The British Myth of Russia

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PREFACE

An article with the catchy title "Why Western authors are in love with Mother Russia" appeared in a major British newspaper in 2010. It was authored by Andrew Miller, a British writer and journalist, also known for his novel *Snowdrops* about the criminal Moscow of the early 21st century. Both his article and novel expose the general traditionally negative tone of perceptions of Russia in the West: "Russia has for centuries been a distorting, fairground mirror for the west", a country located "at the other end of the ethical spectrum."[1] The image of a mirror implies not only repulsion from another culture but also recognition of the elements of one's own world in it. Behind this image lies an interesting and long history of the formation and existence of the Western myth of Russia.

The study of various images of a foreign culture as a single system of meanings is based on the general idea of modern human sciences about the relatively independent existence of sociocultural constructs. Born out of their era, culture, and sociocultural community, such constructs are only indirectly impacted by political and historical events, but, in their turn, have a strong influence on the consciousness of native speakers of the language and culture.

This book does not aim to give a definitive picture of the Western myth about Russia. Rather, it is limited to tracing the formative history of the myth about Russia in British culture, exploring the British myth about Russia at its different stages, and determining the particularities of its relationship with narrative imagery while giving special consideration to the most riveting and least researched period of the early 20th century. The author's primary focus is on the origin and development of the British myth of Russia as a dialogue between two cultures in the context of the self-perception of the British and Russians.

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[1] A.D. Miller, "Why Western authors are in love with Mother Russia", *The Observer*, The New Review Section, December 19, 2010, 37.

At the same time, this book covers theoretical issues related to the problem of the perception and depiction of a different culture, country, or people. By analysing specific facts, the author seeks to define a set of basic mechanisms that operate within the myth and determine its stability and ability to develop.

Based on the material of the past, this book's ultimate goal is to come closer to answering the question of why Astolphe de Custine's words about Russia, "it is only too easy to be deceived by the appearances of civilisation",[2] keep being invoked in modern Britain alongside the claim that "every British intellectual drinks from the fountain of Russian culture."[3]

[2] Ibid. The article contains a hidden reference to the famous book by Astolphe de Custine, a French writer and traveller, *La Russie en 1839* [*Russia in 1839*].

[3] Quote from the interview by Tom Stoppard, a modern British playwright, with the newspaper *Izvestia*. See M. Davydova, "Dramaturg Tom Stoppard: 'Svoboda mnenii dushit golosa ehpokhi' ["Playwright Tom Stoppard: 'Freedom of Opinion Stifles the Voices of the Era'"], *Izvestia*, no. 184, October 9, 2007, 5.

INTRODUCTION

MYTH OF A DIFFERENT CULTURE

Myth in human sciences

The word 'myth' is as nuanced as the phenomenon it denotes. In Russian, three particularly significant meanings are distinguished: "an ancient folk tale about legendary heroes, gods, about the phenomena of nature"; "non-credible story invention"; "fiction."[1] In English dictionaries, four key meanings are mentioned: "a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people"; "a popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone"; "a person or thing having only an imaginary or unverifiable existence"; "the whole body of myths."[2] These meanings, however, reflect the content of the notion of myth only superficially. As Mircea Eliade, a Romanian philosopher of culture and ethnographer, put it, myth as a phenomenon "is an extremely complex cultural reality, which can be approached and interpreted from various and complementary viewpoints."[3]

In the ancient Greek language, 'mythos', from which the word 'myth' stems, means 'word', 'legend', 'speech' and 'lore'. This means that myth goes beyond a simple word and implies the potential development of a name into a story, a series of events, or a plot. Moreover, in the narrator's speech, myth manifests itself not as an individual word but as a word of yore, i.e., a story sanctified by a tradition – the tradition of reproducing and understanding the myth.

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[1] See "Myth", in S.I. Ozhegov, *Tolkovyi slovar' russkogo yazyka* [*The Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language by Sergei Ozhegov*].
[2] See, e.g., "Myth", in Merriam Webster.
[3] M. Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, trans. W. Trask. (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 5.

Unlike 'logos', myth as a phenomenon of human culture is a word about the world (universe) that captures and embodies its meanings in names and events. Yakov Golosovker, a Russian and Soviet philosopher, offers the following definition: "Myth … is knowledge of the world, imprinted in images, in all the splendour, horror and ambiguity of the world's mysteries."[4]

Studies of myth with a focus on its ancient identity began in the 18th century (Giambattista Vico and his *Principi di una scienza nuova d'intorno alla comune natura delle nazioni*). Two main schools of studying classical (primaeval) mythology were formed in the 19th century: the mythological school, whose representatives searched folklore for traces of ancient natural cults (Max Müller, the Brothers Grimm, Adalbert Kuhn, Alexander Afanasyev), and the anthropological school, seeking to discover the idiosyncrasies of mythological thinking by juxtaposing archaic tribes with modern man. The latter brought forth Sir James Frazer, a British social anthropologist, and his idea of myth being implanted in magical rituals and rites (*The Golden Bough*, 1890).

