A RUSKINIAN VIEW OF RUSSIA?[1]

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The boundary between international history, transnational history and cultural history has become increasingly porous in recent years. The study of Anglo-Russian relations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has, like many other fields, been enriched by this development. Numerous scholars have explored how British perceptions of Russia – and indeed Russian perceptions of Britain – were shaped by a growing awareness of foreign cultural developments fostered by networks of individuals who interacted with one another either in person or 'through the page'.[2] The formal diplomatic relationship between London and St Petersburg represented just one element in the interactions between two societies that engaged with one another in complex and changing ways. Edward Said explored in *Orientalism* how language and culture can create and sustain patterns of hierarchy between different societies.[3] It is an insight that has had great influence on the study of imperialism, though it has been less appealing to international historians, who typically see culture simply as one mode of interaction between sovereign states. And although it is certainly possible to explore Anglo-Russian relations through what might be called an 'oriental-occidental' lens, the simple fact that both countries were great powers makes it difficult to apply Said's ideas in a simple way, even if Russia's semi-peripheral status and cross-continental geography hints at ways in which it might be possible to do so productively.

[1] I would like to thank Professor Charlotte Alston for her response to this talk, given in March 2021. I would also like to thank Dr Stuart Eagles for his helpful comments and for providing me with a copy of one of his articles that proved stubbornly elusive.

[2] Among the large literature see, for example, the numerous books by Anthony Cross, including Anthony Cross (ed.), *A People Passing Rude: British Responses to Russian Culture* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2013); see, too, Olga Kaznina (ed.), *Russkie v Anglii* (Moscow: Nasledie, 1997).

[3] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003).

This short paper has no space to dwell on the complex relationship between culture and power. It will instead explore questions of cultural exchange between Britain and Russia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with a particular focus on the ideas of John Ruskin or, more specifically, on ideas and values that have often attracted the label 'Ruskinian'. It will start by reviewing some of the work carried out by scholars tracing the networks through which Ruskin's ideas spread to Russia in the decades before 1917,[4] discussing whether the growing interest in what might be called a 'Ruskinian' way of thinking can be explained in terms of identifiable patterns of influence or is instead best understood as a response to immediate social and cultural contexts. The second part will then look at the development of a 'Ruskinian' construction of Russia in the British imagination in the years before the Russian Revolution, suggesting that the word 'Ruskinian' had by the end of the nineteenth century broken free from its moorings in the ideas of John Ruskin. It had instead become something of a catch-all term, with a shared if uncertain resonance in the minds of those who used it, touching on motifs including anti-industrialism and the importance of craft in overcoming estrangement between humans and their material world.

Scholars including Stuart Eagles and Rachel Polonsky have done excellent work examining *how* Ruskin's ideas became familiar to Russian writers associated with the symbolist movement, including Andrei Bely and Aleksandr Blok, as well as artists like Mikhail Nesterov, whose paintings were pivotal in the first phase of that most elusive of intellectual and artistic movements.[5] Translation naturally played a key

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[4] See, for example, Rebecca Beasley, *Russomania: Russian Culture and the Creation of British Modernism, 1881–1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Stuart Eagles, '"For Fear of Bears": Ruskin in Russia (A Biblio-Historical Sketch)', *Nineteenth-Century* Prose, 38.2 (2011), 157–94; Stuart Eagles, 'The Apostle of Beauty: Some Turn-of-the-Century Perceptions of Ruskin in Central and Eastern Europe', in Emma Sdegno, Martina Frank, Myriam Pilutti Namer and Pierre-Henry Frangne (eds), *John Ruskin's Europe: A Collection of Cross-Cultural Essays* (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari), pp. 399–412; Rachel Polonsky, *English Literature and the Russian Aesthetic Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and Wendy Salmond, *The Arts and Crafts in Late Imperial Russia: Reviving the Kustar Art Industries, 1870–1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[5] Much has been written about the 'silver age' of Russian culture – both its

role in allowing Ruskin's ideas to become known in Russia, though a considerable number of Russian artists and writers were able to read the original works. Lev Nikiforov among others provided translations of many of Ruskin's publications at the turn of the twentieth century, as well as writing his own study of Ruskin's ideas,[6] while translations also started to appear of key English-language works including Hobson's *John Ruskin: Social Reformer* and Mary Aldin Ward's *Three Biographies: Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, Lev Tolstoy*.[7]

