

Wagner in Russia, Poland
and the Czech Lands
Musical, Literary and Cultural Perspectives

Edited by

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ASHGATE

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to witness the Expressionist outpourings of Schoenberg in 1909, he would almost certainly have considered fully justified his view that Wagner would ultimately bring about 'the end of opera itself'.

Chapter 3

How Russian was Wagner? Russian Campaigns to Defend or Destroy the German Composer during the Great War (1914–1918)

Rebecca Mitchell

In 1913, on the eve of the Great War, the Russian symbolist writer Sergey Durĭlin (1877–1954) defended Richard Wagner as 'the last German in whom the spirit of music was the spirit of Christianity'.¹ Over the previous decades, Durĭlin argued, the German people (*narod*) had failed to offer a sufficiently Christian basis for Wagner's creative work.² As a result, Wagner's true disciples were only to be found in the Russian *narod*, whose inherent Christianity was uniquely suited to combine with the German genius's true creative brilliance. Like many educated Russians

¹ 'В Вагнере в последнем немце дух музыки был духом христианским', Sergey Durĭlin, *Rikhard Vagner i Rossiya: o Vagnere i budushchikh putyakh iskusstva* [Wagner and Russia: about Wagner and the future paths of art] (Moscow, 1913), p. 13. Durĭlin was a Moscow literary scholar, editor and theater critic, active with the Russian publisher Posrednik (from 1904) and later the symbolist publishing house Musaget (from 1910). In 1914, he graduated from the Archeological Institute. In the post-revolutionary period, Durĭlin remained active both as a professor and as a theater scholar. See Sergey Durĭlin, *V svoym uglu* [In my own corner] (Moscow, 1991), pp. 11, 13; 'Durĭlin, Sergey Nikolayevich,' in G.B. Bernandt, I.M. Yampol'skiy and T.E. Kiseleva, *Kto pisal o muzike: bio-bibliograficheskiy slovar' muzikal'nikh kritikov i lits, pisavshikh o muzike v dorevolyuetsionnoy Rossii i SSSR* [Who wrote about music: bio-bibliographical dictionary of musical critics and people writing on music in pre-revolutionary Russia and the USSR] (2 vols, Moscow, 1971–89), vol. 1, p. 296; Anna Reznichenko, *S.N. Durĭlin i yego vremya* [S.N. Durĭlin and his time] (Moscow, 2010).

² The Russian term *narod* encompasses an entire constellation of meanings, including ethnicity, nationality and the common people. For this reason, I have chosen to maintain the original term as it appeared in contemporary discourse rather than select one particular translation. On the historical development of the concepts of *narod* and *narodnost'* and their relation to political discourse, see Nathaniel Knight, 'Ethnicity, Nationality, and the Masses: Narodnost' and Modernity in Imperial Russia', in David Hoffmann and Yanni Kotsonis (eds), *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 41–64.

who derided contemporary Germany for its 'individuality' and 'materialism', Durilin nevertheless found in Wagner a symbol of Russia's future path.

The outbreak of war in 1914 seriously disrupted this imagined connection between Wagner and Russia. The Russian press of the day repeatedly protested alleged 'German bestiality' [немецкое зверство] and 'German dominance' [немецким засильем] in economic, political, social and cultural spheres and fueled a widespread sense that the military conflict was the physical embodiment of two fundamentally different cultural paths (German and Russian).³ Within this context, the figure of Wagner emerged as a contested symbol, employed by both extremes in an increasingly nationalistic discourse. How could Wagner, a German, have anything to offer Russia? Did his music not embody 'Germanness' itself and all the ills associated with it—militarism, individualism and secularism? Occasionally, the same critic even found himself alternately praising and condemning both the composer's music and thought. So it was that, in the midst of the Great War, the German composer himself became a contested field, repeatedly assaulted and defended both by musicians and by the broader Russian *intelligentsia*.

By the early twentieth century, Wagnerism had seized the imaginations of many imperial Russian musicians, writers and audience members. The number of publications and performances devoted to Wagner increased substantially, and Wagnerian themes were common in literature and art of the time.⁴ The year prior to the outbreak of war (1913) marked the hundredth anniversary of the composer's birth and thirtieth anniversary of his death (1813–83), and was celebrated in the Russian empire with a wide array of concert performances as well as published reflections upon the German composer's significance for Russia in particular.⁵ As several musicologists and literary scholars have demonstrated, symbolist figures such as Andrey Bely, Ellis (Lev Kobylinsky) and Emil Medtner framed their own lives as if they were themselves figures in a Wagnerian drama.⁶ To make sense of the cultural significance Wagner had gained in late imperial Russia, these studies have

³ Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign Against Enemy Aliens During World War One* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), pp. 11–30; Dietrich Beyrau, 'Mortal Embrace: Germans and (Soviet) Russians in the First Half of the 20th Century', *Kritika* 10/3 (2009), pp. 423–39 (pp. 428–9).

⁴ On Wagner reception in the early twentieth century, see Rosamund Bartlett, *Wagner and Russia* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 59–116; Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, 'Wagner and Wagnerian Ideas in Russia', in David C. Large and William Weber (eds), *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics* (Ithaca, 1984), pp. 198–245.

⁵ The thirtieth anniversary meant that, according to German law, all of Wagner's compositions were now in the public domain. See Yu[liy] E[ngel]', 'O vagnerovskoy literature' [On Wagnerian literature], *Russkiye vedomosti* [Russian news] 36 (13 February 1913), p. 4.

⁶ See for instance Magnus Ljunggren, *The Russian Mephisto: A Study of the Life and Work of Emilii Medtner* (Stockholm, 1994); Ada Steinberg, *Word and Music in the Novels of Andrey Bely* (Cambridge, 1982); Simon Morrison, *Russian Opera and the Symbolist Movement* (Berkeley, 2002); Bartlett, *Wagner and Russia*, pp. 117–218.

tended to focus primarily on personal biographies and creative output, offering valuable insight into the creative world of these individuals. In her analysis of Wagnerism in Russia and the Soviet Union, historian Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal offers a valuable synthesis of three historical trends within which responses to Wagner's ideas and music can be placed (aesthetic-cultural, mystical-religious, revolutionary).⁷ As a historian interested in questions of national and imperial identity, I offer a temporally more focused analysis (1900–17), exploring how Wagnerian symbolism was employed in the Russian press of the time. In such a study, the figure of Wagner gains import not only as an influential cultural figure, but also as a valuable lens through which to inspect and interpret political, social and cultural change in the final years of the Russian empire. In particular, Wagner's assumed connection with German national identity (together with his Russian admirers' attempts to demonstrate his unique significance for Russia) offers a new field upon which to investigate the increasingly exclusive style of European nationalism that gained ground in the years leading up to the Great War.

The Wagnerian symbols which found the greatest resonance within Russian society tied the composer to contemporary cultural and political concerns rather than individual artists' personal crises. Of particular interest to contemporaries were questions of national identity and comparisons between the respective roles of Germany and Russia in the modern world. While contemporary Germany was often compared with the 'pagan' characters and imagery from *Der Ring*, Russia and its future mission were regularly associated with the Christian hero in *Parsifal*. The war sharpened these cultural associations, as Russian observers discussed, debated and pondered *how* Russian Wagner truly was.

After exploring contending interpretations of Wagner as a symbol of either 'German' or 'Russian' culture in the years leading up to the Great War, this chapter considers how military conflict exacerbated these pre-existing cultural stereotypes connected to the German composer. In the end, Wagner proved an unwieldy symbol, fitting comfortably into neither side of the exclusive nationalist discourse of the war. Like many other figures and symbols from the multi-ethnic cultural world of pre-war Europe, the fate of Wagner in Russia's Great War demonstrates the contradictions that emerged from the process of invention and myth-making that accompanied the triumph of an exclusionary nationalist outlook in Europe. In this sense, Russia's great war over Wagner provides new insight into the complex relationship between culture, national identity and political power during the violent early decades of the twentieth century.

