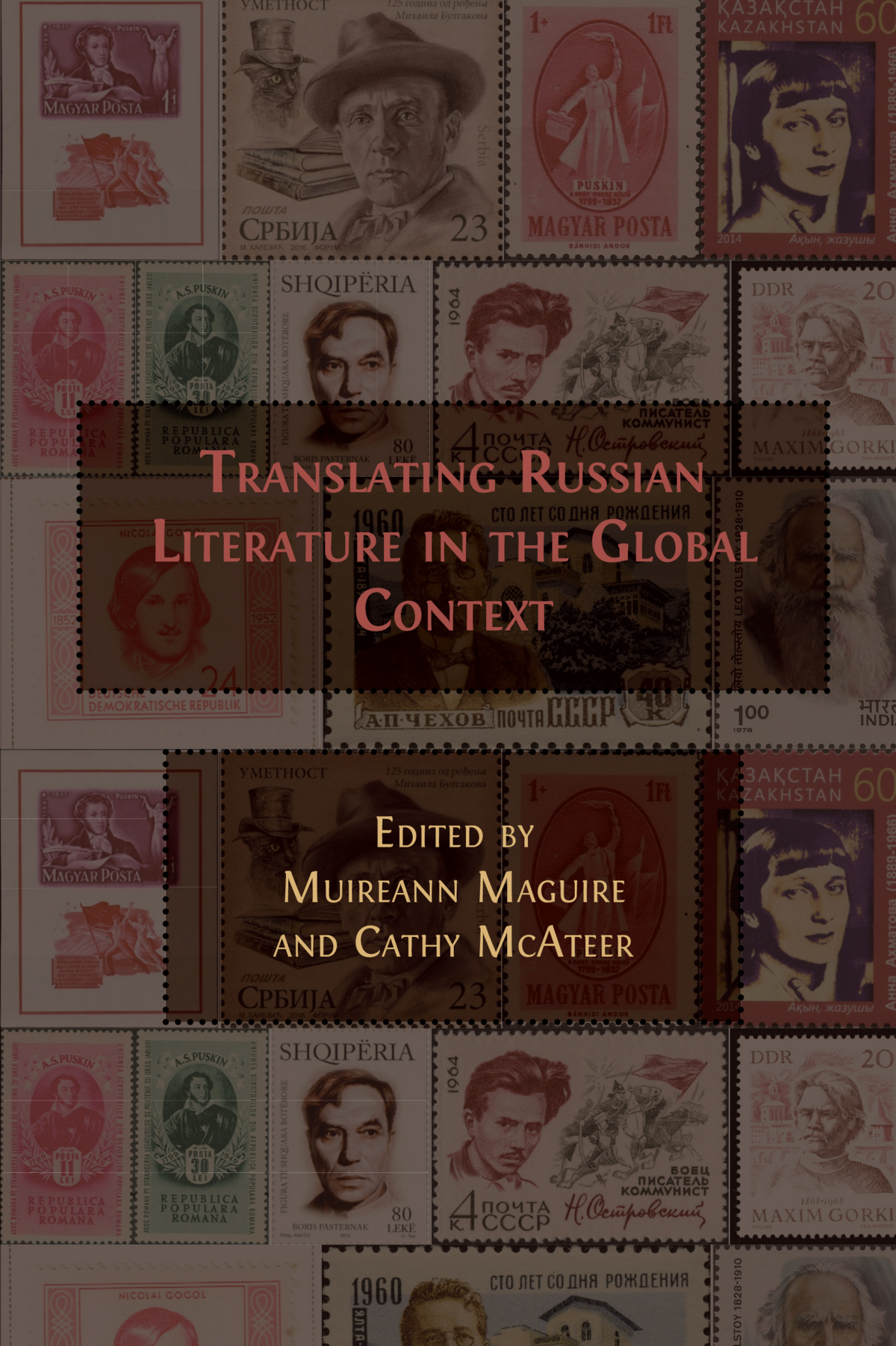

Translating Russian Literature in the Global Context

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Russian Literature in the Anglophone Nations:
An Overview

