THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO

THE CLASSIC RUSSIAN NOVEL

Edited by Malcolm V. Jones and Robin Feuer Miller

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Many Russian novels of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have made a huge impact, not only inside the boundaries of their own country but across the Western world. *The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel* offers a thematic account of these novels, in fourteen newly commissioned essays by prominent European and North-American scholars. There are chapters on the city, the countryside, politics, satire, religion, psychology, philosophy; the Romantic, Realist, and Modernist traditions; and technique, gender, and theory. In this context the work of Pushkin, Dostoevskii, Tolstoi, Turgenev, Bulgakov, Nabokov, Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn, among others, is described and discussed. There is a chronology and guide to further reading; all quotations are in English. This volume will be invaluable not only for students and scholars but for anyone interested in the Russian novel.

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO THE CLASSIC RUSSIAN NOVEL

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO THE CLASSIC RUSSIAN NOVEL

EDITED BY

MALCOLM V. JONES

University of Nottingham

AND

ROBIN FEUER MILLER

Brandeis University

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ROBERT BELKNAP is Professor of Slavic Languages at Columbia University. He is the author of numerous articles on Russian literature; his books include *The Structure of "The Brothers Karamazov"* and *The Genesis of "The Brothers Karamazov."*

JOSTEIN BØRTNES is Professor of Russian Literature at the University of Bergen. His books include *Visions of Glory: Studies in Early Russian Hagiography*.

CARYL EMERSON is A. Watson Armour III University Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Princeton University. She is translator and author of several books on Mikhail Bakhtin, on Russian music, and of articles on Russian nineteenth-century prose, philosophical thought, and readings of Dostoevskii, Tolstoi and Pushkin. She is also General Editor of *Studies in Russian Literature and Theory* for Northwestern University Press.

SUSANNE FUSSO, Associate Professor of Russian Language and Literature at Wesleyan University, is the author of *Designing "Dead Souls": An Anatomy of Disorder in Gogol*, and co-editor with Priscilla Meyer of *Essays on Gogol: Logos and the Russian Word*. She is now writing a study of Dostoevskii's *Adolescent.*

BARBARA HELDT is Professor Emerita of Russian, University of British Columbia. She is author of *Terrible Perfection: Women and Russian Literature*, translator of Karolina Pavlova, *A Double Life*, *Kozma Prutkov: The Art of Parody*, and author of numerous articles and contributions to symposia on Russian literature.

MALCOLM V. JONES is Emeritus Professor in Residence at the University of Nottingham. The author of books and articles on Tolstoi, Dostoevskii and other aspects of Russian literature and intellectual history, he is also President of the International Dostoevsky Society and has recently retired as General Editor of *Cambridge Studies in Russian Literature.*

W. GARETH JONES is Professor of Russian at the University of Wales, Bangor. His publications include books and articles on aspects of the Russian eighteenth-

century enlightenment, Tolstoi, Chekhov, and other topics from Russian nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature.

ROBERT A. MAGUIRE is Bakhmeteff Professor of Russian Studies at Columbia University. His books include *Red Virgin Soil: Soviet Literature in the 1920s*, *Gogol from the Twentieth Century: Eleven Essays*, and *Exploring Gogol*. He has also translated widely from Russian and Polish.

HUGH McLEAN is Professor Emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley. He is author of *Nikolai Leskov: the Man and his Work* and articles on Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoi, Kushchevskii, Chekhov, Maiakovskii and Zoshchenko.

ROBIN FEUER MILLER is the author of *Dostoevsky and "The Idiot": Author, Narrator, and Reader* and of *"The Brothers Karamazov": Worlds of the Novel*, as well as of essays on Russian and comparative literature. She edited *Critical Essays on Dostoevsky* and co-edited Kathryn Feuer's *Tolstoy and the Genesis of "War and Peace."* She is Dean of Arts and Sciences and Professor of Russian and Comparative Literature at Brandeis University.

LESLEY MILNE is Reader in Modern Russian Literature at the University of Nottingham. She is the author of books and articles on twentieth-century Russian satire. Her most recent books are *Mikhail Bulgakov: A Critical Biography* and an edited volume, *Bulgakov: The Novelist-Playwright.*

GARY SAUL MORSON is Frances Hooper Professor of the Arts and Humanities at Northwestern University and has written studies of Dostoevskii, Tolstoi and Bakhtin. Best known for his theories of "prosaics" and "sideshadowing," his most recent book, *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time*, won the René Wellek award.

ROBERT RUSSELL is Professor of Russian at the University of Sheffield. He is the author of books and articles on Valentin Kataev, Russian drama of the 1920s, and other aspects of twentieth-century Russian literature.

VICTOR TERRAS is Henry Ledyard Goddard University Professor Emeritus, Brown University, Providence, R.I. A native of Estonia, he immigrated to the United States in 1952, where he resumed his academic career, interrupted by the war, in 1959. He has taught Russian and Comparative literature at several American universities. He is the author of many books and articles on Russian literature including *A History of Russian Literature*.

ANDREW WACHTEL is Professor of Slavic Languages and Literature at Northwestern University. He is author of books and articles on the representation of childhood in Russian culture, on the writing of history by Russian novelists, on the ballet *Petrushka*, and on Russian art and music.