Wagner's German Soul: Germany as Siegfried in the Russian Imagination

Rising nationalist sentiment throughout Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries stimulated intense internal debates within Russian educated

⁷ Glatzer Rosenthal, 'Wagner and Wagnerian Ideas in Russia', pp. 198–245.

society about the role that Russian nationalism might play within the multi-ethnic empire. Supporters of a more exclusionary form of Russian (*russkiy*) nationalism, in which the Russian *narod* were envisioned as the dominant cultural force to which other ethnic minorities were expected to assimilate (supported in part by the Russification policies of the last two Tsars, Aleksandr III and Nikolay II), vied with more liberal reformers who sought to envision an imperial Russian (*rossiyskiy*) identity in which the unique cultural and linguistic aspects of various ethnic groups were incorporated into a greater whole.⁸ Both sides of this debate tended, by and large, to adopt a romantic image of national identity as an organic and inherent attribute belonging to a specific, clearly defined group of people, and discussion of differing 'national' characteristics was common within Russian educated society.⁹ This conversation developed as Prussia succeeded in politically unifying Germany in 1871; for this reason, educated Russians found in Germany a useful foil through which to discuss the relative merits of national identity, politically and culturally. As one of Germany's most influential contemporary composers, Wagner served as a key symbol through which German (and by extension, Russian) national identity was discussed in Russia.

Philosopher Vladimir Solov'yov (1853–1900) gave voice to two of the dominant themes through which Wagner's competing German and Russian identities were interpreted in early twentieth-century Russia. In the first instance, he drew a sharp distinction between national culture and nationalism. As Greg Gaut has argued, Solov'yov actively condemned the growth of exclusionary forms of nationalism and favored an image of empire (and national identity) that incorporated peoples from multiple ethnic backgrounds.¹⁰ Within his analysis, Solov'yov employed Germany as a symbol through which he could distinguish national identity (which he viewed in a positive light) from nationalism (which he considered a negative influence). For Solov'yov, the cultural products of Germany's artists, philosophers and musicians were national in basis and universal in significance (thereby benefitting human society as a whole), but German political nationalism possessed only negative attributes (thereby proving the deleterious effects of conservative forms

⁸ Greg Gaut, 'Can a Christian be a Nationalist? Vladimir Solov'ev's Critique of Nationalism', *Slavic Review* 57/1 (1998), pp. 77–94.

⁹ For classic assessments of nationalism as a modern, rather than organic phenomenon, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (New York, 1991); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd edition (Cambridge, 1990); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY, 1983). On the impact of exclusive nationalist sentiment in Russia during the Great War, see Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire*.

¹⁰ Gaut, 'Can a Christian be a Nationalist', esp. pp. 79–91. On the limitations of Solov'yov's inclusive vision, see *ibid.*, pp. 92–4; Susanna Soojung Lim, 'Between Spiritual Self and Other: Vladimir Solov'ev and the Question of East Asia', *Slavic Review* 67/2 (2008), pp. 321–41.

of nationalist sentiment within the Russian empire).¹¹ This differentiation between German culture and German political aspirations provided a basis that allowed later Russian commentators during the Great War to claim Wagner's creative output for Russia, while condemning what was viewed as unprovoked German militarism.

In his second and perhaps even more significant observation, Solov'yov sought to associate the ruler of contemporary Germany with the Wagnerian character of Siegfried. Shortly before his death in 1900, Solov'yov employed this well-known comparison in his poem 'The Dragon'. This work was written after Kaiser Wilhelm II's spontaneous 2 July 1900 address to his soldiers, who had gathered for a punitive expedition to China in retaliation for the assassination of the German envoy to Peking during the Boxer Rebellion. In the published version of the text, the Kaiser explicitly contrasted the Christian culture of Germany with the 'heathen culture' of China.¹² Inspired by this imperial posturing, Solov'yov dedicated his poem 'To Siegfried' (referring to Kaiser Wilhelm II). The text of the poem celebrated the unification of the Christian cross with the might of the sword, and envisioned Wilhelmine Germany as the forceful upholder of Christian values. Wagner's hero Siegfried (associated with the Kaiser personally, and with the Christian mission of Europe more generally) was referred to in flattering terms:

Heir of the sword-bearing host!
You are true to the sign of the cross,
The fire of Christ is on your sword,
And your words are imminently holy.
[Наследник меченосной рати!
Ты верен знамени креста,
Христов огонь в твоём булате,
И речь грозящая свята.]¹³

The Kaiser's public reaction to the Boxer Rebellion was similarly praised as the recognition of Christian duty:

Before the mouth of the dragon
You understood that sword and cross were one.

¹¹ V[yacheslav] Serbinenko, 'The Russian Idea: Metaphysics, Ideology and History', in Madhavan K. Palat (ed.), *Social Identities in Revolutionary Russia* (New York, 2001), pp. 1–17, esp. 11; Gaut, 'Can a Christian be a Nationalist', p. 83.

¹² Ernst Johann (ed.), *Reden des Kaisers: Ansprachen, Predigten und Trinksprüche Wilhelms II* (Munich, 1966), pp. 86–8, trans. Richard S. Levy at www.h-net.org/~german/gtext/kaiserreich/china.html [accessed 30 July 2012]; Lim, 'Between Spiritual Self and Other', p. 340; Gaut, 'Can a Christian be a Nationalist', p. 93.

¹³ V.S. Solov'yov, 'Drakon' [Dragon], *Sobraniye sochineniy Vladimira Sergeevich Solov'yeva* [Collected works of Vladimir Sergeevich Solov'yov] (10 vols, St. Petersburg, 1911–14; reprint edn with two additional volumes, Brussels, 1966–70), vol. 12, p. 97.

[Но перед пастню дракона
Ты понял: крест и меч – одно.]¹⁴

The symbol of Siegfried thus emerged as a way symbolically to distinguish Christian Europe (embodied in Germany) from what Solov'yov viewed as the pagan menace of Asia.¹⁵

When considered in relation to the plot of *Der Ring*, Solov'yov's choice of Siegfried as a conquering hero sallying forth to defend Christian values can appear somewhat anachronistic. Loosely based upon Norse sagas and the epic poem the *Nibelungenlied*, the plot, characters and imagery of the cycle presented pre-Christian motifs.¹⁶ Perhaps for this reason, Solov'yov's Christianized version of Siegfried failed to enter general use.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the association between the characters from Wagner's *Ring* and contemporary Germany soon became commonplace in Russian public discourse. Rather than just the Kaiser, Russian commentators envisioned Siegfried as a reference to German society as a whole; whether employed positively or negatively, Siegfried and *Der Ring* in general thus came to serve as a popular evocation of 'German' cultural identity.

The conflation of Wagner, *Der Ring* and German culture found particularly clear expression in the late imperial publications spearheaded by writer, journal editor and music critic Emil Medtner.¹⁸ A devoted Germanophile, Wagnerian and influential figure in the Russian symbolist movement, Medtner sought to counter Solov'yov's critique of German nationalism with the assertion that 'Germanism' was not a negative, 'narrow nationalism' [узко национальным] in essence, but an embodiment of universal values, and was therefore capable of 'fertilizing the musical creation of related nations' [способным оплодотворить звуковое творчество родственных народов].¹⁹ One did not have to be German, Medtner

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Solov'yov later doubted his own assessment of the situation. See Lim, 'Between Spiritual Self and Other', p. 340.