Several scientific approaches to understanding the essence of myth crystallised in the 20th century. The following schools of thought were established, among others: a myth and ritual school that sought to scrutinise mythological structures in any literary text (Matthias Bodkin, Northrop Frye); a school of symbolic forms that defined myth as a special symbolic system of world cognition and brought to light the basic fabric of mythological thought (Ernst Cassirer); a structuralist school (Claude Lévi-Strauss) that aspired to identify the particular logic of structuring myths and to define their special image and plot structure; and a school of analytical psychology that maintained myths exist because the collective unconscious tends to cognise the world through common, elementary images (Carl Jung). In general, "beginning with the second decade

[4] Y.E. Golosovker, "Logika antichnogo mifa" [Logic of Classical Myth], in Y.E. Golosovker, *Izbrannoe. Logika mifa* [Selected Writings. Logic of Myth] (Moscow and St. Petersburg: Centre for Humanitarian Initiatives, 2010), 106.

of this century, re-mythification became an unstoppable process that in the end came to dominate different sectors of European culture."[5]

Contributions by Aleksei Losev and Roland Barthes marked important milestones in studies of myth. Losev, a Soviet philosopher and philologist, published his book *The Dialectics of Myth* in 1930, where he maintained that myth is the true reality of human consciousness and not "fantasy, fiction, or invention". The book was quickly suppressed, Losev was arrested, and readers had to wait until 1990 to appreciate the novelty of his work. In the meantime, a new understanding of myth was developed by Barthes, a French philosopher. A series of his essays on myth from the perspective of modern people who live in the box of mass culture was published in the 1950s. In Barthes' definition, myth is a reality, yet it is also not genuine and a pseudo-reality, deliberately false: it is a "system of communication" – "a certain message" that "distorts" "literal sense" and thus "transforms history into nature."[6] Consequently, the ideas about myth in Losev's and Barthes' writings are similar in affirming the reality of myth as a word, myth as an event, and myth as a story for human consciousness. This notion represents one of the most important results of the voluminous studies of myth in the 20th century: it became obvious that "certain aspects and functions of mythological thought are constituents of the human being"[7] and that, in this regard, mythology is a form of social consciousness "prevailing in the life of people throughout their history."[8]

Simply put, in the scope of scientific ideas of today, man, including the modern civilised man, in many ways lives by myths – not by what does not exist, not by fanciful representations of primitive consciousness, but by that which actively operates in the

[5] E.M. Meletinskii, *The Poetics of Myth*, trans. G. Lanoue and A. Sadetsky (London: Routledge, 2000), 17.

[6] R. Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. S. Zenkin (Moscow: Sabashnikov Publishers, 2000), 233, 249, 255.

[7] Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 181.

[8] M.I. Ibragimov, "Natsional'nyi mif" kak teoreticheskaya problema" ["National Myth" as a Theoretical Problem] in *Sopostavitel'naya filologiya i polilingvizm: sb. nauchnykh trudov* [Comparative Philology and Multilingualism: Proceedings] (Kazan: Kazan State University, 2003), 214–217.

collective consciousness. Myths are a screen that sifts 'objective reality' for us.

Myth and imagology

Imagology studies the principles and mechanisms of the perception(s) of a different country, its culture and people, and explores how images of this country are formed in the original culture. This is one of the branches of comparative humanitarian research. Imagology emerged within European literature studies and then grew increasingly interdisciplinary, since the research is focussed not on the aesthetic phenomenon per se, but rather on understanding the reality of another culture expressed through this phenomenon.

Imagological studies in Russia rely on European achievements in the discipline and, at the same time, take a separate route. While European scholars (Hugo Dyserinck, Daniel Pageaux, Joep Leersen) tend to research "social and ideological functions" of the images of other cultures (including those in literature),[9] Russian scholars (Nina Mikhalskaya, Viktor Khorev, Valery Zemskov) keep to the traditional view of a literary image as an aesthetic phenomenon. The implications are as follows:

a. Western scholars regard a literary image of another culture as a form, an embodiment, a way to transmit a certain ideology, a "means of disseminating stereotypes", and a constructed and therefore false "mirage" (the term used by Hugo Dyserinck) of another culture;
b. Russian imagologists treat a literary image of another country primarily as a complex aesthetic phenomenon, a way of conceptualising the 'otherness' that connects the national 'own' with 'theirs' in the world of a *literary* work;
c. These two points of view are united by treating any image (including a literary one) of a different culture in its correlation

[9] V.P. Trykov, "Status imagologii v sovremennoi gumanitaristike" [The Status of Imagology in Modern Humanities], *Educatio. Filologicheskiye nauki* [Educatio. Philological Sciences] 4, no. 5: 118.

