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# Korney Chukovsky in Britain

Anna Vaninskaya

The story of the reception of one national literature by another is by definition the story of intermediaries, of ‘secondary figures: obscure translators, academics and publishers’, as Rachel Polonsky calls them in her account of the reception of English literature by Russian writers of the Silver Age.<sup>1</sup> The ‘obscurity’ of such figures is, of course, a relative matter: the subject of this essay was much more famous in Russia than any of the émigré intermediaries – Sergey Kravchinsky (‘Stepniak’), Samuel Koteliansky, or Prince Dmitry Sviatopolk-Mirsky – familiar to students of the British reception of Russian literature. But Stepniak’s collaboration with Constance Garnett, Koteliansky’s with the Woolfs, and Mirsky’s surveys of Russian literary history launched from his post at the University of London, all hold a much more prominent place within the received narrative of British engagement with Russia than the activities and writings of Korney Chukovsky (1882–1969). Chukovsky has never been entirely invisible: as an obituary-cum-eulogium in the *Russian Review* pointed out, ‘Beginning in World War I with his liaison work with the British and Americans . . . he maintained a lifetime of contacts abroad, even when it was dangerous to do so, and he was a conduit between the Russian and the international intellectual worlds.’ His usefulness as a primary source is also recognized: ‘It sometimes seems as if there was no literary figure of twentieth-century Russian intellectual life that Chukovsky did not know as a friend. Thus

<sup>1</sup> Rachel Polonsky, *English Literature and the Russian Aesthetic Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 7.

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his biographies and memoirs are a remarkable source for modern Russian intellectual history.<sup>2</sup>

He was closely linked, both personally and through his criticism, with nearly every Russian writer, artist, and theatre producer of note from the 1900s to the 1960s, and no scholar of modern Russian culture can avoid referencing his diaries and reminiscences.<sup>3</sup> But for all this, Chukovsky's place in the complex networks of translation, criticism, and interpretation that determined the British response to Russian literature in the first third of the twentieth century has never been adequately assessed. His place is an unusual one, and therefore all the more interesting as an example of the unpredictable ways in which such networks develop.

Chukovsky's relative neglect on the British side may be owing to the fact that his importance as a cultural emissary on behalf of Britain in Russia has always eclipsed his role as a conduit in the other direction. Chukovsky spent a large portion of his working life translating, editing, introducing, paraphrasing, and popularizing British, Irish, and American authors. He served as the head of the Anglo-American section of the World Literature ('Vsemirnaia literatura') publishing operation established by Maksim Gorky in 1918, and co-founded and co-edited the short-lived journal *The Contemporary West* (*Sovremennyi zapad*), a precursor of the later and better-known *Foreign Literature* (*Inostrannaia literatura*). His enthusiastic anglophilia struck even the Jamaican poet and Harlem Renaissance novelist Claude McKay, who met him in Petrograd in 1922 and immediately labelled him an 'intellectual "westerner"'.<sup>4</sup> Chukovsky's own critical practice was in many ways moulded on the British model. He introduced the paradox, the aphorism, the informal colloquial essay or causerie – a kind of middlebrow Edwardian note – into Russian criticism.<sup>5</sup> He admired

<sup>2</sup> Lauren G. Leighton, 'Homage to Korney Chukovsky', *Russian Review*, 31 (1972), 38–48 (pp. 48, 46).

<sup>3</sup> Chukovsky in his various guises has been used for studies as different as Catriona Kelly's *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (Oxford, 2001), where he figures as a plebeian autodidact, to Lesley Chamberlain's *The Philosophy Steamer: Lenin and the Exile of the Intelligentsia* (London, 2006) and Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (London, 2009), where he appears as a father-figure and mentor who preserved the ethos of the older intelligentsia.

<sup>4</sup> Claude McKay, 'Soviet Russia and the Negro', *Crisis*, 27 (1923–4), 61–5 and 114–18 (p. 118). Chukovsky introduced McKay to a variety of writers and artists and recorded their meeting in his diary; see Korney Chukovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 15 vols (Moscow, 2001–9), XII, 86–7. This edition will be referred to hereafter as *SS*, with volume and page numbers given in the text and translations being my own.

<sup>5</sup> In his *D. S. Mirsky: A Russian-English Life, 1890–1939* (Oxford, 2000), p. 84, Gerald Stanton Smith dismisses Chukovsky as someone whose 'taste never moved beyond the Georgian[s].'

the British penchant for biography, and his own favoured method was equal parts biographical and formalist, an analysis of form always leading to insights into character. He wrote in 1941, in an essay entitled 'How I Came to Love Anglo-American Literature': 'I consider myself extremely indebted to English letters. When I composed my sketches of Russian writers, I could feel the colossal help of the great master of historical portraits Lytton Strachey, and his whole school. And before writing my children's stories, I imbibed English Nursery Rhymes, Lewis Carroll's *Alice*, the *Nonsense Books* of Edward Lear, and the poems of A. A. Milne' (SS, III, 487). Chukovsky was also a voracious consumer of the British periodical press: *The Athenaeum*, *The Academy*, the *Review of Reviews*, *The Times*, the *Daily News*, *The Observer*, the *London Mercury*, the *New Statesman and Nation*. His ability to act in after-years as a cultural intermediary can be traced to one simple fact: he began life as a typical Edwardian autodidact, attending lectures at the Working Men's College and catching up on his reading of Carlyle, Macaulay, Hazlitt, De Quincey, Arnold, Browning, Rossetti, and Swinburne at the British Museum. He was himself a product of Edwardian Britain; and British realities, the British context, shaped his world view as much as his approach to literary criticism. His story is so different from that of other Russian anglophiles – the well-connected diplomats, critics, poets, and political émigrés who came to Britain in the 1890s and 1900s – that it bears recounting more fully.

Chukovsky's discovery at the age of sixteen – after being expelled from school in his hometown Odessa and earning his living by tutoring and painting rooftops – of 'a battered copy of *English Self-Taught*' changed the course of his life, and quickly became part of his personal mythology.<sup>6</sup> His English pronunciation always remained dreadful, and was later mocked by the upper-class Nabokov household – a response entirely in line with the sneers his provincial, lower-class, and journalistic origins earned him when he made his literary debut.<sup>7</sup> But years before that, when he was first planning to leave Odessa at the age of nineteen, Britain was already his guiding star, and his list of essential books consisted chiefly of an English dictionary, *English Self-Taught*, and a set of *Royal Readers* (SS, XI, 28). *The Royal Readers*, published by

<sup>6</sup> Kornei Chukovskii, 'Thoughts on Receiving an Honorary Degree at Oxford', *Oxford Magazine*, 31 May 1962, p. 340.