¹⁶ On the textual sources for Wagner's *Ring*, see Elizabeth Magee, *Richard Wagner and the Nibelungs* (Oxford, 1990).

¹⁷ *Siegfried* and *Der Ring* were, however, employed by symbolist writers like Aleksandr Blok and Andrey Bely as symbols for revolutionary social change in the aftermath of the 1905 and 1917 revolutions. See Glatzer Rosenthal, 'Wagnerism in Russia', pp. 227–34.

¹⁸ In addition to his activities as a literary editor and music critic, Emil Medtner was connected to the musical community of late imperial Russia through his younger brother, Nikolay Medtner (1880–1951), an active composer and pianist of the period.

¹⁹ Vol'fing [Emil Medtner], 'Invektivī na muzikal'nyu sovremennost'' [Inveictive on contemporary music], *Trudi i dni* [Works and days] 2 (1912), pp. 29–45, here p. 29. While supporting the idea that Russian culture would be enriched by the influence of German culture (including Wagner), Emil Medtner also shared the anti-Semitic prejudices of the German composer, arguing that Jews should be excluded from Russian cultural life. See Vol'fing [Emil Medtner], *Modernizm i muzika: stat'i kriticheskiya i polemicheskiya, 1907–*

asserted, in order to acknowledge German musical hegemony from Bach to Wagner, which should serve as the basis for the further musical development of all nations, including Russia.²⁰ In order to offer what he considered a balanced assessment of Wagner's current relevance, Medtner ran a recurring column in his journal *Trudi i dni* [Work and days] devoted to uncovering Wagner's import for contemporary Russian readers.²¹ Here Wagner's *Ring*, particularly the figures of Siegfried and Wotan, were claimed to demonstrate the composer's most perfect 'myth-creating element' [мифотворящую стихию] in which the spirit of the German *narod* had found its voice.²² In these pro-German assessments, Siegfried in particular emerged as a positive figure who embodied Germany's cultural traditions and continuing strength, which in turn might serve as a guide for Russia.

In the increasingly hostile atmosphere leading to Russian–German military conflict in 1914, the image of Siegfried (along with other characters from *Der Ring*) began to take on a more sinister historical role. In his 1913 poem 'The Shield of the Nibelungs', published in the journal *Novoye zveno* [New link], Mikhail Balyasny decried Germany for its increasingly militant stance towards Russia. Contemporary Germany, suggested Balyasny, had treacherously sought to control the city of Constantinople (*Tsar'grad*), a city to which Russia was deeply connected both historically and spiritually.²³ To combat this latter-day 'Siegfried' (used in reference to contemporary German politics, which, Balyasny suggested, had sought to seize control of Constantinople from Russia), he employed imagery borrowed from Russian epic tales (*bilini*), writing dramatically of Russia's preparations for coming conflict:

Prepare, glorious druzhina
Tsar and the people of our homeland Rus'
With a mighty giant hand
Let us tear away the shield of Siegfried!

1911 [Modernism and music: critical and polemical articles, 1907–1911] (Moscow, 1912), pp. 87–122; Rosenthal, 'Wagnerism in Russia', pp. 223–5.

²⁰ Vol'fing [Emil Medtner], 'Sixtus Beckmesser Redivivus: etyud o "novoy muzike"' [Sixtus Beckmesser Redivivus: study on 'New Music'], *Zolotoye runo* [The golden fleece] 2 (1907), pp. 65–9.

²¹ Vol'fing [Emil Medtner], 'Vagneriana: nabroski k kommentariyu' [Wagneriana: sketches for a commentary], *Trudi i dni* 4–5 (1912), pp. 23–37.

²² Ibid., p. 29; 'Vagneriana: Nabroski k kommentariiu', *Trudy i dni* no. 6 (1912): pp. 27–48, here 38.

²³ The emphasis on the importance of Constantinople for Russian culture and Russia's historical claims to it were regular themes during the Great War. See for instance Pyotr Struve, 'Velikaya Rossiya i svyataya rus'' [Great Russia and holy Rus'], *Russkaya misl'* [Russian thought] 12 (1914), pp. 176–80; Kn. Sergey Gagarin, 'Konstantinopol'skiye prolivi' [The Straits of Constantinople], *Russkaya misl'* 5 (1915), pp. 43–62. This celebration of Russia's historical link with Constantinople served as a means through which to rationalize Russia's involvement in war while denigrating German aims.

[Готовься, славная дружина, –
Царь и народ Руси родной!
Рукой мощной исполина
Зигфридов щит сорви долой!]²⁴

As the clouds of war gathered, Wagner and his operatic characters took on an increasingly negative aura, serving as a convenient reference to the imagined culture and mentality of the German enemy.

Wagner's Russian Soul: Parsifal as Russia's Christian Mission

Echoing the same sentiments expressed by Durilin in this chapter's opening vignette, music critic Yuly Engel' concluded in 1913 that the greatest contemporary followers of Wagner were not in his native Germany, but in Russia.²⁵ Writing for the larger readership of the newspaper *Russkiye vedomosti* [Russian news], he called for greater intellectual engagement with Russia's love affair with Wagner; namely, he called for the appearance of specifically Russian literature about Wagner, distinct from German nationalist interpretations of the composer. He argued that 'for us, most important of all in this genius is his general humanness, and not his specifically German side, which is usually brought to the forefront in German books on Wagner'.²⁶ Engel's call for *Russian* literature on Wagner demonstrates a growing interest in the composer's symbolic role, not just for contemporary European society in general, but for Russia in particular. December 1913 marked the first official performance of Wagner's final opera *Parsifal* in Russia (following the lifting of copyright), and this work attracted particular attention even as political tensions between the German and Russian governments grew.²⁷ For many Russian commentators, *Parsifal* seemed to hold the greatest significance for contemporary Russia. It was, in short, Wagner's most 'Russian' work.

²⁴ Mikhail Balyasny, 'Nibelungov shchit' [Shield of the Nibelungs], *Novoye zvono* [New link] 2 (1913), p. 63.

²⁵ Yu[liy] [Engel'], 'Pamyati Vagnera' [In memory of Wagner], *Russkiye vedomosti* 106 (1913), p. 4. See also K[onstantin] Eiges, 'Rikhard Vagner i yego khudozhestvennoye reformatorstvo' [Richard Wagner and his artistic reforms], *Russkaya misl'* 6 (1913), pp. 56–68 (p. 60).

²⁶ 'Для нас в этом гений важнее всего его общечеловеческая, а не специфически-немецкая сторона, обыкновенно выдвигаемая на первый план немецкими книгами о Вагнере.' E[ngel'], 'O vagnerovskoy literature', p. 4.

²⁷ The 30-year copyright on *Parsifal* ended on 31/19 December 1913. The opera was first performed in Russian by Aleksandr Sheremet'yev's concert society on 21 December 1913 in the Hermitage Theatre in front of an audience that included the imperial family, the diplomatic corps, State Duma representatives and senior government officials. At least five published guides appeared at the same time. See Bartlett, *Wagner and Russia*, pp. 112–13.

