

## RUSSIAN INK IN A BRITISH PEN: ANGLO-RUSSIAN ECHOES OF IVAN TURGENEV'S AESTHETICS IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S «THE YEARS»

In a letter to Edward Garnett dated May 1917, Joseph Conrad writes:

The truth of the matter is that it is you who have opened my eyes to the value and the quality of Turgenev. As a boy, I remember reading *Smoke* in a Polish Translation [...] and the *Gentlefolks* in French. I liked those things purely by instinct [...] with which the consciousness of literary perfection had absolutely nothing to do. For the rest Turgenev for me is Constance Garnett and Constance Garnett is Turgenev. She had done that marvellous thing of placing the man's work inside English literature and it is there that I see it – or rather that I *feel* it.<sup>1</sup>

Conrad's letter is of particular relevance when it comes to exploring the intellectual inheritance the Garnetts left to modernist writers. Constance's translations and Edward Garnett's critical readings of Turgenev offered the English reading public new tools to appreciate the Russian master's prose, and they paved the way to modernist re-readings and re-writings of Turgenev's texts. The Garnetts' joint enterprise took place in the wake of the Russian émigrés' desire to popularise all things Russian abroad, thus encouraging a cross-cultural fertilization. Sergey Mikhailovich Kravchinsky, best known as Stepniak, a Russian political émigré who arrived in England in 1883, is highly representative in this context, as his collaboration with Constance Garnett enabled her to give a trustworthy English voice to Turgenev. This demonstrates the ways in which Russian émigrés promoted the process of border blurring, in geographical and literary terms, which stimulated English interest for Russian literature and culture, and gave birth to Anglo-Russian literary exchanges and collaborations that were to have a remarkable impact on the aesthetics of modernism.

My intention here is to explore the connection between the Garnett family and Stepniak, to call attention to certain aspects of their literary collaboration and to shed light on the offshoots this Anglo-Russian exchange had in modernist fiction, particularly in Virginia Woolf's prose. Although Virginia Woolf's indebtedness to Russian literature has been extensively investigated in recent years, there seem to be resonances between the Garnetts' work and Woolf's critical and fictional writings that still need to be explored, particularly in relation to the reception and

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1 Garnett 1928, pp. 248-249.

promotion of Turgenev.<sup>2</sup> This essay argues that Virginia Woolf's appreciation and reception of the Russian writer was influenced by the Garnett's literary collaboration with Stepniak, and shows that this influence shaped Woolf's writings, giving a work such as *The Years* an essentially Anglo-Russian disposition.

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## 1 Anglo-Russian literary networks in London

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When Russian political émigrés arrived in Britain in the 1880s, their first aim was to awaken the British public opinion to the burning political, social and humanitarian issues that were troubling Tsarist Russia. In so doing, they established a direct dialogue with their host country. Some members of the British intelligentsia proved receptive to the émigrés' claim for attention and directly engaged in the promotion of the Russian cause in England. These cross-cultural dynamic exchanges lead to the creation of the "Society of Friends for the Russian Freedom," founded by Sergey Mikhailovich Kravchinsky (Stepniak) and Felix Vadimovich Volkhovskiy in alliance with two British sympathisers – Robert Spence Watson and Thomas Burt – in April 1890.<sup>3</sup> This organization stands out as a telling instance of political and ideological collaboration. Owing to their sympathies with the Russian cause, the Garnett family was directly involved in the "underground" and "unofficial" activities of the revolutionary émigrés: Stepniak asked Olive Garnett to contribute to «Free Russia», the journal of the "Society of Friends for the Russian Freedom". This proposal she kindly declined, though she helped him with his editing and offered to sell copies of the journal in Hyde Park.<sup>4</sup> As for Constance Garnett, Stepniak invited her to go to Russia with the pretext of improving her Russian linguistic skills, whilst asking her to smuggle prohibited literature and personal letters to Russia.<sup>5</sup> The Garnetts were part and parcel of this Anglo-Russian group, yet with a twist and somehow a special status, as they did not simply sympathise with the Russian émigrés and support their cause but also established a dense web of literary exchanges with them.

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2 See for example: Kaye 1999, pp. 66-95; Reinhold 2003, pp. 1-27; Dalgarno 2004, pp. 129-150; Protopopova 2006; Rubenstein 2009; Protopopova 2010; Dalgarno 2012, pp. 69-96; Protopopova 2013, pp. 386-397.