> with the *traditional* perception of the said culture in its own national literature and culture, as well as by the idea that a literary image not only receives and reproduces this tradition but can also influence it.

Russian imagology as a line of comparative research began to take shape in the last decade of the 20th century. In-depth studies of alternational images in fiction, historical literature, and mass media have been published. Particularly noteworthy are the works by Elena Artemova, [10] Vsevolod Bagno, [11] Valery Zemskov, [12] Tatiana Krasavchenko, [13] Nina Mikhalskaya, [14] and Viktor Khorev; [15] the

[10] E.Y. Artemova, *Kul'tura Rossii glazami posetivshikh ee frantsuzov (poslednyaya tret' XVIII veka)* [The Culture of Russia Through the Eyes of the Visiting French (Last Third of the 18th Century)] (Moscow: Institute of Russian History of the RAS, 2000).

[11] V.E. Bagno, *Rossiya i Ispaniya: obshchaya granitsa* [Russia and Spain: Common Border] (St. Petersburg: Nauka Publishers, 2006).

[12] V.B. Zemskov, "Rossiya 'na perelome'. Vvodnaya stat'ya" [Russia "at the Turning Point." Introductory Article], in *Na perelome: Obraz Rossii proshloi i sovremennoi v kul'ture, literature Evropy i Ameriki (konets XX – nachalo XXI vv.)* [At the Turning Point: Image of Russia Past and Present in the Culture and Literature of Europe and America (Late 20th-Early 21st centuries)] (Moscow: Novyi Khronograf Publishers, 2011), 4–46.

[13] T.N. Krasavchenko, "'Zapad est' Zapad. Vostok est' Vostok'? Obraz Rossii v angliiskoi kul'ture" ["West is West, and East is East"? Image of Russia in English culture], in *Na perelome: Obraz Rossii proshloi i sovremennoi v kul'ture, literature Evropy i Ameriki (konets XX – nachalo XXI vv.)* [At the Turn of Ages: Image of Russia Past and Present in the Culture and Literature of Europe and America (Late 20th – Early 21st Centuries)] (Moscow: Novyi khronograf Publishers, 2011), 159–231.

[14] N.P. Mikhalskaya, *Obraz Rossii v angliiskoi khudozhestvennoi literature IX – XIX vv.* [Image of Russia in English Fiction of the 9th-19th centuries] (Moscow: Moscow State Pedagogical University, 1995).

[15] V.A. Khorev, *Pol'sha i polyaki glazami russkikh literatorov. Imagologicheskie ocherki* [Poland and Poles Through the Eyes of Russian Writers. Imagological Essays] (Moscow: Indrik Publishers, 2005).

thesis research of Lilia Khabibullina,[16] Sergei Danilin,[17]and Natalia Butkova; [18] and the publication of the collective monographs *Odysseus. Man in History*, [19] *Image of Russia. Russia(ns) as Perceived in the West and the East* (1998), [20] *Image of Russia. Russian Culture in the Global Context* (1998),[21] *Russia and the West at the Beginning of the New Millennium* (2007),[22] *At the Turn of Ages: Image of Russia Past and Present in the Culture and Literature of Europe and America (Late 20th-Early 21st Centuries)* (2011).[23] The scientific journal *Imagology and Comparative Studies* has also been in publication in Russia since 2014.