EDITORS' PREFACE

The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel is not a history of the Russian novel. It is a collection of essays chiefly about those Russian novels and novelists – émigrés excepted – that have made a significant impact on world literature and about the tradition that they represent. It is in this sense that the word "classic" is used, not to confer status, but to acknowledge effect. Forty years ago, Harold Orel, remarking that the importance of the Russian novel in English literary history could hardly be overemphasized, wrote:

> Henry James referred to Turgenev as "le premier romancier de son temps"; George Moore, who admired Tolstoy's "solidity of specification," referred to *Anna Karenina* as the world's greatest novel; Robert Louis Stevenson interpreted Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* as a room, "a house of life," into which a reader could enter, and be "tortured and purified"; Galsworthy sought "spiritual truth" in the writings of Turgenev and Tolstoy; and Arnold Bennett compiled a list of the twelve greatest novels in the world, a list on which every item came from the pen of a Russian author.[1]

Lists varied, but the cult of the Russian novel reached its apogee in England in the years following the First World War. In 1931, by which time he had established himself as one of the most promising young English novelists of his generation, William Gerhardie sketched the stylistic features which, in his view, young writers of his time most admired and strove to cultivate. He included among his exemplars Pushkin, Lermontov, Chekhov, Tolstoi, Dostoevskii, and Turgenev. Gerhardie was showing off, his judgments more witty than profound. Yet on an impressionistic level the notes that he strikes are instantly recognizable: Pushkin's lyrical power and paganism; Lermontov's elegiac quality combined with his Byronism;

[1] Harold Orel, "Victorians and the Russian Novel: A Bibliography," *Bulletin of Bibliography* (January–April 1954), 61; quoted in George Zytaruk, *D. H. Lawrence's Response to Russian Literature* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1971), p. 36.

Chekhov's miraculous naturalness and consumptive cough; Tolstoi's life-imparting breath conjoined, alas, to his foolishness; Dostoevskii's pathological insight but extravagant suspiciousness; Turgenev's purity in reproducing nature marred by his sentimentalism.[2] These are the familiar burdens of the Russian soul, mediated through the great prose works of the nineteenth century, as familiar to us as the strains of Shakespeare, Austen, Dickens, Trollope, James, Twain, Hemingway, Conrad, an inalienable part of the modern literary sensibility and, in the view of many, its crowning achievement. Born in St. Petersburg in 1895, Gerhardie himself has some slight claim to being regarded as a "Russian novelist" and might be suspected of favoritism. Yet, with his polyglot background, he was able to draw inspiration from a wide range of European literature. The significant thing is that, once again, the Russians occupy a dominant place.

By adoption, or perhaps by absent-mindedness, we recognize the great Russian realist novels as our classics, an integral part of that interactive web of the modern imagination which found one of its most notable expressions in the novel and which prompted D. H. Lawrence to declare (and the world-famous Russian theorist of the novel Mikhail Bakhtin to imply by his choice of subject) that the novel is among the greatest intellectual achievements of the modern mind.[3] We think of them, as we do of the works of Tchaikovsky or Kandinskii, as part of our common heritage, yet extending it in ways which eluded our native-born writers. For they are also in some ways strangely alien to us – strangely Russian – and it is perhaps unsurprising that the Russians themselves have made concepts such as "defamiliarization," and the distinction between "one's own word" and "the alien word," central features of their theories of the novel. Russia, and its literature, has always been conscious of being torn between East and West, where "East" has ranged from Constantinople to the Tatar hordes, and "West" has incorporated the whole of Europe and its cultural progeny.

Before exploring that thought further, it is worth pausing to raise a further question prompted by Gerhardie's list: what Russian names would an anglophone novelist of the 1990s wish to add to it and what would be his or her comments on them? This is a quite difficult question. In 1834, the Russian critic Vissarion Belinskii concluded that there was no such thing as Russian literature, only a few isolated peaks of achievement by outstanding individuals. That might seem to be the common judgment on the Soviet

[2] William Gerhardie, *Memoirs of a Polyglot* (London: Robin Clark, 1990; first published 1931), pp. 164–65.

[3] Zytaruk, *D. H. Lawrence's Response*, p. 74.

novel some 160 years later. In *Cancer Ward* Solzhenitsyn's narrator says of one of his characters that he was rather frightened at the thought of how many writers there were. In the last century there had only been about ten, all of them great. In this century there were thousands; you only had to change a letter in one of their names and you had a new writer. There was Safronov and there was Safonov, and more than one Safonov apparently. And was there only one Safronov? No one could possibly have time to read all their books, and when you did read one, you might just as well not have done. Completely unknown writers floated to the surface, won Stalin prizes, then sank without trace.[4] Solzhenitsyn's character is, of course, caricaturing the achievements of the Soviet novel, which are greater than he would allow. But, searching his or her mind for familiar names, our contemporary writer would probably begin by reciting the same ones as Orel or Gerhardie, the "ten" great novelists of the last century. Then, depending on his or her knowledge of the twentieth-century Russian literary scene, a number of others would tumble out: Solzhenitsyn for certain, and then perhaps Belyi, Sholokhov, Pasternak, Bulgakov . . . The *cognoscenti* might add Zamiatin or Pilniak, Olesha or Platonov. And those with an even more intimate knowledge of the tradition would no doubt wonder whether they should include Karolina Pavlova, Goncharov, Aksakov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, Leskov, Gorky, Sologub, Bunin, Fedin, Leonov, Aleksei Tolstoi, and more recent writers such as Vasilii Grossman, Tendriakov, Trifonov, Bitov, Voinovich, Petrushevskaia, Tatiana Tolstaia, Rasputin, Erofeev, Aksenov or Zinoviev, who have been quite extensively published and written about in the West. But there is an important difference. The Russian writers in Gerhardie's list repaid their debt to Western literature a hundredfold. They inspired both admiration and imitation across the globe. Those in our supplementary list, while having undoubted claims to the attention of the well-read reader of our time, and in the cases of Bunin (1933), Pasternak (1958), Sholokhov (1965), and Solzhenitsyn (1970) even attracting Nobel Prizes, have not significantly fed back into the Western literary tradition and seem unlikely ever to do so. The two exceptions are perhaps Belyi, whose novel *Petersburg* has been much admired as a modernist classic, and Bulgakov, whose influence Salman Rushdie has openly and gladly acknowledged.[5] The great mass of Soviet novelists, even the good ones, seem unlikely ever to achieve ongoing international acclaim, let alone classic status.

