

THE SPECIFICS OF THE PERCEPTION OF RUSSIAN CULTURE IN CONTEMPORARY FOREIGN LITERATURE

Специфика рецепции русской культуры в современной
зарубежной прозе

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ISSN: 1698-322X ISSN INTERNET: 2340-8146

Fecha de recepción: 18.04.2023

Fecha de evaluación: 27.11.2023

Cuadernos de Rusística Española n° 19 (2023), 141 - 153

ABSTRACT

The present article delves into the nuances of how Russian culture is portrayed in contemporary foreign literature. The primary goal of this research is to discern the distinctive features of the representation of Russian culture in three novels: Pawel Huelle's "Castorp" (2004), Hans Pleschinski's "Königsallee" (2013), and William Boyd's "Restless" (2006). The core focus of this study is intertwined with the enduring fascination of literary scholars with the concept of imagology and the scrutiny of how the "Other" or the "Foreign" is depicted within national literary contexts. The analysis of these Polish and German novels reveals that the image of Russia is largely influenced by the prominent German writer Thomas Mann, who serves as a bridge to understanding Russian culture. In William Boyd's case, Russian culture is closely associated with the works of A.P. Chekhov, whose influence significantly shapes the poetics of the British author's novels. The conducted analysis demonstrates that the portrayal of Russia in these novels relies on certain literary clichés

and stereotypes that are ingrained in Western public consciousness. However, it is noteworthy that among contemporary writers who incorporate Russia into their works, Huelle, Pleschinski, and Boyd tend to adopt a more balanced perspective, refraining from aligning themselves with the more extreme views of its critics.

Keywords: imagology, Russian-foreign literary connections, image of Russia, Hans Pleschinski, Pawel Huelle, William Boyd.

РЕЗЮМЕ

В статье приводится анализ специфики рецепции русской культуры в современной зарубежной прозе. Цель работы состоит в выявлении особенностей изображения образа России в романах Павла Хюлле «Касторп» (2004), Ханса Пleshински «Королевская Аллея» (2013) и Уильяма Бойда «Неугомонная» (2006). Выбранный в исследовании подход продиктован неослабевающим интересом литературоведов к проблемам имагологии, к изучению специфики образов «Другого» («Чужого») в национальных литературах. Анализ немецкого и польского романов показал, что образ России формируется под влиянием взглядов великого немецкого писателя Томаса Манна, который выступает «проводником» в постижении русской культуры. Для Уильяма Бойда русская культура неразрывно связана с творчеством А.П. Чехова, чье творчество оказало влияние на поэтику романов британского писателя. Проведенный нами анализ позволил выявить, что образ России в данных романах основан на ряде литературных клише и стереотипов, свойственных западному общественному сознанию. Однако в современной зарубежной художественной литературе о России Хюлле, Пleshински и Бойд занимают скорее умеренную позицию и не относятся к радикальному крылу ее критиков.

Ключевые слова: имагология, русско-зарубежные литературные связи, образ России, Ханс Пleshински, Павел Хюлле, Уильям Бойд.

INTRODUCTION

This article is a component of a larger research endeavor conducted within the Research Laboratory for Comparative Literature and Artistic Anthropology at Moscow State Linguistic University. The overarching research project is dedicated to tracing the evolution of the portrayal of Russia in foreign literature during the 20th and 21st centuries. The specific focus of the present research is to analyze the depiction of Russian culture in foreign literature from the years 2000 to 2010. The research materials encompass three novels written in Polish, German, and English.

The concept of "culture", as elucidated in the research title, is comprehended by researchers in accordance with the framework established by V. S. Stepin. Culture is regarded as a system encompassing historically evolving supra-biological programs governing human life activities, including actions, behaviors, and communication. It serves as the foundation for the perpetuation and transformation of social life across its various fundamental aspects (Stepin 2011: 8-17). In our exploration of the romanticized perception of Russian culture, we examine its artistic representation, interpretation, analysis, and, conversely, the stereotyping of corresponding political processes, economic realities, mentalities, religions, lifestyles, as well as literature and art.

Recent developments in Russian Literary Studies have increasingly focused on the portrayal of Russia as reflected in various national literary works. However, during the mid-20th century, a multidisciplinary field known as "imagology" emerged within Western humanities. Imagology is concerned with the enduring images of the "Other" or the "Foreign", adding another layer to the study of cross-cultural representations.