While *Der Ring* had drawn upon Germanic and Norse mythology, thereby linking it with pagan religious imagery, *Parsifal* was perceived to be deeply Christian in its content and message.²⁸ Loosely based upon Wolfram von Eschenbach's thirteenth-century epic poem *Parzival*, the plot of both poem and musical work follow the Arthurian knight Parsifal's quest for the Holy Grail, emphasizing the values of virtue, compassion and redemption. For Russian commentators, this mystical reinterpretation of Christian values struck a chord: such values seemed sorely lacking in modern society and tied in well with a shared ideal of the Russian soul popularized by Fyodor Dostoevsky (itself underpinning a broader religious renaissance that swept Russian educated society in the early twentieth century).²⁹ In his influential 'Address on Pushkin', delivered at the unveiling of the Pushkin Monument in Moscow in 1880, Dostoevsky had envisioned the future task of the Russian nation as synthesizing the deeply Christian values of the *narod* with universal (i.e., European) ideals. Only Russia, Dostoevsky had argued, possessed the ability

to seek finally to reconcile all European controversies, to show the solution of European anguish in our all-humanitarian and all-unifying Russian soil, to embrace in it with brotherly love all our brethren, and finally, perhaps, to utter the ultimate word of great, universal harmony, of the brotherly accord of all nations abiding by the law of Christ's Gospel!³⁰

This emphasis on the uniquely Christian basis of the Russian *narod*, in combination with the subject matter of Wagner's last opera, provided the essential basis for later Russian commentators, who recognized in Wagner's art uniquely *Russian* attributes.

²⁸ On the non-orthodox nature of Christian imagery in *Parsifal*, see William Kinderman, 'Introduction: The Challenge of Wagner's *Parsifal*', and Mary A. Cicora, 'Medievalism and Metaphysics: The Literary Background of *Parsifal*', in William Kinderman and Katherine R. Syer (eds), *A Companion to Wagner's Parsifal* (Rochester and Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 1–28 and 29–53.

²⁹ On the religious renaissance of the early twentieth century in Russia and its sources of inspiration, see for instance Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal and Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak (eds), *A Revolution of the Spirit: Crisis of Value in Russia, 1890–1924* (New York, 1990); Judith Deutsch Kornblatt and Richard F. Gustafson (eds), *Russian Religious Thought* (Madison, 1996), esp. pp. 3–21; P.P. Gaidenko, *Vladimir Solov'yev i filozofiya Serebryanogo veka* [Vladimir Solov'yov and Silver Age philosophy] (Moscow, 2001). Two of the classic works on this topic (in Russian and English) are Nikolay Berdyaev, *Russkaya ideya: osnovniye problemi russkoy misli XIX veka i nachala XX veka* [The Russian idea: foundational problems of Russian thought in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries] (Moscow, 2000), and Nikolay Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the XX Century* (London, 1963).

³⁰ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, 'Pushkin: A Sketch', in Marc Raeff, *Russian Intellectual History: An Anthology* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1988), pp. 288–300 (p. 300).

The importance of Wagner's *Parsifal* for contemporary society was highlighted for readers of Emil Medtner's journal *Trudi i dni* in early 1913, with the publication of a lengthy article by the symbolist poet Ellis. Rejecting Friedrich Nietzsche's famous dismissal of Wagner's final work, Ellis offered a detailed symbolic analysis of Wagner's version of the Grail legend. He argued that, in *Parsifal*, Wagner had discovered the only true path forward for artistic expression: the merging of religion and art into a 'Christian mystery' [христианской мистерии] that symbolically re-enacted the 'one true mystery' [единой, реальной мистерии] of Golgotha.³¹ *Parsifal*, claimed Ellis, marked the only modern attempt at such a synthesis and was, therefore, a transitional work from mere art towards spiritual insight into higher reality. Wagner's earlier characters, such as Siegfried, represented earlier phases in human spiritual development; Parsifal, in contrast, was the Christian knight who embodied the current historical age. The significance of *Parsifal*, Ellis argued, lay in Wagner's unconscious envisioning of hope for salvation from the amoral tendencies of modernity. While such ideas might well have seemed 'incomprehensible and strange' [непонятно и странно] in the 1880s when *Parsifal* was written, it now captured the 'resurrecting Christian self-consciousness' [возрождающегося христианского самосознания] that was beginning to blossom throughout Europe.³²

The poet Marietta Shaginyan seconded Ellis's interpretation of both *Der Ring* and *Parsifal* in a 1914 article published in *Trudi i dni*. Pondering the different philosophical implications of the terms 'end' [конец] and 'completion' [окончание], Shaginyan drew a connection between 'end' and death, and the process of 'completion' and resurrection. She associated 'completion' with the ending of individual identity, seeing in it the 'transition from subject to object' [переход субъекта в объект]. Thus, she concluded that, while 'Siegfried leads Wotan to the end' [Зигфрид ведет Вотана к концу], in contrast, 'Parsifal will lead [Wotan], already re-formed and resurrected not as a pagan god, but as a Christian shepherd, to completion' [Парсифаль приводит его, уже преображенного и во крещении не языческого бога, а христианского пастыря, к окончанию].³³ *Parsifal* demonstrated Wagner's greater spiritual growth beyond the limitations of *Der Ring*, in which the struggle between power and love could end only with the death of the gods; in his final work, Wagner had recognized the redemptive power of the Christian myth itself.³⁴

³¹ Ellis [Lev Kobilinskiy], 'Parsifal Rikharda Vagnera' [Richard Wagner's *Parsifal*], *Trudi i dni* 1–2 (1913), pp. 24–53 (p. 34).

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 40, 52.

³³ Marietta Shaginyan, 'O "kontse" i "okonchani": neskol'ko misley po povodu trilogii' [On 'Ending' and 'Completion': some thoughts on the trilogy], *Trudi i dni* 7 (1914), pp. 53–57.

³⁴ For additional reactions to *Parsifal* in the Russian press, see for instance I. Ashkinazi, 'Teatr Vagnera' [Wagner's theatre], *Obrazovaniye* [Education] 3 (1909), pp. 101–16; V. Karatigin, 'Parsifal v S. Peterburge' [*Parsifal* in St. Petersburg], *Russkaya misl'* 4 (1914), pp. 20–25; 'Pervaya postanovka Parsifalia v Bayreyte' [The first production of *Parsifal* in

Within these mystical readings of Wagner's *Parsifal*, national identity received only minor attention. While acknowledging that any myth was deeply rooted in national folk tradition, Ellis was most interested in the failure of contemporary art, which celebrated the 'passing and transparent values' [призрачных и преходящих ценностей] popular in modern life.³⁵ Similarly, Shaginyan emphasized the historical evolution of Wagner's ideas without specific connection to contemporary Russia. Nevertheless, an implicit relation between Wagner's Christian rebirth and popular ideas about the 'Russian soul' among Russian intellectuals informed the interpretations of both authors. Other Russian commentators made such implicit assumptions explicit.

Developing his own idea of a unique connection between Wagner and Russia in *Russkiye vedomosti*, A. Gornfel'd drew a direct comparison between Wagner and Dostoevsky. The fundamentally Christian orientation of both artists, Gornfel'd argued, was apparent through a comparison of each man's final work – *Parsifal* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. The similarities Gornfel'd highlighted included a shared focus on Christian rebirth as the basic idea underpinning the work, marked by an emphasis on the values of love, purity, compassion and humility. In the characters of both Parsifal and Alyosha, Gornfel'd identified a sharp critique of the modern focus on individualism. Finally, he argued, though both men were unquestionably nationalists, each demonstrated the need for a reconsideration of national traditions, giving them an important place within universal human culture.³⁶

Given Wagner's uniquely Christian vision in *Parsifal* and Russia's vaunted 'Christian' identity, it is not surprising that several Russian contemporaries reached the conclusion that Russians would appreciate the essence of Wagnerian art more than any other nation. Such an argument served as the basis of Viktor Kolomiytsov's 1913 study of Wagner's significance for Russia.³⁷ However, the specific emphasis on Wagner's *Parsifal*, together with its connection with Russia's spiritual calling, found its most extended argument in Sergey Durilin's book *Vagner i Rossiya* [Wagner and Russia]. As already noted, the general worldview and assumptions from which Durilin began his analysis were similar to the symbolist

Bayreuth], *Muzika* [Music] 163 (4 January 1914), pp. 14–16, 24–5; E. Petrovskiy, 'Posle Parsifalya' [After Parsifal], *Muzika* 175 (29 March 1914), pp. 263–8; L. Saminskiy, 'Posle i po povodu Kitezha' [After and about *Kitezha*], *Muzika* 217 (4 April 1915), pp. 217–20. Rosenthal also notes the special emphasis placed on Parsifal. See Glatzer Rosenthal, 'Wagnerism in Russia', p. 212–14.

