work itself, however, remains consistent with, and, indeed, further illuminates, much of Eliot's other writing, particularly concerning Russia, the notion of 'heresy', and the necessity of social homogeneity.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Tratner has also pointed out that in Eliot's canonical poems, such as *The Wasteland*, “women are involved in mysterious ways in the emergence of anarchic mobs” which emasculate traditional structures of “upper-class male authority” (170).

<sup>6</sup> Despite listing such characteristics as being typical, Spivak goes on to warn against attempts to essentialise or reduce to a single set of defining traits the excluded 'Subaltern': “Yet even this does not encompass the heterogeneous Other. Outside (though not completely so) the circuit of the *international* division of labor, there are people whose consciousness we cannot grasp ... Here are subsistence farmers, unorganized peasant labor, the tribals, and the communities of zero workers on the street or in the countryside” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 326).

<sup>7</sup> Martin Scofield, for instance, posits that, within Eliot's work, “mere *speech* can only reach (weakly) into the silence, whereas the form of art can apprehend meaning”, particularly in the case of musical arts – such as Opera, Orchestral performance, and, in this case, Ballet – which, unlike words (that often “exist without a pattern”) are necessarily bound to purely stylistic conventions (210).

<sup>8</sup> While largely positive in his reactions, it is important to also note that Eliot is, on occasion, critical of the Russian ballet, particularly several later performances by the Ballets Russes, such as *Cimarosiana*, which he describes as “bad from *every* point of view” (*Letters II* 546).

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, it was the “high priest of ballet romanticism” Theophile Gautier – whose poem “Invitation to the Dance” was originally used as the libretto to *Le Spectre de la Rose* (which, as we shall see, was used in turn as source material for a number of Eliot poems) – who had “so summarily banished [Male dancers] from the scene” of French ballet in the first place (Haskell 61).

<sup>10</sup> Although both volumes were published much later – 1996 and 1950 respectively – the material contained within largely consists of previously uncollected poems written by Eliot between 1907 and 1917.

<sup>11</sup> Despite Eliot's claims that there was “nothing homosexual” about his portrayals, there is, in both poems, an obvious element of male eroticism and cross-gendered role playing, as well as clear tradition of homosexuality associated in particular with the St. Sebastian myth, of which Eliot was well aware (Miller 242-243).

<sup>12</sup> Ezra Pound notes that he first “took Parson Elyot to see the Prima Ballerina” – whom he had become close to prior to the opening of her Chelsea dance studio 'The Pheasantry' in 1917 – “with a firm intuito that a poem wd result & intention that it should”, which eventually “evoked 'Grushkin’” (Thormahlen 141).

<sup>13</sup> David Chinitz makes a similar point when he notes that such neo-classical comparisons are capable of suggesting the “falseness of the dichotomies by which literary genres are separated from subliterary ones” (238).

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<sup>14</sup> Ovid's ur-text is invoked throughout "Sweeney among the Nightengales" in a variety of ways – firstly in the titular reworking of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Bianca Among the Nightingales," and secondly the discarded epigraph from *The Raigne of King Edward the Third* "Why should I speak of the nightingale? The nightingale sings of adulterous wrong," both of which take *The Metamorphoses* as their explicit point of reference (Ward 35).

<sup>15</sup> In addition to their personal interactions, the careers of these otherwise disparate artists were also united by the fact that both converted to strict forms of Christian worship – Anglo Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy respectively – between 1926 and 1927 (Stayer 315).

<sup>16</sup> Although there is little reason to think that Eliot was even aware of this correspondence between *The Wasteland* and the production history behind *The Rite of Spring* – and the fact that Eliot's commentary seems to suggest that "A Game of Chess" was a reference to Thomas Middleton's *Women Beware Women* (or, more probably, the identically titled play by the same author) – in light of the wider similarities uniting the works, and his well-documented interest in the Ballets Russes such a connection remains a real, and tantalising, possibility (Hargrove "T.S. Eliot and the Dance" 83).

<sup>17</sup> While the exact origin and intent behind this passage is somewhat unclear, according to Valerie Eliot the line comes from a "conversation with the countess" her husband remembered years later, a fact which does little, however, to explain its significance (Kermode 97).

<sup>18</sup> The contrast Heraclitus draws between the *logos*, or sense of eternal reason, and the flux of everyday experience, which he characterized through the element of fire, is apparent throughout *Four Quartets*, most notably in the two epigraphs to "Burnt Norton," which in translation respectively read "Although the Law of Reason (*logos*) is common, the majority of people act as if they had an understanding (wisdom) of their own," and "The way upward and the way downward are the same" (Williamson 208).

### **From Revelation to Revolution: D. H. Lawrence and Russian Hybridity**

*“Russia will certainly inherit the future. What we already call the greatness of Russia is only her prenatal struggling”*

D.H. Lawrence, Foreword to Lev Shestov’s  
*All Things are Possible*

Much like Russia itself, D. H. Lawrence has always been a figure capable of generating strong and divisive emotions within the English public. As Terry Eagleton notes, since the 1960s the ranks of Lawrentian supporters have “been growing thin on the ground,” as politically conscious critics increasingly came to reject the imputedly “racist, proto-fascist, [and] male supremacist” philosophy of absolutism which inhabits his work (256). Lawrence's detractors have pointed out a variety of features in his fiction which display authoritarian tendencies, including a “fondness of force,” “personal arrogance,” “primitive values,” “nationalism,” “hero-worship,” and above all, a rejection of mental consciousness comparable to “the mass hysteria of the regimes of Hitler and Mussolini” (Mensch 7-12). Indeed, one does not have to look far within the Lawrentian canon to find evidence of such racist and anti-liberal sentiments. For instance, in *Studies in Classic American Literature* he describes a South Sea Islander as living in a backwards and “uncreate[d] condition ... nearer the reptile, the Saurian age” (127), while in *Aaron's Rod*, the writer Rawdon Lily argues that “The ideal of love ... the ideal of liberty, the ideal of the brotherhood of man, the ideal of the sanctity of human life ... is dead and putrid, the logical consequence is only stink” (326). Although perhaps overstating the case somewhat, it is entirely possible to understand how, at the height of post-war Nazi antipathy, even those who knew Lawrence personally, such as Bertrand Russell, could accuse his “mystical philosophy of the blood” of leading “straight to Auschwitz” (Burden 90).

Many of Lawrence's comments on Russia also seem to be in keeping with the anti-Comintern and anti-Slavic doctrines of continental Fascism. Don Ramon for instance, the

paramilitary leader of a primitive cult in *The Plumed Serpent*, argues that “Bolshevism is one sort of bullying, capitalism another: and liberty is a change of chains” (61). Lawrence himself, in equally apocalyptic language, suggests that “Today Antichrist speaks Russian, a hundred years ago he spoke French, tomorrow he may speak cockney or Glasgow brogue” (*Apocalypse and Writings on Revelation* 89). Similarly, in *Movements in European History*, we see repeated descriptions of ethnic groups from within the modern Greater Russia in terms of barbarism and savagery. The inhabitants of Scythia and Tartary, for instance, are “hordes of dark, wild, horse-riding Asiatics” (43), the Ukraine a “barbarous land” from which issues a barbarous nation intent on plundering the “peaceful Roman provinces” (54-55), and even in the seventeenth-century, the Eastern border of Prussia is described as a “frontier against the wild people of Russia” (210). At least on the surface, such comments about Russia would appear to not only support, but even advance, the argument that Lawrence possessed a broadly fascistic and “Orientalist” world-view.

In spite of this apparent hostility towards Russia as a political and racial entity however, Lawrence himself had numerous and almost uniformly cordial relationships, both intellectual and personal, with a number of prominent members of the Anglo-Slavic community. For instance, upon meeting for the first time Madamn Stepniak, widow of the infamous Sergei Kravchinsky, he described her as possessing “a beauty infinitely lovelier than the beauty of the young women I know” (*Letters III* 116), while Baron Stempel, a young Baltic Russian whom he met in Sicily, struck him as by far the most likeable member of the party he was attending, if somewhat glum and eccentric (*Letters III* 637). In fact, Lawrence's wife Frieda even had a “Polish countess” for a grandmother and “Tartar” looking eyes (Moore 140-142). Moreover, as Mara Kalnins points out, despite the fact that he frequently disparaged her work as “not *very* much good,” many of Lawrence's esoteric ideas concerning the mystical unity of the individual and the universe, and the importance of pagan ritual, were derived from his extensive reading during the war of the works of

Helena Blavatsky, including *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine* (4). And far from unequivocally rejecting Bolshevism, Lawrence seriously contemplated offering his assistance to the newly established unofficial Soviet embassy in London headed by Maxim Litvinov, the husband of Lawrence's close friend Ivy Litvinov *nee* Low, and was only restrained from doing so by the thought that he would not be “much use at this point” (*Letters III* 210). At one moment during his stay in New Mexico, Lawrence even considered spending “a few months in Russia – even a year,” drawn there by what he understood to be the Bolshevik policy of dismantling the monetary system (*Letters IV* 362). Although the trip was eventually abandoned, apparently more for financial rather than ideological reasons, Lawrence had by this stage gone so far as to begin learning the rudiments of the Russian language, studying several ordinary grammar books and receiving lessons in early 1926 (*Letters V* 367).

The person who provided both the books and lessons, and in many ways shaped Lawrence's relationship with, Russia was a Ukrainian Jew named Samuel Solomonovich Kotliansky. “Kot,” as he was affectionately known within the Bloomsbury circle, had emigrated from Russia in 1911 to escape Tsarist repression, and was working in London as a translator for the Russian Law Bureau (and later Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press) at the time when he met Lawrence in July 1914 while on a walking tour of the Lake Districts (Woods 111). The two immediately became close friends, and collaborated on a variety of projects. Kotliansky helped organize the translation of several of Lawrence's works into Russian and even suggested “Ranim,” a word derived from the Hebrew for “rejoice” as the name for Lawrence's planned utopian commune. Lawrence, for his part, acted as an unacknowledged co-editor for several of Kotliansky's translations, including English versions of Lev Shestov's *All Things Are Possible*, Ivan Bunin's *The Gentleman from San Francisco*, and Maxim Gorky's *Reminiscences of Leonid Andreyev* (*Zyaturk The Quest for Ranim* xxvii-xxxiv).