It is possible, too, to identify certain individuals who played a critical role in the process of disseminating Ruskin's ideas in Russia. Perhaps the most important name in this context is Olga Solov'eva, whose philosophy helped to frame the development of Russia's 'silver age' of culture in general, and the development of Russian symbolism in particular (Olga herself translated some of Ruskin's work for the literary journal *Severnyi vestnik*).[8] Solov'eva was the cousin of the mother of Aleksandr Blok, and through her translations and family networks she played an important role in introducing Ruskin's ideas to the creative intelligentsia. Bely recalled in his *Memoirs of Blok* the important role Solov'eva played in bringing Ruskin to the attention of the younger generation of symbolists.[9] And, whatever the precise character of the

significance and even its existence – but the term has sufficient shared resonance to provide a useful focus for discussion. A useful discussion, focused on one of the most prominent figures of the time, can be found in Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, *D. S. Merezhkovsky and the Silver Age: The Development of a Revolutionary Mentality* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975).

[6] L.P. Nikiforov, *Dzhon Reskin. Ego zhizn', ideia i deiatel'nost'* (Moscow, 1896). Nikiforov was also well-known for his numerous commentaries on Tolstoy.

[7] Dzhon Atkinson Hobson, *Obshchestvennye idealy Reskina* (Saint Petersburg: Znanie, 1899), tr. N. Konchevskaya and V. Libin; Mei Olden Uard, *Tri biografiia: Tomas Karleil', Dzhon Reskin, Lev Tolstoi* (Moscow: M.V. Kliukin, 1900).

[8] A useful discussion of Solov'eva and other early translators of Ruskin can be found in Eagles, '"For Fear of Bears"'. Solov'eva was the sister-in-law of the philosopher Vladimir Solov'ev, who exercised enormous influence on the development of Russian culture in the thirty years or so before the Russian Revolution. For a useful introduction to Solov'ev's thought, see Jonathan Sutton, *The Religious Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov: Towards a Reassessment* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1988).

[9] Andrei Bely, *Vospominaniia o Bloke* (Moscow: Respublika, 1995), <http://az.lib.ru/b/belyj_a/text_1923_vosp_o_bloke.shtml> [accessed 27 September 2021].

networks that facilitated the growth of interest in Ruskin in Russia, the *fact* of that influence cannot be doubted. Rachel Polonsky and Oleg Maslenikov, among others, have provided convincing readings of Blok and Bely respectively that show the influence of Ruskin on their work.[10]

Ruskin's influence on Russian culture and the development of Russian symbolism was not limited to Russian poetry or indeed architecture, a subject that William Craft Brumfield has examined in detail.[11] The artist Mikhail Nesterov noted in his memoirs that Ruskin was an influential figure for all his generation.[12] Nor was this simply a reference to Ruskin's 'medievalism', though Nesterov himself often turned to history for inspiration, painting many mythological scenes from Russia's ancient past.[13] Nesterov's symbolism instead reflected an implicit sense that art provided a form of knowing that demanded new ways of seeing how the material world was illuminated by the presence of the eternal.[14] This was not so much a form of pantheism. It was instead informed by a conviction that close attention to the world could reveal new patterns of significance.

This focus on the ways in which Ruskin's ideas reached Russia, and were acknowledged as influential by important cultural figures, is perhaps too simplistic in understanding how ideas and cultural motifs cross national boundaries. Russian writers and artists were not simply passive recipients of Ruskin's ideas: they used them in new and creative ways that reflected their own interests and values. Many of Ruskin's ideas in any case found an echo with developments that were *already*

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[10] Polonsky, *English Literature and the Russian Aesthetic Renaissance*, 140–51; Oleg A. Maslennikov, 'Ruskin, Bely, and the Solovyovs', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 35.84 (1956), 15–23.