Muireann Maguire

> I bore you from the regions of the north
> Where ye first blossom'd, flowers of poetry!
> Now light your smiles and pour your incense forth
> Beneath our Albion's more benignant sky.
>
> —John Bowring (1821)[1]

> Finally, in reading the works of Tolstoi, Turgenev, Dostoevski, Gorki, Chekhov, Andreev, and others, what is the general impression produced on the mind of a foreigner? It is one of intense gloom.
>
> —William Lyon Phelps, *Essays on Russian Novelists* (1911)[2]

When John Bowring (1792–1872), a young wine merchant from Exeter in the English county of Devon, travelled to St Petersburg on business in 1819, he could hardly have known that he was about to inaugurate a new creative field: the translation of Russian literature into English. Although he lacked any literary qualifications, his apprenticeship in a merchant's office and his European travels had made him fluent in several languages, besides gaining "book-knowledge" of Russian and Hungarian.[3] When a friend at court, Friedrich von Adelung, the historian, linguist and quondam tutor to the future Tsar Nikolai I, provided

1 John Bowring, untitled poem, in Bowring, *Specimens of the Russian Poets*, 2nd edn (London: R. and A. Taylor, 1821), p. xxxvi.

2 William Lyon Phelps, *Essays on Russian Novelists* (1911). https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/5996.

3 Lewin B. Bowring, 'A Brief Memoir', in Sir John Bowring, *Autobiographical Recollections of Sir John Bowring*, ed. by L.B. Bowring (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1877), pp. 1–42 (p. 4).

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Bowring with a helpful German crib—or bridge translation—of the latest Russian poetry, "the attraction was too powerful to be resisted", although as his son Lewin later noted, it was "no doubt detrimental to the prosecution of successful commercial pursuits".[4] The following year, Bowring's *Specimens of the Russian Poets* was published, the first ever English-language collection of Russian verse.

Bowring's 'Introduction' to his 'Russian Specimens' offers an interesting survey of the pre-Pushkinian players in Russian literature. (He can hardly be faulted for not including Pushkin, since the latter was in Crimean exile when Bowring visited Moscow; and known then only for *Ruslan and Ludmila* (*Ruslan i Liudmila*, 1820).) Lomonosov was identified as "the father of Russian poetry";[5] Sumarokov dismissed as an imitator of La Fontaine; the comedies of Von Visin [sic] were singled out for praise; and Derzhavin praised above all his contemporaries. Bowring translated poems by Kheraskov, Zhukovskii, Bogdanovich, Kapnist, Khemnitzer, Krylov, Dmitriev and Karamzin (whom he criticised for imitating Laurence Sterne on the grounds that "the peculiarities which characterize [Sterne] are only tolerable because they are original"),[6] among others. He added occasional insights into the personalities of these poets: "Krilov [sic] holds an office in the Imperial library in Petersburg. He is well known to the *bons vivants* of the English club. His heavy and unwieldy appearance is singularly contrasted with the shrewdness and the grace of his writings".[7] Of Karamzin, Bowring later wrote, "I found him an agreeable and intelligent man, but I remember nothing in his conversation that betokened a high order of intellect. It was his object to flatter the Emperor […]".[8]

I expand on Bowring's *Specimens of the Russian Poets* because this slender anthology inaugurated not only the flow of Russian literature into the English language, but also an attitude to the field which would prove more enduring than the translations themselves. Bowring's critique, written from the sophisticated perspective of a religious and political radical (he was a Unitarian and a Benthamite), combined his personal view of Russian society as primitive and brutal, with sincere admiration for its writers' creations.[9] Although he dedicated the second edition of *Specimens* to Tsar Aleksandr I, his preface blamed Russian

4 Ibid., p. 5.
5 John Bowring, 'Introduction', in Bowring, *Specimens of the Russian Poets*, 2nd edn (London: R and A Taylor, 1821), pp. vii-xxxv (p. ix).
6 Ibid., 'Introduction', p. xv.
7 Ibid., 'Introduction', p. xvii.
8 Sir John Bowring, *Autobiographical Recollections*, p. 122.
9 For more discussion and criticism of John Bowring's role as an early translator of Russian literature, see Anthony Cross, 'Early English Specimens of the Russian Poets', *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, IX:4 (1975), 449–62; Arthur Prudden Coleman, 'John Bowring and the Poetry of the Slavs', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 84:3 (1941), 431–59; Miloš Sova, 'Sir John Bowring (1792–1872) and the Slavs', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 2:2 (1943), pp. 128–44.