METHODOLOGY

Imagology is conventionally regarded as a discipline that delves into the examination of foreign countries, societies, and cultures from social, cultural, and literary perspectives. As articulated by J. Leerssen, imagology is fundamentally a literary field, given that depictions of a nation are primarily conceived, established, and disseminated through literary texts. These depictions tend to endure more resolutely compared to journalistic pieces, critical essays, political documents, and other forms of textual expression¹ (Поляков 2015: 165). Polyakov underscores a significant point: stereotypical images operate within the intertextual dimension. In every specific facet of characterizing a nation, the initial reference is not anchored in empirical reality but is intrinsically tied to the intertextual framework employed to identify corresponding textual examples (Поляков 2015: 165). The objective of researchers in this context is to identify these instances of intertextuality that serve to exemplify the national representation of a particular culture.

The researchers employ several methods, including imagology, the comparative historical method, and close reading, all of which enable the preservation of the artistic and aesthetic dimensions within the texts.

The theoretical and methodological framework of this research is rooted in the concept of intertextuality. G. Genette defines intertextuality as the "coexistence of two or more texts, more commonly the presence of one text within another" (Genette 1982: 8). In the words of J. Kristeva, a work of fiction can be seen as "a mosaic of quotations, "where"any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Кристева 2000: 429). Even more precisely, Umberto Eco's perspective describes how primary texts "resonate" within a text through direct citations, allusions, acts of plagiarism, parody, ironic manipulation of borrowed elements, and the creation of new variations on existing texts (Эко 1989: 437).

RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

The initial text under scrutiny is Pawel Huelle's novel "Castorp", first published in 2004. Huelle's novel serves as something akin to a prequel to Thomas Mann's renowned work, "The Magic Mountain," and is aptly named after its central character. The inspiration for this novel struck Huelle when he encountered the phrase, "He had four semesters of study at Danzig Polytechnic College behind him (Castorp)..."

Pawel Huelle's novel can be seen as a missing chapter in Thomas Mann's narrative—a chapter in which Castorp's significant experiences in Danzig play a pivotal role, profoundly influencing his character and setting the stage for his subsequent adventures in Switzerland within Thomas Mann's "Magic Mountain," particularly in relation to the Russian theme.

As noted by N. Kakauridze, Huelle appears to emulate Thomas Mann's stylistic approach in his novel. In the introduction to "Castorp", Y. Kurkevich posits that the

1. Here and further citations from Russian, German, and Polish sources are translated by the authors.

homage Huelle pays to Mann would likely be met with appreciation by the latter (Kakauridze 2019).

In Huelle's novel, we discern a distinct synthesis of Eastern, Asian, Slavic, and, notably, Russian elements — a characteristic feature shared with Mann's Castorp and his milieu. As the narrative unfolds, two primary perspectives on Russian culture come into focus. Firstly, the older generation, represented by Uncle Tienappel, tends to equate "Russian" with "uncivilized" and "irrational." Consul Tienappel articulates a common viewpoint held by this generation, contending that Slavic people inhabit a civilized, progressive world primarily due to the influence of the German nation, while Eastern nations owe their socio-political systems, culture, and technological progress to Europe. Pastor Gropius, Castorp's companion aboard the ship "Mercury" ("Merkurego"), echoes a similar sentiment, asserting that Western Europe prevented the Eastern part from descending into anarchy. Within the narrative, the irrationality, chaos, and anarchy often associated with Slavic cultures are depicted as embodying a Dionysian nature, while civilized Europe symbolizes the Apollonian, drawing a parallel to Nietzschean philosophy.

A distinct perspective on Russian culture emerges through Castorp's own interpretation. In Castorp's view, "Russian" is linked with the irrational, but this association carries a highly positive connotation. The protagonist regards Eastern culture as alluring and enigmatic. For him, Russia is a distant, majestic, and exotic land with a captivating connection to the forces of nature.

This perception is most vividly expressed in the second chapter of the novel, where Castorp's fascination with the mysterious grandeur of Russia is conveyed through a metaphor: the Russian warship "ABPOPA" (Aurora). The engineer's metaphysical interest in the cruiser is, to some extent, professional in nature. The image of a modern, agile ship with its concealed weaponry piques Castorp's imagination, prompting him to closely observe it while speculating about the hidden might of the vessel. Although Castorp cannot decipher the ship's name, written in the Cyrillic alphabet, this does not deter him from forming an association with Russian "bogatyrs" (epic heroes), further deepening his fascination with the culture.