Lawrence was apparently drawn to the Ukrainian for two simultaneous, yet diametrically opposed reasons. On the one hand, Koteliansky was a scrupulously orderly and well organized man: “His house was scrubbed and polished and dusted, with a special place for every cup, plate, book, or piece of paper” (Zyaturk *The Quest for Raninim* xv-xx). On the other hand though, he was also intense and highly emotional, demonstrating what Leonard Woolf described as a “passionate approval of what he thought good” and an “intense hatred of what he thought bad” which “appealed strongly to Lawrence” (Zyaturk *The Quest for Raninim* xv). Despite Koteliansky's obvious distaste for Frieda, which Lawrence somewhat acerbically suggested was because Kot did not understand enough and lived in a narrow world “all of one hemisphere,” these personal similarities and intellectual ties led to the two remaining close friends, exchanging hundreds of letters right up until Lawrence's death in March 1930 (Moore 209).

This apparent disconnect between Lawrence's cordial personal relationship with individual Russian's such as Kot, and the loathing of Russia which he seems to express in his writing, can be seen as symptomatic of the dualistic nature of his thought. As Graham Hough points out, Lawrence's personal philosophy invariably evolves through a system of dialectical competition between symbolic opposites, such as “Light/Dark, Sun/Moon, Intellect/Blood, Will/Flesh, Male/Female, Love/Law, Spirit/Soul, Mind/Senses, Consciousness/Feelings, Moon/Sun [and] Knowledge/Nature” (260). Traditionally, critics have tended to see Lawrence as advocating the right hand, or what may be termed the “romantic,” side of this binary,<sup>1</sup> through his valorisation of the spiritual and the sensual in opposition to what F. R. Leavis calls the “mental consciousness” of “scientific industrial civilization” (Przybylowicz 293). Lawrence's own comments on the issue however, would suggest that such a one sided evaluation is too simplistic, and that the proper relationship between the two halves of this symbolic equation should be one of balance and dynamic tension. For instance, in his essay “The Crown” Lawrence argues that there can be “no rest,

no cessation of the conflict” which animates life, “for we are two opposites which exist by virtue of our inter-opposition. Remove the opposition and there is collapse, a sudden crumbling into universal nothingness” (*Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine* 256). In this context, the crown of supremacy, which both sides fight for, becomes itself an emblem of the hybridity and equilibrium which ultimately characterizes the relationship between the symbolic foes: “The direct opposites of the Beginning and the End, by their very directness, imply their own supreme relation. And this supreme relation is made absolute in the clash and the foam of the meeting waves. And the clash and foam are the Crown, the Absolute” (*Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine* 259). As Amit Chaudhuri has suggested, this unfinalized system – consistent with Hall’s notion of unstable and “floating signification” – which refuses to give primacy to either side, is characteristic of a post-modern consciousness, in that it “refuses to give a position of hierarchy to a single identity or interest from whose vantage point the distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ ‘essential’ and ‘redundant,’ would be made” (128). Lawrence’s meta-philosophy, therefore, can be seen as a rejection of univocality and a celebration of symbolic ambivalence.

It is because of this equivocal structure in Lawrence’s thought, I would suggest, that his attitude towards Russia is similarly divided. While in individual isolated instances, there appears to be cohesion to his analysis, I will argue that the overall picture he presents of Russian, Bolshevik, and Slavic culture – much like more general English attitudes – is one criss-crossed by contradictions and paradoxes. Not only is Russia *treated* ambivalently throughout Lawrence’s writing, however, in many instances it is also presented as a *symbol of ambivalence*. Like the way in which Lawrence understands Samuel Kotliansky, “Russianness” is comprised of disparate and often diametrically opposed characteristics. Because of this internal division, I will also argue, Lawrence’s intellectual relationship with Russia can be understood within the context of wide-ranging theoretical engagements with

the concept of “hybridity,” a discursive mode centred on the concepts of “symmetry” and “tension” between East and West.

### **Lawrence and the In-Betweenness of Russia**

In its most basic formulation, the idea of hybridity involves the synthesis of two or more radically different cultural or racial elements into a new and distinctive organic whole which is more than the sum of its constituent parts. According to Homi K. Bhaba’s influential formulation, hybridity exists as the

liminal space, in between the designations of identity, [which] becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white ... the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial space between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (5)

Despite the positive appraisal of hybridity offered by contemporary theorists, until recently this kind of generative intermixing has been treated, more often than not, as a perverse and abnormal phenomenon. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, for instance, debates about hybridity were largely conducted within a medical and biological discourse which regarded ethnic miscegenation and mixed race offspring as “degeneration[s] of humanity ... rejected by nature,” and the types of Creole society which they formed as an imperfectly organizable threat to the genetic inheritance of society at large (Young *Colonial Desire* 15-19).

Lawrence's own attitudes towards hybridity are in many ways both consistent with, yet also critical of, this defensively monocultural position. Despite being widely travelled and possessing a well-documented interest in primitive cultures, Lawrence often found the

indigenous populations with which he interacted to be unsettlingly alien and fundamentally unknowable. For instance, in *Mornings In Mexico*, he argues that “the Indian way of consciousness is different from and fatal to our way of consciousness. Our way of consciousness is different from and fatal to the Indian. The two ways, the two streams are never to be united. They are not to even be reconciled. There is no bridge, no canal of connection” (46). His theoretical writing on the subject likewise attests to a belief in the lack of common ground between different races. In the epilogue to *Movements in European History*, for example, which expansively traces the evolution of the post-Roman occident, he concludes that “in its root and trunk, mankind is one. But then the differences begin. The great tree of man branches out into different races ... Every branch has its own direction and its own growing tip. One branch cannot take the place of any other branch. Each must go its own way, and bear its own fruit and flowers” (256). At times he even espouses a popular anti-Semitic critique of hybridity. As Ronald Granofsky points out, there are numerous instances in Lawrence's fiction where Jewish characters are presented in terms of an undesirable and socially elusive “in-betweeness,” ranging from his attack on the attempts of culturally alien middle-class Jews in *The Captain's Daughter* to impersonate “Austrian aristocrats” – and thereby covertly assimilate with European society – to the portrait he presents of Ben Cooley, the failed Jewish militant leader in *Kangaroo*, who is metaphorically destroyed by an inability to resolve his personal conflict between the opposing principles of love and power (209-218). By representing this heterogeneous Semitic culture through an imagery of abjection and internal division, Lawrence positions social crossbreeding as an advanced form of decay, symptomatic of the “violent maelstrom of destruction and horror” with which “the Jews [came] to utter the final death-cry of this epoch: the Christians [being] not reduced sufficiently” (*Letters II* 660).

In contrast to these largely negative depictions of hybridity, there are also many examples throughout Lawrence's work where intercultural mixing is given a positive and redemptive role. Although Lawrence was inimical to the idea of *being* both American Indian and European simultaneously, he was receptive to the possibility of *understanding* both modes of consciousness, a feat which he thought could be achieved by having “a little ghost inside you which sees both ways, or even many ways” at the same time (“Indians and Entertainment” 33). This ability to “see both ways” is treated, in *The Plumed Serpent*, as a divine and transcendent quality, associated principally with the Mexican sun-deity Quetzalcoatl, god of “the eagle and the snake. The earth and the air .... Lord of the two ways” (305). Far from being the cause of racial and cultural degeneration, on many occasions hybridity is presented as the very basis of human advancement. European civilization, for instance, is described as being born out of the “fusion of the dark-eyes with the blue,” such intermixing producing the “joy of our ages” (*Phoenix* 110). Because of this, Lawrence's response to hybridity can be seen, much like his wider philosophical position, as essentially divided, simultaneously presented as possible and impossible, desirable and undesirable.<sup>2</sup>

Although Lawrence's conception of hybridity itself involves serious conflicts and discontinuities, his conception of the specifically Russian variant of this interstitial form is, in some respects, more stable. In his representation of Russian literature, for instance, “Slavicness” is consistently depicted as a form of multiplicitous heterogeneity.

Despite displaying an early infatuation with Russian authors, including in a letter to Blanche Jennings in May 1909 in which he exhorted her to “Read *Anna Karenina* – no matter, read it again, and if you dare to fall out with it, I'll – I'll swear aloud,” it was Lawrence himself who soon fell out with Russian literature altogether (*Letters I* 127). In another letter, this time to Catherine Carswell in December 1916, Lawrence noted that while “Turgenev, Tolstoi, Dostoievsky – [had previously] mattered almost more than

anything” to him, he now saw a “certain crudity and thick, uncivilized, insensitive stupidity” in their work (*Letters III* 45). The reason for this change of heart was the discovery in these authors of a disease which Lawrence termed “Russianitis”: a spiritual and psychological affliction which manifests itself as a love of being “divided against themselves” (*Phoenix* 369-370).<sup>3</sup> Their work, he suggested, unfolds as a “tick-tack of lust and asceticism, pietism and pornography,” producing a pernicious and volatile oscillation between the principles of sensuality and spirituality, body and mind, which distorted and corrupted the “old human wholeness” (*Phoenix* 370). It is not just that each author possesses a bifurcated consciousness however, but that this division is largely unstable and unbalanced. In Dostoevsky, for instance, Lawrence sees a writer who is not only torn between “the complete selflessness of Christian love” and the “complete self-assertion of sensuality,” but who also, through the manner in which he presents his characters, takes both principles to destructive extremes:

Dmitri Karamazov and Rogozhin will each of them ... obtain the sensation and the reduction within the flesh, add to the sensual experience, and progress towards utter dark disintegration, to nullity. Myshkin on the other hand will react upon the achieved consciousness or personality or ego of everyone he meets ... obtaining the knowledge of the factors that made up the complexity of the consciousness ... [then] reduce further and further back, till himself is a babbling idiot, a vessel full of disintegrated parts. (*Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine* 282)

In this instance, an unregulated excess of both mind *and* body can be seen as leading to the dissolution of personal identity and spiritual death more generally.