<sup>7</sup> As late as 1926, when the world had changed irrevocably, Viktor Shklovsky still called Chukovsky 'a provincial reporter, an alien in high literature'. Cited in Anna Muza, 'Kornei Chukovsky, and "Men and Books of the 1860s" in the 1920s', in *Out of the Shadows: Neglected Works in Soviet Prose: Selected Essays*, edited by Nicholas Luker (Nottingham, 2003), pp. 1–18 (p. 17).

T. Nelson and Sons, were some of the most popular textbooks in use in British board schools, with millions of copies sold. However Chukovsky managed to get a hold of them in turn-of-the-century Odessa, his use of the *Readers* indicates a thorough acquaintance with the curriculum of a typical British working-class youth. Some of those youths, after leaving school at thirteen, went on to educate themselves by reading eighteenth-century and Victorian classics, and Chukovsky fits the model perfectly.<sup>8</sup> His reading was eclectic: his notebooks from 1901 mention Spencer, Ruskin, Grote, and the anthropologist MacLennan. That year he also devoured Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, Buckle, Bentham, Jerome, Stevenson, Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*, and volumes of Poe and Swinburne. He went to the Odessa public library and swallowed Keats, Shelley, Tennyson, Hazlitt, Macaulay, De Quincey, Carlyle, Browning, Thomas Moore, and Dickens. Over the next couple of years he would go on to read, and sometimes translate for his own edification, most of the English classics and contemporary Edwardian authors.

But then came another turning point. In 1903 he was sent as a correspondent to London by *Odessa News*, for which he had been freelancing for the previous two years. The move was symbolic, and the trajectory would have been familiar to many provincial late Victorian British writers of less than illustrious origin, not a few of whom in this period escaped their class through journalism and a relocation to the capital. In Chukovsky's case the real escape would be signalled by his move to the other capital, St Petersburg, in 1905, but the interlude in London was formative in many respects – and for all his accumulated reserve of literary anglophilia, he mostly hated it. Later in life these years would acquire a rosy glow, but in the immediate aftermath, leaving for Russia by ship in September 1904, he wrote in his diary: 'only now does one understand what rot England is' (SS, XI, 98). This conclusion would not have surprised anyone who had regularly followed his *Odessa News* dispatches. Although his editor blamed him for spending too much time in the British Museum Reading Room instead of seeking out newsworthy material, Chukovsky did manage to come into contact with an amazing variety of aspects of London life. His were not the typical observations of respectable Russian visitors to Britain, who commented on the season or on the latest art exhibitions. Nor could anything have been more unlike the Symbolist poet (and later Chukovsky's literary nemesis) Konstantin Balmont's 1902 sojourn in Oxford for the purpose of translating Shelley, which alternated

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (London, 2001), is standard for the reading habits of the British autodidact.

between bouts of drunkenness and 'monastic isolation among English books'.<sup>9</sup> Chukovsky saw British life, as he later put it himself, from the slums.<sup>10</sup>

He did socialize extensively with other Russian journalists and émigrés based in London. There were the famous Dioneo (the pseudonym of Isaak Shklovsky) and his wife, with whom he seemed to be on very familiar terms; the journalists and political activists S. I. Rappoport and A. F. Aladin (whom he criticized mercilessly); P. N. Miliukov, the future leader of the Cadets but at that time still a mere historian; V. F. Lazursky, a literature professor who was in London doing research for his dissertation; a Professor Demchenko from Warsaw; various correspondents for Odessa papers; and other acquaintances more difficult to identify. Though he professed to despise their style of writing, in his dispatches Chukovsky often adopted the familiar manners-and-customs-of-the-natives language of travel writing, confirming most of the entrenched stereotypes about the British national character – in particular, that most beloved of Russian clichés about the Westerner's lack of soul or psychological depth. But there was more to it than that. Because of financial trouble at the newspaper, he spent long periods of time without money – surviving on what he borrowed from his émigré friends, moving from boarding house to tenement room, at one point even discovering rats in his bed – and his criticisms of Britain obviously stem in part from these experiences as a penniless foreigner. His descriptions of visits to see the Russian Jewish emigrants in Whitechapel were virtually contemporaneous with Jack London's undercover slumming in the East End documented in the famous *The People of the Abyss* (1903), and they betray a degree of self-identification he shared neither with the better-off revolutionary exiles like Kropotkin (whom Chukovsky saw in the British Museum but did not actually meet until 1917 in Petrograd), nor the other Russian expatriates with whom he associated.

But the dispatches do not let on much about this state of affairs; they are written with the all-knowing world-weary contempt of a twenty-one-year-old fresh from the provinces. Individual articles cover typical denizens of the streets, from beggars to sandwichmen, and public figures like Spencer, Watts, and W. T. Stead (one of the fathers of popular journalism). In fact, the British popular press, from the

<sup>9</sup> Polonsky, *English Literature and the Russian Aesthetic Renaissance*, p. 76.

<sup>10</sup> In 1903–4, Chukovsky reminisced, he was 'a provincial, an ignoramus . . . Cadbury Cocoa and Beecham's Pills, Review of Reviews – destitute – from Russell Square I was kicked out to Tichfield Street – a street of the unemployed, of thieves and prostitutes: a real slum' (SS, XIII, 329).

*Daily News* and the *Daily Express*, to *Reynolds's Newspaper* via the *Westminster Gazette*, is a major topic, and obviously an equally major source of information. But as a self-conscious foreigner, Chukovsky was particularly interested in the plight of poorer emigrants, especially in the East End, and he dedicated a number of dispatches to the parliamentary commissions that were laying the groundwork for the 1905 Aliens Act, and to Guildhall judges who castigated petty criminals from Chukovsky's own Odessa for 'abusing [British] hospitality' (SS, XI, 457). He observed the strange antics of John Bull with a mixture of admiration and disgust, though the positive reviews of British philanthropy, respect for the law, and safeguarding of individual rights, the paeans to the Crystal Palace and the self-made man, were usually outweighed by criticisms – of the bizarre and punitive justice system, of the 'Chinese' sway of tradition and the despotism of public opinion, of the cult of heritage, British conservatism, xenophobia, imperialism, and jingoism. The British bourgeois was primitive and had no spiritual life; the species was epitomized by the useless and ignorant 'middle-class woman', who occupied her mind with nothing nobler than her household, her purity, and her hymnbook (SS, XI, 452). Students were no better: they did not care for anything except 'the racing news' and 'who's who in football'. Mechanization and narrow specialization had killed off the national spirit which produced his beloved Keats, Shelley, and Browning. He ranted against the family hearth and the obsession with business, and 'Mrs Grundy' appeared in the dispatches with worrying frequency: the Englishman's censorship of plays, his prudery in sexual matters, his hypocrisy, were all castigated.