Castorp finds himself entirely unfamiliar with the true nature of Russia. When it comes to his assumptions about Russian culture, the protagonist relies solely on his intuition. Interestingly, many of his new acquaintances are much better versed, particularly in Russian literature. During a conversation with a clerk, Castorp misinterprets the interlocutor's remarks regarding the context of Gogol's works. The clerk, while discussing the Russian writer, emphasizes the issue of the indifference of Russian bureaucratic society toward ordinary people, a recurring theme in many of Gogol's works. Castorp initially struggles to perceive the problem from this perspective. His inquiry about Russian frost and inclement weather demonstrates that Hans is relying on stereotypes when forming his image of Russia. In Gogol's "The Overcoat," the protagonist blames the climate for all the setbacks in his life. The irony in this situation becomes quite apparent as the clerk points out that the real culprit is the government's negligence in addressing urban improvement issues.

Simultaneously, Castorp's perception of the Russian mentality takes shape through direct interactions with Russians. The protagonist secretly observes two affluent merchants on vacation, whose behavior strikes him as impudent and brazen, evident in

the way they consume five bottles of champagne, which he likens to "gulping down." This image is constructed based on the merchants' coarse and uncultured demeanor, accompanied by a bacchic element that characterizes their behavior. Significantly, this portrayal aligns with Uncle Tienappel's notion of Slavic ignorance. (It is worth noting the clear parallel with "the Bad Russian table" depicted in Mann's novel "The Magic Mountain.")

In a particular scene, there is a subtle allusion to Russia in connection with the tense socio-political climate in the country during the early 20th century. When Castorp encounters two Russians, Waldemar Rosenbaum and Edgar Mazkeit, he becomes privy to the mention of "Cossacks, Count Tolstoy, and nihilists throwing bombs" (Huelle 2002: 105). This revelation astonishes the protagonist, leading him to envision the strained Russian-Polish relations and the dramatic conflict between these fraternal nations.

Castorp's understanding of the situation in Russia is solely based on the information he gathers from his new acquaintances in Gdansk. For instance, Detective Herman Tischler informs him about labor strikes in Russia and the looming possibility of war. Frau Wybe characterizes Russians as potential adversaries not to be underestimated. It is noteworthy that there is no mention of Russia in the local newspaper "Anzeiger." Meanwhile, strikes and terrorist activities in Russia are subjects of widespread discussion in society. This hints at a deliberate effort by the mass media to suppress information related to Russia. Moreover, the special position of Russian literature and politics within the global geopolitical discourse becomes evident in the conversation between Jonathan Gray and Wolfram Altenberg at the bathhouse. They delve into discussions about Russia alongside topics such as Jewish assimilation, geopolitics, English monetarism, French suffragists, and more.

Lastly, there is the image of Wanda Piletcka, the woman Castorp falls in love with. In his infatuation, Castorp erroneously projects his preconceived notions about Slavic people onto Wanda, mistakenly identifying her as a Russian woman. He envisions her with "bluish-gray or grayish-blue eyes," a description that coincidentally matches Pribislav Hippe's eyes in "The Magic Mountain." However, Castorp later discovers that Wanda's eyes are actually grayish-green. Upon hearing a conversation between Sergiej Dawydow and Wanda Piletcka, Castorp keenly observes the tenderness of their Russian accents. In his quest, mirroring Thomas Mann's own fascination with the alluring Eastern country, Castorp seeks to find something dear and familiar within it.

Hans Pleschinski's novel "Königsallee" (first published in 2013) has a different connection to Mann's intertext. The narrative revolves around Thomas Mann's brief return to Germany in 1954. Simultaneously, Klaus Heuser, one of Thomas Mann's lovers during the mid-1920s, whose image he immortalized in Joseph, the protagonist of his renowned tetralogy "Joseph and His Brothers" (1926–1943), coincidentally stays at the same hotel as Thomas Mann.

The prospect of their potential encounter stirs inner emotions, coinciding with the socio-political turmoil sparked by the visit of the exiled literary giant to post-war Germany. Various characters, such as Erica Mann, Golo Mann, Ernst Bertram, and others, relentlessly pursue their individual agendas, continually influencing the unfolding situation. Concurrently, these events serve as a backdrop for the exploration of timeless themes in art, including questions about fame, renunciation, an artist's responsibility,

success, love, and, naturally, political history. The Russian theme gains relevance in light of the latter context.