3 For more information about the "Society of Friends for the Russian Freedom", see Hollingsworth 1970, pp. 45-64; Grant 1970, pp. 3-24; Saunders 1980, pp. 80-93. See also Comtet 1971, pp. 422-438; Slatter 1983, pp. 33-49.

4 For a detailed analysis of Olive's collaboration with Stepniak and how it affected the literary imagination of the time see Moser 1984, pp. 3-44.

5 See Garnett 1991, p. 116.

Of course, this Anglo-Russian group focused great attention on the political and social questions in Russia, however the literary tendencies of its Russian members, particularly Stepniak's, should not pass unnoticed, as they were intimately connected with the professional career of Constance and Olive Garnett. Though Volkhovsky had already established an intellectual and professional collaboration with the Garnett family, (he was tutoring both Constance and Olive in Russian, and in turn they proofread his English papers)<sup>6</sup> Stepniak weaved the most meaningful connections with it. He acted, in fact, as Olive Garnett's literary advisor and mentor: they used to go through passages of her writing together, on which occasions Stepniak suggested emendations and re-writing when necessary,<sup>7</sup> and discussed literature during their long walks together, particularly about «writing, [their] feelings in writing».<sup>8</sup> Moreover, he also advised her to study Turgenev in order to learn how to write fiction, a fact that confirms Stepniak's life-long intellectual admiration for the Russian writer, as well as the shared impression that Turgenev could be truly considered as a master of modern letters and a model for young writers. The Russian émigré established an even more fruitful collaboration with Constance Garnett, with the intention of popularizing Russian literature in England, particularly the works of Turgenev. The ambitious and monumental plan to translate Turgenev's fiction into English was Stepniak's, as Constance writes in her 1899 translation of *The Jew and other Stories* (1846-1868), which she dedicated «to the memory of Stepniak whose love of Turgenev suggested this translation».<sup>9</sup> Constance warmly welcomed this task, which took her more than five years to accomplish (from 1894 to 1899). This enterprise can be defined as a collaborative one, not so much because of Stepniak's suggestion, but because he took an active part in the process of translation, as well as in the critical assessment of Turgenev's works. In fact, he thoroughly proofread Constance's drafts and compared the original texts with her translations to verify the accuracy of her work. Moreover, he wrote the critical-historical introductions to the first two of Turgenev's novel that Constance translated, to be precise her 1894 translations of *Rudin* (1856), and of *A House of Gentlefolk* (1859), while Edward Garnett introduced the other volumes. As a result, Stepniak brought to England, along with his revolutionary ideas, his passionate interest in Turgenev's prose, as well as his

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6 See Garnett 1989, pp. 52, 58, 146.

7 See Ivi, pp. 190, 201.

8 Ivi, p. 214.

9 Turgenev 1899.

distinctive Russian approach to and point of view on the works of his compatriot. However, Stepniak deserves to be praised not so much because he introduced Turgenev's fiction to the English reading public. William Ralston, for example, published a translation of *Lisa (A Nest of Gentlefolk)*<sup>10</sup> as early as 1867, Henry James wrote critical essays on Turgenev in the 1870s, and George Moore published an article on Turgenev in 1888, just to mention a few contributions to English criticism.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, Stepniak's importance depends on the fact that he fostered the publication of the first edition of the complete works of Turgenev. Not only was it the first systematic attempt to translate Turgenev in the west (Europe and America), but it also was the first collected edition in English directly translated from the original Russian texts.<sup>12</sup> In fact, before Constance's translations, the English reading public referred to German or French versions of Turgenev's works, since they started to be translated in those languages as early as the 1860s, and the first English translations were, therefore, mediated by either French or German ones.<sup>13</sup> For these reasons, Stepniak's collaboration with the Garnett family proved to be a dynamic and fertile enterprise, as it favoured the creation of an Anglo-Russian group that, through translations and critical writings, dictated Turgenev's fame in England. This tradition of Anglo-Russian collaborations and dialogue with the Russian realists was part of Virginia Woolf's cultural biography, and she cherished it in both her critical and fictional writings.