To read Chukovsky's observations is to hear again, though in strange accents, the criticisms of Ruskin, Morris, Hardy, Wilde, Shaw, George Moore, and any number of *fin de siècle* socialists. He lambasted British anti-intellectualism at every turn – only foreigners, in Chukovsky's London, read for pleasure. Phenomena such as the breach of promise lawsuit, birth control, anti-vivisection, spiritualism, the Salvation Army, Protestant theology – the workings of all of which he observed firsthand – horrified him. Political topics like Tariff Reform, women in Parliament, international trade competition, immediately called forth harsh judgements on the status quo. He attended meetings in Essex Hall and in Hyde Park, and was not impressed; he went to lectures and reading groups at the Working Men's College and seasoned his awe with reservations; he frequented the theatre and criticized the hegemony of melodrama and the exclusive focus on spectacle and special effects. He devoted a long article to the sad state of English drama: tragedy was dead in the homeland of Shakespeare; serious

dramatists like Wilde, Shaw, and Pinero were ignored; censorship throttled everything of worth; and avant-garde foreign influences were non-existent. He bewailed British ignorance of the latest continental developments in literature, philosophy, and the dramatic arts. Ibsen, Nietzsche, Maeterlinck, and Chekhov, Chukovsky lamented, were unknown names: 'There are no foreign influences of any kind; just as Chekhov, Hauptmann, and Maeterlinck are wowing Europe with glimmering new aspects of life, the aims of the drama here are reduced to the recreation on stage of train crashes, floods, war, and so on' (SS, XI, 508). Zola and Maupassant, he found, were sold in the same shops as contraception.

British lack of interest in Russia, and in Russian literature in particular, got several articles to itself. A silver shot glass, Chukovsky was outraged to discover, was all that 'represented [his] homeland' in the British Museum. If a visitor wished to find out 'what went on in that big country which gave him Tolstoy and Dostoevsky', what were its cultural achievements, its 'manners and customs', there was nothing to point to but Russian 'drunkenness' (SS, XI, 455). The fact that Chekhov's death in 1904 went completely unnoticed by the British press stung him deeply, and he remembered it for the rest of his life. 'It was in vain that I waited several days, hoping to see even one English newspaper mention our deceased writer – but not a single line has appeared anywhere... the biggest Russian loss, the most painful Russian grief has not been noticed' (502). Chekhov was a particularly sore point – his name did not appear in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in its own right, and only a few brief sentences in the entry on contemporary Russian literature blithely coupled it with the name of some nonentity. Chekhov, Chukovsky concluded, was utterly inaccessible to the 'primitive' Englishman (447), who would 'demand his money back' if he were made to sit through *The Cherry Orchard* (509). Not even the *Athenaeum's* annual survey of Russian literature, written by the likes of Miliukov, Balmont, and Briusov, was enough to assuage his discontent – it paid too much attention to Bely and Merezhkovsky, and not enough to Chekhov. An English translation of *The Black Monk* did exist, but was apparently too dreadful for words; while a translation of *Ward No. 6* by a friend of Chukovsky's was turned down by Fisher Unwin because the author was unknown to the public. Even Russian writers who could boast of a reputation abroad, like Tolstoy, fared no better among the 'enlightened savages in top-hats' (507). Chukovsky ridiculed W. T. Stead's Tolstoyanism, and skewered *Webster's Dictionary* for getting Tolstoy's date of birth wrong and calling him a 'socialist (!)' (503; 483). He went to see Tolstoy's *Resurrection* on



stage, but beheld instead 'the devil knows what. A mockery of Tolstoy, syrupy sentimentalism, shrill melodrama' that even the theatre-goers of a working-class suburb of Odessa would disdain (449). The only place in London where Russian literature was properly appreciated was the Russian reading room in Whitechapel, frequented exclusively by Russian Jews.

Chukovsky's impressions of British parochialism were not, of course, entirely correct. Maeterlinck's plays, to give just one example, enjoyed a phenomenal success in London just a few years after he wrote; and although Chukovsky was acquainted with the critic Zinaida Vengerova, who knew the Garnetts, it does not appear that he was at this point aware of the activity that had for many years been going on at their house, the Cearne. But Chukovsky's accusation of neglect was broadly justified. Garnett's translations had not yet done their cultural work: her Chekhov did not begin publication until over a decade later, and it is true that the author was little known in Britain during his lifetime.<sup>11</sup> No theatre historian would argue with Chukovsky's assessment of the popular stage, and as a regular consumer of the popular press his summary of mainstream perceptions and preoccupations was more representative than the perspective of the literary avant-garde.

This familiarity with popular culture, which gave him the edge over more culturally privileged visitors, was also to have far-reaching consequences for his own development. Much of Chukovsky's mature criticism in the 1900s and 1910s would be dedicated to uncovering the functioning of market mechanisms, to the mass reader and the mass writer of the Russian equivalent of Grub street, to detective and horror stories, adverts, pornographic literature, the new cinema, and popular literature for children. And it was his experience of London that moulded the interest in mass culture which became his defining theme as a literary critic: from the provocative and influential *Nat Pinkerton and Contemporary Literature* of 1908 to the unfinished 'Thrillers and Chillers' of 1969. He may have been the first to treat urban popular culture seriously in Russia, as his biographers claim, but in Britain the topic had dominated the periodical press for the previous generation, and Chukovsky first turned his attention to it there, surely echoing the approach he found in the reviews he perused so avidly. One of his dispatches was entitled 'English Clerks and *Tit-Bits*' and was devoted to that favourite whipping boy of late Victorian and Edwardian cultural commentators: the New Journalism and its hapless lower-middle-class

<sup>11</sup> As Oliver Elton confirmed in his seminal 1929 Taylorian lecture: see *Essays and Addresses* (London, 1939), p. 119.

audience (SS, XI, 441–4). Little did he dream that just over a decade later he would get to meet Harmsworth in the flesh. The British book market, Chukovsky complained in another article, was flooded with pamphlets and sensationalist entertainment of the murders and ghosts variety. Literature was produced not for serious purposes but for leisure and escapism. This was a view from below that contemporary Russian lovers of British literature, the translators of Ruskin, Pater, and Swinburne, would hardly have recognized.