Upon analyzing the novel, a discernible notion emerges: everything that contributes to the creation of an alluring image of Russia in the narrative is in some way tied to the persona of Thomas Mann.

For instance, the nephew of city councilman Richard Giesewind draws inspiration from the portrayal of Claudia Chauchat in "The Magic Mountain" and fabricates an entirely fictitious Russian lover after reading the novel.

It is worth noting that the fascination with Slavic, Oriental, and, as previously mentioned, Russian cultures is kindled among Germans, particularly those who grew up in the pre-war era, through works like "Death in Venice," "The Magic Mountain," and other texts by Thomas Mann.

In the chapter titled "Reception," Thomas Mann is depicted as drawing attention to Russian literature, aligning it with contemporary socio-political issues as he visits major cultural centers around the world. Pleschinski's narrative highlights Mann's engagements in cities like Vienna, Prague, London, and New York, where he addressed thousands of people and spoke about topics ranging from Albrecht Dürer and Russian writers to *The Spirit of the Republic* (Pleschinski 2013: 78).

In the overarching narrative, the term "Russian" is closely associated with the already established concept of chaos. Throughout the novel, Russia, as a part of the Soviet Union, emerges precisely during those moments when the familiar and orderly aspects of life veer off course, allowing the irrational element to take center stage.

Russian culture is depicted in the novel as an embodiment of "intelligence serving culture." However, the narrative also highlights the exaggerated perception of its absolute power. Erica Mann recounts instances of being labeled a "Kremlin's agent" by persecutors of Communists in the USA, who mistakenly believed she was promoting Stalin's version of democracy.

Due to the backdrop of World War II, several characters in the novel frequently attribute overall economic decline and devastation in European countries, particularly in the German Democratic Republic (GDR or East Germany), to Russia's influence. They view Russia as an aggressor rather than a liberator. This reflects the politicization and stereotyping of the concept of "Russia," wherein Russia is equated with communism and communists are equated with Russia.

Political and ideological divisions give rise to miscommunications that spill over into cultural and economic domains. One notable instance is when Erica Mann discloses certain aspects of her dealings with Russians: a Russian publisher withholds payment for the novel "Buddenbrooks" and insists on settling the debt in rubles.

Stalin's tyrannical rule becomes a recurring theme in conversations among characters of similar age as Erica Mann. Erica accentuates the contrast between the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), highlighting the role of the Russians in preventing the socialist Germany from recovering after the war, which she attributes to the aftermath and political dependencies.

Offering a more comprehensive perspective on this phenomenon is Thomas Mann's son, the historian Golo Mann. He provides insights into the prevailing political landscape in a devastated and troubled Europe, where Russia and America are rated higher than

other European nations. Golo Mann's view of Russia characterizes it as a place marked by the dominance of a cult of personality and the absence of freedom for nonconformists.

Thomas Mann enters the narrative in the final section of the novel, assuming a fully developed character role. He maintains a composed demeanor and refrains from engaging in discussions of ideological matters, deliberately avoiding making one-sided judgments—an expectation held by many of those around him. This approach, as observed by O. Jahraus (2018), allows Thomas Mann to be perceived as a representation of historical future.

In response to a provocative question concerning his stance on figures like Stalin and Walter Ulbricht, Thomas Mann tactfully complicates the ostensibly straightforward message conveyed by the local media. He comments, "Communist ideology is fundamentally akin to the Christian concept of radical charity. Nevertheless, this very ruthlessness and limitations often lead to such programs. So, I would much prefer, and with all my heart, to align myself with Schiller and his call for freedom, urging us to be humane and never to oppress or humiliate those close to us. As for a life motto, this should suffice... In truth, if you'll allow me this observation, I find these ideological topics quite repulsive" (Pleschinski 2013: 341–342).

The concept of "ideology" repels Mann, as it directly or indirectly suggests the narrowing of horizons and the reduction of the principle of dialogism, which is intrinsic to his artistic mindset. This principle would later serve as the foundation for "New Humanism" in Mann's subsequent works.

