

Just as Lychnis bewails the sacrifice of human emotionality on the altar of science, Theotocopulos decries the loss of freedom to progress. Unlike Socrates in Plato's dialogue about the Republic, Wells does not banish the poets. This gesture points up his attempt to avoid a utopia oriented exclusively towards the attainment of specialised (scientific) objectives. At the same time, neither Wells nor other utopian authors supply a utopia whose universalist claim would satisfy every human need. *Utopian Literature and Science* leaves us with a lucid account of the roles of fiction, quest and experiment in constructing a utopian society; it also poses a thought-provoking question about the limits of the utopian imagination to envisage an ultimate *novum*.

**OLGA SOBOLEVA AND ANGUS WRENN, *FROM ORIENTALISM TO CULTURAL CAPITAL: THE MYTH OF RUSSIA IN BRITISH LITERATURE OF THE 1920S* (FRANKFURT AM MAIN: PETER LANG, 2017) ISBN 978-3-0343-2203-4 (PB) £48.00 [MAXIM SHADURSKI]**

*From Orientalism to Cultural Capital: The Myth of Russia in British Literature of the 1920s* supplies an informative, theoretically and historically grounded account of how the British perceptions of Russia were shaped by some of the most prominent British writers of the early twentieth century, including H. G. Wells. Olga Soboleva and Angus Wrenn place their analyses in a conceptual context informed by Edward Said's notion of the Orient as the cultural Other of Western modernity, on the one hand, and Pierre Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital as a form of acknowledging the impact and value of a transmitted culture, on the other. Within this framework, the book sets out to record the ways in which Russia's Oriental profile (barbarous, backward, submissive, despotic), dominant in British cultural discourse from the sixteenth to the second half of the nineteenth century, gave way to a hereto unprecedented vogue for things Russian, which lasted until a change in Russia's political climate in the early 1930s. The authors' major argument is that, in a crisis of Western rationalism, Russian culture granted different ways of feeling and knowing, and served as a vehicle for modernising the Victorian idea of Englishness (62-3).

Following introductory notes and a chapter on the transformations of the myth of Russia, the book features six writer-based chapters discussing how John Galsworthy, H. G. Wells, J. M. Barrie, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot – in their own unique ways – engaged with Russian

culture. Soboleva and Wrenn explain their choice of writers by drawing on a 1929 *Manchester Guardian* survey which listed Galsworthy, Wells and Barrie among authors whose work, according to a vast majority of the newspaper's readers, would be read a century later (5, 65). The choice of Lawrence, Woolf and Eliot, on the other hand, must have been guided not by the number of 'likes' given by 1920s readers, but retrospectively, based on what more recent literary historians valorised as the decade's canon. Seeking to investigate the transmission of the myth of Russia among the British reading public at the time, Soboleva and Wrenn fail to articulate the overwhelming popularity of 'middle-brow' as opposed to 'high-brow' writing, which leaves a faulty impression that Wells and Woolf, for example, had a comparable mediating impact on their contemporary audiences.

The chapter on Galsworthy situates his work in relation to that of Ivan Turgenev, for the most part. Through very close reading, the authors challenge Virginia Woolf's long-standing assumption that Galsworthy belongs, alongside Wells, in the category of Edwardian materialists. However, Galsworthy's recourse to Turgenevan poetics testifies to his privileging of 'inner knowledge', for which Woolf found much use as a self-proclaimed spiritualist writer (97). The chapter on Barrie brings into focus his presently neglected playlet, *The Truth about the Russian Dancers* (1920), considering it as an extended commentary on the state of contemporary fashions. Even though the playlet reworks the personal life story of one of Diaghilev's ballerinas, it parodies the gaudy and frequently vacuous otherness to which certain cultured circles aspired in interwar Britain. In the chapter on Lawrence, Soboleva and Wrenn trace this writer's interest in Russian culture back to his editorial collaborations with Samuel Kotliansky, which allowed him to acquire an understanding of Russia as a synergetic hybrid of savagery and modernity. Lawrence is shown to have hailed the Russian Revolution of 1917 as an occasion enabling Russia to defy Western materialism and return to Slavic paganism. Yet his growing knowledge of Russia's modernising aspirations compelled him to rethink its candidacy for a Rananim, an organic alternative to Western civilisation. For Lawrence, both Russia and its cultural capital, represented by Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, became treacherous (227). The chapter on Woolf yields a detailed treatment of 'Lappin and Lapinova', a short story from her final collection, *Haunted House and Other Short Stories* (1943). A further sweep through Woolf's criticism and some of her major novels highlights the features of Russian literature that she held in high esteem: neither Tolstoy's anarchistic tendencies nor Dostoevsky's religious bigotry (regardless of his attention to

the ‘Russian soul’), but Chekhovian suspense and formal inconclusiveness. The last chapter deals with T. S. Eliot’s multifarious responses to Russian culture: his insight from Dostoevsky’s Raskolnikov resurfaces in Prufrock, and, before being edited out by Ezra Pound, the marginalia of *The Waste Land* abound in references to Russia. Soboleva and Wrenn suggest that Eliot found a kindred spirit in Turgenev, a cosmopolitan and exile like himself, and had no difficulty sensing the discrepancy that existed between the high culture of the Ballets Russes, Turgenev, Chekhov and Dostoevsky, and the backwardness of the rest of the country.

Chapter 3 is centrally concerned with Wells’s understanding of Russia and his trips there in 1914 and 1920. Discussion of Wells’s engagements with Russian culture includes a reference to his patronage of the Diaghilev ballets and an exposition of his 1928 preface to Tolstoy’s *Resurrection*, which dismayed many contemporary critics, even though Wells’s notion of the social objectives of art, as well as his anti-imperialism and anti-militarism coalesced with those of Tolstoy. Further, on three separate occasions, the reader is informed that Wells came to Russia not only holding preconceived views on what he was going to see, but also being on the look-out for a confirmation of his social schemes (109, 121, 126). We do learn about Maurice Baring’s influence on Wells’s idea of Russia as a vast land with an equally vast character (124), yet there is surprisingly nothing on *My Adventures in Bolshevik Russia* (1923), a reportage by Odette Keun that might have affected Wells’s later perspective. This omission is rectified by a thorough exploration of the parallels between Bolsheviks, including Lenin, and the samurai from *A Modern Utopia*. Both are highly competent and even resemble Nietzsche’s overman (120), and both entertain ideas of gradual reform, resonant with the Fabians’ earlier propositions for progress towards a welfare state (118). Wells may have done his utmost to forge an image of Russia as presenting no threat to Britain (141), yet this achievement should be seen jointly with his denigration of Marxism and continuing anxiety about the destructive energies that the working class allegedly epitomised.

When reading Soboleva and Wrenn’s book, I kept thinking about my own exposure to the myth of Russia even before I knew anything about its reception in British culture. My teacher of Russian in what historically was Brest-Litovsk would always assert the importance of her subject by appealing to my interest in English: I had to know my Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Chekhov as a pledge of social success once in Britain. Little did I realise that British mythologies had the capacity to traverse space and time, and I applaud the reviewed book’s critical sense of such transpositions.