[11] William Craft Brumfield, *The Origins of Modernism in Russian Architecture* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1991).

[12] M. V. Nesterov, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Sov. Khudozhnik, 1985), p. 113.

[13] For a useful discussion of Nesterov's work, see Abbot Gleason, '"Russkii Inok": The Spiritual Landscape of Mikhail Nesterov', *Ecumene*, 7.3 (2000), 299–312.

[14] Among the vast literature on Russian symbolism, a useful general account can be found in Avril Pyman, *A History of Russian Symbolism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Pyman's other work, including biographies of Aleksandr Blok and Pavel Florenskii, also provide valuable insights into the complex and diverse nature of Russian symbolism. See, too, Ronald E. Peterson, *History of Russian Symbolism* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1993).

taking place in Russia (inevitably making it impossible to prove with any precision the 'influence' of Ruskin on a particular writer or artists). Long before the 1890s, there was growing interest in Russia in things that seem distinctly 'Ruskinian'.

If I can for a moment strike a personal note, when I was reading recently about the history of the artistic colony at Abramtsevo, I was struck by the way in which Ruskin's ideas provided members of the pre-revolutionary Russian creative intelligentsia with a language that articulated ideas and insights that had long percolated through Russian culture. Abramtsevo was a Russian estate about fifty miles north-east of Moscow, which I first visited in the 1980s, when I was a graduate student in Moscow writing a thesis about the Aksakov family who lived there in the 1840s and 1850s. The Aksakovs were active in the Slavophile movement, which among other things emphasised the value of a largely mythical 'old' Russia, where social life was characterised by organic unity and a deep sense of religious harmony (*sobornost'* in Russian).[15] But Abramtsevo is better-known today as the site of Russia's first major 'arts and crafts' colony.[16] The estate was bought in 1870 by the merchant and cultural entrepreneur Savva Mamontov and his wife, who shared a vision of creating a colony devoted to celebrating Russian craft traditions and culture, as well as providing what would now be called 'meaningful work' for their employees. The enterprise developed over the next thirty years, both in scale and intellectual scope, and by the

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[15] Among the large English-language literature on the Slavophiles, see the monumental four-volume series by Peter Christoff, *An Introduction to Nineteenth-Century Russian Slavophilism: A Study in Ideas*, Vols 1–2 (The Hague: Mouton, 1961, 1972), Vol. 3 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), Vol. 4 (Boulder, CO, and Oxford: Westview, 1991). See, too, Nicholas Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West in the Teaching of the* Slavophiles (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952); Andrzej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). On Sergei Aksakov, see Andrew R. Durkin, *Sergei Aksakov and Russian Pastoral* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983).

[16] On Abramtsevo, see Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, Chapter 1. See, too, the important collection of essays edited by Louise Hardiman, Ludmilla Piters-Hofmann and Maria Taroutina, in the special issue of *Experiment: A Journal of Russian Culture*, 25 (2019).

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end of the century it had become a celebrated cultural centre devoted to combining traditional Russian motifs with innovative ideas about the purpose of arts and crafts in an industrialising society.

Ruskin's ideas were, as we have seen, well-known in Russia by the end of the century. Yet Ruskin was little known in Russia at the time when Savva Mamontov and his wife first mooted the idea of developing a colony as a site for celebrating Russian culture. The same was true of other luminaries of the arts and crafts movement such as William Morris. By contrast, when other celebrated art colonies of late Imperial Russia were established, such as the Talashkino workshops founded by Princess Maria Tenesheva in 1900, the ideas of Ruskin and indeed Morris already formed an important part of the mental-cultural 'map' of those who sought to develop forms of manufacturing capable of prospering in the burgeoning market for arts and crafts.[17]