Similar to his character Hans Castorp, Mann consistently endeavored to embody a "man of contradictions" ("Herr der Gegensätze"). In the context of Huelle and Pleschinski's novels, this characteristic can be observed in their characters and artistic creations, although to a lesser extent in their narrators. The ideologically oriented figures in the novels by these Polish and German authors from the early 21st century, who intertextually reference the life and work of Thomas Mann, can be seen as manifestations of Thomas Mann as a literary character to some degree. This sets them apart in more monolithic artistic realms created by Huelle and Pleschinski.

It's evident that German and Polish novels can hardly be studied in isolation from the tradition of Thomas Mann, as his legacy is a favored subject of intertextual artistic reinterpretation. The German classic, known for numerous articles about Russian writers, Russian literature, and Russian-German literary connections, held L.N. Tolstoy, F.M. Dostoevsky, N.V. Gogol, I.S. Turgenev, I.A. Goncharov, and A.P. Chekhov as his literary mentors. Russian classical literature had a profound influence on the development of the English novel as well.

William Boyd (born 1952) stands as one of the most acclaimed and accomplished Scottish novelists, frequently delving into the portrayal of Russia in his literary works. The writer's fascination with Russia can be traced back to his profound admiration for Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, whose personality and oeuvre exerted a significant influence on the philosophical and aesthetic aspects of British society. In numerous interviews, Boyd has openly referred to himself as a "Chekhov obsessive" (Mesure 2012).

Boyd considers Chekhov's novella "My Life" (1896) to be the author's most pivotal work, a piece that encapsulates what Boyd refers to as "all the key Chekhovian tropes." These encompass elements such as "black humor, candid depictions of life's

absurdity, its fleeting moments of happiness, its 'weirdness and vulgarity' (in the words of Stanislavsky), and its brutal unpredictability" (Boyd 2004).

Boyd's fascination with Chekhov began in 1981 when he watched the BBC's television program "The Cherry Orchard," directed by Richard Eyre, which infused Russian characters with the accents and airs of the Scottish aristocratic society. This experience led Boyd to draw parallels between Scotland and pre-revolutionary Russia, perceiving similarities such as decaying aristocrats, a rising mercantile class, a working class, an urban working class, and a peasant crofter class (Battersby 2013).

As Kravchenko notes, William Boyd's affinity for Chekhov extends to the playwright's plays and short stories, indicating that Boyd's interest in Chekhov is deeply rooted and systemic (Кравченко 2021).

This fascination with Chekhov has, in turn, piqued Boyd's interest in Russia and the "Russian character." Similar to many individuals from Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and other regions within the United Kingdom, Boyd embraces his national heritage. Consequently, the author places a woman named Eva Delectorskaya at the center of his novel "Restless" (2006), which was adapted into a television series in 2012. Eva Delectorskaya is a character of dual heritage, being both half Russian and half English, a blend described by one character as "a volatile mix."

The narrative unfolds through two interconnected plotlines. The first revolves around the life of Ruth Gilmartin, a young single mother who teaches English to foreign students while pursuing her PhD thesis. Ruth's life takes a turn after separating from her child's father, a German professor, and returning to Great Britain. Her daily routine, which includes teaching foreigners, attending kindergarten with her child, and visiting her mother every weekend, is disrupted when her mother unexpectedly reveals that she is not who she claims to be. During one of these visits to her mother, Sally, Ruth receives a notebook titled "The Story of Eva Delectorskaya," introducing the second plotline that delves into the biography, development, and revelation of the true identity of the person Ruth has always considered her mother.

Eva Delectorskaya's life journey commences in pre-revolutionary Moscow. In 1917, following the October Revolution, she and her family emigrate from Vladivostok to China, where her English mother passes away. Subsequently, in 1924, they relocate to Berlin, and by 1928, they find themselves in France. Eva's travels take her across various modes of transportation, from Moscow to Vladivostok, then on to China, involving luxury wagon slits, troop trains, goods trains, and provincial stopovers on branch lines. There are even days spent stationary, awaiting another locomotive (Boyd 2006: 27).