Woolf's connection to the Garnetts began in 1913, when Edward, who was working as a publisher's reader and editor for Duckworth, Woolf's half-brother, wrote an enthusiastic report of Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915), influencing the book to be accepted for publication.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, Leonard Woolf was aware of Edward's importance as a publisher's reader, and he even accepted his advice to publish Herbert Ernest Bates's *The Flame* in «The Nation» in the 1920s. Although the actual connections between Woolf and Edward and Constance Garnett are not many, or

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10 Constance Garnett's version of the title, that is «A House of Gentlefolk», slightly deviates from the original Russian. The more recent version, «A Nest of Gentlefolk» is closer to Turgenev's original title.

11 See Bryner 1958, pp. 5-19.

12 Though William Ralston himself translated Turgenev's *Lisa* directly from the Russian original text, his attempts was an isolated one, and not part of a broader project.

13 Ernest Carrière's French version of Turgenev's *Sketches* was the basis for the first translation of Turgenev's works in England by James MeikleJohn in 1855. See Freeborn 2000.

14 See Lee 1996, p. 327. See also Jefferson 1982.

remain undocumented,<sup>15</sup> there are critical and literary affinities, which point in the direction of a subterranean intellectual dialogue and invite an exploration of the interwoven modes through which they received and (re)interpreted Turgenev's fiction. The Garnetts' Russian connections and their collaboration with émigrés from the east to disseminate Turgenev in Britain were part of the «intellectual climate in which [Virginia Woolf] breathed».<sup>16</sup> It may come, therefore, as no surprise that Woolf, in her formative years, closely followed the Anglo-Russian path opened up by Edward and Constance Garnett. Moreover, Woolf started to learn Russian and to translate Russian fiction with Samuel Solomonovich Koteliansky, a Ukrainian émigré, re-enacting, as it were, Constance and Stepniak's collaborative enterprise.<sup>17</sup> Contrary to Stepniak and the Garnett's extensive collaboration, Woolf published in alliance with Koteliansky three translations only, that is Dostoevsky's hitherto unpublished chapter of *The Possessed*, namely *Stavrogin's Confession and The Life of a Great Sinner*, A.B. Goldenveizer's *Talks with Tolstoy*, and Tolstoy's *Love Letters*.<sup>18</sup> In addition to this, Woolf engaged in critical writing about Russian literature with a specific focus on the novels of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov and Turgenev, and she reviewed Koteliansky's translations of these authors. Not to mention the fact that she also reviewed Meriel Buchanan's book on Russia, *Petrograd: The City of Trouble 1914-1918* (1918) and Norman Douglas's *Strong Wind* (1917), a fact that confirms Woolf's familiarity with the Russian theme. Most interestingly, she contributed a review of Constance Garnett's 1922 translation of Turgenev's *Two Friends and Other Stories* for the «Times Literary Supplement»,<sup>19</sup> thus acting as Edward Garnett's female counterpart, for she also tried to mediate between Turgenev's aesthetics, Constance's translations and the English reading public.

15 A further connection between the Garnett family and Virginia Woolf's one is of mere biographical nature: notoriously, David Garnett, Constance and Edward's son, Duncan Grant and Virginia Woolf's sister, Vanessa Bell, lived together in Charleston for a period of time. David eventually married Vanessa and Duncan's daughter, Angelica in 1942. See Garnett 1991, pp. 294-295. For Woolf's connections with the socialist groups Constance Garnett sympathised with, and the aesthetic responses they triggered in Woolf's literary works, see Livesey 2007, pp. 126-144.

16 Phelps 1956, p. 137.

17 For more details about this collaboration, see Davison-Pégon 2011, pp. 334-347; Davison 2012, pp. 229-242; Beasley 2013, pp. 1-29; Davison 2014.

18 Dostoevsky 1922; Goldenveizer 1923; Biryukov 1923. For an informed study of the Woofs, their Russian connections and publications see Marcus 2003.

19 See Rubenstein 2009, pp. 133-134.

Of no lesser importance is the fact that, although Woolf studied Russian, she lacked more than a cursory command of the language and, therefore, resorted to reading Russian literature in English. It comes, therefore, as no surprise to acknowledge that Woolf read Constance's translations of the Russians. When considering Turgenev's writings, she observed that «we feel again and again that Turgenev evades his translator. It is not Mrs Garnett's fault. The English language is not the Russian».<sup>20</sup> Again, in a letter of 1933 to Helen McAfee, when talking about her essay on Turgenev, Woolf wrote that she spelled the Russian names, «as Mrs Garnett spelt them».<sup>21</sup> As Woolf came to Turgenev through the translations of Constance Garnett, it is highly plausible that she also read Stepaniak's and Edward's critical introductions, as there are some affinities between her critical writings (1917-1933) and those promoted by the Garnetts' Anglo-Russian literary workshop.