[4] A. Solzhenitsyn, *Rakovyi korpus* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1968), p. 110.

[5] See Arnold McMillin, "The Devil of a Similarity: *The Satanic Verses* and *Master i Margarita*," in Lesley Milne (ed.), *Bulgakov, the Novelist-Playwright* (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995), p. 232.

In Belinskii's time, the problem was to escape the thrall of Western European literature and establish an "organic" tradition on a comparable or superior level, which Russia could call its own. This it did, it is commonly claimed, through the dual heritage of Pushkin and Gogol, establishing, as Robert Belknap shows in his essay, a new conception of narrative technique, resulting in what Henry James called "baggy monsters" and "fluid puddings," but which later readers came to regard as a key discovery of the Russian novel,[6] which has spiralled back into Western literature in the modernist period. Caryl Emerson, in her essay, shows how the Russians themselves have theorized this achievement.

In the twentieth century, at least from the late 1920s to the post-war period with its succession of thaws and freezes, Russian literature, prolific though it was, would seem to have lain under a curse, from which only a few outstanding individuals contrived a heroic escape, and often enough by a reverse trajectory, through achieving recognition, though not imitation, in the West. This book does not radically challenge this thesis, though it does demonstrate that the soil in which these outstanding writers grew continued to be fertilized by the on-going Russian literary tradition, a tradition which is now in the 1990s showing signs of a new flowering, enriched perhaps by a period of enforced dormancy.

Contributors to this book were asked to write on their particular subjects with an eye to a list of writers whose claim to the status of "classics" is widely agreed, but with the freedom to vary names in the list in deference to the demands of their topic. They were also advised that the essays were not to be conceived as extended encyclopedia articles but would, we hoped, offer new, even idiosyncratic, insights into the subject, informed, where relevant, by recent political and cultural developments. The extent to which we have succeeded is for others to judge. Of course, the strategy, the topics and the list (the very idea of which echoes the unfashionable idea of a literary canon) are all open to debate. But this is a risk which we have chosen to take. We hope that the resulting essays will be of interest to undergraduate, graduate and general readers wishing to discover the common ground between the Russian and the Western novel as well as the characteristic features which Russia has brought into the tradition. They will have to look elsewhere for encyclopedic coverage and for strict consistency of approach. The volume opens with essays by Robert Maguire and Hugh McLean on the twin themes of the city and the countryside, thereby setting out the unique landscape of the Russian novel. The second

[6] See Caryl Emerson's essay in this book and Donald Fanger, "On the Russianness of the Russian nineteenth-century novel," in Theofanis George Stavrou (ed.), *Art and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), pp. 40–56.

section addresses specific cultural themes with which the Russian novel is widely associated: the often baleful influence of politics (W. Gareth Jones), the tradition of satire which was in many respects a response to it (Lesley Milne), the religious tradition of Russian Orthodoxy (Jostein Børtnes), the relationship of the Russian novel's famed psychological depths to the social setting (Andrew Wachtel), and the philosophical dimension established by the three nineteenth-century giants (Gary Saul Morson). In the third section, Susanne Fusso explores the contribution of the Romantic tradition to the development of the Russian novel while Victor Terras seeks to define the sources and nature of Russian Realism. Robert Russell examines the emergence in the early part of the twentieth century of the Modernist tradition. Finally, in part four, Robert Belknap discusses the peculiar features which characterize the Russian plot and Barbara Heldt asks about the effects on women's writing of a novelistic tradition which was the exclusive preserve of powerful male writers. The last essay, by Caryl Emerson, both gives an overview and critique of Russian theories of the novel and, by implication, furnishes a variety of possible solutions to the problems raised in this introduction and in the essays which follow.

Malcolm V. Jones
Robin Feuer Miller

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

The Library of Congress system of transliteration from Cyrillic has been used. This includes proper names, though hard and soft signs (which are included in the notes) have been omitted in names in the text of the book. The only exceptions to this rule are names which have become so familiar in English in another form that they would be unrecognizable if this policy were strictly adhered to (e.g. Tchaikovsky, Herzen) and the names of tsars (Alexander I). Like any other policy attempting a compromise between user-friendliness and faithfulness to a particular system, this inevitably leads to some inconsistencies (for example Herzen appears also as Gertsen where works by him in Russian are referred to in the notes) but the editors thought that this would not mislead anyone who is able to read Russian and would not interest anyone who is not.

All translations of quoted extracts are by the appropriate chapter author unless otherwise specified.