[16] L.F. Khabibullina, *Mif Rossii v sovremennoi angliiskoi literature* [Myth of Russia in Modern English Literature] (Kazan: Kazan University, 2010).
[17] S.A. Danilin, "Obraz Rossii i ee politiki v anglo-amerikanskoi publitsistike kontsa XIX – nachala XX vv" [Image of Russia and its Politics in Anglo-American Opinion Journalism in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries] (Thesis for a Candidate Degree in Historical Sciences, Moscow, 2006).
[18] N.V. Butkova, "Obraz Germanii i obrazy nemtsev v tvorchestve I. S. Turgeneva i F. M. Dostoevskogo" [Image of Germany and Germans in Ivan Turgenev's and Fedor Dostoyevsky's Works] (Candidate Degree Thesis (Philological Sciences), Volgograd).
[19] The part entitled "Chuzhie" [Others] by Lev Kopelev is particularly noteworthy here. See L.Z. Kopelev, *Odissei. Chelovek v istorii* [Odysseus. Man in History] (Moscow: Nauka Publishers, 1994), 8–18.
[20] *Obraz Rossii. Rossiya i russkie v vospriyatii Zapada i Vostoka* [Image of Russia. Russia(ns) as Perceived in the West and the East] (St. Petersburg: RAS, Institute of Russian Literature (The Pushkin House), 1998).
[21] E.P. Chelyshev, ed., *Obraz Rossii. Russkaya kul'tura v mirovom kontekste* [Image of Russia. Russian Culture in the Global Context] (Moscow: Azbukovnik Publishers, 1998).
[22] *Rossiya i Zapad v nachale novogo tysyacheletiya* [Russia and the West at the Beginning of the New Millennium] (Moscow: Nauka Publishers, 2007).
[23] *Na perelome: Obraz Rossii proshloi i sovremennoi v kul'ture, literature Evropy i Ameriki (konets XX – nachalo XXI vv.)* [At the Turning Point: Image of Russia Past and Present in the Culture and Literature of Europe and America (Late 20th-Early 21st Centuries)] (Moscow: Novyi Khronograf Publishers, 2011).

Western Europe and the United States have also witnessed the development of imagology: anthologies and monographs have been published;[24] the journals *Synthesis* and *Arcadia* mostly feature articles on matters of imagology; and compelling studies of images of other cultures in American, German, English, and French literature have come out (see, e.g., the work of Rudolf Bader,[25] Waldemar Zacharasiewicz,[26] Iver Brynild Neumann,[27] and Ulrich Pallua[28]).

Russia's image in the literature and culture of various countries has been studied by a number of researchers, including Nina Mikhalskaya, Lilia Khabibullina, Tatiana Krasavchenko, Anthony Cross, and Patrick Waddington. The book *From The Russian Fugitive to The Ballad of Bulgarie. Episodes in English Literary Attitude to Russia from Wordsworth to Swinburne* by Waddington, a British researcher of Russian literature, highlights historical aspects and plot-related features of images of Russia and Russians in poems by such authors as William Wordsworth, Robert Browning, Alfred Tennyson and Algernon Swinburne.[29] Cross, a prominent British scholar of Russian history, covers both matters of the general cultural

[24] See A.R. Oshchepkov, "Imagologiya" [Imagology], *Znanie. Ponimanie. Umenie* [Knowing. Understanding. Mastering] 1 (2010): 251–253; O.Yu. Polyakov, *Imagologiya: teoretiko-metodologicheskie osnovy* [Imagology: Theoretical and Methodological Foundations] Kirov: Raduga-press Publishers, 2013.

[25] R. Bader, *The Visitable Past: Images of Europe in Anglo-Australian Literature* (Bern, New York: P. Lang, 1992).

[26] W. Zacharasiewicz, *Images of Germany in American Literature* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007).

[27] I.B. Neumann, *Uses of the Other: "The East" in European Identity Formation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

[28] U. Pallua, *Eurocentrism, Racism, Colonialism in the Victorian and Edwardian Age: Changing Images of Africa(ns) in Scientific and Literary texts* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2006).

[29] P. Waddington, *From The Russian Fugitive to The Ballad of Bulgarie. Episodes in English Literary Attitude to Russia from Wordsworth to Swinburne* (Oxford, Providence: Berg, 1994).

and historical evolution of British perceptions of Russia and particular features that are characteristic of certain epochs.[30]

Two Russian monographs – *Image of Russia in English Fiction of the 9–19th Centuries* by Nina Mikhalskaya and *Myth of Russia in English Literature of the 20th Century* by Lilia Khabibulina – offer an in-depth review of imagological myth and the formation of Russia's image in British literature. As the monographs' titles suggest, the early 20th century remains largely unexplored. This is the time, however, when a fundamentally new British myth of Russia was being formed and embedded anew into British fiction. During this period, the inertia of the actual literary canon of how Russia should be depicted becomes apparent, while the 'Russian' closely converges with its 'own' in works of fiction.

Mikhalskaya and Waddington study the 19th century in great detail in their works. The latter, however, only reviews poems by selected authors (Wordsworth, Browning, Tennyson, Swinburne). Mikhalskaya's book is focussed on specific poems by Wordsworth and Swinburne, leaving the "Russian theme" in Tennyson's and Thackeray's work outside of the study's scope. Whether to regard the period of the 1790s-1890s (when the myth of Russia is fully embedded in British literature for the first time) as a special stage of the existence of the British myth of Russia still remains up in the air. 'Russian' literary images by different authors and in different works of fiction should be explored in a holistic context of the history of the formation and development of the British myth of Russia and in terms of the (re)creation of its meanings and their transmission by means of fiction.