The entirety of the Russian presence and "Russianness" in the novel revolves around the character of Eva. Boyd, like other English writers, aims to embody the British conception of the "Russian character" through Eva's portrayal. Possessing an analytical mindset, tenacity, ingenuity, quick reflexes, and enduring qualities, Eva embodies a distinctly Russian-like personality marked by emotional depth and sincerity. She lives in accordance with moral principles and preserves her "living soul" under any circumstances. When the Englishman Lukas Romer offers her a position with the British Security Service (BSS), promising her prestigious British citizenship and financial gain, Eva, a staunch maximalist opposed to pragmatism, firmly declines despite her challenging immigrant situation. She only accepts the offer after her father pleads with

her to secure a solid legal and financial foundation for her life and Romer, through persuasive arguments, manipulates her emotions by emphasizing that she must avenge her beloved brother Kolya. Eva Delectorskaya's story unfolds in 1939, a time when the world teeters on the brink of World War II, and Kolya, while fulfilling Romer's mission to participate in the anti-Fascist struggle, becomes involved with a French pro-Nazi organization and meets his demise.

Boyd's portrayal of Eva is not founded on stereotypes about Russians, as the character is depicted from a certain distance from her homeland. The Russia where Eva was born no longer exists, and she barely remembers it, resulting in a lack of references to Russian realities in the novel. Nonetheless, the Russian background of Eva's family is intertwined with the image of her father, a Russian emigrant who found himself in Paris. His children are the only remnants of his former life, and the mystery surrounding Kolya's death, followed by the revelation of the truth, renders Mr. Delectorsky's life unbearable. He finds solace and tranquility solely among his collection of books, primarily comprising Russian classics from the 19th century.

The heroine's narrative unfolds through the dynamic interplay and conflict between Eva and Lucas Romer. Information about Romer, a privileged Englishman hailing from the British establishment, is scattered throughout various "Who's Who" entries. It is reported that he attended a prestigious private school, served as a captain in the Royal Yorkshire Infantry Regiment during the First World War, and received the Military Cross in 1918. He graduated with honors from Oxford University in 1923, pursued studies in history at the Sorbonne from 1924 to 1925, and subsequently worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1926 to 1935. He was also honored with the Belgian Military Cross in 1945 and enjoyed a successful career as a publisher. In 1953, he was elevated to the peerage as Lord Mansfield for his contributions to publishing. His portrait graces the walls of the National Portrait Gallery, and he possesses substantial wealth, a house in a fashionable London district, a villa in the south of France, and membership in exclusive clubs. Curiously, the period from 1935 to 1945, during which he served in British intelligence services, remains omitted from his official biography.

Lucas Roamer's collaboration with Eva becomes the very piece missing from his biography, a period during which she, acting as an agent, extricates him from challenging situations either created by Roamer's design or through his negligence. Surprisingly, this does not prevent Eva from falling in love with him, a vulnerability that Lucas Roamer deftly exploits. He discreetly instructs her to seduce one of President Roosevelt's closest aides, with the aim of later blackmailing him, thereby compelling Roosevelt's employee to work for British intelligence.

The backdrop of World War II frames Eva's narrative and introduces the image of the Soviet Union into the storyline. The USSR is perceived by Eva and other British agents as an ally. While the author refrains from offering a direct characterization of the country, he underscores the professionalism of NKVD members and Soviet soldiers in their actions.

Eva's espionage skills, which become evident during her training at the intelligence service school and throughout her service, position her as a top-notch specialist who is on par with Lucas. The writer emphasizes the internal contrast between Eva and Roamer: Eva is an individual with emotions who is unaccustomed to blindly following

orders, while Roamer is a calculating and charismatic agent who prioritizes a rational approach. In pursuit of his objectives, he places Eva in grave peril, effectively casting her as a traitor. Employing a double game, he cynically uses members of "his team" and discards them as expendable pawns from the chessboard. This starkly resembles the real-life narrative of privileged Englishmen who became Soviet agents, such as "Kim" Philby, Guy Burgess, and Donald MacLaine.

The significance of the title becomes evident through the enduring confrontation between Eva and Lucas that spans their lifetimes. Despite miraculous rescues, their return to England, and the creation of a family, the heroine remains unable to find inner peace. As noted by her daughter Ruth, in their ongoing battle, Eva ultimately triumphs as the goddess of retribution for the people Lucas destroyed. She tracks down Lucas in 1976, and after their conversation, he realizes that he has been exposed. As she expected, he commits suicide. Despite all his talent, Roamer never quite understood Eva's Russian soul. However, Eva, in her victory, finds no joy. Even after Roamer's death, she continues to stand at the window with binoculars, gazing into the forest, believing that their confrontation persists beyond his demise.