Chukovsky's first view of Britain was a jaundiced one – far more critical than any of his later reactions – but he did manage to pick up on all the major issues that were agitating Edwardian commentators (without ever admitting, of course, that it had all been said by others before him). One should also bear in mind that while he was writing his condemnatory articles with one hand, with the other he was continuing to turn the pages of English literature, while also making strenuous efforts to teach his wife English and sending home precious postcards depicting Kipling, Spencer, Watts, and Ruskin. On the whole, Britain remained Chukovsky's literary ideal, and the unflattering negative impressions of his first visit were retrospectively smoothed out by an idealizing nostalgia. When in 1925 Raisa Lomonosova, the wife of a leading railway administrator, established a literary agency in Berlin to 'facilitate the transmission of modern Western literature to Russia and bring new works by Soviet writers to the attention of Western publishers and readers', she immediately got in touch with Chukovsky to advise her on the Russian side of the enterprise (placement of plays, recruitment of translators), and maintained a regular correspondence with him after she moved to Britain.<sup>12</sup> Having just survived several appallingly difficult years of near-starvation, he wrote to her: 'England is the dream of my life.' Despite the poverty of his existence there he 'fell in love with that city [London] like a homeless dog'. Though treated like royalty during his second visit in 1916 (he recalled with longing the bath at the Cecil Hotel), he did not forget the other London of his youth: 'In the most romantic way I still love the English, even their cant, even their snobbery' (SS, XIV, 621). In 1904 his views on English cant and snobbery had been very different indeed. 'I envy you horribly', Chukovsky told Lomonosova, whose son was at school in Reading. 'Of all the countries in the world I love England most. In Reading I was young and in love. Maybe that's why it seems to me

<sup>12</sup> Richard Davies and W. J. McCormack, 'Sean O'Casey's Unpublished Correspondence with Raisa Lomonosova, 1925–1926', *Irish Slavonic Studies*, 5 (1984), 181–91 (p. 181). See also Christopher Barnes and Richard Davies, 'The Correspondence between Boris Pasternak and Raisa Lomonosova', *Scottish Slavonic Review*, 7 (1986), 153–4.

so appealing' (SS, XIV, 620). In 1904 he found Reading anything but appealing: it was so hopeless and depressing that he wondered to his diary how high its suicide rate must be (SS, XI, 94).

But though he veered between the extremes of disgust and adoration, it cannot be denied that his experiences of Britain were transformative in every sense. Although during his first visit he was almost entirely cut off from the higher circles of British literary life, his acquaintance with the everyday cultural realities of Edwardian London stood him in good stead for the rest of his career. And by the time of his second and third visits Chukovsky had had the chance to become acquainted with a full cross-section of British society: from the working-class autodidacts, alcoholic down-and-outs, and lower-middle-class residents of the cheaper boarding houses of Edwardian London, to members of the intelligentsia and the aristocracy. Few other Russian visitors and expatriate intermediaries could boast of that. And along with his changing social status, Chukovsky's views of the British reception of Russia changed as well.

When he returned to London in 1916 as the representative of the journal *Niva*, in company with Aleksey Tolstoy and Nabokov senior, it was on very different terms from his first stint as a penniless young hack. The Russian writers' delegation was received by the king at Buckingham Palace, entertained by Lord Derby, and introduced to Lloyd George, Edward Grey, Arthur Balfour, Lord Kitchener, and Lord Northcliffe, as well as to literary establishment figures like Edmund Gosse, H. G. Wells, and Arthur Conan Doyle. This was an official trip with a set itinerary. In 1916 Britain and Russia were allies, and the British government invited the Russian delegation with a war propaganda purpose in mind: part of its function was to publicize Britain's support for its former enemy. They visited secret military installations, met Australian soldiers and saw training exercises at Aldershot, were shown ships and aeroplanes under construction, and were taken to the front. Chukovsky by this point was no stranger to propaganda for cultural rapprochement: in 1915 he had already published a lavishly illustrated book, *The Silent Speak: Tommy Atkins at War*, intended to arouse sympathy for the British war effort and humanize the British private soldier through a close analysis of his letters home.<sup>13</sup> The Russian Ministry for People's Enlightenment, the Russian War Ministry, and the British Consul all approved it for reading in schools and in the army, and tens of thousands of copies were ordered (SS, XIV, 380). The book was reviewed by the Petrograd

<sup>13</sup> K. Chukovskii, *Zagovorili molchavshie: Tommi Atkins na voine* (Petrograd, 1915).

correspondent of *The Times*, and during the delegation's audience at Buckingham Palace 'Count Benckendorff brought to the King's notice the book that has recently been published in Russia by M. Chukovsky, and about which the British public first learned from *The Times Russian Supplement*.<sup>14</sup> Chukovsky's own work was finally making an impact in Britain, although ironically – and fittingly – it was a book about Britain itself.

When Chukovsky returned to Russia, he produced, like his co-delegates Nabokov and Tolstoy, an admiring (though not unironical) book of impressions, *England on the Eve of Victory*,<sup>15</sup> and edited a severely abridged translation of a memoir by Lt-Colonel John Henry Patterson, *With the Zionists at Gallipoli* (1916; translation 1917). From his letters of the period it would appear that he regarded the tasks as necessary hackwork, though by the time he rediscovered the former two titles in the 1960s his attitude had changed considerably. From a distance of fifty years *England on the Eve of Victory* seemed to him 'a shallow and lying book'; it did not help that he had written it 'earnestly' and with 'a naïve trust': 'I derive little consolation from the fact that I was an earnest idiot' (SS, XIII, 322–3). But the official aspects of the 1916 visit were not confined to the military matters which provoked the scorn of his older self. In London the delegation stayed at the Savoy (Chukovsky even remarked on the contrast between the opulence of his surroundings and the holes in his shoes (SS, XIV, 385)), and was feted at the Reform Club and the Royal Automobile Club. Amid the never-ending round of speeches and dinners, Arthur Conan Doyle took Chukovsky and Tolstoy on a tour of London, and Wells welcomed them at his Essex retreat. They were pursued by journalists, and Chukovsky himself did a bit of chasing after celebrities, taking the opportunity of meetings in high places to obtain a number of autographs for his scrapbook from Edward Grey, Lord Northcliffe, J. R. Jellicoe, and other admirals of the Royal Navy. Various generals and members of Cabinet contributed quotes from Tennyson and patriotic slogans, but the literary men took the scrapbook exercise in a different spirit. 'For his new (but old) Russian friend Kornei Tchookovski', wrote Edmund Gosse. 'John Buchan (of the tribe of Bavabba) to a son of Apollo', wrote Buchan, and presented Chukovsky with a handwritten note by Kipling. Wells drew cartoons. Wilde's friend and executor

<sup>14</sup> 'The New Europe after the War. Sir E. Grey's Speech to Russian Writers', *The Times*, 24 February 1916, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Kornei Chukovskii, *Angliia nakanune pobedy* (Petrograd, 1916).