When Ruskin's ideas entered the Russian cultural landscape in the late 1880s and 1890s, then, they found fertile ground in the sense that ideas about the importance of craftmanship as an aesthetic and moral good were well-established. It is perhaps a cliché to note that ideas – including ideas about literature – have in Russian history often been the setting for more far-reaching debates about social and political questions. Yet the cliché is true. Stuart Eagles notes how some of the *fin de siècle* cultural figures associated with the influential art journal *Mir iskusstva* believed, at least for a time, that Ruskin could offer a kind of *via media* between the aesthetic utilitarianism articulated by Nikolai Chernyshevskii in the 1860s and the ideal of 'pure art' against which both he and later generations of radicals railed so vehemently.[18] It is

[17] See, for example, the discussion of furniture production at Talashkino in Dzhesco Ozer, *Talashkino: Dereviannye izdeliia masterskikh Kn. M. Kl. Tenishevoi*, 2 vols (Moscow: Izdatel 'skii dom Rudentsovykh, 2016). See, too, Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, Chapter 4. For a useful discussion of the international arts and crafts movement, which examines how it managed in to combine internationalism with a commitment to preserving different national craft traditions, see Anne-Marie Thiesse, 'The Transnational Creation of National Arts and Crafts in 19th-Century Europe', Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalisms (SPIN) lecture 2012, trans. by J. Rogove <https://spinnet.eu/news.p/3.m/68/anne-marie-thiesses-spin-lecture-now-online> [accessed 27 September 2021].

[18] Eagles, '"For Fear of Bears"', p. 172.

an interesting insight, and one that deserves to be built on further by scholars, since it once again focuses not so much on the *transmission* of Ruskin's ideas to Russia, but rather on understanding the historical context that made them seem important.

Another more 'tangential' way of thinking about the influence of Ruskin on Russia can be gleaned from a study of the poetic and critical work of Robert Cording, whose ideas on art have developed in dialogue with thinkers ranging from Czeslaw Milosz and Iris Murdoch to Rowan Williams and Wendel Berry. Cording's interest in Ruskin – visible both in his critical work, such as *Finding the World's Fullness*, and his poetry collection *Walking with Ruskin* – centres on the notion of 'seeing'.[19] In his hands, it serves as a kind of jumping off point for an epistemology which assumes that while language does not provide unmediated access to the world, it is more than a closed labyrinth of signs that have meaning only through their relationship with one another. Cording's ideas are subtle but rest on the conviction – to echo George Steiner – that there is a 'real presence' that can be known not simply through quasi-scientific scrutiny but also through metaphor and image.[20]

Such ideas help explain why Ruskin appealed so strongly to the Russian symbolists *and* why different writers and artists sometimes understood him in different ways. Although it is folly to think of Russian symbolism as a unified movement, its most prominent representatives were united in believing that art and literature could provide new ways of seeing (even if one sets aside the vexed question of whether there was any agreement about whether there were unproblematic truths waiting to be seen). Cording firmly rejects the idea that close observation is inconsistent with possessing a sense of the mystery and fullness of the world. Seeing properly – which so preoccupied Ruskin – instead opens the world to being understood in ways that are not reducible to a set of objects with no resonance or significance beyond themselves: in Cording's words, 'I believe that words point to and depend on a

[19] Robert Cording, *Finding the World's Fullness: On Poetry, Metaphor and Mystery* (Eugene, PR: Slant); Robert Cording, *Walking with Ruskin: Poems* (Fort Lee, NJ: Cavan Kerry Press, 2010).

[20] George Steiner, *Real Presences: Is there Anything in What we Say?* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999).

reality apart from the acts of verbal reference'.[21] And this reality is itself many-sided. There is of course a religious worldview lurking here. It is perhaps no accident that the Russian symbolists were divided between those who thought of themselves as searching for a new form of religious consciousness and others who were more sceptical. Yet one of the hallmarks of the movement was the sense that cultivating new ways of seeing could provide new forms of knowledge and understanding. And that – again – is why Ruskin appealed to so many of them. Close attention could reconcile paying homage to the material world while seeing it as something more than itself.