³⁵ Ellis, 'Parsifal', p. 28.

³⁶ A. Gornfel'd, 'Vagner i Dostoyevskiy (K stoletiyu so dnya rozhdeniya Rikharda Vagnera)' [Wagner and Dostoevsky (on the 100th anniversary of Richard Wagner's birth)], *Russkiye vedomosti* 114 (1913), p. 2.

³⁷ V. Kolomiytsov, 'Rikhard Vagner i muzikal'naya drama v Rossii' [Richard Wagner and musical drama in Russia], *Muzikal'nyy kalendar' na 1913 god* [Musical calendar for 1913] (St. Petersburg, 1913), p. viii. Cited in Bartlett, *Wagner and Russia*, pp. 111–12. Kolomiytsov argued that Russia and Germany had many 'spiritual features' in common.

ideas expressed by Ellis, Shaginyan and others. He claimed that the purpose of art in contemporary society was the creation of new 'myths' through which to bring meaning to human existence. The ravages of modernity on human culture required the rebirth of Christianity, which would reawaken a lost sense of unity and purpose that had been lost in the contemporary age.³⁸ In Durflin's interpretation, the German composer's unique importance came from his ability to root his myth-creation in the *narod* rather than merely in his own person.³⁹ Building upon an earlier argument voiced by symbolist Vyacheslav Ivanov concerning the division between the *narod* and the artist-genius in contemporary society (a division which could only be overcome through the creation of new myths), Durflin argued that the true artist drew inspiration from the myths of the *narod*, which he reworked and returned to the people in a new form.⁴⁰ It was only through mutual interchange that an artist could 'free oneself from the contemporary spirit because only the *narod* is eternally innocent'.⁴¹ No matter how great the individual artist, he was dependent upon the myth-creating potential of the *narod* from which he sprang.

This mutual dependence between the genius and the *narod* spelled Wagner's ultimate failure. Wagner 'could not give the strength and wholeness [of myths] to the German people of the nineteenth century, just as he could not himself receive from [the German *narod*] his own predisposition, his own predestination to that wholeness, strength and unity'.⁴² The reason for this disconnect, Durflin claimed, was Germany's loss of its Christian foundation. Contemporary Germany embodied the individualism and divided nature of modern European society. While earlier German music (Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven) had been created on a Christian foundation, after Wagner's death Durflin contended that Germany had 'enter[ed] into a period of musical decline and broke with its tradition of religious-musical inspiration'. The new generation of German composers (Richard Strauss, Anton Bruckner, Max Reger) demonstrated the divisive, non-Christian orientation of contemporary German culture. This new German *narod* 'could not be placed in living connection with the great religious-

³⁸ Thus, Durflin called for 'Symbolism as an artistic method, myth-creation as the fruit of art and religion as the living creative spirit of art'. See Durflin, *Vagner i Rossiya*, p. 19.

³⁹ Durflin argued that it was this aspect that differentiated Wagner from the earlier Romantics. See *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁴⁰ 'Ibid.', pp. 7-8. Durflin's choice of words ('Poet i chern') is a direct evocation of symbolist Vyacheslav Ivanov's earlier article by the same name. See Vyacheslav Ivanov, *Po zvyozdam* [By the stars] (St. Petersburg, 1909), pp. 33-42.

⁴¹ 'Но освободиться от современной души можно только прикоснувшись к народной душе или, точнее, воссоединившись с ней—потому что вечно-невинно только народ.' Durflin, *Vagner i Rossiya*, p. 21.

⁴² 'Этой силы и цельности Вагнер не мог дать немецкому народу XIX ст., как не мог и сам от него получить личного своего предрасположения, предназначения к этой цельности, силе и единству.' *Ibid.*, p. 12.

musical spirit and Christian soul that great German music possesses'.⁴³ While Wagner had succeeded in founding a pagan myth in the figure of Siegfried, his attempt to forge a Christian myth with Parsifal was a failure. This was not a failure on the part of Wagner, but of the German *narod* who proved unable to offer a Christian basis for the type of myth-creation that the composer had envisioned:

Siegfried, not knowing fear, not knowing sin, a child of the forest, a wonderful beast beyond sin, was the universally accepted, perfect and expected form of mythic thought of the victorious German *narod*. This is where Wagner's poetry was truly heard not by a rabble, but by a sympathetic and unanimous *narod*.... Siegfried is the most perfect pagan form in Wagner's art.... On the night [of the performance of] *Siegfried*, Bayreuth was a temple of the Mystery that the German *narod* most needs and the only one [they] now recognize.⁴⁴

Wagner's German 'mystery', embodied in the figure of Siegfried, demonstrated the militaristic and fundamentally anti-Christian focus of the German *narod* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Lacking a truly Christian cultural basis or understanding, Durflin argued, they proved themselves unable to respond to the Christian 'mystery' of *Parsifal*.⁴⁵

In contrast, Durflin saw in *Parsifal* the traces of a true Christian 'mystery', a task that Wagner had striven toward but failed to achieve. The ultimate accomplishment of such a work was, in Durflin's mind, a specifically *Russian* task:

There is one point that is most important for Wagner and us, in which no one is closer to him than we are. This is our unquenchable, growing thirst for religious art, the national (*narodnoye*) Russian and Christian mythic thought that is true to this day. It is the longing for a united Christian world-view that never leaves us [and] which is uncovered in life, in thoughts, in art. Here it is our Russian right

⁴³ 'Германия, вступив в полосу музыкального упадка, вместе с тем разорвала с преемственностью религиозно-музыкальных вдохновений, ибо ни творчество Р. Штрауса, ни Брукнера, ни органная религиозная стилизация Ререга, не могут быть поставлены в живую связь с великими выявлениями религиозно-музыкального духа и христианской души германского народа у великих немецкой музыки.' *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴⁴ 'Зигфрид, не знающий страха, не ведающий греха, лесное дитя, великолепный внегрешный зверь, явился завершенным, чайным, всеми принятым образом мифомышления победоносного германского народа. Вот где, действительно, поэту Вагнера внимала не чернь, но сочувствующий и единомыслящий народ.... Зигфрид же есть и совершеннейший языческий образ в искусстве Вагнера — совершенный музыкально, поэтически, пластически, драматически.... Байреит в вечера "Зигфрида"—храмина нужнейшей и единой признаваемой ныне германским народом мистерии.' *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

to think and speak of Wagner, here the indissolubility of the connection of the words *Wagner and Russia* is comprehensible.⁴⁶

Durĭlin cited the myth of the city of Kitezh as a specific example of the Russian *narod's* deeply Christian view of the world. He suggested that this particular myth was now ripe for artistic development by a Russian composer who would succeed where Wagner had failed, creating a true Christian and folk 'mystery'.⁴⁷ In this way, *Parsifal* (and Wagner) symbolized a tragic connecting link: as a German, Wagner was unable to complete the Christian mystery required to overcome the negative effects of modern life; nevertheless, as a cultural visionary, his final work had laid the path that Russian culture must follow. Though not a Russian himself, his creative work (specifically *Parsifal*) could nevertheless be claimed as part of Russia's cultural heritage.