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## 2 The Turgenev effect and Virginia Woolf

Woolf expresses her appreciation of Turgenev's aesthetics in her essay entitled *The Novels of Turgenev* first published in 1933. In her essay, Woolf highlights Turgenev's subtle power of observation:

The novelist must observe everything exactly, in himself and others. [...] We must observe perpetually, impersonally, impartially. [...] But few combine the fact and the vision; and the rare quality that we find in Turgenev is the result of this double process. [...] With infallible eye he observes everything accurately. Solomin picks up a pair of gloves; they were 'white chamois-leather gloves, recently washed, every finger of which had stretched at the tip and looked like a finger-biscuit.' [Virgin Soil] But he stops when he has shown us the glove exactly; the interpreter is at his elbow to insist that even a glove must be relevant to the character, or to the idea. But the idea alone is not enough; the interpreter is never allowed to mount unchecked into the realms of imagination; again the observer pulls him back and reminds him of the other truth, the truth of fact.<sup>22</sup>

In Woolf's opinion, Turgenev's greatest achievement is his ability to combine in his writings «fact and vision», that is observation and understanding, events and their interpretations. Observation and interpretation of both objects and events cooperate in order to unveil the inner depth of human consciousness: therefore, by oscillating from one perspective to the other, the writer should attempt to find a balance between them in order to hint at a possible understanding of reality. In

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20 Woolf 1967a, p. 316.

21 Virginia Woolf to Helen McAfee [November 1933], Nicolson 1979, p. 228.

22 Woolf 1967b, p. 10.

so doing, Turgenev does not provide pictures of the bodies, but of sketches of the minds of his characters, thus casting a light on psychological and emotional truths. Interestingly, Woolf's interpretation of Turgenev's prose echoes Edward Garnett's introduction to Constance's 1920 translation of Turgenev's *A Lear of the Steppes* (1870).

Not only did [Turgenev] observe life minutely and comprehensively, but he reproduces it as a constantly growing phenomenon, growing naturally, not accidentally or arbitrarily. [...] He is a great realist, and his realism carries along with it the natural breath of poetry [...]. His thoughts and his emotions are blended in one; he interprets life, but always preserves the atmosphere, the glamour, the mystery of the living thing in his interpretation.<sup>23</sup>

Though he uses the term "realist", Garnett is not to be considered alongside those late Victorian critics that interpret Russian realism in terms of photographic and life-like representations, positions, such as that of Matthew Arnold, which Woolf strongly opposes, for example in *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown* (1924).<sup>24</sup> Conversely, Edward Garnett formulates a new interpretation of Turgenev's realism by drawing the reader's attention to the inner world of the characters,<sup>25</sup> a critical stance that Stepniak reiterates. Though Stepniak's criticism of Turgenev bears traces of a sort of Victorian residue, particularly of naturalistic stances, as he refers to Turgenev's «pursuit of photographic faithfulness to life»,<sup>26</sup> he significantly moves a step forward in the appreciation of the Russian master's prose, as he draws greater attention to aesthetic questions. In fact, in his introduction to Constance's translations of *Rudin*, Stepniak concludes that Turgenev «possessed the keys to all human emotions, all human feelings, the highest and the lowest, the noble as well as the base. From the height of his superiority he saw all, understood all: nature and men had no secrets hidden from his calm penetrating eyes».<sup>27</sup> Celebrating Turgenev's power of observation and his ability to understand and faithfully interpret of the meaning of life, Stepniak and Edward Garnett charge the notion of realism with a new meaning.<sup>28</sup> Checkmating the Victorian idea of "photographic realism",

23 Garnett 1920, pp. xi, xvi-xv.

24 For Woolf's analysis of the notion of "realism" see Woolf 1924.

25 For an interesting comparison between Edward Garnett's criticism and that of other Edwardian critics, particularly Murray, see Kirkham 1978, pp. 111-119.