CHRONOLOGY

1703	Peter the Great founds St. Petersburg
1709	Victory over Sweden at Poltava
1725–27	Reign of Catherine I
1725	Death of Peter the Great
1727–30	Reign of Peter II
1730–40	Reign of Anna
1740–41	Reign of Ivan VI
1741–61	Reign of Elizabeth
1755	Foundation of the University of Moscow
1761–62	Reign of Peter III
1762–96	Reign of Catherine II
1763	F. A. Emin's novels *Miramond* and *Thermistocles*
1766	F. A. Emin's epistolary novel *Letters of Ernest and Doravra*
1770	M. D. Chulkov's *The Comely Cook* Death of F.A. Emin (1735?–70)
1773–75	The Pugachev Revolt (Cossack and peasant uprising led by Emelian Pugachev)
1790	A. N. Radishchev's *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*
1792	Death of M. D. Chulkov (1743?–92) N. M. Karamzin's "Poor Liza"
1796–1801	Reign of Paul I
1801–25	Reign of Alexander I

1802	Death of A. N. Radishchev (1749–1802)
1807	Treaty of Tilsit (with Napoleon)
1812	Napoleon invades Russia and enters Moscow
1814	Alexander I enters Paris with his troops after defeat of Napoleon V. T. Narezhnyi's *A Russian Gil Blas*
1818–26	N. M. Karamzin's *History of the Russian State* (12 vols.)
1822	A. S. Pushkin's poem "The Prisoner of the Caucasus"
1823–31	A. S. Pushkin's *Evgenyi Onegin*; published in full, 1833
1824	A. S. Pushkin's poem "The Gypsies"
1825–55	Reign of Nicholas I
1825	Death of V. T. Narezhnyi (1780–1825) Decembrist Revolt (led by Guards officers seeking to establish a constitution)
1826	Death of N.M. Karamzin (1766–1826)
1829	F. V. Bulgarin's *Ivan Vyzhigin*
1830	A. S. Pushkin's *Tales of Belkin*
1832–34	M. Iu. Lermontov's *Vadim*
1832	N. V. Gogol's "A Bewitched Place"
1833	A. S. Pushkin's *The Queen of Spades* A. S. Pushkin's poem "The Bronze Horseman"
1834–36	A. S. Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter*
1834	V. G. Belinskii's ground-breaking critical articles *Literary Reveries*, arguing that Russia has no national literary tradition
1835	N. V. Gogol's *Taras Bulba*, "Nevskii Prospekt" and "Notes of a Madman"
1836	P. Ia. Chaadaev's *First Philosophical Letter* arguing that Russia has made no contribution to universal history N. V. Gogol's "The Nose"
1837	Death of A. S. Pushkin (1799–1837)
1840–41	M. Iu. Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*

1841	Death of M. Iu. Lermontov
1842	N. V. Gogol's *Dead Souls* and *The Overcoat*
1843–59	K. K. Pavlova's *Quadrille*
1846	D. V. Grigorovich's *The Village* F. M. Dostoevskii's *Poor Folk* and *The Double*
1847	D. V. Grigorovich's *Anton Goremyka* N. V. Gogol's *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends* V. G. Belinskii's *Letter to Gogol* circulated I. A. Goncharov's *A Common Story*
1848	K. K. Pavlova's *A Double Life* Death of V. G. Belinskii (1811–48) F. M. Dostoevskii's "White Nights"
1849	I. A. Goncharov's "Oblomov's Dream"
1852	Death of N. V. Gogol (1809–52) L. N. Tolstoi's *Childhood* I. S. Turgenev's *A Sportsman's Sketches*
1853–56	Crimean War (between Russia and the combined forces of Britain, France, and Piedmont)
1854	L. N. Tolstoi's *Adolescence*
1855–81	Reign of Alexander II
1855–57	I. A. Goncharov's *The Frigate Pallada*
1855	N. G. Chernyshevskii's treatise on *The Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality*
1856	S. T. Aksakov's *A Family Chronicle* and *Recollections* I. S. Turgenev's *Rudin*
1857	L. N. Tolstoi's *Youth*
1858	S. T. Aksakov's *Childhood Years of Grandson Bagrov* A. F. Pisemskii's *A Thousand Souls*
1859	I. A. Goncharov's *Oblomov* I. S. Turgenev's *A Nest of Gentlefolk* Death of S. T. Aksakov (1791–1859) Death of F. V. Bulgarin (1789–1859) L. N. Tolstoi's *Family Happiness* N. A. Dobroliubov's essay "What is Oblomovitis?"

1860	I. S. Turgenev's *First Love* I. S. Turgenev's *On the Eve*
1861	The Emancipation of the Serfs, followed by a series of reforms in the early 1860s Death of N. A. Dobroliubov (1836–61) F. M. Dostoevskii's *The Insulted and Injured* A. F. Pisemskii's *An Old Man's Sin*
1862	I. S. Turgenev's *Fathers and Children*
1863	N. G. Chernyshevskii's *What is to be Done?* L. N. Tolstoi's *The Cossacks* F. M. Dostoevskii's *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* A. F. Pisemskii's *The Troubled Sea*
1864	V. P. Kliushnikov's *Mirage* F. M. Dostoevskii's *Notes from Underground* N. S. Leskov's *No Way Out*
1865–69	L. N. Tolstoi's *War and Peace*
1866	F. M. Dostoevskii's *Crime and Punishment*
1867	I. S. Turgenev's *Smoke*
1868	F. M. Dostoevskii's *The Idiot*
1869–79	M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin's *The History of a Town*
1869	I. A. Goncharov's *The Ravine*
1871–72	F. M. Dostoevskii's *The Devils*
1872	N. S. Leskov's *Cathedral Folk*
1873	N. S. Leskov's "The Sealed Angel" and "The Enchanted Wanderer"
1875–80	M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin's *The Golovlev Family*
1875	F. M. Dostoevskii's *A Raw Youth* N. S. Leskov's "At the End of the World"
1877	L. N. Tolstoi's *Anna Karenina* I. S. Turgenev's *Virgin Soil*
1880	F. M. Dostoevskii's *The Brothers Karamazov*
1881–94	Reign of Alexander III
1881	Assassination of Alexander II