Durĭlin's interpretation of Wagner, Russian and German cultures found supporters within the Russian musical community. The reviewer B.P. observed that, in his recent book, Durĭlin had attempted to shed light upon the "internal religious striving", that ever more broadly and notably seizes and unites the more sensitive circles of Russian society at all levels now: from the true "*narod*" to the heights of the intelligentsia".⁴⁸ Acknowledging the existence of a clear cultural difference between Germany and Russia, the reviewer concluded that Durĭlin's greatest service to his Russian readers was not just his explication of Wagner's symbolic significance for Russians, but also his refusal to be distracted by the 'delights of the Grail on the soul of a Russian searcher' [чары Граля над душой русского искателя]. Rather than being carried away by the appeal that such a story held, B.P. insisted that the true Russian follower of Wagner should (as Durĭlin had argued) adopt the myth of the city of Kitezh rather than the Grail as the basis for their own Christian mystery. In conclusion, the critic wrote, 'this [book] is not simply a characteristic symptom of our age, but a joyful harbinger of the current renewal of Russian artistic thought, its return to the bosom of folk-

⁴⁶ 'Но есть одно, самое важное для Вагнера и нас, в чем никто не ближе к нему, чем мы: это – неутоленная, растущая наша жажда религиозного искусства, это – народное русское и действенное доньше христианское мифомышление, это – непокидающая нас никогда тоска по христианскому единому мироощущению, раскрываемому в жизни, мысли, искусстве. Здесь – наше русское право думать и говорить о Вагнере, здесь мыслимо и нерасторжимо сочетание слов: *Вагнер—и Россия*.' Ibid.

⁴⁷ Durĭlin argued that Rimsky-Korsakov's opera based on the legend had been the only attempt thus far by a composer to combine the Russian folk and Christian tradition, but that the composer had not truly understood the mission that lay ahead, and thus failed to become the 'artist myth-creator' that Russia needed. Ibid., p. 25.

⁴⁸ "внутренним религиозным устремлением", которое все шире и знаменательнее охватывает и объединяет теперь наиболее чуткие круги русского общества во всех его слоях: от подлинного "народа" до верхов интеллигенции.' B.P. [no title], *Muzika* 187 (1914), pp. 417–18. On the impact of Durĭlin's book, see also [anonymous], 'Parsifal', *Muzika* 172 (1914), pp. 223–4.

religious art, remaining specifically on Russian earth in a world of creations of exceptional beauty and feeling'.⁴⁹

In January 1914, just months before the outbreak of war, Eduard Stark further contributed to the aura surrounding *Parsifal*, by contrasting the 'destructive' tendencies of the emerging futurist movement in Russia with the unique achievements of Wagner's *Parsifal*. Since the German composer's final masterpiece, argued Stark, 'not a single composer has managed to create anything nearly equal to it'.⁵⁰ Only Rimsky-Korsakov, suggested Stark (with a nod to Durĭlin), had even demonstrated similar leanings in Russia. While Durĭlin argued that Russia was ripe for the appearance of a composer to carry on Wagner's mission of creating a truly Christian art, Stark proved himself to be far more skeptical. Citing both 'social and spiritual' [светской и духовной] censorship, Stark argued that, until the Russian Orthodox Church changed its view on theater, there was no reason 'for us even to dream of any victorious, sanctified performances, though they might directly sanctify the soul, awakening love and charity, calling forth goodness and brotherhood between peoples'.⁵¹ Nevertheless, he saw in Wagner's *Parsifal* evidence that 'a theater of great and eternal symbols' [театр великих и вечных символов] was possible. He praised Wagner's dream of making *Parsifal* a free performance, thereby 'purifying it of the final sign of the greatest of earthly sins' [очистить их от последнего признака величайшей из земных сует] (monetary gain) and mourned that the recent performance at Moscow's *Narodniĭ dom* [People's house] had charged spectators for attending the performance. In

⁴⁹ 'Она—не только характерный симптом нашего времени, но и радостный предвестник грядущего обновления русской художественной мысли, ее возвращения в лоно народно-религиозного искусства, именно на русской земле оставившего миру создания исключительной красоты и проникновенности.' B.P. [no title], pp. 417–18.

⁵⁰ 'ни один композитор не удосужился создать ничего приблизительно ему равного.' Eduard Stark, 'Teatr-khram' [Theatre-temple], *Novoye zveno* 3 (1914), pp. 90–91. This metaphysical interpretation of Wagner was not universally embraced. Music critic Konstantin Eiges rejected such spiritual claims for the composer, dismissing Wagner's musical aesthetics as a 'philosophy of action upon the listener' rather than a 'process of creation'. The 'process of creation' to which Eiges referred was the moment of higher mystical experience, through which (he argued) an artist transcended the lower, physical realm. By merely 'acting' upon the listener, Wagner's music thus lacked higher spiritual insight. See Eiges, 'Rikhard Vagner i yego khudozhestvennoye reformatorstvo', pp. 66–8. On Eiges' mystical interpretation of music, see Rebecca Mitchell, 'Nietzsche's Orphans: Music and the Search for Unity in Revolutionary Russia' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, 2011), pp. 105–14; Rebecca Mitchell, 'In Search of Orpheus: Music and Irrationality in Late Imperial Russia, 1905–17', in Julia Mannherz (ed.), *Irrational'noe v russkoy istorii* [The irrational in Russian history] (forthcoming: Moscow, 2014).

⁵¹ 'Нечего нам и мечтать ни о каких торжественных освящающих представлениях, хотя бы они и впрям освящали душу, будили любовь и милосердие, призывали к добру, к братству между народами.' Stark, 'Teatr-khram', pp. 90–91.

contrast to contemporary theatrical practice, Stark saw in Wagner's *Parsifal* a symbol of the future theater to be established, 'a mystery, cleansing the soul of the audience member with the light of god-bearing ideas' [мистерию, очищающую душу зрителя светом богоносных идей].⁵²

To varying degrees, each of these commentators connected the Christian mystery contained in *Parsifal* with contemporary Russia. While authors like Ellis and Shaginyan left the immediate connection with Russia implicit, the underlying connection between the Russian *narod* as 'god-bearers' famously popularized by Dostoevsky lay close to the surface. Other commentators made this connection explicit. With the outbreak of war in 1914, however, the divisions between Wagner's German and Russian aspects found themselves embroiled in military conflict.

Interpreting Wagner in the Great War

With the outbreak of war in 1914, the connection between music, cultural expression and patriotism was even more heatedly discussed in the Russian periodical press.⁵³ In literary, philosophical and musical journals, as well as in the general newspapers of the day, a common differentiation emerged between acceptable cultural products from past German artists and composers (associated with universal cultural achievements of earlier generations) and recent works that, it was argued, supported a militaristic, secular search for world domination. While Russians might continue to draw upon the cultural products of an earlier, cultured Germany, contemporary works were suspected of pollution with militaristic, 'Prussian' values.⁵⁴ Moreover, Russian intellectuals argued ever more stridently for an exclusionary interpretation of Russian national culture as the basis upon which the Russian empire should function.⁵⁵ The position of Wagner within this dichotomy was hotly contested, as Russian commentators struggled to determine whether the 'German' or 'Russian' aspect of Wagner was predominant. Despite the observance of a general ban on Wagner's music, the composer and his operas thus featured regularly in public discourse in the early months of the war.⁵⁶

In a public address marking the anniversary of Vladimir Solov'yov, liberal philosopher Evgeny Trubetskoy turned to Wagner's music in order to define the

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Rebecca Mitchell, 'Music and Russian Identity in the Twilight of Empire', in Murray Frame, Boris Kolonitskii, Steven Marks and Melissa Stockdale (eds), *The Cultural History of Russia in the Great War and Revolution, 1914–1922* (forthcoming).