26 Stepniak 1920, p. xxvii.

27 Ivi, p. vii-viii.

28 Interestingly, Garnett's interpretation of realism in terms of the connection between insight into human life and its relation to the outside world is to be found in his essays on Chekhov and other writers and philosophers her praised. This fact stands witness

and its focus on the moral dimension, they promote a new “poetic realism” to use Garnett’s words, a way of seeing life «in perspective»<sup>29</sup> that links factual observation and emotional insight,<sup>30</sup> a reading that stimulates Woolf’s receptive mind. In other words, Woolf’s critical assessment of Turgenev is carried out in the light of Garnett and Stepniak’s intellectual tradition. Therefore, when she declares her intention to «give the whole of the present society – nothing less: facts, as well as visions, and to combine them both»,<sup>31</sup> in her novel *The Years* (1937), Woolf does not only establish a connection with the Russian writer’s aesthetics, but she also engages in an intellectual dialogue with the critical scheme that the Garnetts’ Anglo-Russian coterie initiated.

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### 3 Patterns

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In order to understand what Edward Garnett, Stepniak and Woolf interpret as Turgenev’s power to combine fact and vision in his fictional writings, it is worth taking into consideration a brief extract from *The Forest and the Steppes*, the ending to *A Sportsman’s Sketches* (1852),<sup>32</sup> where Turgenev describes the hunter’s life.

The still sky is a peacefully untroubled white through the bare brown branches; in parts, on the limes, hang the last golden leaves. The damp earth is elastic under your feet; the high dry blades of grass do not stir; long threads lie shining on the blanched turf, white with dew. You breathe tranquilly; but there is a strange tremor in the soul. You walk along the forest’s edge, look after your dog, and meanwhile loved forms, loved faces dead and living, come to your mind; long, long slumbering impressions unexpectedly awoken; the fancy darts off and soars

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to what Edward truly valued in Edwardian and modern fiction. See Garnett 1922.

29 The notions of “poetic realism” and “life in perspective” are formulated in Garnett’s essay on Chekhov. See *ivi*, pp. 39-68.

30 Henry James seems to promote a similar idea in his article *The Art of Fiction*. Arguing that novel writing stems from experience, he concludes that «experience is never limited and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web, of the finest and silken threads, suspended in the chamber of consciousness and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative much more when it happens to be that of a man of genius – it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations» (James 1899, p. 388). James himself values the interconnection of observation of reality and its interpretation as the pivotal aspect of fiction, an idea that he probably derives from Turgenev himself: in fact, James’s fascination for and appreciation of Turgenev’s fiction is rather well known. This cast light on the pervasive influence Turgenev’s aesthetics has on English literary modernity.

31 Bell 1982, p. 151.

32 Here I use the 1895 translation by Constance Garnett, published by Heinemann.



like a bird; and all moves so clearly and stands out before your eyes. The heart at one time throbs and beats, plunging passionately forward; at another, it is drowned beyond recall in memories. Your whole life, as it were, unrolls lightly and rapidly before you: a man at such times possesses all his past, all his feelings and his powers – all his soul; and there is nothing around to hinder him – no sun, no wind, no sound.<sup>33</sup>

Turgenev's vivid description of the natural landscape is intriguing, for it is in this scene that the hunter is somehow reconnected to a metaphysical inner dimension. The view, in fact, stirs the hunter's mind, and awakens forgotten impressions: the character seems able to detect a hidden meaning of life, a unifying principle that could combine his past, present, and future experiences. It is precisely this connection of sight and imagination, factual reality and impressions of the mind, that Woolf wishes to re-articulate. Although Turgenev's novels of "fact and vision" are rooted in the conventions of mid-nineteenth-century narrative form, they, nonetheless, prove to be an inextinguishable source of inspiration for Woolf's modernist fiction. Woolf's extensive study of Turgenev's narrative, in fact, enables her to «shape her ideas about the relationship among idea, feeling, and form»<sup>34</sup> and to write her own novels of "fact and vision", yet another of her narrative experiments.