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[30] A. Cross, *The Russian Theme in English Literature. From the Sixteenth Century to 1980. An Introductory Survey and a Bibliography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); A. Cross, *Anglo-Russica. Aspects of Cultural Relations between Great Britain and Russia in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Oxford, Providence: BERG, 1993); A. Cross, *Peter the Great through British Eyes: Perceptions and Representations of the Tsar since 1698* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); A. Cross, "By Way of Introduction: British Reception, Perception and Recognition of Russian Culture", in *A People Passing Rude: British Responses to Russian Culture*, ed. A. Cross (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2012), 1–36.

Also remaining open are questions about the periods, methods and mechanisms of forming and developing the British myth of Russia and about the interaction of literary images of Russia and their correlation with the British myth of Russia. It is to all these questions that this book strives to respond. The description of the British myth of Russia as described herein is both underpinned by the ideas of the aforementioned Russian scholars and aims to elaborate on them with regard to a number of concepts.

Underlying concepts

A **myth of another culture** is a mental set in the collective consciousness of a people that captures a national or socially significant historical, political, or aesthetic experience in the exploration of another nation's world; a stable mental formation coming from the idea of a positive 'national self', generated by the collective consciousness in the process of convergence with another culture and expressed in the form of images, characters, stereotypes, plots, etc. that has the ability to preserve and develop semantic complexes (layers).

A **semantic complex (layer) of a myth of another culture** is a system of images, ideas, judgements, plots and stereotypes that are engendered by the experience of exploring another national culture (country, people) at a certain historical stage of its perception and are expressed in literary and other texts within its own culture. Each subsequent layer of such myths is linked to all previous layers through its 'core' (initial layer) and interrelates with them in the semantic field of literary texts.

The **artistic (literary) image of another culture** is a special authorial aesthetic embodiment of a myth of another culture, driven by historical context and the genre, which exists over individual images, as it were, and permeates them all at the same time. Unlike the stereotype, the artistic (literary) image of another culture is "multidimensional",[31] correlates with stereotypes of another country

[31] V.B. Zemskov, "Obraz Rossii «na perelome» vremen (Teoreticheskii aspekt: retseptsiya i reprezentatsiya «drugoi» kul'tury)" [Image of Russia at

in a mixed fashion, naturally embodies the author's aesthetic and worldviews, and can carry a complex reflection of various layers of the myth. The artistic image of another culture is generally an image of a world which is not alien but different.

In imagological terms, a literary image of another culture is not so much a separate aesthetic structure as a special product of the dialogue between two cultures – its 'own' and 'theirs'. There should also be an internal distance, resulting from the common features of the dialogue of the two cultures, between the author's personality and the images of a foreign culture s/he creates. It is these common features for the host culture that represent what is termed a **myth of another culture** (or an **imagological myth**).

Myth of another culture: Principles of existence

The principles of existence are the fundamental factors that account for the formation and development of a myth of another culture. Among these principles are the following:

1. **The principle of cultural and historical correlation** means that a myth of a different culture in general, as well as its every layer, represents a form of processing the real experience of 'meeting' another country, a different culture. This does not mean, however, that the received notions cannot be deliberately and artificially modelled within certain layers (e.g., through mass media).
2. **The principle of systemic coherence** means that the key images and meanings in each individual layer of the myth and in all these layers themselves are interconnected and, as such, operate in the scope of the national culture as an integrated system.

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the Turn of Epochs (Theoretical Aspects: Reception and Representation of a 'Different' Culture)], *New Russian Humanitarian Research. Literary Studies* 1 (2006), http://www.nrgumis.ru/articles/archives/full_art.php?aid=37&binn_rubrik_pl_articles=246.

3. **The principle of subsystemic coherence** means that a myth of a different culture comprises several 'layers' or subsystems that correlate with certain periods of exploring the culture.
4. **The principle of myth memory** means that neither a significant semantic element nor, least of all, a 'layer' can be removed from the myth, yet it may become obsolete or subject to radical change.
5. **The principle of adaptation** implies that a myth of a different culture can be adapted to new cultural, ideological, and socio-historical realities, either allowing for the re-interpretation of its old layers or generating new ones.

Myth of another culture: Development mechanisms

Mechanisms are specific procedures or schemes that ensure the self-preservation of a myth of a different culture and its connection with the changing reality of 'meeting' that culture. They include:

- **Contrasting** another culture with the national 'own'. This basic mechanism entails a negative view of 'theirs' as 'alien', and with one's 'own' being regarded as absolutely positive.
- **Equating** another culture's elements to one's 'own' as a means of accepting other norms and values at a certain stage of their perception.
- **Disequating** certain figurative and semantic elements of a different culture's myth due to a change in one's perception of the culture. The equating and disequating mechanisms enable the myth to respond to historical, political, and spiritual events of 'meeting' another culture.