	Death of F. M. Dostoevskii (1821–81) Death of A. F. Pisemskii (1821–81)
1883	Death of I. S. Turgenev (1818–83)
1887	Execution of Lenin's brother L. N. Tolstoi's *On Life*
1889	Death of N. G. Chernyshevskii (1828–89) Death of M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin (1826–89)
1891	Death of I. A. Goncharov (1812–91)
1892	Death of V. P. Kliushnikov
1893	Death of K. K. Pavlova (1807–93)
1894–1917	Reign of Nicholas II
1895	Death of N. S. Leskov (1831–95)
1896	A. P. Chekhov's play *The Seagull*
1897–98	L. N. Tolstoi's treatise *What is Art?*
1897	A. P. Chekhov's "The Peasants"
1898	Foundation of the Marxist Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP)
1899	L. N. Tolstoi's *Resurrection* A. P. Chekhov's play *The Three Sisters* Death of D. V. Grigorovich (1822–99)
1901	A. P. Chekhov's play *Uncle Vania*
1903	A. P. Chekhov's play *The Cherry Orchard* Split of the RSDLP into Menshevik and Bolshevik factions (the latter led by Lenin)
1904–05	Russo-Japanese War
1904	Death of A. P. Chekhov (1860–1904)
1905	The abortive 1905 Revolution leads to establishment of the short-lived First Duma (Parliament)
1906	Maksim Gorkii's *Mother*
1907	F. K. Sologub's *The Petty Demon*
1908	A. M. Remizov's *The Clock* A. A. Bogdanov's *Red Star* Maksim Gorkii's *Confession*

1910	I. A. Bunin's *The Village* Death of L. N. Tolstoi (1828–1910)
1911	I. A. Bunin's *Sukhodol*
1912	A. A. Bogdanov's *Engineer Menni*
1913	Maksim Gorkii's *Childhood*
1914–18	First World War
1915	V. V. Maiakovskii's poem "A Cloud in Trousers"
1916	Andrei Belyi's *Petersburg* (in book form)
1917	Nicholas II abdicates in February; he is succeeded by a Provisional Government; in October the Bolsheviks seize power E. I. Zamiatin's "Islanders"
1918–21	Civil War and period of War Communism
1920–21	E. I. Zamiatin's *We* (published for the first time in Russian in 1952 and in the USSR in 1988)
1920	E. I. Zamiatin's "Mamai"
1921–22	Boris Pilniak's *The Naked Year*
1921–40	A. N. Tolstoi's *A Tour of Hell*
1922–23	A. N. Tolstoi's *Aelita*
1922	Andrei Belyi's *Petersburg* (revised, shortened edition)
1923	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) formally established D. A. Furmanov's *Chapaev*
1924	Death of V. I. Lenin K. A. Fedin's *City and Years* A. S. Serafimovich's *The Iron Flood*
1925	Beginning of Maksim Gorkii's uncompleted novel *The Life of Klim Samgin* M. A. Bulgakov's *The White Guard* F. V. Gladkov's *Cement*
1926	Isaac Babel's *Red Cavalry* Death of I. A. Furmanov (1891–1926)
1927	Death of F. K. Sologub (1863–1927)

	A. A. Fadeev's *The Rout* L. M. Leonov's *The Thief* Iu. K. Olesha's *Envy*
1928–32	Stalin inaugurates the collectivization of agriculture
1928–40	M. A. Sholokhov's *The Quiet Don*
1928	Death of A. A. Bogdanov (1873–1928) *The Twelve Chairs* by I. Ilf and E. Petrov
1929	A. P. Platonov's *Chevengur* M. M. Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevskii's Creative Work*
1930	Death of V. V. Maiakovskii (1893–1930) A. P. Platonov's *Foundation Pit* V. V. Nabokov's *The Defense*
1931	Boris Pasternak's *Safe Conduct* *The Golden Calf* by I. Ilf and E. Petrov
1932–60	M. A. Sholokhov's *Virgin Soil Upturned*
1932–34	N. A. Ostrovskii's *How the Steel was Tempered*
1932	V. P. Kataev's *Time Forward!*
1934	Promulgation by A. A. Zhdanov of the doctrine of Socialist Realism at First All-Union Writers' Congress in August Death of Andrei Belyi (1880–1934)
1936–38	The Great Purges
1936	Death of Maksim Gorkii (1868–1936)
1936–37	M. A. Bulgakov's *Black Snow*
1937	Probable year of death of Boris Pilniak (1894–1937?) Death of E. I. Zamiatin (1884–1937)
1938	V. V. Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading*
1940	Death of M. A. Bulgakov (1891–1940)
1941–45	Russia participates in the Second World War
1941–44	Siege of Leningrad
1941	Germany invades the USSR Death of Isaac Babel (1894–1941)
1945	A. A. Fadeev's *The Young Guard* (inflated Stalin-inspired version 1951) Death of A. N. Tolstoi (1883–1945)