Despite this extreme and violent division, Dostoevsky's split consciousness is also presented as being lopsided, in that without the benefit of balance or control, it eventually degenerates into a state where the mental principle dominates the physical. His personality,

Lawrence argued, was that of a “pure introvert, a purely disintegrating will – there was not a grain of the passion of love within him,” while even his theology of “Christ-worship” was similarly described as being the overly rationalistic outcome of an evil will” (*Letters II* 314). For Lawrence, this exaltation of the mind over the body was characteristic of almost all Russian literature. In Tolstoy's case, for instance, although Lawrence describes him as possessing a “marvellous sensuous understanding,” like Dmitri Karamazov and Rogozhin, he is similarly seen as having debased and “disgusted himself in his own flesh” through youthful sexual excess, and consequently come to espouse a metaphysic of stoicism and self-denial (*Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine* 479). This repression of carnal impulse, Lawrence argues, manifests itself throughout Tolstoy's work in the failure of illicit love, such as the tragic romance between Anna Karenina and Count Vronsky, who are needlessly destroyed by “the judgement of men,” as opposed to the “judgement of their own souls or the judgement of God” (*Zyaturk D. H. Lawrence's Response to Russian Literature* 83). Instead Tolstoy holds up for admiration those such as Prince Nekhlyudov in *Resurrection* who engage in a religious penance for past sexual misdeeds, but in doing so extinguish “the flame of [their] waning manhood” and crush the sensual elements in their personality (*Selected Critical Writings* 189). In Tolstoy, as in Dostoevsky, Lawrence sees a writer whose unbalanced hybridity manifests itself through a celebration of an overly calculated and moralistic version of Christianity, and a perverse denial of his inner bodily desires.

According to Lawrence however, the cause of this corrosive dualism is not so much the ancient Russian Orthodox religious institutions we see in Tolstoy, but rather the artificial imposition on this devout and primitivistic Russia of the alien consciousness of Western modernity. In an interesting inversion of the dominant discourse which saw Russian culture as a pathogenic threat to English purity, “Russianitis” is presented as a result of an unnatural infusion of “the virus of European culture and ethic” into Russia:

The virus works in them like a disease. And the inflammation and irritation comes forth as literature. The bubbling and fizzing is almost chemical, not organic ... What the Russian is struggling with, crying out against, is not life itself: it is only European culture which has been introduced into his psyche, and which hurts him ... Russia has been expressing nothing inherently Russian. (*Phoenix* 215)

In this context, Lawrence sees Tolstoy and Dostoevsky as having abandoned the true, passionate Russian soul in favour of an anaemic and rationalistically moral version of Christianity. They have, in their “sham Christianity,” betrayed “the Russia that needed [them] most, / The clumsy, bewildered Russia / So worried by the Holy Ghost” (*The Complete Poems* 536). Because of this, the “Instinctive animal Russia, with its miseries and splendours,” had been replaced by “a thinking, or pseudo-thinking Russia, enacting a few old thoughts, the best spontaneity destroyed” (*Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine* 386). And although there are still several examples of writers who continue to draw from this “vast old pagan background” – most notably the work of philosopher V. V. Rozanov<sup>4</sup> – for Lawrence, the old Russian vitality had largely become a thing of the past (*Zyaturk D. H. Lawrence's Response to Russian Literature* 144).

This portrait of the Slavic psyche as divided but with a tendency towards hyperconsciousness is also apparent in the figure of Maxim Libidnikov, the “suave young Russian” dilettante in *Women in Love*. When we first encounter Maxim, in the company of the London intelligentsia, he is described in overtly physical and sensual terms, possessing “a warm coloured face and black, oiled hair,” “dark, and smooth-skinned, and [a body] full of a stealthy vigour,” and a voice, “so small and perfect,” that it “sounded in the *blood* rather than in the air [my italics]” (69-76). In this depiction of his inherent voluptuousness, it is implied that Maxim shares a homosexual relationship with the effete and disgusting Halliday, through the manner in which he leads Halliday away from the club, and the fact

that they are discovered “stark naked” together in front of the fire in their apartment the next morning (71-77). Given what Ferrell describes as the “conventional association of homosexuality with narcissism” which Lawrence displays throughout much of his work, it seems plausible to suggest that Maxim can be seen as yet another example of the degenerative Russian sexual overindulgence (122). In Maxim's case however, this licentiousness is offset by the fact that he is also concurrently portrayed as restrained and socially cultivated. Despite the way in which his voice sounds “in the blood,” his style of speech itself is described as “precise” and “elegant,” exuding an aura of sophistication. Similarly, while at the party, at which almost everyone appears to be drunk and excitable, he strikes Gerald as the “only one who seemed to be perfectly calm and sober” (69-70). He even displays an officious attention to cleanliness, castigating a Hindu man-servant for being excessively dirty (73). This civilized, mental consciousness eventually comes to dominate his inherent sensuality, as we see in the scene where he spitefully attacks Birkin's doctrine of the divinity of sexual desire, describing it as a “form of religious mania” (384). Like Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, Maxim appears, in the last analysis, as an example of the Russian tendency to struggle with, and ultimately suppress, an inherently sensual nature.

For the most part however, Maxim is portrayed as essentially ambiguous. The conflicted mind/body division which exists within his character, for instance, is associated, not only with a psychological liminality, but also with the unresolved geographical location between East and West which he, as a Russian, inhabits. He is symptomatic of what Gudrun refers to as the “rootless life of the Russians” (211). His intermediary status, moreover, is suggested by the way in which he adopts the role of translator, metaphorically bridging the gap between savage and civilized. It is he, for example, who explains the ritual significance and value of West African wood sculpture to a bemused and sceptical Gerald Crich (74). Despite this divided and deracinated social identity, Maxim is also frequently subjected to description in terms of Orientalist tropes. For instance, he is often

pictured as a mute and inscrutable Asiatic, with a “hushed,” “whispered,” “silen[t],” and “discreet” tone of voice, and a personal demeanour which is largely withdrawn and centred around standing clear of the petty squabbles which characterize his social milieu (70-81). His difference from his Western companions is further emphasized by the manner in which he is referred to, more often than not, as “the Russian” or “the young Russian,” rather than Maxim – suggesting that his identity is being cast as that of a reified racial and national type, rather than a thinking and self-conscious being. In this sense, Lawrence's portrayal of Russianness in Maxim is more subtle than in the case of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, in that it enacts a double layered hybridity. Russian identity, in his case, not only mediates cultural difference, but is also, simultaneously, a radically and unknowable instance of Eastern otherness.

### **Anglo-Slavic Hybridity in *The Rainbow***

In spite of the clear depth and complexity of Maxim's character, the role he plays in *Women in Love* is only a minor and fleeting one. Lawrence's longest and most sustained fictional depiction of Slavic culture comes in *The Rainbow*. This prequel to *Women in Love* deals with the emotional and spiritual development of three generations of immigrant Polish women, and also their relationships with the English Brangwen men. Although the Lenskys – Lydia, Anna, and finally Ursula – are descended from “Polish landowner[s],” there is good reason to suggest that Lawrence's depiction of them is also reflective of his understanding of Russia (39-40). Firstly, throughout his writing, both fictional and otherwise, Lawrence propounded a theory in which it was ethnicity, above all else, that fundamentally defined the boundaries of any given country. For instance, in *Women in Love* Gerald suggests, and Rupert later affirms, that “in Europe at least,” it is clear that “race is the essential element in nationality” (28), while in *Movements in European History*, Lawrence more specifically argues that each race of mankind, including the

“Slavic races,” is possessed by a “different spirit and idea, which becomes its own spirit and idea,” and serves to define its evolution as a nation (256). Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, when *The Rainbow* was first published in 1915, Poland was still, despite more than a century of sporadic armed insurrections, very much a part of the Russian empire. Indeed, Lawrence himself discusses, and – in contrast to most English observers – appears to have had little sympathy with, Polish nationalist aspirations in *The Rainbow*, describing Lydia's militantly patriotic husband Paul as a braggart who’s “bravery could not quite have equalled the vividness of his talk” (40). Clearly, then, on both a theoretical and political level, there is little reason to suppose that Lawrence's writing would draw an obvious distinguishing line between Polish and Russian culture.

Perhaps the best evidence that Lawrence merges Russian and Polish identity into a singular set of idiosyncratically “Slavic” traits however, is the divided and hybrid, yet finally rationalistic, symptoms of “Russianitis” which similarly inhabit Polish characters in *The Rainbow*. Initially, the Lenskys initially possess passionate and romantic personalities. Lydia's first husband Paul, for example, is described as a “fire-eater” who, in his insurrectionary fervour, would “incite his countrymen” to the destruction of all things Russian (40). Lydia herself, although less ardent than her husband, has an “almost savag[e]” lust for life, particularly the pastoral world of “peasants . . . in their sheepskins and their fresh, ruddy, bright faces” which characterize her childhood in Poland (42). Eventually, however, this affective freedom is eventually crushed by outside forces, leaving only an empty rationalism. Paul's dedication to the failed Polish revolutionary cause turns him into a “broken, cold man,” so emotionally dead that he is described as having “no affection” for his wife, “nor for anyone” (216). Paul's emotional ossification, and the tragedy of his eventual death, also undermines Lydia's sense of vitality. When we first encounter her she is described as “expressionless and void,” having been cut off from the life of her youth (42). This transition from physical to mental consciousness is also

portrayed in terms of the Slavic embrace of avaricious materialism. We see this principally in the figure of the elder Baron Skrebensky. Despite being a “fiery aristocrat” and political exile, Skrebensky has become bitter and miserly, almost exclusively concerned with possessions and status. He feels slighted, for instance, by the lack of homage from the common people he receives in his parish, and indignant over the mere “two hundred pounds a year” he is paid as a vicar (81). He even decides to give Anna, whom he sees as his ward, a substandard wedding gift – a set of heavy old Russian jewellery – on the grounds that he “never quite approved” of her inability to speak Polish (164). There is, however, a certain irony to his objection that Anna lacks authenticity as a Pole, in that, as we discover, she is in fact a much more complete embodiment of this divided and worldly racial temperament than even Skrebensky:

She was curiously hard, and then passionately tender-hearted. Her mother was ill, the child stole about on tip-toe in the bedroom for hours, being nurse .... Another day, her mother was unhappy. Anna would stand with legs apart, glowering balancing on the sides of her slippers. (80)

As time goes on, however, the hybridity and ambivalence in her character also becomes unstable, and she shifts more and more towards the later, intellectual side of this binary. This appears most notably in the contempt she displays towards the inherently mystical and miraculous Christian philosophy to which her husband Will adheres – an anti-rationalist doctrine which rejects the assumed supremacy of “the Written Word” and “the human mind,” affirming instead the validity of “dark-souled desires” and a visceral relationship with the divine (145). Although, like Tolstoy, Anna subconsciously acknowledges that there is something real about this instinctive metaphysics, she nonetheless clings to the “worship of human knowledge,” in an effort to suppress her own subterranean spiritual yearnings (145). For her, as for Lawrence, the essence of the Polish

identity which she inhabits is one which yearns to be, but never quite is, free of savage Slavic primitivism.