CHAPTER ONE

BRITAIN AND RUSSIA: SELF-PERCEPTION AND SELF-PRESENTATION

British culture takes a very special place in the perception of Russia and the creation of the country's images. This is primarily due to Britain and Russia geographically being the opposite 'edges' of Europe, as it were; to both countries forming the two mightiest empires in the world in the 19th century; and to various ties that have necessitated mutual self-perception and self-presentation between Britain and Russia since approximately the 16th century.

The most important factor in creating a myth about another culture, however, lies in the system of people's ideas about themselves and their world. This is why the self-perception and self-presentation of the British, on the one hand, and the Russians, on the other, should be reviewed before looking into Britain's perception of Russia.

The way any nation perceives itself is driven first and foremost by the people's ideas of their history and their national character. In order to understand the British national character in British culture, the historical layers of forming the British nation and the conceptualisation of these layers over time will be reviewed.

British culture: National and cultural identity

Researchers have identified five ancient layers in British culture. The first layer is that of the 'prehistoric' inhabitants of the island, who arrived there 15,000 years ago. Little is known about them, and some graves, remnants of their settlements, and petroglyphic drawings in the caves of Nottinghamshire, Norfolk, and Devon are all that have remained. Paleontological data, however, suggest a direct genetic

link between the modern inhabitants of these areas and their ancient ancestors.

The period between the 6th and 4th millennia BC brought people from different parts of Europe to the isles – Celtic tribes. The Celts gave rise to a new cultural layer in England, associated with land cultivation, writing, the cult of forests and trees, caste hierarchy (druids), and human sacrifice, as well as ritual and mythological consciousness. The Celtic layer has been preserved in British culture in traces of Celtic myths. These have generated a whole family of poems and novels of the 'Arthurian cycle'. Celtic myths about Arthur and the gods of his circle transformed into novels about the exploits of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, spreading throughout medieval Europe. As for English literature, they played a particularly significant role in the work of Alfred Tennyson and Algernon Swinburne.

Along with the chivalrous and courtly reinterpretations of myths about Arthur, images of 'primordial forces of earth and fire' and 'spirits inhabiting rivers and forests' were extensively disseminated in the Middle Ages, featuring as kings or saints in chronicles and lives of saints and hermits. In this fashion, Celtic mythology dictated certain features of the British identity, lending its images to folk and high culture alike.

Distinctive features of Celtic mythology merit separate consideration. First of all, it is marked by extreme *vibrancy*, *contrast* and *hyperbolism*. For example, the dogs of the Otherworld are 'glittering bright white', with 'blood red' ears and 'glowing red' eyes. Cú Chulainn, a well-known character of Celtic myths, is said to produce terrific body heat, enough for the deep snow to melt 'for thirty feet of every side', and the sea hissed and evaporated when he dipped his red-hot body into it. He can also bring down storms and solar eclipses on his foes.

In comparison with the deeds of ancient Greek heroes, the exploits of the heroes of Celtic myths are generally distinguished by 'exaggerated heroism' or gigantism. Greek warriors defeat dozens of enemies, but Celtic heroes defeat hundreds. A single blow of their sword can cut off the tops of huge hills. At feasts, they devour whole oxen and wash them down with barrels of mead. Like the Greek

heroes, however, the Celtic ones do not so much defend themselves as *attack*, *subjugate* and *conquer*.

The deities in Celtic mythology form two warring families. One, symbolising primordial forces of chaos and darkness (descendants of 'Chaos' and 'Crone of the Night'), is headed by Llyr, a god of the sea, which renders itself as an uncontrollable element giving rise to Fomorians (monstrous giants) or gods of darkness, night and death. The other, symbolising life, light and fertility, is headed by Danu, a mother goddess, and her husband, Llud or Nnud, a god of death and ruler of the Otherworld. This kinship of death and life in the same family of gods is particularly noteworthy. The two families are continuously at war with one another.

Humans in Celtic mythology are *consanguine* with gods. They belong to the family of the goddess Danu and are both children of light and natives of the realm of the dead, who came to *conquer the earth*. It is for this reason that people can *defeat even gods*. Battles of people against gods and Fomorians in Celtic myths are reflected in the epic tale of Beowulf (similar plots can be found in other Germanic myths), where Beowulf first fights the sea monster Grendel and his mother, then battles a terrible dragon and defeats them all. People are still mortal, though, and nearly always return to the realm of the dead. It is important to know that the souls of the fallen heroes *do not just return of their own volition* – instead, the 'great hunter' Nnud *chases them*, 'hunts' them down, and brings them back by force.