1947–54	"Cold War" between the Soviet bloc and the West
1949	Death of A. S. Serafimovich (1863–1949)
1953	Death of I. V. Stalin Krushchev elected First Secretary Death of I. A. Bunin (1870–1953) L. M. Leonov's *Russian Forest*
1956	I. G. Erenburg's *The Thaw* Death of A. A. Fadeev (1901–56)
1957	Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* Death of A. M. Remizov (1877–1957) Launching of Sputnik I
1958	Death of F. V. Gladkov (1883–1958)
1960	Death of Iu. K. Olesha (1899–1960) Death of Boris Pasternak (1890–1960)
1961	Iurii Gagarin is the first to travel in space
1962	Cuban missile crisis A. I. Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*
1963	M. M. Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevskii's Poetics* (revised edition of 1929 book on Dostoevskii) A. I. Solzhenitsyn's "Matrena's Home"
1964	Fall of Khrushchev; he is succeeded by Brezhnev and Kosygin
1966–67	M. A. Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*
1966	F. A. Iskander's *The Goatibex Constellation*
1967	Death of I. G. Erenburg (1891–1967)
1968	A. I. Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward* A. I. Solzhenitsyn's *The First Circle*
1973–75	A. I. Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*
1973	F. A. Iskander's *Sandro from Chegem* V. Erofeev's *Moscow Circles* M. A. Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* (full, Moscow edition)
1974	Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is expelled from the USSR

1975	Death of M. M. Bakhtin (1895–1975) V. N. Voinovich's *The Life and Extraordinary Adventures of Private Ivan Chonkin* (published in the USSR in 1988–89)
1976	V. G. Rasputin's *Farewell to Matera* A. Zinoviev's *Yawning Heights* (published in USSR in 1990) Iu. V. Trifonov's *House on the Embankment*
1977	Death of K. A. Fedin (1892–1977) Death of V. V. Nabokov (1899–1977)
1978	A. G. Bitov's (1937–) *Pushkin House*
1979	V. N. Voinovich's *Pretender to the Throne* (published in the USSR in 1990)
1982	F. A. Iskander's *Rabbits and Boa-Constrictors* (published in the USSR in 1987) Death of Brezhnev; Iurii Andropov elected as General Secretary
1984	Death of Andropov; Konstantin Chernenko elected as General Secretary Death of M. A. Sholokhov (1905–84) Death of Chernenko; Gorbachev elected General Secretary
1985	Gorbachev and Reagan meet at Geneva
1986	Death of V. P. Kataev (1897–1986) V. N. Voinovich's *Moscow 2042* (published in the USSR in 1990) Explosion at Chernobyl nuclear reactor Academician Sakharov released from detention in Gorkii Policy of *glasnost'* and *perestroika* announced at XXVII Party Congress
1988	Celebration of millennium of Russian Orthodox Church
1990	Yeltsin resigns from Communist Party
1991	Yeltsin elected President of Russia August coup against Gorbachev Abolition of USSR (December)

I

MALCOLM V. JONES

Introduction

What does give the classic Russian novel its power over the imagination? There have been many attempts to define its unique features and to account for its rise to pre-eminence in such unpromising soil. Underlying most analyses is the perception that Russian literature achieved its stature in a dialectic (or dialogue) with Western European literary traditions. Bakhtin has provided a theoretical model for this process in a shift from regarding the Western tradition as "authoritative discourse" to regarding it as "inwardly persuasive discourse"; in other words from a mental attitude which saw Western traditions as providing unsurpassable achievements which could only be imitated or rejected, to one which assimilated them to native Russian experience as part of a process of growth-in-dialogue: a complex dance in which the partners now lightly touch, now embrace and now draw apart, at times melting into a common movement and at times loudly asserting their difference.

The double helix comes unbidden to the modern mind as a model of this process. And that is no doubt one of the major reasons for the extraordinary fascination which the Russian novel has exercised over the Western reader. It is not simply that Russian writers have always had the Western tradition at the back of their minds, and woven it into their own tradition, trying to overcome what Harold Bloom has famously called the anxiety of influence. It is that for the first time Russian literature is reflecting back to Western readers a profounder, broader, more complex and, it often seems, more authentic, view of themselves, a view which puts in question not only Western achievements, but also the Western literary heritage as embedded in the novel itself. To put it more simply, Russian novels force us to ask questions about ourselves, about novels, and more broadly about human discourse, as well as about the physical world they purport to convey.

A key role in this process – characterized by a profound inferiority complex and a countervailing impulse to discover and assert an authentic

national voice – was played in the last century by the Russian intelligentsia, for whom the novel was the primary medium of debate. The intelligentsia was both a channel for the assimilation of Western culture and a vehicle for the affirmation of Russia's own unique experience and values and (potential or presumed) contribution to world civilization. Educated Russians of all social classes were heirs both to Western cultural traditions, which they shared with their European and North American counterparts, and their own cultural and historical roots, which were uniquely theirs and which retained a strong sense of otherness. The novel appeared and achieved respectability in Western Europe just at the right moment to act as a vehicle for this ambitious programme. By the 1830s it had come of age in Russia too. Moreover, a more capacious and appropriate vehicle could hardly have been designed for the purpose. The novel was capable, as Bakhtin has famously argued, of absorbing all other genres. As Russians discovered, no field of contemporary human discourse – except perhaps the strictly technical or scientific – was debarred. Imaginative fiction could be manipulated in all sorts of ways unavailable to more direct forms of discourse and, above all, it was capable of relating, as no other medium could, broad social, political, philosophical and religious questions to the existential experience of the individual through the medium of narrative, thus facilitating entry to these questions at a variety of different levels. Through the evolution of its narrative techniques, the novel had proved capable of engaging the interest of the reader simultaneously at the level of story and, as modern theory has it, at the level of "ideal author".