autocracy—and the rigid Russian system of social ranks—for the country's comparative backwardness. Bowring added hopefully: "Russia, full as she is of the materials out of which great minds are formed, may yet perhaps take her stand in intellectual eminence among the nations of Europe, at no distant period".[10] In other words, the translation of Russian poetry was part of a complex process of invitation, education, and inclusion—educating the British about Russian literature, while encouraging Russian writers to Westernise their social and political system in order to become full members of the European canon. Thus, Russian writers were represented at the very beginning of their translation journey into English as victims of their government; arguably, since the imperialist and anti-democratic trajectory of Putin's regime became obvious in the 2010s, this perception is once again dominant.

In two centuries since Bowring published his *Specimens*, the translation and reception of Russian literature in the Anglophone world has passed through three major stages: discovery, canonisation, and altruism. In this short essay, I will try to offer an overview of how these stages elapsed on each side of the Atlantic. I have focused on the United States and Great Britain, as the core regions from which most English-language translations have been exported to other Anglophone nations such as Australia and New Zealand,[11] South Africa,[12] and Canada.[13] (The Irish reception of Russian literature is covered separately in this

10 John Bowring, 'Introduction', p. xxv.

11 Russian influence on the Anglophone literature of Australia and New Zealand is under-explored; my own lack of expertise prevents me from expanding on it here. In New Zealand, university programmes in Russian or Slavonic Studies have been developing since the 1940s, and several of the contemporary writers most obviously influenced by Russian literature are also academics: one example is the poet Anna Jackson (b. 1964), who has written various lyrics responding to Vladimir Maiakovskii and Osip Mandel'shtam. See Jacob Edmond, 'No Place Like Home: Encounters Between New Zealand and Russian Poetries', *Landfall*, 213 (2007), 73–80 (esp. pp. 75–78). The New Zealand author Katharine Mansfield (1888–1923), who moved to England aged nineteen, drew on both Chekhov and Dostoevsky in her fiction; while another expat New Zealander, Dan Davin (1913–1990) modelled the plot of his first novel *Cliffs of Fall* (1945) upon *Crime and Punishment*. (On Davin, see Lawrence Jones, 'Strange Conjunctures: Three Russian Episodes in New Zealand Fiction', *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, (1996), 45–52 (esp. pp. 48–52).) In Australia, the most prominent author overtly influenced by Russian literature may be Robert Dessaix (b. 1944), the novelist and Turgenev biographer. On the development of Slavonic Studies in both countries, see Peter Hill, 'Slavonic Studies in Australia and New Zealand During the Cold War and in the Post-Cold-War Era', *Transcultural Studies*, 9 (2013), 145–64.

12 See Jeanne-Marie Jackson, *South African Literature's Russian Soul: Narrative Forms of Global Isolation* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

13 Russian influence on Canadian literature appears to be an under-studied subject, despite Canada's large Russophone diaspora.

volume.)[14] Traditionally, most comparative studies of Russian literary influence have focused on a single author, usually one of Phelps's "standard five" (see below) with the addition of Chekhov.[15] Such studies are unfailingly useful and enlightening; several essays in the present volume follow this pattern. Here, however, I try to isolate how the essential characteristics of 'Russian' literature were defined at different times in the USA and in Britain, and how sociopolitical and reputational changes in both nations have accelerated, or impeded, its reception.