To aestheticize this connection of facts and visions in *The Years* Woolf resorts to the narrative motif of the pattern, a motif that, as Sim observes, runs throughout her work.<sup>35</sup> It is, therefore, worth exploring the distinctive nature of Woolf's use of the motif of the pattern, particularly in the wake of the entry in her diary quoted in the previous paragraph, for it enables Woolf to re-enact and re-write Turgenev's aesthetics. However, while Turgenev articulates a sort of complicity between nature and the individual in his novel, for it is the contemplation of natural scenes that triggers the hunter's imagination, Woolf draws her attention elsewhere. By exploring the imaginative potential domestic interiors and ordinary objects have, she attempts to delineate the possible existence of a universal pattern, a unifying principle in the multiplicity of human ordinary experience.<sup>36</sup> A first instance of Woolf's distinctive

33 Turgenev 1852 (English version 1895).

34 Rubenstein 2009, p. 131.

35 See Sim 2010. The nature of Woolf's pattern varies according to the philosophical or aesthetic models she adopts, as Sim's study highlights. However, the scholar fails to point out that when Woolf set out to write *The Years* she resorted to Turgenev's suggestive method of combination of fact and vision, and therefore that in this case her use of the motif of the pattern was largely informed by Turgenev's aesthetics.

36 I here use the term "ordinary" instead of "everyday", because, as Sim observes, Woolf uses the former with much more frequency. Furthermore, the two terms carry different cultural implications: while the everyday in cultural studies refers to the sphere

use of the motif in analysis occurs in the first part of the novel entitled *1880*, when Delia and her siblings are looking after their invalid mother and waiting for their father to return home.

They ate in silence. The sun, judging from the changing lights on the glass of the Dutch cabinet, seemed to be going in and out. Sometimes a bowl shone deep blue; they became livid. Lights rested furtively upon the furniture in the other room. Here was a pattern; here was a bald patch. Somewhere there's beauty, Delia thought, somewhere there's freedom, and somewhere, she thought, he is – wearing his white flower ... But a stick grated in the hall.<sup>37</sup>

By looking at the lights rested on the furniture, Delia's mind is suddenly stirred, and she perceives a pattern, a broader universal design of which her life is a small particle. The vision is suddenly stopped by her father entering the hall and its meaning, the general and universal pattern of human life, thus seems to elude understanding and interpretation. Interestingly, Maggie adds a unique approach to the motif in analysis.

Maggie rose. She gave one more look at the cheap lodging-house room. There was the pampas grass in its terracotta pot; the green vase with the red crinkled lip; and the mahogany chair. On the dinner table lay the dish of the fruit; the heavy sensual apples side by side with the spotted yellow bananas. It was an odd combination – the round and the tapering, the rosy and the yellow. She switched off the light. The room now was almost dark, save for the watery pattern fluctuating on the ceiling. In this phantom evanescent light, only the outlines showed: ghostly apples, ghostly bananas, and the spectre of the chair. Colour was slowly returning, as her eyes grew used to the darkness, and substance ... She stood there for a moment looking. Then a voice shouted: "Maggie! Maggie! I'm coming!" she cried, and followed them down the stairs.<sup>38</sup>

Unlike Delia, whose mind was trying to sketch, to delineate a universal «imaginary» pattern that could express an "over-arching" meaning of life, here Maggie is presented as looking at a concrete spot, a luminous pattern on the ceiling, which is likely created by the lights in the street outside. This slight distinction notwithstanding, the fluctuating pattern that Maggie contemplates plays a similar role to the imaginary pattern in the previous example, as it triggers the character's power of interpretation. This pattern is the sole spot of light in the room: thanks to it, Maggie is able to see both the most superficial aspects, such as shapes and colours, of objects, and also to

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of human activities, "ordinary" is a more over-arching term, for it also embraces things and does not evoke the ideas of monotony and repetition that are embedded in the everyday. Woolf's concern with the ordinary highlights her deep interest in both things and behaviours. See Sim 2010.

37 Woolf 2012, p. 13.

38 Ivi, pp. 240-241.

experience a brief insight into what Woolf defines as the «substance», the essence of things, though it is abruptly interrupted. The expression «watery pattern fluctuating on the ceiling» recurs three more times in the novel. The association of the pattern to the watery element further exemplify the connection with life, as the fluctuating spot may symbolically stand for the fluidity and eternal movement of life, whose meaning the motif of the pattern is trying to interpret.

The continuity and fluidity of life is pivotal in Eleanor's experience, as she tries to outline a pattern that could unify past and present in a single whole.