The great novels of the nineteenth century could be, and often were of course, read simply for entertainment. The majority of readers, unlike the writers, were women and the novels often read aloud *en famille*. Richard Ware draws our attention to a contemporary account of the reception of *Anna Karenina*, according to which most readers regarded the novel simply as entertaining and absorbing reading, an opinion held not only by short-sighted aristocrats but even by some contemporary critics.[1]

Another account recalls that there was neither singing nor laughter on the days when a new issue of *Russkii vestnik* appeared with a fresh installment of Dostoevskii's *The Brothers Karamazov*. When all were gathered, the family took their places round the table with a green shaded lamp in the middle, and the reading aloud began. Everyone took turns to read and there was no pause until they reached the final page. Faces alternately turned pale and burned with excitement; the voice of the reader shook. The reading was then followed by detailed discussion of every movement in the souls of the characters and by attempts to guess what would happen next.[2] In a delightful essay on *War and Peace*, Nikolai

Bakhtin (Mikhail Bakhtin's brother) recalls how, like many Russian readers, he had, by dint of reading and rereading, come to know the characters in the novel like real-life friends and acquaintances. Then he confesses that actually he had never read the whole of Tolstoi's great novel from cover to cover. He had just dipped into it again and again.[3]

But, whatever its primary appeal to the reading public, the significance of the nineteenth-century novel will not be fully grasped unless it is understood that each new volume to appear was part of the ongoing debates in the literary journals, the salons and the private apartments of the intelligentsia. Neither Tolstoi's *Anna Karenina* (1875–78) nor Dostoevskii's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879–80) can be appreciated as phenomena of their time apart from the discussions on marriage and the family inspired by Chernyshevskii's novel *What is to be Done?* (1863). No more, in a later period, can Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* be wholly appreciated apart from its satire on the Soviet literary scene and, on a broader scale, on the Soviet system itself. The aim of literature was not merely to entertain, to instruct or even to reflect reality. It was to seek "the measure of life" in all its dimensions, together with an understanding (and this was a particular feature of its Russianness) of the limitations of the human mind in attempting to grasp its meaning. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Russian culture experienced two irresistible imperatives (both exemplified in Pushkin's and Gogol's work): to grasp and represent in imaginative literature the full range of contemporary reality, exemplified in such concepts as the *narod* (the Russian people), *the rodina* "motherland"), the vast, primitive, anarchic Russian countryside, the history and the symbolism of her capital; and to understand their place in history. This latter quest sometimes embraced the idea of national historical mission, which at times, for example in Dostoevskii's hands, became messianic. Though most of the nineteenth-century intelligentsia lived and worked in the city, the two capitals of St. Petersburg and Moscow, and experienced all the strains of urban life, they were fully aware of the countryside, populated by the oppressed peasant classes, their lives lived out among the beasts they tended. Yet, some thought these same peasants were possessed of superior spiritual insights, often associated with ancient peasant beliefs and folk traditions, such as those celebrated in the novels of Leskov in the nineteenth century and the works of the "village prose" writers (Belov, Rasputin and others) in the twentieth. The liberal intelligentsia (Turgenev, Aksakov, Tolstoi) were themselves often landowners and experienced the tension between the landowner's love of the rural idyll and guilt at the price others had to pay to preserve its semblance. Increasingly, as the nineteenth century wore on, the countryside was seen not just as the repository of Russia's

spiritual heritage, but also as the setting for a social and moral degeneration in which all classes were caught up. Although overlaid by more recent historical events, two world wars, the Revolution and Civil War, the collectivization programme, the purges and the collapse of the Soviet Union, these dimensions have continued to dominate the Russian experience and its representation in fiction to the present day.

That the idyll of the Russian countryside was deeply flawed struck some (Saltykov-Shchedrin, Bunin) so painfully that it seemed to plunge them into a grotesque, nightmarish gloom. Others (Goncharov, Aksakov) presented it more ambiguously. Turgenev and Tolstoy, perhaps, preserved their love of the Russian countryside best. What all the nineteenth-century novelists seem to be acutely aware of is the ultimate futility and hubris of Russia's repeated attempts to subject the vastness and majesty of nature to the human will, together with the inadequacy of human reason fully to comprehend life's meaning. The theme has its first memorable expression in Pushkin's great poem "The Bronze Horseman"; it is central to Tolstoi's philosophy of history in *War and Peace*; it underlies Dostoevskii and the long anti-rationalist tradition in Russian thought, the fate of Bazarov in Turgenev's *Fathers and Children*, the failure of the Bolshevik experiment in Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, the collapse of Platonov's anarchic *Chevengur*, and the tragic–comic depiction of a Moscow thrown into confusion by a visit from the devil in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*.