The stage of discovery, from the 1880s to the 1910s, coincided with the global dissemination of Russian literature. Translators, educators, and critics who had independently discovered the aesthetic and philosophical value of Russian literature (whether in the original or in translation), subsequently imposed on themselves the task of making that literature available to as many of their compatriots as possible. These advocates included translators like Britain's Constance Garnett (1861–1946), who translated virtually the entire canon of late nineteenth-century Russian literature, mostly for the publisher William Heinemann, during her forty-year career; while in the US the work of Isabel Hapgood (1851–1928), Nathan Haskell Dole (1852–1935) and Leo Wiener (1862–1939) brought Tolstoy as well as other writers to Anglophone audiences for the first time. (Translations by the last-mentioned pair, although still frequently accessed as free online editions, are not noted for their quality, often because of the haste with which they were accomplished; Wiener, for example, translated twelve volumes of Tolstoy in two years.)[16] Marian Fell (1886–1935), an American citizen who spent much of her adult life in England, translated

14 No single article or monograph, as far as we are aware, studies the influence of Russian literature on Irish-born writers active prior to independence from Britain in 1922, such as George Moore, J.M. Synge, W.B. Yeats and G.B. Shaw. This is a significant lacuna in comparative literature.

15 Worthy examples—to make a very limited selection—include the following titles: Gilbert Phelps, *The Russian Novel in English Fiction* (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1956); Helen Muchnic, *Dostoevsky's English Reputation, 1881–1936* (New York: Octagon Books, 1969); Glyn Turton, *Turgenev and the Context of English Literature 1850–1900*, which includes a close reading of Constance Garnett's Turgenev translations (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); Gareth Jones, *Tolstoi and Britain* (Oxford: Berg, 1995); and W. J. Leatherbarrow, *Dostoevskii and Britain* (Oxford: Berg, 1995). See also the Bibliography at the close of this volume.

16 For more on Wiener's intellectual contribution to US culture, see Susanne Klingenstein, *Jews in the American Academy, 1900–1940: The Dynamics of Intellectual Assimilation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), esp. Chapter 1, 'A Philologist: The Adventures of Leo Wiener (1862–1939)', pp. 8–17. On Constance Garnett, see her grandson's biography *Constance Garnett: A Heroic Life* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1991). A new life of Garnett by American journalist Jennifer Wilson is in preparation at the time of writing.

Chekhov's short stories for the major American publishing firm, Scribner's.[17] It is notable that Russian literature was never marketed as entertainment: a 1907 advertisement by the Boston publisher Dana Estes for a 'cabinet set' of Tolstoy's complete works in twenty-four volumes, translated by Wiener, made no effort to describe the contents of the volumes, apparently assuming that the target audience would recognise the intrinsic value of owning and reading Russian literature. Its one boast was that a biography of Tolstoy had been added, since the author's life "was as remarkable as his writings".[18] Tolstoy's name conferred literary value: a 1905 advertisement by the same publisher promised that a new novel by the German author Gustav Frenssen was "as popular as Dickens; as profound as Tolstoy" (a rather unfortunate equivalence, in view of Frenssen's later pro-Nazi sentiments).[19] Similarly, in the 1890s a British firm, the Walter Scott Publishing Company, offered an eight-volume set of 'Count Tolstoy's Works' at two shillings and sixpence per volume (or five shillings apiece if one opted for the luxury half-morocco binding, with gilt top). The set included both fiction and non-fictional works, with the option of adding moralistic essays such as 'If You Neglect The Fire, Don't Put It Out' as individual 'booklets'. The symbolic value of Russian literature as a source of both edification (if you actually read the novels) and of cultural cachet (if your work stood comparison with them) was thus, from their first appearances in the American and British literary fields, exceptionally great.[20]

Once translators had made Russian novels accessible, cultural advocates imbued them with symbolic value and, through criticism, citation, and emulation, embedded them in the Anglophone literary canon. This process is inextricable from the growth of Slavonic Studies in British and American universities between 1870, when the first lectures on the topic were delivered at Oxford, and 1946, when US donors established major interdisciplinary research institutions, the Davis and Harriman Centres, at Harvard and Columbia respectively. Important early advocates for Russian literature included, in the US, Willian Dean Howells (1837–1920) and William Lyon Phelps (1865–1943), and in the UK, Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) and Bernard Pares (1867–1949). Howells and Woolf

17 See Anna Maslenova, 'The Silhouette of a Translator: Marian Fell and Russian Culture', *Modern Language Review*, 118:4 (2023), pp. 434–57.