The realm of the dead holds the cauldron of abundance (or inspiration) – a prototype of the Holy Grail, which shall not belong to anyone but which many want to take possession of. With the gods incapable of it, heroes can and do capture it *for the good of people*: Cú Chulainn steals the cauldron from the king of the City of Shadows, while Arthur wins it from the ruler of the realm of the dead.

It can be argued that Celtic mythology is the root giving growth to what the English perceive in themselves as "sentiment", "an organisation quick to feel impressions, and feeling them very strongly", "to aspire ardently after life, light, and emotion, to be expansive, adventurous, and gay."[1]

[1] M. Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1867), 100.

The Roman conquest (third layer of British culture) of Britain between the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD also left a deep mark on the island's civilisations. It manifested itself most clearly in urban areas, where the administrative elite relied on the authority of the Roman conquerors to prove their legitimacy. Stone administrative buildings, roads, places of worship and squares served to establish a link in the minds of the inhabitants of the British Isles between the local authorities and the Roman Empire, sanctified by the ancient origin and public order.

This link would thrive and be emphasised in the future. It would certainly be associated with the dominance of Latin as the language of books and worship in Catholic divine services and with the traditional emphasis on the study of Latin and Roman literature in English schools through to the 20th century. Dedication to the state, the spiritual foundation of the Roman Empire, built the core of the British state (imperial) myth. This core originates from the images of pre-Briton heroes that legitimise the royal power.[2]

The History of the Kings of Britain by Geoffrey of Monmouth, one of the most influential books of the Middle Ages, already traces British history to the founding of "New Troy" (London) by "Brutus", a mythical hero and a great-grandson of Aeneas, a Trojan hero. Alongside establishing parallels between the 'new' (own) and 'old' (Roman) history, this signals the direct continuity of statehood: Aeneas, who founded the Roman race and has been, for many centuries, a symbol of a human hero who cultivated wildland, was also a direct ancestor of the new cultural hero, the founder of the 'new Troy' and the 'new Rome'.

For English literature, the image of the Roman state continued to serve as a historical example, ultimate ideal, and model of orderly prosperity, and it played the role of 'homeland' throughout the 19th and 20th centuries (e.g., Italy's image in Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*).

The image of Victorian Britain was underpinned by comparisons of the modern British Empire with that of ancient Rome. In the

[2] See, for example, L.F. Khabibullina, "Imperskii mif v angliiskoi literature ehpokhi Vozrozhdeniya" [Imperial Myth in English Literature of the Renaissance], *Humanities Research* 1, no. 33 (2010): 120–124.

second half of the 19th century, the British world became keenly aware of and manifested its individual self in foreign policy, state ideology and public sentiments. 'British' began to replace 'English' ('Scottish', 'Welsh') and became inseparable from 'imperial'. It was then that a distinct mental and cultural type of 'English-British' crystallised.

> The idea of a great Empire, created by ancestors and called from on high to rule over nations, to bring peace, progress and civilization everywhere, was perceived an axiom by Victorians of all generations. … [T]he moral credo … of the British 'imperialists' consisted in the service to the Empire, the common good, involvement in the common cause, willingness to take risks and defiance of fate.[3]

The image of ancient Rome becomes a cementing foundation for Victorian England, a historical *precedent* that seems to prove that the nation and state are developing in the right direction. This image is attractive not just because of its military and political power and internal political structure (relatively loose connections of Rome with the provinces), but is also due to its spiritual foundation, which includes freedom, welfare, political activity of citizens, their missionary approach calling towards civilising the conquered peoples, and the ideal of serving the Empire.[4]

In light of the above, Matthew Arnold's statement that "Latin civilisation" gave English culture a "sense for fact" and a "love of strenuousness, clearness, and rapidity" rings true.[5] The involvement with the world of Roman civilisation also made it possible to connect

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[3] N.V. Dronova, "Traditsii imperskogo myshleniya i novatsii imperskoi propagandy v Velikobritanii v 70–e gody XIX veka" [Traditions of imperial thinking and innovations of imperial propaganda in the 1870s], *Modern and contemporary history: Interuniversity collected works* 21 (2004): 158, 168–169.

[4] I.G. Gurin, O.O. Tartygina, "Imperskaya ideya v predstavlenii ehlity Velikobritanii XIX – nachala XX veka" [Imperial idea as perceived by Britain's elite of the 19th – early 20th century], *Herald of Samara State University* 5/3, no. 55 (2007): 89–95.

[5] Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, 112, 114.

the role of the British Empire and the 'mission' of the British with the civilising role of ancient Rome.