The conflicted relationship between Lensky “mind-consciousness” and Brangwen “blood-consciousness” which we see here is crucial, not only to understanding the way in which Lawrence conceives of the internal hybridity that exists *within* Slavic identity, but also to delineating the external hybridity that occurs during the interaction *between* Slavic and non-Slavic cultures. As R. S. Sharma has pointed out, the way in which this contest between English and Polish racial elements plays out in *The Rainbow* can be seen as enacting a “myth of the second Fall of man through the former’s encounter with the “society, history and 'otherness'” embodied in the latter, and also a “vision of the immediate salvation” of humankind through intercultural engagement (107). The novel itself, for example, opens with a vision of an Edenic paradise at Marsh Farm in which the Brangwen men exist in a state of pre-lapsarian, almost sensual, harmony with the natural world: “[they] came and went without fear of necessity, working hard because of the life that was in them, not for want of money. Neither were they thriftless. They were aware of their last halfpenny ... But heaven and earth was teeming around them, and how should this cease? ... the limbs and body of the men were impregnated with the day, cattle and earth and vegetation and the sky ... their blood flow[ing] heavy with the accumulation from the living [world]” (3-4).<sup>5</sup>

In spite of living in this fulfilling pastoral state however, the Brangwens also desire “the spoken world” which exists beyond, and is fundamentally alien to, their isolated provincial existence at Cossethay (4). This desire for otherness is manifest as an attraction towards the opposed principles inherent in the Lenskys, and operates on several different levels.<sup>6</sup> Firstly, in a metaphysical sense, the two families occupy different sides of the Lawrentian body/mind division, hence the impulsive and sensual Englishmen yearn for “something that was not blood-intimacy” in the form of Slavic rationalism (*The Rainbow*

4). Secondly, on a sexual level, the two families occupy different sides of the gender divide, and so in each of the marriages – Tom/Lydia; Anna/Will – the Brangwen men can be seen as seeking “a consummation of himself with that which is not himself, light with dark, dark with light” (*Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine* 283). Thirdly, and most importantly, on a cultural level, they are separated by the marked differences between the Bragwen's working-class English, and the Lensky's aristocratic Polish, heritage. Because of this socio-historical divide – and in a sense comparable to Eliot's theories concerning language and community – both parties struggle to make themselves understood to one another. In the first generation, for instance, Tom frequently complains that although they talk, he is incapable of penetrating the true essence of Lydia's being, and consequently cannot “bear to be near her, and know the utter foreignness between them, know how entirely they were strangers to each other” (38). In the second generation however, the situation is reversed, and this time it is Will who is left “mute and dead” by an inability to explain his “dark-souled” theology in the language of Anna's mind-consciousness (142-144). In spite of this alienness however, or indeed because of it, there is also a clear attraction between the families which transcends their lack of cultural similarity.<sup>7</sup> Lydia feels, for example, that “There was an inner reality, a logic of the soul, which connected her with” Tom (32). And even Anna, though often vocal in her resentment, also feels a “fragile flame of love [coming] out of the ashes” of her superficial difference from Will (146). As clichéd as it may seem, the Brangwens and Lenkys quintessentially embody the adage “opposites attract.”

Although this rationalized and feminized Slavic “other” is deeply and even irrationally alluring to the Brangwens, interaction with them is ultimately destructive to their peaceful way of life. Both sets of couples are, for most of their courtship, almost constantly at war with one another. And while Tom and Lydia's is essentially a silent battle of wills characterized by a “wide-eyed ... rage, inarticulate, not understanding, but solid

with hostility” (50), Anna's conflict with Will erupts into bouts of screaming philosophical argumentation and obscure accusation, such as her claim that “you [Will] don't let me sleep, you don't let me *live*. Every moment of your life you are doing something to me, something horrible, that destroys me” (155). Superficially, this strife appears to be overcome through the process of conception and child birth, where the opposing racial/metaphysical elements which divide each couple come together to form a point of complete biological unity, which not only engenders social harmony amidst them, but synthesises them body and soul. Anna, for example, is blissful in her pregnant state, where “day after day came shining through the door of Paradise, day after day she entered into the brightness. The child in her shone till she herself was a beam of sunshine ... How happy she was, how gorgeous it was to live: to have known herself, her husband, the passion of love and begetting” (150). According to Lawrence however, this form of relationship, in which both parties negate their individual identities through the act of synthesization, is a *false* and *destructive* form of “bitter-corrosive love,” which prefers the “maudlin self-abandon and self-sacrifice, the degeneration into a sort of slime and merge,” rather than the *genuine* process of love which culminates in “the arrival at a state of simple, pure self-possession, for man and woman” (*Aaron's Rod* 201). Far from returning the Lenskys and Brangwens to their felicitous pre-lapsarian state therefore, this form of self-abandoning hybridity represented by child birth results in, and is explicitly linked to, a form of chastisement and condemnation which is in keeping with the biblical thematic already established. For example, it is precisely when Anna discovers her state of pregnancy that she finally, through her rationalist attacks on her husband's intuitive mysticism, drives him to burn his precious wood-carving of Adam and Eve (145). The symbolism is obvious: having already been compared to a “serpent” and a “viper” in her childhood, Anna's arguments have acted as the fruit of knowledge, causing Will to be cast out of his state of Edenic spiritual innocence. Tom Brangwen also suffers biblical

retribution for entering into such a hybrid form, manifest this time through his drowning in the midst of a torrential storm. Through the repeated references to “Noah,” “year naught,” and rain falling until “kingdom-come,” it is strongly suggested that this deluge is a metaphor for the great flood in the book of Genesis, which separates the “just [and] the unjust”; the implication of Tom's death being that by integrating with the “other” in his relationship with Lydia, he too is to be counted among the unjust (204-205). Indeed, the theological disciplining of the Brangwen men in these instances can, in some ways, be read as a punishment visited upon them by the Lawrentian author-god for simultaneously defying his injunction against self-abandon, and his decree that disparate racial streams are “never to be united.”

Lawrence's attitude toward Anglo-Russian intermixing, however, is on the whole more complex than this. Although, as we have seen, he objects to forms of hybridity in which opposed elements exist in an imbalanced or merged relationship to one another, this does not necessarily suggest that Lawrence discarded the idea of Anglo-Slavic hybridity *per se*. In fact, Lawrence's ideal of human relationships does involve a unity of opposites, but with the crucial provision that the relationship between each side must be one of *balance and separation*. In *Women in Love*, for instance, Birkin argues that “One must commit oneself to a conjunction with the other – forever. But it is not selfless – it is a maintaining of the self in mystic balance and integrity – like a star balanced with another star” (*Women in Love* 152). The “splendid love-way,” as Rawdon Lily similarly puts it in *Aaron's Rod*, necessarily involves unity without dissolution of individual identity, much like the conflict between “Two eagles in mid-air, grappling, whirling, . . . but all the time each lifted on its own wings: each bearing itself on its own wings at every moment of the mid-air love consummation” (202).

The distinction Lawrence draws between false and true love roughly correlates with one Mikhail Bakhtin makes, in his discussion of novelistic form, between “organic” and

“intentional” hybridity. Although there are several differences between the two, what is relevant here is that organic, or unintentional, hybridity occurs specifically when the mixture of belief systems is “mute and opaque, never making use of conscious contrasts and oppositions,” whereas in the case of intentional hybridity, the “Two points of view are not mixed, but set against each other dialogically,” producing a “collision between differing points of view on the world” which, unlike its more inert and passive organic variant, entails an “openendedness” which “can never be fully actualized, can never be fused into finished utterances” (360-361). Further, Homi Bhaba has made the case that such instances of dialectical competition between world-views are instrumental in the production of new social forms and discourses which are liberated from hegemonic notions of truth:

The necessity of heterogeneity and the double inscription of the political objective is not merely the repetition of a general truth about discourse introduced into the political field. Denying an essentialist logic and a mimetic referent to political representation is a strong, principled argument against political separatism of any colour, and cuts through the moralism that usually accompanies such claims.

*(The Location of Culture 26)*

Within this framework, the assimilated and uncontested post-pregnancy Anglo-Slavic relationships are clearly examples of a static and comparatively unproductive “organic” style of hybridity, in that their hitherto existing contradictions are dissolved in what Lawrence criticizes as a destructive pseudo-love. However, out of the ashes of these failed relationships – adumbrated by the immolation of Adam and Eve, and the corresponding motif of Will's carved phoenix “rising on symmetrical wings, from a circle of very beautiful flames” (96) – is born a more balanced, self-sufficient, and liberating “intentional” hybrid, in the form of Will and Anna's first daughter Ursula.