Cording, as a practising poet, has a licence to go beyond the world of footnotes when writing about these things. His ideas can nevertheless illuminate how intellectual and cultural developments should not be seen as the product of networks and influences, or even as things to be analysed through close contextual analysis, but more generally as ways of thinking about how to make sense of the world. In other words, historians as well as philosophers and artists should be open to raising their noses from the grindstone and be ready not only to explain but to explore as well. But that is perhaps too big a question to dwell on here. It is sufficient to conclude the first part of this paper by noting that understanding the appeal of Ruskin's ideas in pre-revolutionary Russia demands a multifaceted approach. It requires a study of the way in which his ideas were introduced to a large section of the cultural elite. It demands a study of why his ideas 'struck a chord'. And it also needs an understanding of how Ruskin's intellectual ambition and polymathic range struck a chord with Russians preoccupied by what Aleksandr Herzen once called 'the cursed questions': the array of social and metaphysical questions about the meaning of human life.

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The second part of this paper examines how Russia was sometimes viewed in Britain during the years before 1917 through a kind of 'Ruskinian' prism. This is not to say that Ruskin's ideas served as a formal framework for understanding the country. It is rather to acknowledge

[21] Cording, *Finding the World's Fullness*, p. 5.

that by the end of the nineteenth century the terms Ruskin and Ruskinian had become bowdlerised in ways that John Ruskin himself would doubtless have deplored, yet which occupied a significant place in the cultural discourse of the time. The adjective 'Ruskinian' had at least in part broken free of its roots and was shaped by more or less coherent associations with the pre-Raphaelites, with William Morris and more generally with a critique of industrial society that saw it as dehumanising whole generations of men and women.

A brief search for the term 'Ruskinian' in digitised collections of British newspapers for the period 1890–1905 comes up with several hundred examples, while a look at the context and collocations shows how the word was used in a variety of different ways. Sometimes the term 'Ruskinian' was deployed to refer directly to Ruskin's ideas. The *Westminster Gazette* used it in 1898, for example, when discussing J. A. Hobson's positive critique of Ruskin's economics.[22] On other occasions it was used to describe those who were in some sense definitely connected with Ruskin's ideas and legacies (for example, members of Ruskin Hall, Oxford).[23] Yet the term was often employed in ways that did not refer to the work of Ruskin so much as a diffuse set of ideas and attitudes with which he had become associated. The *Pall Mall Gazette*, for example, used the term 'Ruskinian' in 1890 to describe retrospectively the anxiety about the social consequences of industrialisation that characterised the work of the late Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli. Many references to 'Ruskinian' thinking or ideals were by the time of Ruskin's death shorthand for a philosophy that emphasised the moral value of craftsmanship and a concomitant dislike of industry and, more generally, the appurtenances of a modernity that seemed to break communities and alienate individuals from the world around them. In other words, Ruskin's influence rested not simply on his own writings, but more generally on the way his ideas had been absorbed and re-fashioned over half a century, sometimes in ways he would not have approved.

[22] *Westminster Gazette*, 13 December 1898. On this subject, see John Tyree Fain, 'Ruskin and Hobson', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 67.4 (1952), 297–307.
[23] *Hull Daily Mail*, 3 June 1902.

Such a simplistic genealogy inevitably does violence to Ruskin's complex and subtle thought, homogenizing his ideas and undermining their dynamism and fluidity. The points made in the previous paragraph can nevertheless explain, or perhaps justify, what might at first glance seem rather loose talk about the development of a Ruskinian construction of Russia in the twenty years or so before 1917. It is a development that can be explored through the life and writings of Stephen Graham, the journalist and writer, who played a key role in shaping a distinct narrative of Russia in the years before 1917, helping to shape a view of the country as a place that was not simply 'different', but also one that had escaped the ravages of modernity and could serve as a living symbol of a different dimension of human existence and potential.