Robert Ross gave Chukovsky a manuscript page of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, and scribbled scathing comments about English morality and Victorian ideals.<sup>16</sup>

The trip also had a personal side, and in his letters Chukovsky indulged in reminiscences: from the window of his palatial suite he could see the place on the Embankment where he had sat with his wife on her departure day twelve years previously. He revisited his old haunts, and remarked on the changes wrought by war and time. Women were everywhere, working and driving cars; horse-drawn omnibuses had disappeared and been replaced by motor ones; Underground lines had proliferated, but still the conductors shouted with the same scary voices, still the housemaids washed the front steps in the mornings, and stores announced sales and slashed their prices (SS, XIV, 386). He saw again many of the Russian émigrés he had known during his first stay in the country. When the delegation arrived in London from Newcastle (Chukovsky travelled third class so he could talk with the soldiers and sailors), they were met by K. D. Nabokov and A. F. Aladin. He spoke on the phone with Dioneo, and met with his old editor Zhabotinsky (who disappointed him) and the critic Zinaida Vengerova. Continuities with the Britain of 1903–4 were still apparent, though his status as an honoured guest of the government was light-years away from his former half-starved existence as an unknown journalist.

Both at the literary and the political level the 1916 trip can be regarded as the type of an official visit: the cultural elites of two countries coming together for the furtherance of policy objectives and some after-dinner banter at the club. The visit was covered in detail in *The Times*, including the Court Circular; there was a transcript of Edward Grey's speech to the delegation at Lancaster House; and the delegates received quite a few column inches to themselves. The *Times Russian Supplement* (which began publication in 1911 and appeared until 1917) printed a 'humorous sketch' by Chukovsky alongside Nabokov's 'Impressions'.<sup>17</sup> The Petrograd Correspondent Robert Wilton also sent in a translation of a long article

<sup>16</sup> See Kornei Chukovskii, *Chukokkala: Rukopisnyi al'manakh Korneia Chukovskogo* (Moscow, 1999), pp. 266, 268, 262, 247, 249, 264, and *passim*.

<sup>17</sup> 'Court Circular', *The Times*, 24 February 1916, p. 11; Count Alexis Tolstoy, 'Our Guests from Russia. A Winter's Journey. Humour by the Way', *The Times*, 25 February 1916, p. 7; 'Russian – An Open Sesame. Humorous Sketch by M. Chukovsky', and 'A Russian View of England. M. Nabokov's Impressions', *Times Russian Supplement*, 29 April 1916, p. 2. In 'Russian – An Open Sesame', Chukovsky is introduced as 'the popular and humorous young author of a book on the British soldier', and the topic of the sketch is the extraordinary hospitality the British show to Russian visitors.

of Chukovsky's on Anglo-Russian relations from *Russian Word* (*Russkoe slovo*), written just before the delegation departed, and 'reviewing the extraordinary growth of interest and feeling for Russia and the Russians among English people'.<sup>18</sup> Chukovsky had obviously revised his views since 1904, and in any case, he was now writing to order. The genuine surge of interest that occurred after the Anglo-Russian entente of 1907 coincided with the need to paint wartime allies in the most glowing colours. Although Chukovsky was never one to take an entirely uncritical approach, the article still read like a veritable *Who's Who* of aficionados of Russian literature and culture in Georgian Britain. 'No one in the world has ever been so infatuated with us as the English are at present', Chukovsky marvelled, citing current books by Denis Garstin, Stephen Graham, and Hugh Walpole. He alluded to English translations of Vladimir Soloviev, Chekhov, Goncharov, Sologub, Andreev, and the epic *Song of Igor's Campaign* (*Slovo o polku Igoreve*), mentioning Vengerova's lectures to the Irish, the appropriation of Russian words in English, and the fact that '*The Times* is sending Turgenev's prose poems to the soldiers in the trenches.' He remarked especially on 'the tendency to overdo and to exaggerate', which leads the English to idealize Russia, its spirituality, and its freedom from conventionality. He mocked the British 'Slavophiles', the lovers of icons and monasteries, and the readers of Russian fairy tales.

This trip was as much a turning point as that of 1903–4. When Maurice Bowra, the classical and Russian scholar and future Warden of Wadham College, Oxford, visited Petrograd in 1916, Robert Wilton introduced him to the

amusing and engaging... Kornei Chukovsky, who had just been to England and returned with a taste for all things English. Chukovsky was later to become a famous scholar as well as an inspired writer of books for children, and at this stage he was rich in fancy and humour and totally unpredictable in what he said and did. He spoke of a friend of his, called Vladimir Mayakovsky, whom he regarded as a genius. I hoped to meet him, but never did.<sup>19</sup>

And so began, though with a missed opportunity, Chukovsky's second career – not as an observer of Britain and Britain's attitude to Russia, but as a go-between for British observers of Russia abroad. Chukovsky spent the rest of his life from the 1920s onwards as an intermediary,

<sup>18</sup> Robert Archibald Wilton, 'Russia and England', *TLS*, 16 March 1916, p. 129 (also for further quotations in this paragraph). This was the Robert Wilton who later in the same year introduced Chukovsky to Maurice Bowra in Petrograd (below).

<sup>19</sup> C. M. Bowra, *Memories 1898–1939* (London, 1966), p. 63.

a personal contact who oiled the wheels of communication between Western writers and scholars and their Russian counterparts, arranging introductions and facilitating cultural exchange. His two most famous encounters were with H. G. Wells and Isaiah Berlin, and their visits will bear a closer look, as the accounts of Russia they penned upon their return demonstrated in opposite ways the significance of the relationship with the 'local guide'.