18 *The Publishers' Weekly*, 72:13 (28 September 1907), pp. 895–6 (p. 895). The volumes cost $1.50 each, or $72 for the entire set bound in morocco leather; equivalent to more than $2500 in 2023.

19 *The Publishers' Weekly*, 67:15 (15 April 1905), p. 1121.

20 For a study of how the popular British novelist Hall Caine sought to increase his own cultural capital through association with Tolstoy, see my 'Master and Manxman: Reciprocal Plagiarism in Tolstoy and Hall Caine', in *Reading Backwards: An Advance Retrospective on Russian Literature*, ed. by Muireann Maguire and Timothy Langen (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2021), pp. 129–58, https://books.openbookpublishers.com/10.11647/obp.0241/ch6.xhtml.

exerted huge influence both as novelists and as critics.[21] Through their work, whether intended for students of literature or the intelligent reading public, Russian literature became a crucial section of the intellectual architecture of the twentieth-century Western mind. They made sense for readers and students of an otherwise incoherent programme of 'Russianness', extending from Tolstoy's crusading campaigns through Chekhov's almost actionless plays, Dostoevsky's hysterical protagonists, and a spectrum of radically intentioned political organisations, from the editorial committee of Aleksandr Herzen's journal *The Bell* (*Kolokol*, published in London 1857–65)[22] to the underground network of the novelist and former terrorist Sergei Stepniak-Kravchinskii, Constance Garnett's linguistic mentor. Thanks to critical interpretations, the Russian novel emerged from this mass of conflicting values to become metonymous with both psychological insight and social justice. Each critic picked at least one writer to champion. For Woolf, it was Dostoevsky; for Howells, Tolstoy; while Phelps, writing in 1911, helpfully picked "five standard writers" from among the many Russian authors "deservedly attracting wide attention": these were Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy. He argued:

> Russian literature and American literature are twins. But there is this strong contrast, caused partly by the difference in the age of the two nations. In the early years of the nineteenth century, American literature sounds like a child learning to talk, and then aping its elders; Russian literature is the voice of a giant, waking from a long sleep, and becoming articulate.

21 On Howells's use of his role as a *Harper's Monthly* columnist between 1885 and 1892 to advocate for Russian literature, especially Tolstoy's writing, see Clare Goldfarb, 'William Dean Howells: An American Reaction to Tolstoy', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 8:4 (December 1871), 317–37. On how the Russian writer influenced his own novels, see Harry Walsh, 'Tolstoy and the Economic Novels of William Dean Howells', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 14: 2 (1977), 143–65. Phelps, a professor of literature at Yale, published his well-received lectures on the Russian novel in 1911. On Bernard Pares' achievements as an academic, diplomat, and translator of Russian, see Michael Hughes, 'Bernard Pares, Russian Studies and the Promotion of Anglo-Russian Friendship, 1907–14', *The Slavonic and East European Review* 78:3 (2000), 510–35. On how Woolf and her contemporaries received and critiqued Russian literature, and disseminated certain authors through Leonard and Virginia Woolf's publishing company, The Hogarth Press, see Peter Kaye, *Dostoevsky and English Modernism 1900–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), and Helen Southworth, ed., *Leonard and Virginia Woolf, The Hogarth Press and the Networks of Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

22 In an interesting example of diachronic influence, the Irish dramatist and critic Sean O'Faolain named his own countercultural, philo-European journal *The Bell* (1940–54) in honour of Herzen's publication. See Kelly Matthews, *The Bell Magazine and the Representation of Irish Identity* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012).

Note the change in tone from Bowring's earlier reception of Russian poetry. The British translator had envisaged Russian literature as a post-Petrine edifice requiring the finishing touches of European influence; Phelps, an Ivy League professor who taught Yale's first course on the modern novel, argued that America needed to learn from the Russian novel. True, the latter was distinguished by both morbid melancholy and passive resignation: "no works sound such depths of suffering and despair as are fathomed by the Russians". But by situating the Russian novel within the Christian aetiology of humility and grace, Phelps argued that Russian psychology—exemplified in the work of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy—offered a model of spiritual perfectibility to Western readers.[23] Later critics, like Alfred Kazin, would argue that American literary Realism derived from the national reception of Tolstoy, as mediated by critics like Howells, John Macy, and Van Wyck Brooks; major writers like Theodore Dreiser and even Stephen Crane were firmly imprinted with Tolstoy's influence.[24]