Graham's father was Peter Anderson Graham, who served as editor of *Country Life* from 1900 to 1925, and who was a long-time admirer of Ruskin.[24] So too was his wife Jane (Stephen's mother). Anderson Graham played a significant role in establishing *Country Life's* status as a purveyor of 'arts and crafts' as an ideal commodified to meet the demands of a readership whose aspirations focused on the kind of country houses designed by Edward Lutyens. Anderson's direct influence on his son remains uncertain, for the family was thoroughly dysfunctional, and the father left home when Stephen was just sixteen. We do know that Stephen inherited his father's love for Ruskin (along with Carlyle and Browning). He used to walk the lanes near his home in Chingford – then a place where the London suburbs met rural Essex – reading Ruskin aloud to himself or to a succession of girlfriends. When at fifteen he went to work at Somerset House in London, as a clerk, he found his duties tedious and the work uninspiring and mechanical. Did he develop a consciously Ruskinian critique of his situation? Probably not. But Ruskin seems to have been one of the writers who gave the young Stephen Graham both the impetus and the language to look critically at the mundane and (in all senses of the word) materialistic world of Edwardian England.

[24] On the history of *Country Life*, see Roy Strong, *Country Life, 1897–1997: The English Arcadia* (London: Country Life Books, 1996).

Graham's very first book *Ygdrasil*, which was never published, was written around 1908 when he was still very young and living in London.[25] His decision to choose such a title provides an insight into his intellectual preoccupations, given the presence of the sacred tree of Norse mythology in much of Carlyle's work,[26] and its use as the title of the journal of the Ruskin Reading Guild (first published in 1890). Graham's *Ygdrasil* presented a youthful and rather laboured philosophy based on an intuition of the organic unity of the material world, which served as an expression of 'God's purpose', and could only be fully known through metaphor and the development of a personal spiritual language capable of discerning insights into the highest truths. It rejected all formal creeds and doctrines in favour of what we would now probably call an embodied form of knowing. Graham's language is obscure. It owes much to Carlyle's interpretation of German Romanticism but contains distinct Ruskinian elements too. He was himself later to use the term 'Idealism' to express his sense that the material world could only be understood in all its richness by seeing it as an expression of something beyond itself.

Graham's interest in Russia began with a chance purchase of a second-hand copy of a Vitzetelly translation of *Crime and Punishment*. It started a veritable Russian obsession in the young man – not unusual in the early twentieth century at the height of the Russia craze – but one that became for Stephen quite literally life-changing. A chance phrase he heard in a sermon – that 'No one has achieved much in life who has not at some time or other staked everything upon an act of faith' – led him to throw up his job and move to Russia where he planned to earn his living through writing and journalism.[27] When his Department Head at Somerset House warned him about giving up the 'substance for the shadow', Graham firmly replied that he planned to chase the shadow. And the shadow was not just the prospects of earning a living in ways that were more creative and fulfilling than carrying out the

[25] The manuscript can be found at the Harry Ransom Center, Stephen Graham Papers: Works file, Container 3.1. Graham for some reason used this spelling rather than the more familiar Yggdrasil.

[26] Jude V. Nixon, 'Thomas Carlyle's Igdrasil', *Carlyle Studies Annual*, 25 (2009), 49–58.

[27] Stephen Graham, *Part of the Wonderful Scene* (London: Collins, 1964), p. 17.

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mundane duties of a junior clerk. Nor was it simply the prospect of seeing more of the world than could be glimpsed on the train from Chingford to Liverpool Street. Graham was instead inspired by his belief that Russian society retained a moral depth that had vanished in Edwardian Britain, where life was governed by an unthinking materialism and moral banality.

Graham wrote a slew of books before 1914 about Russia and the Russians. The country became for him a kind of idyll, spared the worst of the menaces of industrialisation and urbanisation, and a place where a sense of the miraculous informed daily life. He was wise enough to know that his utopia was being threatened by rapid economic development, at least in the towns and cities, but he was confident that the Russian peasantry remained rooted in customs and routines that allowed them to find an intuitive sense of meaning in their lives. In the Preface to his second book, *Undiscovered Russia*, he told his readers that:

> The Russians are an agricultural nation [who …] live as Ruskin wished the English to live, some of them, as he tried to persuade the English to live by his "Fors Clavigera." They are obediently religious, seriously respectful to their elders, true to the soil they plough, content with the old implements of culture, not using machinery or machine-made things, but able themselves to fashion out of the pine all that they need.[28]

This is not of course to imply that Graham devoted his pre-revolutionary writings to the deliberate representation of Russia as a place where Ruskin's values were reflected in everyday life. In one of his books, he even seemed concerned that Ruskin's ideas might encourage an instrumental attitude towards work that could only have negative consequences.[29] Yet Graham for the most part believed that Russia was a country where 'Ruskinian' values understood in their broadest sense continued to shape day-to-day existence.