Wells had been fascinated with Russian literature since the 1890s. He knew Aylmer Maude and the Garnett circle, and became friends with Gorky in 1906. His first trip to Russia in 1914 in the company of Maurice Baring was inspirational, and he returned speaking the 'spirituality' lingo of Stephen Graham.<sup>20</sup> He welcomed Russia as an ally in the Great War, and it was therefore perfectly natural that he should receive members of the writers' delegation at his home in 1916. It was equally natural that he should get in touch with Chukovsky again during his second visit to Russia in 1920. But this time things did not go according to plan. Not only did Wells' philistine behaviour at the dinner party arranged in his honour by the starving writers at the Petrograd House of Arts, Chukovsky among them, raise hackles, but his biased account in *Russia In the Shadows*, published immediately upon his return, of the school visit arranged by Chukovsky on his behalf produced a scandal both in the Soviet and the émigré press. Wells did not believe that the children in one of the top schools in Petrograd would ordinarily have known his work, and accused Chukovsky of orchestrating his reception, condescendingly referring to 'certain kindly intrigues and preparations by a literary friend, Mr. Chukovsky the critic, affectionately anxious to make me feel myself beloved in Russia'.<sup>21</sup> Given that Wells was already a minor celebrity during his 1914 visit, and one of the most famous of contemporary foreign authors (his works had always been promptly translated into Russian, and his friend Gorky was involved in the Russian edition of *Mr Britling Sees It Through*), the suspicion certainly seemed unfounded. Chukovsky took offence and complained publicly. An echo of the

<sup>20</sup> See William Harrison, 'H. G. Wells's View of Russia', *Scottish Slavonic Review*, 7 (1986), 49–68; Maria Kozyreva and Vera Shamina, 'Russia Revisited', and Roger Cockrell, 'Future Perfect: H. G. Wells and Bolshevik Russia, 1917–32', in *The Reception of H. G. Wells in Europe*, edited by Patrick Parrinder and John S. Partington (London, 2005), pp. 48–62 and pp. 74–90 respectively. He also wrote an introduction to Denis Garstin's *Friendly Russia* (1915), one of the books Chukovsky referred to the following year.

<sup>21</sup> H. G. Wells, *Russia in the Shadows* (London, 1920), p. 101. Later commentators have slightly different takes on the Wells visit: compare, for instance, O. A. Kaznina's account in *Russkie v Anglii: russkaia emigratsiia v kontekste rusko-angliiskikh literaturnykh svyazei v pervoi polovine XX veka* (Moscow, 1997), pp. 106–12, with Irina Lukianova, *Kornei Chukovskii* (Moscow, 2006), pp. 354–8.

altercation reached even the anglophone public the following year when the journal *Soviet Russia*, the official organ of the Russian Soviet Government Bureau in the United States, published a translation of 'K. I. Chukovsky's protest' entitled 'H. G. Wells Makes a Mistake.'<sup>22</sup>

Although these incidents were not exactly headline news in Britain, they did demonstrate the kinds of pitfalls and misunderstandings that lay in wait for a British writer with little feel for the nuances of the early Soviet literary scene. Isaiah Berlin's 'Meetings with Russian Writers in 1945 and 1956' was, by contrast, a model of fruitful engagement. Encountering Chukovsky at an embassy dinner, Berlin did his 'best to assure him that his own works were read and greatly admired by Russian scholars in English-speaking countries', in particular Maurice Bowra and Oliver Elton.<sup>23</sup> It was Chukovsky who arranged Berlin's meeting with Pasternak which would subsequently prove so important, and Berlin's influential account of the fate of Soviet literature in the 1930s would be based on what he learned from Akhmatova, Pasternak, and Chukovsky.

But was Berlin telling the truth or merely flattering his new acquaintance when he assured him of the admiration of Western academics? Was Chukovsky important as an intermediary in this sense as well – did his critical works play a part in shaping British perceptions of Russian literature? Chukovsky's early edition of Nekrasov was mentioned in Arthur Ransome's account of *Russia in 1919*,<sup>24</sup> but the three Russian writers whose reception in Britain did genuinely owe something to Chukovsky were Chekhov, Andreev, and Feodor Sologub. As early as 1915, the translators of *Plays By Leonid Andreyeff* listed two of Chukovsky's works in their bibliography: *Leonid Andreev: Big and Little (Leonid Andreev bol'shoi i malen'kii, 1908)* and *On Leonid Andreev (O Leonide Andreeve, 1911)*.<sup>25</sup> Then, in the November 1923 issue of the famous modernist magazine *The Dial*, in the midst of contributions by such eminent names as Roger Fry, T. S. Eliot, Bertrand Russell, Edmund Wilson, Marianne Moore, and John Cowper Powys, there appeared a piece titled 'Reminiscences of Leonid Andreyev' by 'K. Chukovsky'.<sup>26</sup> The 'Notes on New Contributors' identified him as

<sup>22</sup> K. I. Chukovsky, 'H. G. Wells Makes a Mistake', *Soviet Russia: A Weekly Journal of Information*, 21 May 1921, p. 498. He was still sore about it in the 1960s. See, for instance, Chukovsky's 'The Phantasmagoria of H. G. Wells', *Literary Russia*, 25 September 1964, in which he cites a 1946 article from the *New Statesman* corroborating his side of the story.

<sup>23</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Personal Impressions*, edited by Henry Hardy (London, 1980), p. 166.

<sup>24</sup> Arthur Ransome, *Six Weeks in Russia in 1919* (London, 1919).

<sup>25</sup> *Plays By Leonid Andreyeff*, translated by Clarence L. Meader and Fred Newton Scott (London, 1915).

<sup>26</sup> Translated by Lawrence Hyde, *The Dial*, November 1923, pp. 463–72.



‘a Russian literary critic best known for his *From Chekhov to Our Times*, published in 1910. He has made many translations from English and American poetry and was also the first to introduce Whitman to Russian readers.’

For American audiences Chukovsky would remain best known as Whitman’s Russian translator and popularizer, but the *Dial* article also arguably reached more British readers than anything else Chukovsky had written since his 1916 pieces in *The Times*. Its publication history is worth tracing as an illustration of the roundabout ways some texts were fated to travel when bridging the gap between two cultures. It first appeared in the Petrograd *Literary Messenger* (*Literaturnyi vestnik*) in 1919, and was then translated as ‘Andreyev, Leonid: As Seen by a Fellow Russian’ in Littell’s *The Living Age*, an American periodical which reprinted selections from various British and American magazines and newspapers. It next resurfaced in Russian in the collective memoir *A Book on Leonid Andreev: Reminiscences* (*Kniga o Leonide Andreeve: Vospominaniia*) in 1922, which was eventually republished in Britain (in the original Russian) as late as 1970 as *Russian Writers on Leonid Andreev*. Chukovsky himself republished a revised and expanded version of the piece in Russian in 1958.<sup>27</sup>