The key to understanding Ursula is that, unlike the principle characters who precede her, she is not only composed of differing metaphysical elements – Intellect/Blood, Will/Flesh – but also differing racial elements. Because of this cultural diversity, she is able to chart a median path which wends its way between the competing principles of Slavic rationalism and English sensualism. To begin with though, Ursula is described as having strongly “identified herself with her Polish” ancestry, and consequently manifests many of the divided and alienated traits of her forebears (214). For instance, she simultaneously possesses a “quick, intelligent, instinctive” mind, replete with a deep desire to learn “Latin and Greek and French and Mathematics,” yet also a “fierce and unyielding” heart, which “burnt in isolation, like a watchfire lighted” (224-226). Furthermore, despite the fact that she and her siblings are born and raised in Cossethay, they too experience a profound feeling of difference from their English neighbours, many of whom taunt, jeer, throw stones at, and otherwise try to “pull them down to make them seem little” (220-221). Unlike previous instances of Slavic identity, however, as the narrative evolves Ursula's personality does not become an unbalanced and hyperconscious victim of Russianitis. Instead, her journey towards self-discovery involves a progressive transcendence of the divisions which characterize her biological inheritance.<sup>8</sup> We see this, for instance, in the religious crisis she suffers as a youth. Although initially “stirred as by a call from far off” by her father's emotive Christian philosophy, she eventually comes to reject his spirituality: “She hated religion, because it lent itself to her confusion. She abused everything. She wanted to become hard, indifferent, brutally callous to everything but just the immediate need, the immediate satisfaction” (241). Simultaneously, however, Ursula also fiercely renounces her mother's realm of mind-conscious worldly endeavour. She objects, in particular, to the way in which the University she attends is run, not as a place of pure learning, but as a “little apprentice-shop where one was further equipped for making money” (366). Having rejected both extremes of spiritualism and rationalism, Ursula

attempts to forge her own individual identity which exists in between the two. For example, in her decision to dedicate her studies towards botany and the uncovering of the “strange laws of the vegetable world” she elegantly brings together Slavic mind-consciousness and the English connection with nature (367). With the help of her scientific school mistress Winifred, Ursula also comes to espouse a compromised form of philosophical deism, in which religious worship is stripped of the unimportant “clothing” associated with its more dogmatic and ritualistic aspects and replaced with a naked “human aspiration” towards the divine (287). In doing so she arrives, philosophically at least, at a middle point between sensualism and rationalism.

This burgeoning sense of self as an individual, distinct from either her Slavic or English cultural inheritance, has several important consequences for Ursula. Firstly, she becomes, like Maxim, a mediator of difference and conflict. We see this arbitrational instinct, for instance, during the scene in which she encounters a couple arguing over what name to give their new-born girl – a choice between “Glady's Em'ly” and “Annabel.” Through Ursula's unintentional intervention, though, they elect to compromise and christen the child “Ursula Ruth” in honour of their guest (264). Even Ursula's *name* engenders harmony. Secondly, and more importantly, however, her increasing sense of identity and balance allows her, unlike her predecessors, to resist the temptation towards self-abandon and assimilation, this time represented in the figure of Anton Skrebensky. Although initially drawn to him by what she sees as his “isolation” and unknowability, it soon becomes apparent that Skrebensky's detachedness does not represent a form of pure self-possession, but rather the characteristically Polish emotional deadness of a man who appears more and more “fixed and stiff and colourless, his life ... a dry mechanical movement” (386). Ursula succinctly describes their relationship when she refers to Skrebensky as the personification of her “yearning for something unknown,” and as a man “whom she knew, whom she was fond of, who was attractive, but whose soul could not

contain her in its waves of strength, nor his breast compel her in burning, salty passion” (404). Consequently, when he proposes marriage Ursula refuses. She suspects not only that, as in her parents’ case, this form of matrimonial life would become a “dead whole which contained them” (382) – undermining her sense of individual freedom and personal identity – but also that she could never be truly satisfied with him, because, unlike her, his personality is one dimensional, lacking “a dignity, a directness ... [a] jolly reckless passionateness” (401).

Because of the way in which Ursula's character evolves through a negotiation between Slavic rationalism and English sensualism, she is psychologically more complete than Anton, and hence, in contrast to Lydia and Anna, is not compelled to seek out a self-sacrificing union with her metaphysical other half in order to attain a sense of wholeness. As a result of her rejection, Skrebensky leaves for India, but not before impregnating Ursula with a child she subsequently miscarries. Through this crisis of abandonment and personal loss however, Ursula is finally able to transcend the philosophical and interpersonal structures which had previously constituted her progress within the novel: “She was the naked, clear kernel thrusting forth the clear, powerful shoot, and the world was a bygone winter, discarded, her mother and father and Anton, and college and all her friends, all cast off like a year that has gone by, whilst the kernel was free and naked and striving to take new root, to create a new knowledge of Eternity in the flux of time” (416). Through her composite identity, forged in the “clash and foam” of conflict between the opposed English and Slavic racial elements, Ursula has metaphorically attained something akin to the spiritual revelation of the absolute in “The Crown.”

This transcendence of the physical is finally symbolized in the rainbow which Ursula sees rising above the town of Beldover at the novel's conclusion: “The arc bended and strengthened itself till it arched indomitable, making great architecture of light and colour and the space of heaven, its pedestals luminous in the corruption of new houses on

the low hill, its arch the top of heaven” (418). As Dorothy Brett notes, Lawrence, her long-time friend, conceived of rainbows as representing the eternal through a “meeting half way of two elements. The meeting of the sun and of the water produce, at exactly the right place and moment. So it is in everything, and that is eternal ... the Nirvana ... just that moment of the meeting of two elements. No one person could reach it alone without that meeting” (280). In its fusion of different colours and arch-like structure – visually evocative of a bridge connecting disparate elements – Ursula's rainbow represents the way in which she has, through a meeting of her opposed racial and metaphysical elements, achieved personal fulfilment.<sup>9</sup> Through her renewed sense of self-expression, it is possible to see in *The Rainbow* a qualified endorsement of Anglo-Slavic hybridity – provided it is predicated on balance and separation – which runs counter to suggestions of a Lawrentian doctrine opposed to inter-racial communion.

### **Russia and the In-Betweenness of Lawrence**

This defence of hybridity, and the concomitant refusal to grant a position of hierarchy to either side of the system of binary oppositions, extends not only to the way in which Lawrence represents Slavic ethnicity, but also to his understanding of Russia as a political entity. In particular, his attitudes towards the Bolshevik revolution and subsequent Soviet state display a similar fluidity and lack of finality which casts doubt on the frequently imputed presence of fascist ideals within his work.

Despite his often adverse comments, Lawrence's initial reaction to the October uprising was largely positive and optimistic. For instance, he describes Soviet Russia as “our chiefest hope for the future,” and as a country which he consequently loved “inordinately” (*Letters III* 4). Not only does Lawrence see communism as desirable, but he also believes that “some sort of Bolshevism is inevitable,” and that, as a doctrine, it would almost certainly inherit the future (*Letters III* 728, 4). There were a variety of reasons for

this ebullient response to the Russian Revolution. Firstly, Lawrence had long espoused a broadly socialist position critical of exploitative capitalist economics. He instead advocated a form of communalism and state ownership of property, a policy he conveyed in a letter to Bertrand Russell in 1915: “There must be a revolution in the state. It shall begin by the nationalising of all ... industries and means of communication, and of the land – in one fell blow. Then a man shall have his wages whether he is sick or well or old ... no man amongst us, and no woman, shall have any fear of the wolf at the door, for all wolves are dead” (*Letters II* 282). As a result of this belief, Lawrence made contact with and attempted to assist a number of prominent left-wing intellectuals, including Maxim Litvinov and Douglas Goldring – the founder of the “1917 Club” dedicated to Soviet style Socialist action – who were intimately involved with the political developments in Russia (*Letters III* 5). Secondly, the Bolshevik revolution came to represent for Lawrence a vast outpouring of the previously repressed visceral forces inherent in Russian society through a “passionate, mindless vengeance taken by the collective, vertebral psyche upon the authority of orthodox *mind*. In the Russian revolution it was the *educated* classes that were the enemy really” (*Kangaroo* 306). Even this ferocious violence apparent in the revolution was necessary, according to Lawrence, in the process of cleansing: “As for Russia, it must go through as it is going. Nothing but a real smelting down is any good for her: no matter how horrible it seems ... chaos is necessary for Russia. Russia will be all right – righter, in the end, than these old stiff senile nations of the West” (*Letters III* 284). Thirdly, and in a point related to the previous two, he also saw Bolshevism as geographically and intellectually drawing Russia away from the rationalist materialism of Europe, and towards a pre-Petrine Asiatic savagery. For example, while acknowledging the internationalism inherent in communist policy, Lawrence reported himself glad to see that Russia was also “at the same time reacting most violently away from all other contact, back, recoiling on herself” into a “savage Russianism, Scythism, savagely self-pivoting” (*Sea and Sardinia*

89). For Lawrence, this further implied that Russia, in its newfound vitality and emancipation from capitalism, was entering into a dualistic relationship in which it assumed the constructive role in opposition to the destructive essence of the West. Russia had become “the positive centre again” whereas the “positivity of western Europe [was] broken” (*Phoenix* 108). In separating from, and in fact defining itself in opposition to, Western values in this way, communist Russia was, according to Lawrence, effectively recovering from its case of Russianitis.<sup>10</sup>

As exuberant as Lawrence was in his early response to the Russian revolution however, with the passage of time he became increasingly outspoken in criticizing what he perceived to be the faults in communist theory and practice. Initially, this took form as a critique of the naïve and fashionable enthusiasm for Soviet Russia apparent in English intellectual circles. We see this, for instance, in the vindictive and conceited figure of Jim Bricknell in *Aaron's Rod* (1922). Jim's self-confessed advocacy of Bolshevik “revolution and the triumph of Labour” is made to seem absurd in light of his other beliefs, particularly his theory that, rather than America and Russia, it is Ireland and Japan that are the “two poles of the world,” upon whom the former nations rely for their socio-political power (93). Soon though, even Lawrence's attitude towards Russia itself had begun to degenerate. He came to see the Bolsheviks not as the saviours of Europe, but simply as loutish and common, a violent rabble with little use “except as disruptive and nihilistic agents. Boring!” (*Letters V* 455). A still more drastic reversal of opinion had occurred in regard to Lawrence's conception of what made up the basis of Soviet philosophy. No longer was Bolshevism a substantially passionate or liberating doctrine, but it had revealed itself to be dogmatic, mechanical and essentially rationalistic. For instance, Charlie May suggests in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* that “The only thing that is a unit, non-organic, composed of many different, and equally essential parts, is the machine. Each man a machine part, and the driving power of the machine, hate ... That, to me, is Bolshevism” (35-36). This triumph

of calculation and impersonal efficiency over human vitality also extended to the economic sphere. Pursuing a philosophy of common sense, Russia had, in Lawrence's view, taken the logical step of removing the unjust power of the “rather foolish Romanov Tsar” and his fellow land holders. In doing so, however, they had arrived at a stultifying system based on permanent financial hand-outs, whereby “Every family is rationed, for food, clothing, and even house-room. That is what commonsense works out to. For rationing is commonsense. But do we like it? Did we like it during the war? – We didn't. We hated it” (*Movements in European History* 260).