This insight recurs time and again in his work. When Graham followed the fortunes of a group of Russian emigrants to the United States, travelling with them to New York in 1913, he wrote sadly how they quickly became immersed in a society where:

[28] Stephen Graham, *Undiscovered Russia* (London: John Lane, 1912), p. ix.

[29] Stephen Graham, *The Way of Martha and the Way of Mary* (London: Macmillan, 1915), p. 182

> the influence of a great machinery gets to the heart of a people […] Each man is drilled to act like a machine, and the drilling enters into the fibre of his being to such an extent that when work is over his muscles move habitually in certain directions, and the rhythm of his day's labour controls his language and thoughts.[30]

Nor was it simply the impact of industrial technology that he feared. It was also the kind of bourgeois society with which it was associated. In an article published in the *Times*, in February 1914, he attacked Kiev's philistine 'new commercial middle class', who flocked to the theatre through city streets crowded with Christmas traffic, while a few hundred metres away there was 'another Kieff, a quiet radiant city, silent but for the footfalls of monks or pilgrims on the snow'.[31] Graham in short believed that Russia was a place where intimations of the divine were present in the material fabric of the world (the transcendent in the immanent, to use a more theological vocabulary). Russia remained for him a country that was almost a living piece of art – a montage of symbols – that could be studied to see things that lay beyond its immediate presence.

Graham was himself intensely interested in Russian symbolism, even if he did not always understand its subtleties, perhaps forgivable given the movement's complexity and contradictions. He wrote in one of his early books that 'all life is symbolism' (though quite what he meant is not clear).[32] Graham met Mikhail Nesterov while he lived in Russia and began writing a biography of the Russian painter.[33] He also translated Viacheslav Ivanov's 'Theatre of the Future' for the *English Review* and, some years later, wrote an article on the ideas of the influential philosopher Vladimir Solov'ev for a theosophical journal.[34] Although Graham

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[30] Stephen Graham, *With Poor Immigrants to America* (London: Macmillan, 1915), p. 116.

[31] *The Times*, 5 February 1914.

[32] Graham, *Undiscovered Russia*, p. 289.

[33] For notes relating to the proposed biography, see Florida State University (Strozier Library Special Collections), Stephen Graham Papers, Box 576, 19 ('Biographical Notes of M.V. Nesterov').

[34] Viacheslaf Ivanof, 'The Theatre of the Future', *English Review*, March 1912, 634–50; Stephen Graham, 'Vladimir Solovyof', *Quest*, 9 (1917–18), 219–39; Vladimir Solovyof, *The Justification of the Good* (London, 1918). Graham also

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may not have understood the discussions that took place in such settings as the Moscow Religious-Philosophical Society, what clearly seized him was the sense that art and philosophy could provide insights into truths that lay beyond themselves. To return for a moment to the language of Robert Cording, Graham believed that he found in Russia a place where it was possible to encounter the fullness of the world.

Much of Graham's writing about Russia was characterised by what might perhaps be called two distinct modes of analysis. Graham was at one level a skilled travel writer, adept at providing sharp sketches of all he saw, who used his own striking photographs of people and places to illustrate his books. And yet at another level, he presented Holy Russia to his readers as a space outside time, almost like a painting to be read symbolically, a response to his yearning to find a place immune from the ravages of industrial modernity. He asked his readers to see Russia in two ways: as a place to be looked at like any other and as somewhere that resonated with possibilities which meant it was a place like no other.