⁵⁴ On the differentiation between 'German' culture and 'Prussian' militarism in the Russian press, see ibid.

⁵⁵ See, for instance, the articles published in the December 1914 issue of *Russkaya misl'*, most of which offer variants of this argument.

⁵⁶ Bartlett, *Wagner and Russia*, p. 71.

militarism of modern Germany.⁵⁷ He found in *Der Ring* an allegorical embodiment of militaristic 'Prussianism' that was embraced by many Russian contemporaries.⁵⁸ Despite this seemingly negative interpretation of the composer, however, Trubetskoy was careful to differentiate between Wagner the artist and the symbolic import of his work. For Trubetskoy, Wagner remained a visionary, and his *Ring* was a prescient warning to all countries of the dangers of being carried away with dreams of world hegemony; modern Germany had succumbed to the very weakness that Wagner's opera cycle had cautioned against. The greatest challenge now facing Russia, Trubetskoy argued, was not the military defeat of Germany (an outcome of which he had little doubt), but to heed Wagner's admonition where Germany had failed—Russia needed to overcome the same tendency towards national pride and desire for world domination to which Germany had succumbed. In this interpretation, Wagner maintained a preeminent position as a messenger warning against the dangers of modernity to all nations. Russia, Trubetskoy hoped, would prove more responsive to Wagner's message than Germany had proven to be.⁵⁹

While Trubetskoy sought to make a distinction between Wagner's creative output and the militaristic values of modern Germany, not all commentators were so generous toward the German composer. For some, Wagner served as a convenient symbol of all German culture, which was now perceived as fundamentally opposed to Russian culture. While Solov'yov had cast the figure of Siegfried in a positive light as the defender of Christianity against pagans (symbolizing Wilhelm II), by 1914 commentators explicitly identified Siegfried not with the Kaiser, but with all of German culture. Moreover, Siegfried with his sword no longer symbolized the defence of Christian values, but the amorality of a nation thirsting for world domination.⁶⁰ In a 1914 article in *Russkaya muzikal'naya gazeta*, L. I-ov argued that the outcome of the present war would be decided 'not just by cannons' [не одни пушки], but by the 'internal life of enemy peoples' [то и внутренняя жизнь враждебных народов].⁶¹ He identified the 'same tendency' [явления одного порядка] embodied in Nietzsche's Overman, Kaiser Wilhelm II and Wagner's Siegfried and argued that such a tendency could not rightly be defined as

⁵⁷ On the liberal tendencies of Trubetskoy's ideas and their philosophical basis, see Randall A. Poole, 'The Neo-Idealist Reception of Kant in the Moscow Psychological Society', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 60/2 (1999), pp. 319–43.

⁵⁸ Evgeniy Trubetskoy, 'Voyna i mirovaya zadacha Rossii' [War and the world task of Russia], *Russkaya misl'* 12 (1914), pp. 88–96 (p. 91); S[ergey] Bulgakov, 'Russkiye dumy' [Russian thoughts], *Russkaya misl'* 12 (1914), pp. 108–15 (p. 109); A. Smirnov (Kutacheskiy), 'Pochemu nam dorog Konstantinopol?' [Why is Constantinople important to us?] *Russkaya misl'* 4 (1915), pp. 20–22 (p. 20).

⁵⁹ Trubetskoy, 'Voyna i mirovaya zadacha Rossii', pp. 90–96.

⁶⁰ See for instance 'Vil'gel'm ili germanskiy narod?' [Wilhelm or the German narod?] *Moskovskiy vedomosti* [Moscow news] 106 (1915).

⁶¹ L. I-ov, 'Po povodu stat'i "Ob iskusstve vragov"' [About the article 'On the art of the enemy'], *Russkaya muzikal'naya gazeta* 44 (1914), pp. 782–5 (p. 783).

'barbarism' [варварство], but was in fact simply an expression of modern German culture itself. The war between Germany and Russia was therefore not just a series of 'strategic maneuvers' [стратегических маневров], but was a 'spiritual war' [духовной борьбы] between two diametrically opposed cultures. For this reason, he concluded, *all* works of German culture, including the music of Wagner, should be banned from Russia because 'in addition to the personality of their creator (belonging to all humanity), that same spirit of the *narod* is present which in these days mysteriously inspires the enemy army in its bloody battle against us'.⁶² In this assessment, Durilin's connection between Wagner and the German *narod* was preserved and expanded upon; regardless of the composer's universal genius that allowed his music to appeal to people of all cultures, the destructive Germanic character was unavoidably imprinted upon his musical works.⁶³ The idea that this was a cultural war, not merely a state war, was cited repeatedly. Russia, it was argued, was called to do battle with the very nature of German culture, embodied both by the militaristic stance of its government and by the national culture of its people.⁶⁴ One of the most convenient symbols for describing this 'German spirit' [немецкий дух] was Wagner's Siegfried.

Music critic A. Gorsky expanded upon this imagery in a series of articles entitled 'Germanism and music', which appeared from 1915 to 1916 in the Odessa-based *Yuzhnyy muzikal'nyy vestnik* [Southern musical herald].⁶⁵ Noting the earlier enthusiasm surrounding the Wagnerian anniversaries of 1913 and the premiere of *Parsifal* in Russia, Gorsky concluded that, only half a year later, nothing remained of the 'German spirit' that the musical work had embodied.⁶⁶ Instead, he claimed that Wagner's creative output should be studied as a means of reaching a clear understanding of the motivations of the German enemy. He suggested that Wagner himself was responsible for Germany's militaristic stance; by creating the character of Siegfried, Gorsky argued, Wagner had laid the basis for future German development, uniting what had been a series of small states and principalities into a single, militaristic whole under the guidance of Prussia.⁶⁷ The path of war was the embodiment of Germany's embrace of the

⁶² 'В них, кроме личности их творца, принадлежащей всему человечеству, присутствует и тот самый дух его народа, который в эти дни таинственно вдохновляет враждебные полки в их кровавой борьбе против нас.' *Ibid.*, pp. 784–5.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 782–5.

⁶⁴ See for instance [anonymous], 'V religiozno-filosofskom obshchestve' [In the religious-philosophical society], *Russkiye vedomosti* 230 (1914), p. 4.

⁶⁵ A. Gorskiy, 'Germanizm i muzika' [Germanism and music], *Yuzhnyy muzikal'nyy vestnik* (YMV) [Southern musical herald] 6 (1915), pp. 6–9; 7 (1915), pp. 9–12; 12–13 (1915), pp. 3–4; 14–15 (1915), pp. 1–3; 5–6 (1916), pp. 23–5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 12–13 (1915), p. 3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4; 5–6 (1916), p. 23.

hero Siegfried, the same path to which Germany had been called by Nietzsche in his later writings.⁶⁸

Gorsky's image of the German spirit that emerged from a close analysis of Wagner's apparently prophetic works was fundamentally negative. Wagner had been the first to see that humanity's 'bright hopes for a wonderful, indefinitely distant future' [крушение радужных надежд на прекрасное неопределенно-далекое будущее] were doomed to failure due to the lack of 'immediate general-human actions in the present' [ближайших общечеловеческих действий в настоящем], an analysis expressed symbolically by the death of the gods in Wagner's *Ring*. As Gorski darkly reminded his readers, Siegfried had not been able to forestall the destruction of Valhalla and the death of the gods; rather, all had died together. Nor did *Parsifal* offer a more positive vision of the future to Wagner's German audience: '*Parsifal* is not an embodiment of the German spirit, like Siegfried, but only a shadowy projection, a hopeless hope, an entreaty for help, spasmodically stretched out hands.... The final mystery of Wagner is a dying mumble.'⁶⁹ Caught between the two visions of the future Wagner had embodied in these works, Germany was left with only two options: 'to suffer and die quickly or to suffer and die slowly' [скорое страдание и смерть, или медленное страдание и смерть].⁷⁰ A 1915 review of Wagner's *Ring*, published in the Moscow journal *Muzika* [Music], offered a similarly dire interpretation of the composer's work, finding in *Der Ring* 'a document, illuminating more clearly than many diplomatic letters the true sources of [those] tendencies causing the unavoidable, tragic catastrophe bursting out before our eyes... a gloomy, bloody meaning for the contemporary reader is found in these significant words emphasized by the author'.⁷¹