In this sense, Lawrence's later constructions present Bolshevist Russia not so much as a diametrical opposite to the Occidental world-view, but rather, much like Slavic identity in *The Rainbow*, as a kind of “in-between”: dissimilar to the West insofar as it is based upon a principled rejection of free market practices, but also comparable in its continued commitment to a highly rationalistic social model. Indeed, Lawrence's work frequently depicts capitalism and communism as two sides of the same coin, the one intimately and irrevocably tied to the other. In his short didactic poem “Cowardice and Impudence,” for instance, Lawrence writes:

Bourgeois cowardice produces bolshevist impudence in direct ratio.

As the bourgeois gets secretly more cowardly, knowing he is in the wrong  
the bolshevist gets openly more impudent, also knowing he is in the wrong.

And between the cowardice and impudence of this pair who are in the wrong,  
this pair of property mongrels

the world will be torn in two. (*The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence* 663)

Both capitalism and communism, in this context, can be understood as representing opposite sides of what Lawrence sees as the same failed worldview, one which privileges the material and worldly over the spiritual and sensual.<sup>11</sup> This does not imply, however, that Lawrence dismissed Bolshevism outright as a failed doctrine, but rather that it is, as he

puts it, a “half-truth,” or, put another way, a “half-lie,” one which contained within it both redemptive and also destructive properties (*Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence* 663-664).

Perhaps the clearest evidence of this divided response to Soviet Russia is the equivocal role which Vladimir Lenin plays within Lawrence's work. Particularly during the period between 1922 and 1926, in which he published his allegedly fascistic “leadership novels,” Lawrence had begun to develop an anti-egalitarian theory of power based on the concept of natural superiority. For example, Richard Somers in *Kangaroo*, a character largely based on D. H. Lawrence's own experience travelling in Australia, puts forward a theory that society ought to be fundamentally based on the idea of the “mystic recognition of difference and innate priority, the joy of obedience and the sacred responsibility of authority” (105). Within the context of this aristocratic theory, Lenin appears as one of the most frequently, if not unambiguously, cited examples of an authoritarian personality. Lawrence's portrayal of him in these circumstances largely vacillates between two extremes. On the one hand, Lenin is frequently presented as exactly the kind of epoch shifting autocrat whom Lawrence admired. In *Apocalypse and Writings on Revelation*, for instance, he is described as a “Tyrannus in shabby clothing,” a natural leader much like Buddha, Francis of Assisi, or even Jesus, who, while “trying to be so humble, as a matter of fact finds a subtle means to absolute power over his followers” (68). On the other hand though, Lenin's Soviet government was far from ideal in Lawrentian terms. For one thing, Bolshevism had, as Lawrence understood it, “degenerated into a worship of Force” as an end in itself, in that, unlike the Russia of the Tsar's – which claimed to obey the dictates of a “higher power” (i.e. God) and at least maintained an “*appearance* of the old inspiration of *noblesse oblige*” – it simply governed through a system of coercion and “*Malice Oblige*” (*Movements in European History* 263-266). Lenin's rule, therefore, was not a result of his natural superiority, but simply due to a campaign of violence and terror.<sup>12</sup> For another thing, the Soviet doctrine of atheist materialism similarly meant that Lenin could

not, in Lawrence's taxonomy, be classed as a truly worthy ruler, as he failed to fulfil the first two of the three basic demands the average human makes upon their leaders:

- “1. He demands bread, and not merely as foodstuff, but as a miracle, given from the hand of God.
2. He demands mystery, the sense of the miraculous in life.
3. He demands somebody to bow down to, and somebody before whom all men shall bow down. (*Phoenix* 284)

Accordingly, in contrast to Attila the Hun, Napoleon and George Washington, who possess “the old divine power” and who, even if they were a scourge, were at least a “scourge of God,” Lenin lacked the credentials to become a truly awe inspiring leader, having “never had the right smell ... never even roused real fear: no real passion” (*Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine* 328). Further, Lenin's failure to satisfy the religious demands of the human soul means that his rise to power was simply “to give men ... The earthly bread. And what was the result? Not only did they lose the heavenly bread, but even the earthly bread disappeared out of wheat-producing Russia” – a reference to the numerous droughts and famines which struck Russia during and after the Civil War (*Phoenix* 287). In this instance, as was the case previously with Will and Tom Brangwen, it is clear that Lawrence is invoking divine wrath as a punishment for the perceived sins of the Slavic people.<sup>13</sup>

Lawrence's attitude towards Soviet Russia, then, can be seen as involving a conflict on multiple interpretative levels. Lenin, for instance, simultaneously embodies both the culmination and the destruction of worldly authority. He was a man who, while loving his people precisely “because he saw them powerless,” himself had become “the final power which should destroy power” in order to liberate them (*Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation* 164). The wider communist political system which Lenin headed also occupies such a contradictory position, merging both democratic and authoritarian tendencies. For example, Lawrence describes Russian politics as displaying a kind of mob rule, or

Ochlocracy, consistent with a literal interpretation of the paradoxical phrase “dictatorship of the proletariat”: “in the most absolute democracy .... The community is inhuman, and less than human. It becomes at last the most dangerous because *bloodless* and insentient tyrant” (*Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation* 71). Lawrence's espousal of ambiguity extends not only to this kind of formal contradiction however, but also at times to a malleable subjectivism. As Somers puts it, “the true life makes no absolute statement ... life is so wonderful and complex, and *always* relative” (*Kangaroo* 272-273). This comes through particularly clearly in Lawrence's long experimental poem “Hibiscus and Salvia Flowers.” Here we see, in a condensed, microcosmic form, the way in which Lawrence rapidly oscillates between passionate hatred and intense love for the idea of communism, failing to arrive at any determinate conclusion on the subject. After initially describing all “Bolshevists. / Leninists. / Communists. / [and] Socialists” as “Sans any distinction at all except loutish commonness,” he then goes on to report how he longs “to be a bolshevist / And set the stinking rubbish-heap of this foul world / Afire at a myriad scarlet points” (313-315). Again however, Lawrence's attitude reverses, this time to a position where he decides “Never / To be a bolshevist / With a hibiscus flower behind my ear” (317). Finally, and tellingly, he arrives at a state of uncertainty and aporia:

If they [the Bolsheviks] pull all the world down,  
 The process will amount to the same in the end.  
 Instead of flame and flame-clean ash,  
 Slow watery rotting back to level muck  
 And final hummus,  
 Whence the re-start (318).

In this last analysis, there can be no sense of closure and finality to Lawrence's dualistic political code, and indeed it seems unlikely Lawrence would have desired one. Logical and straight-forward modes of analysis were largely at odds with his rejection of what he saw

as the excessive rationalism and mechanicalness of contemporary society. In fact, as Lawrence himself concluded, it matters little “*what* a man sets out to prove, so long as he will interest me and carry me away. I don't in the least care whether he proves his point or not, so long as he has given me a real imaginative experience ... Even at the expense of reason we want imaginative experience. For reason is certainly not the final judge of life” (*Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation* 50).

## Conclusion

Within the framework of this multi-layered and constantly self-questioning intellectual outlook, Lawrence's attitude towards Russia rejects finality. From Dostoevsky and Tolstoy's conflicted attitudes towards sexuality, to Maxim's swarthy skin, yet refined manners, Lawrence consistently imagines Russia as split between a commitment to the body and a commitment to the mind. More often than not, however, it is the latter form of “hyper-consciousness” which prevails. In this respect, Lawrence is somewhat unusual. Unlike in wider “Orientalist” theorization, in his writing it is the East which is presented as culturally advanced, whereas the West appears as a zone of savage and pre-lapsarian harmony. Nevertheless, in reversing such orthodox binaries, the underlying narrative of ethnocentrism does not change. England continues to represent the positive, and Russia the negative, pole in his basic philosophical dichotomy. Through the mixed Anglo-Slavic identity of Ursula, however, Lawrence presents a figure capable of transcending such “Orientalist” divisions. Through her trials, passions, and personal discovery we are presented, for the first time in this study, with an articulate and self-aware narrative perspective *inside* the Slavic mind.

Interestingly, this contrast between singularity and fragmentation evident in Lawrence's vision of Russia is consistent with post-structuralist accounts of interpretation. For instance, his understanding of the social divide separating the Brangwens from the

Lenskys in *The Rainbow* bears considerable similarity to Jean-Francois Lyotard's concept of the "differend": a situation in which the lack of shared social assumptions between two parties results in an "unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be," as one is unable to find the words to express ones position in the idiom of the other (*The Differend* 13). In his appreciation for the multiplicity of different, yet equal, modes of understanding, Lawrence displays a similar distrust for "meta-narratives," a position largely incommensurate with charges of fascism within his work. In the transition from primeval unity to worldly plurality undertaken by the Brangwen men, moreover, Lawrence also prefigures the work of neo-Kantian philosopher Ernst Cassirer, who argues that, in contrast to later, dualistic modes of understanding, primitive experience was characterized by "a totality in which there [was] no 'dissociation' of the separate factors of objective perception and subjective feeling" (46). Cultural evolution, for both authors, progresses through an increasing awareness of alternative thought styles. Rather than espousing a return to an undifferentiated state of "merge and slime," however, in the case of Russia Lawrence instead advocates a characteristically post-modern position of balanced and equal plurality.