Roamer provided Eva with three main reasons for betraying her homeland: money, blackmail, and revenge. According to Eva, his own motivation for betrayal was revenge driven by "mostly English motives." "When I saw him that night: Lucas Romer, Lord Mansfield with his Bentley, his butler, his Knightsbridge house, his club, his connections, his reputation <...> I thought to myself: that was his revenge." After observing him for an extended period (he was the first genuine Englishman she ever met), she concluded that sometimes it feels more natural to hate England than to love it. Towards the end of the novel, she shares with her daughter that there is nothing substantial behind all the titles and luxury. Members of society who regard these values as defining characteristics of a true English gentleman are deluding themselves. "He was a "Lord", for God's sake. He was laughing all the time. All the time, laughing at them all. <...> If there was a heaven he'd still be laughing, looking down at his memorial service with all those politicians and dignitaries celebrating him. Dear old Lucas, fine fellow, salt of the earth, a true-blue English gentleman". (Boyd 2006: 323).

Eva arrived in England at the age of 28, already mature. Notably, she married an Irishman instead of an Englishman. After her husband's death, she settled in a picturesque old village in the "heart of England," living in a small house somewhere between Oxford and Stratford. In this setting, she remained a "black sheep" within the community.

One notable distinction between Eva and her British neighbors is her approach to gardening. While she invests a significant amount of time in her garden, her priority is to ensure that the seeds she plants take root, after which she allows the garden to grow wildly. Her exuberant and "uncut" garden contrasts with the local preference for neatness and order, drawing disapproval from her neighbors. Despite the narrative provided about Eva Delectorskaya, she remains shrouded in mystery even to her own daughter.

Boyd delves into the deeper meaning behind Chekhov's belief that the real lives of humans are hidden under a veil of secrecy, asserting that people are fundamentally opaque, even to those closest to them. In this context, Boyd references the observations of American writer Janet Malcolm. In her work on the book "Reading Chekhov" (2002), Malcolm concluded that we do not understand people in real life as clearly as we do

the characters in novels, short stories, or plays. There is a kind of veil that separates us from others. Boyd regards this as one of the great appeals of literature – which we turn to it when we seek to understand something about people.

The Russian heroine of the novel, shaped by the influence of Chekhov's philosophy, provided the Scottish author with an opportunity to convey his ambivalent attitude toward England. Through this character, he highlights the aspects that trouble her and underscores the importance of human emotions, sincerity, and loyalty, which contrast with falsehood, cruelty, and betrayal.

CONCLUSION

What image of Russian culture emerges from the novels written by Huelle, Pleshinski, and Boyd? What are the consistent and variable aspects in the perception of the Russian theme by Polish, German, and British writers?

In Huelle's work, Russia is primarily depicted within the context of world culture. Pleshinski, on the other hand, places Russia within the global geopolitical landscape. The Russian theme in these novels tends to be associated with liminal and extreme periods, either pre-war (Huelle) or post-war (Pleshinski).

Nietzsche's terminology characterizes Russia as the embodiment of the Dionysian, while Europe represents the Apollonian nature. However, Huelle's work introduces a dialogical aspect, suggesting mutual enrichment between Russian (Dionysian) culture and German (Apollonian) civilization as key to sustainable spiritual and political development. Pleshinski takes the Dionysian element to the extreme, emphasizing its potentially destructive nature.

For the British author Boyd, the exploration of Russian culture serves as a means to analyze his "own" national characteristics and to delve into the intricate inner mechanisms of the human spirit.

Both Huelle and Pleshinski's references to Russian culture are influenced by Thomas Mann's perception of it. In contrast, Boyd's engagement with Russian culture is framed through A.P. Chekhov's works. Chekhov's talent lies in his ability to provide substantial information about his characters while leaving them partially enigmatic. This quality, which mirrors the unpredictability and randomness of life, is something Boyd incorporates into his own novels, featuring open endings, historical understatement, and characters shrouded in mystery and opacity.

The image of Russia created in these novels relies on certain literary clichés and stereotypes ingrained in Western public consciousness. However, these authors take a relatively moderate stance in modern foreign fiction about Russia, avoiding alignment with the radical critics or outspoken Russophobes.

The future of this research could involve a deeper exploration of the portrayal of Russia in foreign prose of the 2010s, as well as an analysis of additional intertexts that contribute to the artistic representation of this theme.

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