Naturally, there was dissent. Henry James's famous "baggy monster" slur expressed his impatience with the length and psychological (sur)realism of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Russian aesthetic melancholy was ably lampooned in P.G. Wodehouse's 1920 comic novel *Jill the Reckless*, where one character experiences "the sort of abysmal soul-sadness which afflicts one of Tolstoy's Russian peasants when, after putting in a heavy day's work strangling his father, beating his wife, and dropping the baby into the city's reservoir, he turns to the cupboards, only to find the vodka-bottle empty".[25] But such criticisms lost force as the Anglophone book market on both sides of the channel ceased to be monolithically Anglo. The vast influx of Russian Jews before the 1917 Revolution into Western Europe and the USA, and the émigrés who left to escape the Communist regime, transformed the ethnic profile of both publishing and translation. Alfred Knopf Sr. (1892–1984), who would found Knopf, one of America's biggest publishers of translated fiction (especially Russian) was born into a Russophone family which had emigrated from tsarist Poland and Latvia; Thomas Seltzer, another pioneering publisher who translated Russian short stories for his own New York-based firm, was a Russian native. For Philip Rahv, the Ukrainian-born literary critic who helped define American fiction through his editorship of the *Partisan Review* during the 1930s and 1940s, "literature

23 All citations from Phelps in this section are from his *Essays on Russian Novelists* (1911), https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/5996.

24 Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942), esp. p. 69 and pp. 177–79.

25 P. G. Wodehouse, *Jill the Reckless* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1921), https://www.gutenberg.org/files/20533/20533-h/20533-h.htm. For an excellent and detailed exploration of how British modernism assimilated and ultimately rejected Russian literary influences, see Rebecca Beasley, *Russomania: Russian Culture and the Creation of British Modernism, 1881–1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

began with Dostoevsky".[26] As Russophone émigrés became assimilated into Anglophone culture, so did their literature, assuaging that "hunger for culture", especially European culture, that typified American writers and critics of the early twentieth century.[27]

The second stage of Russian literary reception, that of canonisation, thus began in the 1920s and persisted until the canon became reified in the 1950s. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian literature in various translations were fully integrated into the Western literary canon. Tolstoy and Chekhov were taught in universities; multiple commercial publishers on both sides of the Atlantic cashed in by commissioning new translations of the classics; crucially, the 'Russian novel' had become a pit-stop on the road to intellectual self-discovery. The prevalence of Dostoevsky in twentieth and twenty-first century American letters is ubiquitous, and to a large degree undocumented.[28] His influence mid-century on Black authors was pronounced (it can be read most obviously in the title of Richard Wright's long-unpublished novel *The Man Who Lived Underground* (1940s; 2021)), as argued by Maria Bloshteyn and others.[29] Even today, popular, socially critical fiction like Zakiya Dalila Harris's *The Other Black Girl* (2021), a mildly comical novel about a young Black publishing assistant whose imposter syndrome is exacerbated by a hyper-efficient new colleague, appears to draw on Dostoevsky's *The Double* (*Dvoinik*, 1846). William Lyon Phelps's "standard five" had been reconfigured by mid-century as an 'ineffable four': a quartet of canonical writers, usually Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Gorky, and Chekhov. Familiarity with their fiction was a prerequisite of educated status. Such was their ubiquity that, inevitably, publishers and translators tried to enlarge the canon by proposing newer, more contemporary Russian writers for membership, often by comparing their work favourably to that of one of the quartet.