In 1924 more reminiscences of Andreev – this time by Gorky in Katherine Mansfield’s and Koteliansky’s translation – appeared in *The Dial*. Gorky’s piece had been the first in *A Book on Andreev*, and it is likely that this volume was the ultimate source for both articles, as Chukovsky’s two texts coincide in virtually all particulars. In the same year, Alexander Kaun in his magisterial *Leonid Andreev: A Critical Study* made extensive use of Chukovsky’s testimony, not only in *The Dial*, but in the books mentioned in the 1915 plays, and *From Chekhov to Our Days*, none of which had themselves been translated into English. Kaun was also among the first to voice reservations about Chukovsky’s critical method: his flippancy, his cleverness, his tendency to home in on an author’s idiosyncrasies and trace them ‘with the persistency of a Sherlock Holmes’.<sup>28</sup> When in 1969 James Woodward came to write his *Leonid Andreev: A Study*, he used the same Chukovsky sources (though he opted for the 1958 version of the reminiscences), as well as Andreev’s letters to Chukovsky, and Chukovsky’s own later works

<sup>27</sup> K. I. Chukovsky, ‘Andreyev, Leonid: As Seen by a Fellow Russian’, *Living Age*, 26 June 1920, pp. 776–9; Maksim Gor’kii and others, *Kniga o Leonide Andreeve: vospominaniia* (1922; rpt Letchworth, 1970), pp. 43–54; Kornei Chukovskii, *Iz vospominanii: Repin, Gor’kii, Andreev, Koni, Briusov, Maiakovskii, Zhitkov, Tyntanov* (Moscow, 1958), pp. 243–57.

<sup>28</sup> Alexander Kaun, *Leonid Andreev: A Critical Study* (New York, 1924), p. 77. The title of *Ot Chekhova do nashikh dnei* has been translated in a variety of ways; I follow the usage of the source in question throughout.

which were not yet available when Kaun was writing. Like Kaun, he expressed doubts about some of Chukovsky's judgements, but the views of a critic whom Andreev himself considered one of the most talented of his generation could not be entirely dismissed.<sup>29</sup>

It was thus not entirely coincidental that Mirsky first thought it worthwhile to mention Chukovsky (and by implication the book of reminiscences) in a chapter on Andreev in his *Contemporary Russian Literature*: 'the personality of Leonid Andreev has already become the theme of numerous memoirs, the most interesting those by Gorky and by Chukovsky'. Chukovsky's style, Mirsky noted, 'rich in paradoxes, was formed under the influence of Oscar Wilde and Mr. Chesterton', and like Kaun, he could not help remarking on Chukovsky's method. Chukovsky was an

enjoyable critic... whose first essays created a sensation in 1906–1907. His object was to make criticism readable and entertaining, and this object he certainly achieved... His method of dealing with an author is to single out one or two violently contradictory characteristics, and then to group all the facts so as to corroborate the choice. The result, at its best, is a brilliantly convincing critical cartoon... But in most cases he either misses the point or simplifies to the point of vulgarity matters of extreme complexity, and, readable and entertaining though he is, Chukovsky is, above all, tremendously superficial. But he is a writer of great natural gifts. His memoirs (Andreev) and his essays in biography (Nekrasov), though quite as superficial and dashing as his critiques, are also excellent reading. His *Recollections of Leonid Andreev* have been translated into English, and described by reviewers as most amusing.<sup>30</sup>

The tendency to treat Chukovsky's criticism with suspicion was not universal. The first appearance of his name in a major English-language periodical predated the *Dial* publication by eight years, and the context was entirely positive. In a 1915 *Fortnightly Review* article entitled 'Feodor Sologub', John Cournos, the Jewish-Russian-American writer then residing in Britain, quoted several passages from Chukovsky's *From Chekhov's Days to Ours*, in which the latter had pointed out 'elaborately and brilliantly' the fragmented and impressionistic nature of contemporary Russian literature, its fascination with the 'hopeless tediousness of "provinciality"', best represented by Sologub and Chekhov.<sup>31</sup> Cournos was an associate of the Imagists and a prolific

<sup>29</sup> James B. Woodward, *Leonid Andreev: A Study* (Oxford, 1969). For a rebuttal of Woodward's criticism of Chukovsky see the review of the book by Simon Karlinsky in *Russian Review*, 30 (1971), 76–7.

<sup>30</sup> D. S. Mirsky, *Contemporary Russian Literature, 1881–1925* (London, 1926), pp. 134, 327–8. In his bibliography Mirsky lists not just the 1922 book of reminiscences and the *Dial* piece, but Chukovsky's 1915 book of pro-British propaganda.

<sup>31</sup> John Cournos, 'Feodor Sologub', *Fortnightly Review*, 98 (1915), 480–1.

translator of Andreev, Sologub, Babel, and Soviet short stories, and it was through Chukovsky that he eventually met Sologub during his stay in Petrograd in 1917. While there, he wrote articles on British art 'for the popular weekly, *Niva*', one of Chukovsky's main publishing venues. As Cournos recalled in his *Autobiography*: 'The clever Russian literary critic, Korney Chukovsky, was associated with me in this work. He was a very amusing fellow who knew all of literary Petrograd, and I met a number of celebrities through him.'<sup>32</sup>

Chukovsky's connections stood him in good stead whenever British visitors arrived. By the 'fifties and 'sixties a never-ending stream of academics, not to mention American writers like John Cheever, made sure to stop by Chukovsky's dacha when they visited Russia.<sup>33</sup> It was in the 1960s that Chukovsky finally emerged as a substantial presence in Western scholars' engagement with Russian literature. Notices of his publications appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* from the 1930s onwards, and *The Times* reported on attempts to censor his children's tales in the 1940s.<sup>34</sup> But it was in the 'sixties that interest in him peaked, and scholars realized the importance of Chukovsky's memoirs and critical works for their accounts of Pasternak, Blok, or Mayakovsky. Few modern treatments of Russian Symbolism or Futurism omit to quote from him, though he was no friend to either in his pre-revolutionary writings.<sup>35</sup>

It is perhaps in the reception of Chekhov that the mature Chukovsky's role is most palpable. Volume 8 of Ronald Hingley's *Oxford Chekhov* is dedicated to 'Kornei Ivanovich Chukovsky'; and in the Preface to Volume 6, Hingley devotes a page to addressing the

<sup>32</sup> John Cournos, *Autobiography* (New York, 1935), p. 304.

<sup>33</sup> See Scott Donaldson, *John Cheever: A Biography* (New York, 1988), and Chukovsky's diary. Miklós Kun, *Stalin: An Unknown Portrait* (Budapest, 2003), p. 232, mentions his conversations with Chukovsky during the 1960s (and quotes extensively from his diary); R. Page Arnot was another pilgrim.

<sup>34</sup> 'Soviet Writer's Tale of a Dog Tsar', *The Times*, 14 December 1946, p. 3, and 'Fairy Animals', *The Times*, 6 February 1947, p. 5. The bulk of references to Chukovsky in *The Times* and *TLS* occurs in the 1960s, when he also acted as a contributor; see John William Mills Willett, 'The Writer Reflected', *TLS*, 4 June 1964, p. 467.