Beneath the ex-cathedra univocality apparent in individual political statements, then, there appears to be a genuine ambivalence in Lawrence's attitude towards Russia. Even Bolshevism is treated with alternating sympathy and contempt, appearing as a doctrine of both natural aristocrats and also subservient slaves. Indeed, in the latter instance he often derides Soviet Communism for failing to provide the "romantic" or "spiritual" aspects of human existence. Nevertheless, while such passionate and subjective ideals are important to Lawrence's world-view, he also advocates a doctrine of artistic detachment and objectivity. "So long I have acknowledged only the struggle, the stream, the change," he wrote to his friend Henry Savage in 1914, but "now I begin to feel something of the source, the great impersonal which never changes and out of which all

change comes” (*Letters II* 138). His shifting constructions of “Russianness,” in this context, appear as part of a wider attempt to understand the relationship between metaphysical stability and change.

Accordingly, in a similar sense to wider English interactions with Russia, Lawrence presents Slavic culture in terms of both uniformity and multiplicity, difference and sameness. His artistic persona, as he puts it in *Mornings in Mexico*, acts as the ghost which “sees both ways,” translating Russian identity into a language accessible for English readers. Because of this intermediary position, the idea of “Russianness” undermines many of the binary divisions which inhabit his thought – mind/body, spirit/flesh, woman/man. By analysing the “half-truths” and the “half-lies” which characterize the divided nature of Russian consciousness, he is able to “discover, if unstably, the old human wholeness” (*Phoenix* 317). For Lawrence, as for Lewis and Eliot, the interstitial position of Russia highlights the underlying ambivalence of his wider approach to cultural interpretation.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> John Beer, for instance, argues that Lawrence “devoted himself to those elements in romanticism which encouraged a view of art in terms of process rather than through survey of the finished products” (111), while Colin Clarke, in his influential study *River of Dissolution*, similarly suggests that in Lawrence’s work it is possible to see “the first time English Romanticism becomes fully self-conscious” (35).

<sup>2</sup> Mark Kinkead-Weekes has usefully posited that this inherently conflicted attitude towards race may be understood in terms of the fact that, although Lawrence went further than “any other English-born author of the early twentieth century” in attempting to “decolonise his vision,” his imagination could, at times, prove intermittent, especially given the immense difficulties involved in “unscal[ing] one’s eyes from the prejudices of the time,” causing him to occasionally and unconsciously relapse into the uncritically xenophobic modes of thought often apparent in his work (67).

<sup>3</sup> Although never explicitly stated, the fact that his boon companion John Middleton-Murry, previously an advocate of Lawrentian ideals, had recently published *Dostoevsky: A Critical Study*, in which he robustly defended a philosophy of “consciousness incarnate” against the “his friend’s creed of sensual vitality,” it seems likely that, as a young author attempting to stake out his own literary reputation, Lawrence’s rejection of Russian letters may also, in part, have represented an attempt to dismiss an artistic mode which he perceived to be undermining his personal creative domain (Kaye 36).

<sup>4</sup> While Lawrence suggests that he is guilty of a tendency towards Russianitis, he also praises Rozanov for the fact that “when he isn’t Russianizing, [he] is the first Russian really to see” society in its inherent interconnectedness (*Phoenix* 370).

<sup>5</sup> As Michael Bell points out, this vision of an idealised early “world” draws on the anthropological notion of a primitive and pre-dualistic universe – in which it is possible to exist in an unmediated relationship with nature and the divine – posited by contemporary theorists such as Martin Heidegger and particularly Ernst Cassirer, the outlines of whose work Lawrence probably became acquainted with via Frieda’s sister Else Jaffe (60).

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence’s punning use of the Lensky’s Polish heritage in this context reinforces the sense of a binary or “polar” opposition, particularly when taken in the context of his earlier references to Russia as the “positive pole of the world’s spiritual energy” (*Letters II* 136).

<sup>7</sup> As Fiona Becket notes, it is precisely because of Lawrence’s awareness that purely linguistic modes of communication are functionally inadequate that he privileges a bodily and “frictional ‘metaphysic,’” based upon visceral sensuality and a desire for “the magic and the dynamism [which] rests on *otherness*” (40).

<sup>8</sup> In this sense, Ursula is a clear example of what Kelley Swarthout describes as the Lawrentian attempt to “revalue the lower or aboriginal quality of being, and to incorporate it into modern life” in such a way as to allow that “the dark and the light, the sensual and the spiritual might be reconciled, turning the course of civilization towards a fuller realization of the individual” (129).

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, the manner in which Ursula creates this liberated space of individual identity through an interracial synthesis is comparable to Lawrence’s praise for the decolonizing art of J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur. Lawrence applauded the naturalized French-American author for not only crossing the Atlantic and becoming no longer European, but also for introducing “some little salt of the aboriginal” blood into his writing, in a manner which denied the polarising binaries of race (*The Symbolic Meaning* 61).

<sup>10</sup> In addition to the savage and anti-rational qualities he perceived in the Bolshevik revolution, it is also likely that Lawrence’s communist sympathies may have partly stemmed from his own social origins among the working classes, especially given the fact that his own father had, as he points out in “Autobiographical Sketch,” spent all his life “a collier, and only a collier” in the industrial mining village of Eastwood (*Late Essays and Articles* 35-36).

<sup>11</sup> Peter Scheckner suggests that this divided attitude towards Bolshevism can be construed in terms of the way in which Lawrence was drawn in two separate directions – desiring “radical social change,” while at the same time “fearing political militancy,” particularly because of the horrific carnage he saw necessarily attending a war between Labour and Capital (12).

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<sup>12</sup>As Janice Harris has argued, Lawrence was always careful to clearly distinguish the concept of “Power, or *pouvoir*: the ability to” enact world historical change – evident in the magnetic personalities of natural aristocrats – and the contrasting idea of mere “Will” – apparent in the brutal governance of autocrats and military dictators (47). Unlike Rawdon Lily in *Aaron’s Rod*, who is described as having “left his friends utterly to their own choice . . . neither asking for connection nor preventing connection,” Lenin’s repressive rule appears as an example of this latter, more coercive form of authority.

<sup>13</sup> This critique of Socialism for its failure to adequately account for the spiritual element of existence occurs throughout Lawrence’s oeuvre, particularly in *The Plumed Serpent*, where he attacks Diego Rivera’s frescoes of the Mexican Indians for analysing their subject matter “always from the ideal social point of view. Never the spontaneous answer of blood” (46).

### Conclusion: The Sphinx's Riddle

*“Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,  
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great judgement seat”*

Rudyard Kipling, “The Ballad of East and West”

The central problem that this study aims to address is the problem of intercultural communication. What do we mean, in short, when we talk about the ethnographic “other”? This question is particularly important in the context of English engagements with Russia. Despite the fact that the etymological root from which Slavdom derives its name – “слова” or “*slava*” – translates as “to speak,” for much of its history Russia has appeared silent and inscrutable. “Like Oedipus,” in Aleksandr Blok’s famous formulation, England has perpetually halted, perplexed, “before the Sphinx with its ancient riddle” (Malia 2). Russia, in its culturally and geographically split position between East and West, has continually resisted attempts to incorporate its socio-political image within conventional English narratives of space, place, and identity.

It is because of this unresolved position within English cultural mythology that Russia becomes central to the social and stylistic ruptures of modernism. With the pre-war influx of Slavic aesthetic forms – ranging from the “Cult of Dostoevsky” to Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* – Russia came to provide an alternative to received notions of artistic expression. It was, as Rebecca West put it, “to the young intellectuals of to-day what Italy was to the Victorians” – an exotic form of culture which expanded English creative horizons (19). The “October Revolution,” moreover, served to challenge English preconceptions concerning the politics of late-capitalist industrialism. Various appearing as a utopian alternative to, or a dystopian expression of, the worst vices inherent in modern society, Soviet Bolshevism appeared as a point of contention around which twentieth-century ideological schisms were formed – a divisive “blood-red dawn,” as Cecil Day

Lewis put it, which set asunder the “two worlds” of political left and right (184). Wider accounts of “Russianness,” finally, undermine categorical English divisions between “self” and “other.” In contrast to Edward Said’s absolute difference between Orient/Occident, Colonizer/Colonized, the cross-continental position Russia occupied inside English imaginative frameworks indicates the limitations of such absolute oppositions. Slavic culture represents, at least within modernist discursive structures, an enigmatic and destabilizing unknown, capable of contributing to the evolution of divergent intellectual paradigms.

Rather than any monolithic narrative, therefore, English accounts of Russia were largely comprised of a shifting and complex series of interpretative efforts. In this context, Slavic society came to epitomize what Stuart Hall has termed a “floating signifier”: a fluctuating point of cultural reference stemming from the “tension between a refusal to close the field, to police it and, at the same time, a determination to stake out some positions within it and argue for them” (“Cultural Studies” 1784). Within this theoretical background, English writers presented a vision of “Slavicness” that simultaneously sought uniformity, yet also produced plurality. Even Said acknowledges this co-existence of homogeneity and heterogeneity within Russia. Drawing on Antonio Gramsci’s distinction between political and civil society, he argues that “‘Russia’ as a general subject matter has political priority over nicer distinctions such as ‘economics’ and ‘literary history,’” to the extent that investigations of Soviet energy potential, or the early fiction of Tolstoy, fell under the same rubric of “Slavic studies” (11). For him, as for numerous other observers, Russia was the quintessential example of cultural multiplicity underlying nominal singularity.