An example of an unsuccessful attempt at canonisation is Mark Aldanov (pen name of Mark Aleksandrovich Landau, 1886–1957), a Russian-Jewish émigré

26 Mary McCarthy, 'Philip Rahv, 1908–1973', *New York Times*, 17 February 1974, p. 34.

27 Kazin, *On Native Grounds*, p. 168.

28 As in the case of English literature, academic studies of this topic tend to be piecemeal, by author or genre. Examples include Maria Bloshteyn's article 'Dostoevsky and the Beat Generation', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 28:2/3 (Summer 2001), 218–44; and Jesse Menefee, 'Dostoevsky and the Diamond Sutra: Jack Kerouac's Karamazov Religion', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 53:4 (2011), 431–54, https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/15/article/455858). Benjamin Mangrum argues for the influence of Dostoevsky (particularly *Crime and Punishment*) on Patricia Highsmith's fiction in *Land of Tomorrow: Postwar Fiction and the Crisis of American Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 85–97.

29 For an account of Dostoevsky's influence on the work of James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright, see Maria Bloshteyn, 'Rage and Revolt: Dostoevsky and Three African-American Writers', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 38:4 (2001), 277–309. See also Dale E. Peterson, 'Richard Wright's Long Journey from Gorky to Dostoevsky', *African American Review*, 28:3 (Autumn 1994), 375–87.

writer of serious literary and historical fiction, often likened by critics to Tolstoy. When his novel *The Fifth Seal* (*Nachalo kontsa*, 1938; translated into English in 1943 by the Russian émigré Nicholas Wreden) was published by Scribner's in the US and Jonathan Cape in Britain, it was chosen as a Book-of-the-Month Club selection. Its excoriation of Stalinism briefly precipitated national controversy (this was still the era of tentative Americo-Soviet friendship, pre-McCarthyism). Both the club selection and the scandal jump-started sales; there were even inquiries from Hollywood. Nevertheless, in 1951 Scribner's stopped publishing Aldanov because of dwindling sales and consequent "heavy losses on each of his books". As a senior Scribner's editor confided to a colleague, "[t]here is a determined resistance in this country, at this time, to fiction the scene of which is laid in Russia and the characters of which are Russians".[30] Canonical status was not catching: the Ineffable Four, and a few other typically nineteenth-century authors like Gogol, Turgenev, and Lermontov, enjoyed market security and cultural status which could not easily be imparted to other Russophone authors, whatever their reputation at home. Only Solzhenitsyn, whose fiction sparked a bidding war between American and British publishers, seriously challenged the nineteenth-century authors in terms of sales and symbolic capital.[31] The most commercially successful novels in English translation in the early twenty-first century are genre fiction: the historical detectives of Boris Akunin, and horror-inflected science fiction by Sergei Lukianenko.

Despite the vagaries of sales, by the 1950s Russian fiction was firmly imprinted on the public imagination. The symbolic capital of certain authors, and their novels, was so great that the mere mention of the author's name—or book title—evoked a specific mood or philosophical conundrum. In Joseph Heller's iconic 1955 novel *Catch-22*, the hero, Yossarian, has worked out a self-preserving logic which, in his friend Clevinger's opinion, is equivalent to Raskolnikov's rationalisation of murder in *Crime and Punishment*:

> 'You're no better than Raskolnikov—'
> 'Who?'
> '—yes, Raskolnikov, who—'
> 'Raskolnikov!'

30 John Hall Wheelock, letter to H. Bartlett Wells, 1st May 1951. Box 203 'Author Files', Folder 5. Archives of Charles Scribner's Sons, Manuscripts Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

31 See Cathy McAteer, *Translating Great Russian Literature: The Penguin Russian Classics* (London and New York: Routledge BASEES series, 2021), pp. 132–36. Publishers who have continued attempting to revise and expand the canon of 'classic' Russian literature (for example, the Russian Library series produced until 2022 by Columbia University Press, in collaboration with the nonprofit Read Russia), have relied on non-commercial funding, such as subsidies from Russian state-sponsored organisations. For an overview , see 'The Russian Library', https://readrussia.org/russian-library/.

> '—who—I mean it—who felt he could justify killing an old woman—'
> 'No better than?'
> '—yes, justify, that's right—with an ax! And I can prove it to you!' Gasping furiously for air, Clevinger enumerated Yossarian's symptoms: an unreasonable belief that everybody around him was crazy, a homicidal impulse to machine-gun strangers, retrospective falsification, an unfounded suspicion that people hated him and were conspiring to kill him.[32]

Reference to Russian classics was not confined to literary fiction. In Ross MacDonald's 1950 private-eye caper *The Drowning Pool*, the narrator encounters a drunk boy sitting owlishly on a barstool after an unlucky night's gambling. He promptly labels him "Dostoevsky".[33] Other riffs on Russian literature in Anglophone fiction, highbrow and lowbrow, are legion.