Nevertheless, not all Russian commentators were so quick to abandon what they perceived as Wagner's 'Russian' identity. Although Wagner had embodied the essence of Germany's militaristic culture in *Der Ring*, *Parsifal* might still symbolize Christian virtue rather than secular thirst for power. Indeed, the periodical press of the day often cited *Parsifal* as symbolizing Russia's task of a 'Holy War' against Germany.⁷² While seeking to deny the national basis of the current conflict,

⁶⁸ According to Gorskiy, Wagner's Siegfried symbolized Nietzsche. See *ibid.*, 12–13 (1915), p. 4.

⁶⁹ 'Парсифал не воплощение германского духа, как Зигфрид, но лишь тень проекция, безнадежная надежда, мольба о помощи, судорожно протянутые руки... Последняя мистерия Вагнера—это предсмертный лепет.' *Ibid.*, 5–6 (1916), p. 25.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 24–5.

⁷¹ 'Документ, могущий ярче многих дипломатических нот осветить истинные истоки тенденций, обусловивших неизбежность трагической катастрофы, разразившейся на наших глазах... Мрачный, кровавый смысл кроется в этих подчеркнутых автором многозначительных словах для современного читателя.' Ars. Avt., 'Richard Wagner: Nibelungi' [Richard Wagner: *The Nibelungs*], *Muzika* 218 (1915), p. 248.

⁷² See for instance Yury Shamurin, 'Svyataya voyna' [Holy war], *Muzika* 193 (1914), pp. 462–72.

Evgeny Trubetskoy nevertheless celebrated Russia's current task in the conflict—to find a 'Christian answer to the national question' [христианского разрешения национального вопроса].⁷³ A. Smirnov, alluding to the shared interests of Germany and Russia in the lands of the weakening Ottoman Empire, similarly interpreted the aims of the two countries in symbolic terms informed by Wagner. He saw in German aims on Constantinople a cold lust for power, comparable to the desire for the Nibelung's Ring; in contrast, Russian aims were symbolized by the holy space of St. Sophia. Moreover, 'all Constantinople is such a symbol for us [Russians]—a symbol of spiritual rebirth and comprehension of the wisdom of God'.⁷⁴ Insisting that, in retrospect, Wagner had never been 'truly German' (despite his expression of the faulty basis of German unification in *Der Ring*), Gorsky insisted that the mystery-drama *Parsifal* held a second, 'hidden liturgy' [скрытая литургия] incomprehensible to the German *narod*, but apparent to the Russian *narod*, who had already 'felt' [чувствовал] this truth. Through Russia, 'humanity might be saved and might save the whole world' [человечеству возможно спастись от погибели и спасти весь космос].⁷⁵ It was the task of Russia to free music from 'German dominance', and thereby free humanity from the militaristic path selected by the German *narod*. Wagner had shown the Russian *narod* the path to follow, but it was their task as Russians to bring it to fruition.

Conclusions

Within wartime Russian discourse, Wagner was interpreted both as the prophet of Russia's future mission and as the symbolic expression (occasionally even the cause) of German militarism. However much his Russian admirers tried to glorify the 'Christian mystery' that he had sought to create in *Parsifal*, the sword of Siegfried served as a weighty counterbalance. As Durflin had suggested in 1913, Wagner was the prophet of Russia's spiritual mission, calling the country to its holy task, but his very German nature prevented him from being the prophet who could help bring it to pass. Regardless of Wagner's status as a universal musical genius, in the end he was, in the midst of growing nationalist hatred fueled by war, too German. His message in *Parsifal* might serve to inspire Russian patriots, but he could never unconditionally be claimed as their own.

As the war dragged on, discussions of Wagner featured less prominently in the press. The reality of military conflict limited publication possibilities, while ongoing concert performances emphasized works by Russian composers

⁷³ This goal had been previously voiced by Vladimir Solov'yov. See Gaut, 'Can a Christian be a Nationalist?' pp. 77–94.

⁷⁴ 'И весь Константинополь для нас такой символ—символ духовного возрождения, нового идейного творчества в духе и постижении премудрости Божией.' Smirnov, 'Pochemu nam dorog Konstantinopol'?' p. 22.

⁷⁵ Gorskiy, 'Germanizm i muzika', 5–6 (1916), pp. 25–6.

and composers from the Allied powers. Perhaps the most damning critique of Wagner's significance for Russia was offered by philosopher Sergey Bulgakov in 1916. Rejecting the entire strain of thought that had emphasized Wagner's unique connection with Christianity (embodied in *Parsifal*), and therefore with Russian culture, he concluded that Wagner's ideas had encouraged occultism and distracted people from a true understanding of the higher purpose of art.⁷⁶ Wagner's connection with Russia's spiritual calling was transformed, in Bulgakov's reading, into profanation of true Christianity.

The figures of Siegfried and Parsifal were repeatedly held up in the pre-revolutionary periodical press as symbols of 'German' and 'Russian' national character. An elevated sense of Russia's messianic mission gave rise to attempts to lay claim to *Parsifal* as a uniquely Christian (and therefore Russian) work; at the same time, German militarism was explained as a natural outcome of the spirit of Siegfried. In this way, Wagner was imagined as the figure both of Russia's salvation and, as Russia's war effort faltered, of her destruction. As a figure symbolizing conflicting German and Russian national ideals, the evocation of the composer in either role sounded a death-knell for the multi-ethnic Russian empire, already shuddering under the weight of ethnic violence awakened by war.

Wagner's symbolic image was transformed once again in the aftermath of the revolutions of 1917. The aggressively atheistic stance of the Bolshevik government was mirrored by the virtual disappearance of Wagner's *Parsifal* from both the public stage and from general discussion. In contrast, *Der Ring* once again took center stage in the civil war and NEP eras, periods of dramatic social upheaval.⁷⁷ No longer interpreted as a symbol of Germany's national character, Siegfried was seen as a revolutionary social figure, while the death of the gods and destruction of Valhalla provided an allegorical portrayal of the downfall of bourgeois society.⁷⁸ Just as nationalist rhetoric in the final years of the Russian empire had assigned Wagner an increasingly exclusive nationalist meaning, the internationalist discourse of the early Soviet period transformed the composer into a social revolutionary. While it is questionable how accurate an interpretation either representation offered of the composer or his music, as a symbol with disputed meanings, Wagner provides a valuable prism through which to access the anxieties, hopes and fears of past eras.

⁷⁶ S[ergey] Bulgakov, 'Iskusstvo i teurgiya: fragment' [Art and theurgy: a fragment], *Russkaya misl'* 12 (December 1916), pp. 1–24 (pp. 20–22).

⁷⁷ The New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced by Vladimir Lenin in March 1921 to help the fledgling Soviet Union overcome the economic devastation caused by the civil war. The NEP allowed small businesses to reopen and function for private property, while control of banks, foreign trade and large industries remained in the hands of the state.

⁷⁸ Glatzer Rosenthal, 'Wagnerism in Russia', pp. 229–45; Bartlett, *Wagner and Russia*, pp. 221–58.