Paradoxically, of all the authors within the English modernist canon, this uncertain and destabilizing signification attributed to Russian culture is best represented in the imputedly uniform and conservative work of Wyndham Lewis, T.S. Eliot, and D.H.

Lawrence. Through a careful investigation of the place occupied by narratives of “Russianness” within their wider literary oeuvres, it is possible to problematize univocal constructions of these authors as “reactionary modernists.” Their fluctuating constructions of Russia not only undermine charges of ethnocentrism and rigid conservatism, but also function to underscore the implicit ambivalence of their wider philosophical schemes.

Despite this similar vacillation, each writer approaches the idea of Russia in a different manner. Lewis, for instance, comes to terms with Slavic society through a language of “grotesqueness.” In its interstitial position between East and West, Russia is associated throughout his work with an outlandish mixing of metaphysical hierarchies – human/machine, mind/body. Initially, this “in-betweeness” is celebrated as a form of redemptive and Bakhtinian “carnavalesque.” Over time, however, Lewis becomes more scathing in his attitudes, and consequently Russian ambiguity transforms into an encroaching and Kaiserian variety of “monstrosity.” In *The Revenge for Love*, though, he supplants even this aberrant image, instead picturing Russian communism as a humane, if flawed, doctrine.

Eliot, by contrast, makes sense of Russia through the idea of “tradition.” Given his wider pragmatic metaphysics, in which meaningful expression is only possible within a shared linguistic heritage, Russia variously appears as both mute outsider, and also articulate insider, within the realm of the European community. On the one hand, Soviet Bolshevism, in its deviation from Christian society, is depicted as culturally alien and “meaningless.” On the other, however, the Russian ballet – particularly the work of Sergei Diaghilev and Igor Stravinsky – is portrayed by Eliot as an ancient and customary art form, which connects Slavic culture to Occidental society and allows it to communicate, despite its seeming silence, through the formal features associated with dance.

Lawrence, finally, eschewing both “grotesque” and “community” oriented perspectives, presents Russia via a discourse of “hybridity.” This operates on two levels. In

an imaginative sense, “Russianness” itself appears as a split entity. In his early novels such as *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, for instance, Lawrence observes symptoms of “Russianitis” – a divided personality structure which tends towards hyperconsciousness – in Slavic society. In a personal sense, though, his own attitude toward Russia is itself divided. In his construction of Leninist Bolshevism, it becomes apparent that Lawrence’s conception of “Slavicness” is never uniform or singular. He celebrates, instead, Russian dividedness and its potential to create positive new modes of expression.

In spite of the discontinuities between their works, however, what is perhaps more important is the similar ways in which they also talk back to previous accounts of Russia. The writing of Lewis, Eliot, and Lawrence is part of an on-going English tradition in which Russia functions as a symbol of discursive ambiguity and inscrutability. In constructing their individual visions of Russian society, each author displays a number of traits consistent with the “Three Strategies of Slavicness.” In the first place, Russia is often depicted within their writing as backward and “Oriental.” All three, for instance, attest to the intellectual degeneration of Soviet Bolshevism: Lewis in its connection with the “homme moyen sensuel,” Eliot regarding its anti-intellectual commitment to “art-as-propaganda,” and Lawrence concerning its “savagely self-pivoting” Scythism. Secondly, however, Russia is also presented throughout their work as culturally advanced and “Occidental.” The Bolshevik revolution, for example, is persistently understood as a forward looking doctrine, comparable, whether explicitly or implicitly, to their own utopian visions. Lewis, for one, praises the Comintern desire to impose upon the average masses the “art of being ruled”; Eliot, meanwhile, points out the numerous similarities between Bolshevism and the “idea of a Christian society”; Lawrence, in perhaps the most overt example, not only derives the name for his ideal civilization – “Ranimim” – from a Russian source in Samuel Koteliansky, but also applauds Vladimir Lenin as a natural leader. Finally, though, Lewis, Eliot, and Lawrence also imagine Russia as culturally “in-

between.” This liminality is evident, not only in their dualistic constructions of Slavic character, but also through the theoretical postulates underlying their writing. In prefiguring the theorization of post-colonial and post-structuralist writers such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhaba, their depictions of “Russianness” suggest a similar distrust of absolute racial and metaphysical binaries.

This relationship between each author and the idea of “Russianness,” then, is important, not only for understanding the material progress of English aesthetics, but also the *theorization* of modernism – particularly in the context of “Frankfurt School” arguments over the politics of avant-garde art. On the one side of this debate, Georg Lukács, espousing a standard Comintern position, argues that “experimental literature” – from Naturalism and Impressionism, to Expressionism and Surrealism – is essentially a decadent expression of late-capitalist social dissolution. By contrast to the U.S.S.R., he argues, where such writing was being crushed beneath an increasingly assertive school of realism and neoclassicism, Western authors continued to present a subjective expression of life which was “opaque, fragmentary, chaotic,” and hence incapable of conceiving or critiquing the objective material state of bourgeois civilization (39). On the other side though, Ernst Bloch, counteracting such Bolshevik inspired attempts to dismiss aesthetic innovation, suggests that such anti-realist fiction is inherently subversive. According to his argument, contemporary industrial society is itself characterized by discontinuity, fissures, and crevices, thus artistic works which formally reflected these contradictions facilitate a “transition from the old world to the new” (23).

In a similar sense to their non-conformity within political divides, however, the way in which Lewis, Eliot, and Lawrence engage with Russia also upsets such dualistic formulations of modernism. *Contra* Lukács, each of these authors rejects the artistic superiority of Soviet “socialist realism.” Through a collective and unanimous attack on the “philistinism,” “meaninglessness,” and “didacticism” of communist literature, they

contend that it is Bolshevism, rather than so-called “difficult” art, which is restrictive and socially disconnected. *Contra* Bloch, however, these writers also undermine the notion that experimental art is socially progressive. In their combined political reaction against Russian communism, and commitment to classical artistic norms, it is clear that the literary modes each writer develops are not, in themselves, necessarily liberal or revolutionary. Indeed, what is perhaps most interesting about this interaction between each author and Russia is the way it suggests, albeit in the limited domain of Anglo-Russian relations, how avant-garde art resists endeavours towards a singular or monolithic conceptualization. English ambivalence towards the paradigm of “Russianness,” in their writing, highlights the theoretical ambiguity of modernism itself.

Alongside their wider philosophical commitments, there are also a number of specific epistemic reasons for this unstable formulation of Russia. For instance, many of the characters each author portrays – including Louis Soltyk in *Tarr*, Grishkin in *Poems 1920*, and Lydia in *The Rainbow* – are in fact émigrés. Their sense of Russian identity, as a result, already appears in a problematic state of transition. Further, many of the “Russian” individuals analysed in this study possess somewhat tenuous claims to such a label. They are often either subjugated non-Russians from within the Tsarist Empire – usually either émigré Poles or Jews – or English adherents to what might be termed the Bolshevik “Empire of Ideology.” Consequently, they only represent “Russianness” tangentially or obliquely. Several of the references these authors make to Russia, moreover, are themselves only passing or allusive, and, as such, present greater difficulty in constructing a coherent image than more in-depth interactions such as travelogues or political treatises.

Ostensibly, factors such as these could be read as evidence that each author had little interest in Russia *per se*, and that the image which arises from their works is, at best, peripheral to their wider intellectual concerns. Textually, however, such a reading ignores the sheer extent to which each author *did* fictionally imagine, engage with, and develop

original theories of, “Russianness,” and also discounts the wider significance of Russian culture within twentieth-century English society; “no nation,” as Denis Garstin announced in *Friendly Russia* (1915), had enacted, or indeed would enact, “so large an influence on the perpetual wranglings of Europe as Russia” (241). Theoretically, moreover, this dismissal of Russian significance also disregards the important ways marginalized social forms often contribute to the production of collective meaning; “Orientalism,” as Edward Said points out, “responded more to the culture that produced it than to its putative object” (22). For these “reactionary modernists,” as for wider literary analysis, it was often that which existed on the periphery which provided the most telling insight into the cultural centre.

Accordingly, the way in which Lewis, Eliot, and Lawrence engage with the idea of “Slavicness” reveals more about these authors than about Russia itself. Throughout each of their literary careers, Churchill’s famous “enigma” – a nation not one of these writers ever actually visited – becomes a fantasized vision, crafted from a bricolage of books, newspaper articles, and cultural images, rather than an accurate reflection of Russian material reality. It is “a mere blank,” as George Gissing put it, “to be filled up by the imaginings” of each author (*The Crown of Life* 68). Russia evolves, in their writing, as an oppositional construct, a self-reflexive “other,” which allows them to see their own nation as a sea-power in contrast to the Slavic land-power, liberal democracy to Tsarist-cum-Bolshevik autocracy, and a civilized people compared to barbarian savages. Nevertheless, this “strange Russian temperament,” as Virginia Woolf termed it, also upset such divides (“The Russian Background” 147). In its vast and temperamental existence – incorporating disparate climates, dialects, people, and places – Russia presented an anomaly to English society. It was, according to the old Tsarist proverb, “not a state, but a world,” replete with a boundless variety of contradictions and displacements (Yapp 704). Indeed, between their well-documented interest in pre-modern culture, and the fact that, like Russia itself, all

three authors were geographical outsiders to the mainstream London intelligentsia – hailing from Nova Scotia, St. Louis, and rural Nottingham respectively – Lewis, Eliot, and Lawrence themselves were acutely attuned to the way in which evolving notions of “Englishness” were born out of intercultural exchange. For them, converting the alien structures of Russian culture into mainstream English civilization helped catalyse the dissolution, and subsequent reinvention, of received ideas concerning aesthetics, politics, and society. As Raymond Williams points out, such “mobility, dislocation and paranational communication” were essential to the “definition of modernity” (291). It was through the meeting between East and West that modernism achieved its characteristic shape. Translating Russia, within this shifting and ambivalent framework of cross-cultural exchange, was foundational to the on-going construction of English identity itself.

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