And its source is to be found, like those of many of the other leitmotifs of Russian intellectual and spiritual life, in the uncompromisingly anti-rationalist traditions of the Orthodox Faith, traditions thrown into relief by its anti-Catholic and anti-Protestant stance. In his essay Jostein Børtnes shows the impact of Russian Orthodoxy on those major novels which most strikingly exemplify its influence, but its pervasive effect is very widely evident in Russian culture, in the structuring function of religious myths (for example the Easter myth or the Apocalypse), in the presence of folk religious types (for example the Holy Fool) and artefacts (the icon), as well as in a pervasive Anti-Rationalism and preference for apophatic (negative) theology. Elsewhere, John Garrard[4] has reminded us that, for better or for worse, Russia was not a part of the Roman Empire, nor did it experience directly the fruits of the Renaissance; nor was it a part of the Roman Catholic tradition which the Roman Empire adopted and which embraced the Renaissance. This made the grafting on of European culture in the modern period all the more problematic and the attempt all the more fascinating. Even where Anti-Rationalism was not explicitly made a virtue, as with the progressive Westerners, its influence ran very deep, until in the twentieth century, in one of those periodic attempts by Russia's rulers to

seize history and nature by the scruff of the neck, the power of science and technology to overcome all natural obstacles temporarily became Holy Writ and gave rise to a completely new dominant in Russian culture.

It seems momentarily to have escaped Gerhardie's attention that one prominent feature of the Russian novel is its deep moral seriousness, its uncompromising wrestling with seemingly intractable social and political problems no less than with the "accursed questions" of philosophy and religion, questions which, as Tolstoi was aware, professional philosophers often consider to be unanswerable because misconceived and which the great novels of Western Europe address only obliquely, if at all. It is a signal characteristic of the Russian novel that it takes *seriously* (i.e. as indicative of what is essential in life) aspects of human experience frequently banished to the fringes of the secular European novel, to the extent that they may actually become organizing principles of the narrative, and hence, by implication, of that everyday experience which the narrative seeks to express. Not only does religion sometimes play this organizing role, but so do folklore, the dream, the supernatural, metaphysics, and that peculiarly Russian state of mind which critics call *poshlost'* ("self-satisfied mediocrity") and which, in Gogol's work, facilitates that strange slippage between the material and the surreal (and/or supernatural) which is his hallmark.

This deep seriousness is in part a consequence of the vastness of Russia and of its searing historical experiences, some self-inflicted, some inflicted by external enemies. It is in part a consequence, according to some, of the passion, the complexity, the broadness of the "Russian soul," combining the spirit of Europe with the spirit of Asia, with a tendency to seek extreme, maximalist solutions to the problems of keeping both individual soul and political body under some sort of control. Undoubtedly it is also in part the consequence of working within the context of an oppressive political order, as Gareth Jones explains. As Alexander Herzen wrote, in his "Open letter to Michelet" (1851), the ghastly consequences that attended the written word in Russia inevitably increased its effectiveness:

> The free word is listened to with love and veneration, because in our country, it is uttered only by those who have something to say. The decision to publish one's thoughts is not lightly made when at the foot of every page there looms a gendarme, a *troika*, a *kibitka*, and the prospect of Tobolsk or Irkutsk.[5]

It is as if throughout the history of the Russian novel there was always a third, silent participant in the dialogue, alongside the writer and the reader, the oppressive presence of the Russian state and its apparatus of censorship and repression. Just as in Soviet Russia free conversation on politically sensitive issues was inhibited by fear of being overheard by an agent of the

KGB, so throughout the history of Russian literature the spectre of imprisonment, exile, execution or psychiatric supervision played its role in fashioning what was thought, felt, written and said, and how it was expressed. The frequency with which Russian literature actually deals explicitly with these themes, or some metaphorical equivalent, is therefore hardly surprising. Such a predicament gave rise to ingenious, Aesopian techniques for fooling the authorities, to saying what had to be said metaphorically rather than directly, for cultivating what Bakhtin called "the word with a sideways glance." Most notably it gave rise to the tradition of the satirical novel, to which Lesley Milne's essay is devoted. Of course there were sunny interludes, periods when the censorship was relaxed. But they could never be relied upon to last.

Partly in spite of and partly because of this situation, the imaginative world of the Russian novel seems to stretch out endlessly in space and time and at the same time is capable of focusing on the subtlest movements of the inner world of the individual psyche, from the historical vastness of Tolstoi's *War and Peace* and Sholokhov's *The Quiet Don,* to the tense psychological and physical enclosure of a Dostoevskian novel, from the daylight naturalism of Turgenev's *Fathers and Children*, to the apocalyptic fantasy of Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, from the unremitting satirical gloom of Shchedrin's *The Golovlev Family* to the tragic lyricism of Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*.

Each Russian writer mapped out the territory in his own way and although their works certainly echo each other and develop each other's achievements, rarely could the work of one be mistaken for that of any other. There has been much discussion of various categories of "realism" in Russian literature (Critical Realism, Romantic Realism, Fantastic Realism, Revolutionary Realism, Socialist Realism). One could equally well discuss categories of "Russianness" and indeed, though scorn is nowadays often poured on the idea of the "Russian soul," such terms may still focus discussion of similarities and differences.[6] The point is that, in spite of their pervasive adherence to the principle of "realism," none of the great Russian novelists was a naive Realist, or even a Naturalist in the French sense. Each of them, as we have noted and as several of the essays demonstrate, sought and discovered organizing principles for their perception of experience in realms beyond the material and the immediate. They all understood the limitations of language in expressing human experience. Some, like Gogol, exploited these for satirical and comic purposes. Others, like Dostoevskii, turned them into a structural principle of their fictional world. As Victor Terras argues, Realism was in some measure a negative conception, a move away from Romanticism.