The third and final category of literary reception is altruistic. Translators, publishers, and advocates, including literary critics, are marked by a sense of mission. Readers experience an almost orientalising pathos, provoked by paratexts (such as prefaces) which frame the authors as political martyrs or activists and their narratives as expressions of resistance or disaffection. While aesthetic appreciation and cultural capital remain significant factors in critical reception, the major criterion for publication is the intrinsic value of restoring—in translation—the voice of a writer who has been creatively silenced or even physically threatened in Russia. This dynamic motivated the independent publisher Ardis, established in Ann Arbor, Michigan by Russian specialists Carl and Ellendea Proffer in 1971, which published roughly 400 titles in both Russian and English over the next quarter of a century. By publishing a mixture of nineteenth-century writers and contemporary, banned Soviet authors (most famously Mikhail Bulgakov, but also figures who never gained significant visibility beyond Slavic Studies, such as Andrei Platonov and Fazil Iskander), Ardis acquired significant symbolic capital while 'rescuing' several generations of Soviet literature from total obscurity. At the time of writing, in the 2020s,

32 Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 23. Later in the same novel, when on leave in Rome, Yossarian dodges through a nightmarish cityscape of drunks, prostitutes, and mass violence, where the agents of social order perpetrate disorder instead: even animals and children are savagely beaten. He thinks explicitly of Raskolnikov's dream of the horse beaten by the peasant (p. 475).

33 Ross MacDonald, *The Drowning Pool* (Milton Keynes: Penguin Random House, 2023), p. 121. In a more recent example, Jack Reacher, the drifter anti-hero of British-American novelist Lee Child's book series, reveals an unexpected fondness for both *Crime and Punishment* ("'a great story'") and *The Brothers Karamazov*, particularly Ivan Karamazov's condemnation of cruelty to children ("'Dostoevsky put his feelings in a book. I don't have his talent. So now I'm thinking I'm going to find these guys and impress on them the error of their ways in whatever manner my own talent allows'"). See Lee Child, *Without Fail* (London: Bantom, 2002), p. 340, p. 430.

altruistic reception is resurgent—in the midst of a general collapse in translation of contemporary Russian literature, it may be the only acceptable way to package writers from a politically discredited nation. Not only do the majority of publishers (both commercial and non-profit) currently refuse to accept Russian state subsidies for translations in the wake of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, causing this sector of the literary translation industry (which has never been commercially sustainable) to collapse, many critics now call for 'decolonisation' of the Russophone canon. Both critics and the academy are pivoting towards literature in other languages from the post-Soviet space.

These three categories of reception—discovery, canonisation, and altruism—are not mutually exclusive. Both publishers and critics frequently position newly translated Russian writers as brilliant or innovative (hence worth discovering), following in the tradition of Tolstoy or Gogol (thus attempting canonisation), and morally deserving (hence worthy of rescue).[34] Current critical trends, however, are forcing Anglophone publishers either to retreat to the ever-popular nineteenth-century classics, or else to curate new authors from a shrinking pool of Russian political dissidence, in the hope of premiering a new Solzhenitsyn or Brodsky. Rather like Chichikov's troika, Russian literature is launched on a new trajectory of translation—and its cultural ascendancy may be about to be dismantled.

34 Selected endorsements of contemporary Russian author Nataliia Meshchaninova's debut novel *Stories of a Life* (*Rasskazy*, 2017; translated by Fiona Bell, 2022), which appear on the website of her English-language publisher, the American independent firm Deep Vellum, follow this pattern. One critic canonises her with a comparison to Racine; the publisher identifies the aesthetic and critical value of Meshchaninova's narrative as a witness-text to "gender politics and abuse" in post-Soviet Russia; while her own moral integrity is signalled by her support for Russia's #metoo activism. See https://store.deepvellum.org/products/stories-of-a-life.