And suddenly it seemed to Eleanor that it had all happened before. So a girl had come in that night in the restaurant: had stood, vibrating in the door. She knew exactly what [Nicholas] was going to say. He had said it before, in the restaurant. He is going to say, She is like a ball on the top of a fishmonger's fountain. As she thought it, he said it. Does everything then come over again a little differently? She thought. If so, is there a pattern; a theme recurring like music; half remembered, half foreseen? ... a gigantic pattern, momentarily perceptible? The thought gave her extreme pleasure: that there was a pattern. But who makes it? Who thinks it? Her mind slipped. She could not finish her thought.<sup>39</sup>

Eleanor tries to undermine the inner meaning of her ordinary experience, as her sisters do, and she figures a sort of universal design, a «gigantic pattern» that could harmoniously reunite past and present, a sort of aesthetic order, which could open up paths to interpretations of life. In Woolf's words, Eleanor wants to «enclose the present moment; to make it stay; to fill it fuller and fuller, with the past, the present and the future, until it shone, whole, bright, deep, with understanding», words that distinctly evoke the hunter's experience in Turgenev's *A sportman's sketches*.<sup>40</sup> The expression «half remembered half foreseen» bridges past and future, and it seems to evoke a sort of repetitive and cyclical movement, which goes on regardless of human time. The idea of a universal pattern that, once briefly detected, could help to decipher the meaning of life, also evokes the idea of transiency in human experience: characters are, therefore, nothing but parts of this whole, timeless, mysterious design, that is of modern life for which it is difficult to find a meaning.

These observations on Woolf's narrative are by no means irrelevant to my purpose, for the connection of «fact and vision» Woolf detects in Turgenev's prose, in the wake of Edward Garnett's criticism, is influential in shaping her modernist aesthetics. In a word, Woolf engages in a proper intellectual dialogue with the master of Russian prose: while offering critical readings of his aesthetics, Woolf seems

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39 Ivi, p. 254.

40 Ivi, p. 239.

to negotiate her own aesthetic vision. Thanks to the narrative motif of the pattern, which significantly connects observation to quests for meanings and understanding, Woolf offers a re-writing of Turgenev's literary method in *The Years*, which casts light on the influence the master of Russian fiction had in the negotiation of English modernist aesthetics. In fact, what Woolf observes while reading Turgenev's novels, that is that «we notice, without seeming to notice, life going on, we feel more intensely for the men and women themselves because they are not the whole life but only part of the whole»,<sup>41</sup> can be truly referred to her own fiction. The characters' questioning the relation between themselves and external reality is significantly expressed by Eleanor's final words, by that telling «and now?»<sup>42</sup> repeated twice that is at the core of Woolf's quest for meaning.

As we have seen, there is much to be gleaned by taking collaborative enterprises out of the shadows into the arena of aesthetic debate, allowing a host of secondary questions, associations and reactions to take on new meanings. Constance Garnett's close collaboration with Stepniak led to the creation of an English edition of Turgenev's texts. Stepniak's introductions, along with Edward's ones, proved of pivotal importance in the reception of the Russian master's fiction. This collaborative effort had impact on Woolf's mind, and stimulated her aesthetic quest, in the wake of Turgenev's literary tradition. It would certainly appear likely that Woolf's literary collaboration with Koteliansky was in the line of the Garnetts and Stepniak's tradition, but its most significant impact on Woolf's writing should be looked for elsewhere. In fact, the Garnetts' Anglo-Russian collaborative enterprise shaped Woolf's reception of Turgenev, with whom she established a fertile dialogue, a sort of "intellectual" collaboration that was at the basis of Woolf's modernist aesthetics. In fact, she engaged in process of re-interpretation and re-writing of the master's tradition and her quest into Turgenev's method of combination of fact and vision culminated in her re-formulation of the narrative motif of the pattern in *The Years*. Woolf also operated in the wake of the Garnetts' Anglo-Russian collaborative tradition, which she inherited and cherished, ending up in her distinctive reception and rewriting of Turgenev's aesthetics. These observations demonstrate the subterranean presence of Russian ink in Woolf's British pen, making it possible to talk about the presence of Anglo-Russian voices in English modernism.

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41 Woolf 1967b, pp. 12-13.

42 Woolf 2012, p. 298.

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