This point can be illuminated by a brief discussion about the photographs that Graham took with one of the early box brownie cameras that appeared in the books he wrote about his travels. There seems at first glance to be a kind of disconnection in Graham's books between 'realistic' photographs of such objects as Russian Orthodox churches and a written text which argued that such subjects could only be understood in their plenitude as something more than simple one-dimensional representations of the physical reality.[35] In other words, Graham seems at first glance to have fallen into the trap of not understanding that the ineffable cannot easily be captured by the camera given the patina of realism exuded by its products. Yet the reality may have been more complex. Graham wrote nothing about his photography and seems to have known little about what Ruskin wrote on the subject.[36] But Graham took his photographs seriously, preserving negatives for more

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provided an introduction to the first English translation of Solov'ev's *Justification of the Good* that was published by Constable in 1918.

[35] For a more detailed discussion of this subject, see Michael Hughes, 'Every Picture Tells Some Stories: Photographic Illustrations in British Travel Accounts of Russia on the Eve of World War One', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 92, 4 (2014), 674–703.

[36] For a useful discussion of Ruskin's views on photography, see Michael Harvey, 'Ruskin and Photography', *Oxford Art Journal*, 7, 2 (1984), 25–33.

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than half a century in his Soho home, until his death as an old man of ninety in 1975. He seems to have hoped the reader would use the written text of his books to look beyond the representational aspect of the photographs and see in them expressions of a richer and more complete view of what he called 'Holy Russia'. Far from being simple illustrations, designed to sell books, they were an integral part of what we might today call 'the narrative'.

Graham's photographs should then be seen in the light of his life-long Idealism and his sense that Russia was at least potentially a place of fullness both for what it was and what it represented. The photographs were not simply a form of anthropological 'seeing'. Or, more precisely, they were meant to be viewed through something more than an anthropological lens. Graham was not so much a closet Platonist searching for the form beyond the shadow. He instead believed that by paying close attention to the world it was possible to see things in their true form, as things of value that simultaneously pointed beyond themselves (a concept borrowed from Rowan Williams's work on the Hodegetria Icon).[37] The form and the shadow were two aspects of a single phenomenon.

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John Ruskin never visited Russia. Nor did he ever express any lasting interest in the country. Yet his ideas helped to shape cultural developments in Russia both because they prompted new ways of thinking – whether in art or poetry or architecture – and because they illuminated some of the motifs that Russian artists and writers had been struggling to articulate throughout the previous decades. The preoccupations of the Russian intelligentsia famously ranged over questions stretching from economics and science to literature and art. Ruskin's polymathic outlook found a ready reception in a cultural milieu that was instinctively impatient with disciplinary boundaries and narrow expertise. His ideas were not simply a 'source' or 'influence'. They also inspired many Russian artists and writers to see the world in new ways.

[37] Rowan Williams, *Ponder These Things: Praying with Icons of the Virgin* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2002), 1–18.

The same was of course true in Britain, where Ruskin's ideas became a natural part of the language that many individuals used to describe the world around them, often diffused through a somewhat nebulous 'Arts and Crafts' ethos that looked sceptically at the materialism of industrial society. It is perhaps a paradox that while Ruskin's ideas appealed to Russian artists and writers responding to the social tensions and cultural deracination created by the rapid modernisation of their country, many in Britain used a 'Ruskinian' language to construct an image of Russia as a place spared the ravages of industrialisation and social division. Stephen Graham, as we have seen, knew Ruskin well. And, like many of his generation, he had imbibed a *fin de siècle* instinct that the world of Edwardian Britain was one of ennui and alienation rather than wonder and fulfilment. The Russia he presented to his readers was not 'Ruskin's Russia', but it was a picture of Russia that would never have formed in his mind if he had not known Ruskin's work. The plenitude of Ruskin's ideas meant that they could be interpreted in different ways by different people to reflect their own concerns and interests. Understanding Ruskin's influence across the globe, both in his own times and today, does not just require a study of Ruskin's writings. It also demands a recognition of how his ideas have often broken free from the constrains of authorial intent and become part of the wider intellectual and cultural fabric.

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