<sup>35</sup> See Jeffrey Brooks, 'The Young Kornei Chukovsky (1905–1914): A Liberal Critic In Search of Cultural Unity', *Russian Review*, 33 (1974), 50–62, and 'Popular Philistinism and the Course of Russian Modernism', in *Literature and History: Theoretical Problems and Russian Case Studies*, edited by Gary Saul Morson (Stanford, CA, 1986), pp. 90–110. Victor Erlich, *Modernism and Revolution: Russian Literature in Transition* (London, 1994), uses Chukovsky's testimony extensively in his account of Russian modernism. Further examples are John J. White, *Literary Futurism: Aspects of the First Avant Garde* (Oxford, 1990); Zbigniew Folejewski, *Futurism and its Place in the Development of Modern Poetry: A Comparative Study and Anthology* (Ottawa, 1980); Jennifer Presto, *Beyond the Flesh: Alexander Blok, Zinaida Gippius, and the Symbolist Sublimation of Sex* (Madison, WI, 2008); Avril Pyman, *The Life of Aleksandr Blok*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1979–80); and Christopher Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 2004).

criticisms of 'the distinguished Russian author, critic and translator'. He adds respectfully: 'I now learn with great sorrow of his recent death, and have therefore little heart to discuss the comments on vol. viii of *The Oxford Chekhov* contained on pp. 98–9 of his book *O Chekhove (About Chekhov)*; Moscow, 1967). Such, however, was his lifelong devotion to the art and theory of translation that I feel excused for briefly taking up certain points.'<sup>36</sup> Hingley also includes in his bibliography another of Chukovsky's major Chekhov publications, *Chekhov the Man*. This particular book was first translated into English in the 1940s, attracting a not particularly flattering review in the *Times Literary Supplement*, which echoes the early strictures of Mirsky and Kaun.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, the book has been included in most Chekhov bibliographies,<sup>38</sup> and later Chekhov scholars, especially those who knew Chukovsky personally, never failed to look past the critic's shortcomings to the man's deep intellectual generosity. Carolina De Maegd-Soëp, in the Preface to her book *Chekhov and Women*, acknowledged Chukovsky as a 'rich source of inspiration' who took a 'lively interest' in her work when she studied in Moscow in the 1960s, and (ever the intermediary) introduced her to Viktor Shklovsky.<sup>39</sup>

Building on this wave of scholarly interest, Oxford University in 1962 invited Chukovsky to Britain to bestow upon him – the first Russian man of letters since Turgenev in 1879 – an honorary doctorate. Like the 1916 visit, this was covered in great detail in *The Times*, and Chukovsky's acceptance speech was full of the consciousness of his mission – cultural unity transcending Cold War political rivalry: 'Did not Walt Whitman say that poetry was capable of forging stronger links than the ablest of diplomats could?'<sup>40</sup> In Oxford he was welcomed by S. A. Konovalov, a Russian émigré academic who facilitated the publication of some of Chukovsky's critical work in the *Oxford Slavonic Papers*,<sup>41</sup> and who complained in conversation how constraining he found Oxford, and how difficult it was to be away from Russia. He attended a dinner arranged in his honour at All Souls, and was

<sup>36</sup> *The Oxford Chekhov*, translated and edited by Ronald Hingley, 9 vols (London, 1964–80), VI, p. xi.

<sup>37</sup> R. D. Charques, 'How Chekhov Lived', *TLS*, 1 September 1945, p. 417.

<sup>38</sup> Ronald Hingley probably began the trend with his *Chekhov: A Biographical and Critical Study* (London, 1950); see also his *A New Life of Anton Chekhov* (London, 1976). Chukovsky's later books were taken up by Western critics as soon as even a single chapter appeared in translation; see Marc Aldanov and Ida Estrin, 'Reflections on Chekhov', *Russian Review*, 14 (1955), 83–92.

<sup>39</sup> Carolina De Maegd-Soëp, *Chekhov and Women: Women in the Life and Work of Chekhov* (Columbus, OH, 1987), p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> 'Thoughts on Receiving an Honorary Degree at Oxford' (n. 6), p. 341.

<sup>41</sup> Kaznina, *Russkie v Anglii* (n. 21), p. 185.

entertained by old acquaintances like Isaiah Berlin and Maurice Bowra. He met Iona and Peter Opie, Peter Norman, Elizabeth Hill, and many others. In London he spoke and read his verse at the Britain-USSR Club, Pushkin House, and the BBC Russian Service, and his lecture at the University of London was a roaring success. Away from the tiring official round everything reminded him of the passage of time: walking around central London, he was amazed to discover a statue of the long-deceased George V whom he remembered meeting in the flesh, and to encounter a parade of Great War veterans, the last survivors of his generation. This was his final visit to Britain, and though the country loomed large in his thoughts over the next several years, as Akhmatova followed in his footsteps and Evtushenko was refused an Oxford professorship, he was destined never to see it again.

But he did have the opportunity to experience British appreciation of Russian literature at first hand. Not only were his talks on Russian writers rapturously received, but an evening walk around Oxford resulted in an interesting encounter. ‘Suddenly an excited woman ran out of a house and came straight at me: “We were raised on your books, oh, Moidodir, oh, Muha Tsokotuha, oh, my son, who’s in Algeria, has known your *Tarakanische* by heart since he was a child”’ (SS, XIII, 331). The incident may perhaps have been staged, but it is true that by the 1960s more of Chukovsky’s children’s verse had been translated into English than his criticism. *Crocodile* was even mentioned in the Oxford degree ceremony, and it was not for nothing that, in ‘The Arts in Russia Under Stalin’, Berlin had called his children’s rhymes ‘nonsense verse of genius’, bearing comparison with Edward Lear.<sup>42</sup> Ironically enough, but also appropriately, given his reputation in his homeland, it was the side of Chukovsky’s work that dealt with children’s literature and childhood development that proved most influential in the West. Literary scholars knew of Chukovsky ‘the subtle critic’, as Wells called him in 1917,<sup>43</sup> but as far as the wider British public’s reception of Russian literature was concerned – that same public whose ignorance he lambasted in 1904, and whose consumption of Russian fairy tales he gently mocked in the midst of the Great War – Chukovsky’s greatest legacy may indeed have been his ‘fairy animals’.

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<sup>42</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *The Soviet Mind: Russian Culture Under Communism*, edited by Henry Hardy (Washington, DC, 2004), p. 14.

<sup>43</sup> H. G. Wells, *War and the Future: Italy, France and Britain At War* (London, 1917), p. 6.