A gradual *conversion to Christianity* began on the British Isles during Roman rule. The *gradual and protracted* conversion to Christianity of Celts (2nd-5th centuries) and then the Anglo-Saxon tribes (7th century) signified adhesion to the value system and worldview associated with the dogmas of Catholicism, uniting "the nations of Western Europe in one great commonwealth" and transferring the basis of the ancient civilisation of Rome. [6] Christianity was officially recognised as the single religion of the British Isles but, in addition, was portrayed and conceived as the only 'true' and acceptable faith. English history as well as Celtic and Saxon mythology get a Christian interpretation in a number of sources.

The famous *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (ca. 731) by the Venerable Bede interpreted the history of Britain through the lens of its conversion to Christianity and Christian virtues: even the titles of the chapters are infused with the theme of how sovereigns and people treat Christianity. Thus, Chapter 4 is entitled "Lucius, king of Britain, writing to Pope Eleutherus, desires to be made a Christian", Chapter 6 – "The reign of Diocletian, and how he persecuted the Christians", and Chapter 8 – "The persecution ceasing, the church in Britain enjoys peace till the time of the Arian heresy".

Celtic mythology is reborn in chivalric romance as tales of virtuous and glorious ancestors of British kings. While the plot and imagery of Thomas Malory's novel *The Death of King Arthur* still retain traces of Celtic 'magic' (especially conspicuous in the character of Merlin), the preface to it, which William Caxton, its first publisher and the English printing pioneer, wrote in 1485, emphasises only the Christian meaning of the novel.

Also Christianised is the image of the protagonist of the epic poem *Beowulf* in the extant revision of the 8th-9th centuries. There, Grendel is portrayed as a descendant of Cain and spawn of hell; Beowulf is seen as a humble and God-fearing Christian ascetic,

[6] T.B. Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James II*, vol. 1 (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1855), 6–7.

endowed with characteristics of the Christian 'dragon slayers' and saviours of people; and the Danish king is shown as a pagan who does not know the 'true God'.

The rejection of Catholicism, the creation of the Anglican Church, and the dissemination of various types of Protestantism throughout England from the 16th century on did not fundamentally change the relationship between the British 'own' and Christianity. Hence, the distinctive emphasis on the Anglican Church's continuity of the Old English Church and compromise solutions as regards Catholicism is not at all accidental.

Protestantism introduced (and simultaneously reflected in itself), if not a new sense of spirituality, religious commitment and connection with God, then those deep-seated needs for such an understanding of this connection that corresponded to the British mentality.[7] Its two main features were the understanding of the *Godly nature* of work, worldly efforts, and *cultural development*, on the one hand, and personal responsibility to God and the importance of personal spiritual aspiration for Him, on the other. Britain continued to be thought of and portrayed as a truly Christian country, whose 'God-worshipping' essence was, however, supplemented with the characteristically Protestant features of rationalism, love of freedom, and personal choice of faith.

The famous patriotic song *Rule, Britannia!* of the 18th century, originating from the poem *Rule, Britannia!* by James Thomson (1740), presents England not merely arising "from out the azure main" "at Heaven's command" but also protected by "guardian angels" under a God-sent "charter of the land" (an unmistakable reference to the Charter of Liberties) so that "Britons never, never, never shall be slaves". Achieving political, social, and economic freedom is also read, in a typically Protestant way, as God's "blessing", or a lack thereof for other countries ruled by "haughty tyrants".[8]

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[7] T. Claydon, I. McBride, eds. *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland, 1650–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
[8] J. Thomson, "Ode: Rule, Britannia", in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, vol. 1 (New York, London: W.W. Norton and Co., 2000), 2824–2825.

Land of Hope and Glory,[9] a British patriotic song written in 1902 and preferred today as an unofficial hymn of England, further confirms that internal links between the image of the homeland and Protestant Christianity are preserved in England. The first verse of the hymn contains a straightforward wish for the country to be blessed by the Lord to become more powerful ("God make thee mightier yet!"). This wish is transformed into an assertion in the refrain and is repeated twice, like an incantation. The belief in the truthful and genuine nature of freedom in the Empire ("By Freedom gained, by Truth maintained, / Thine Empire shall be strong") supports the assertion. It is noteworthy how the rationale behind Britain's greatness is expressed through tradition: the images of "ocean large and wide", "ancient fame" and "heroes" in the second verse mesh motifs of Celtic, German and Norse mythology with the Christian Protestant component.

The Anglo-Saxons brought to Britain the fourth mental and cultural layer. As Peter Ackroyd astutely observes, "It was in the interest of the Angles and the Saxons to utilize what remained of Romanized English civilization" rather than to exterminate it.[10] Along with the traditions of agriculture and construction, Christianity has also been preserved in some form, as evidenced by the churches that remain in England from the time of the Romans. The next wave of the Christianisation of England in the 7th century, therefore, was based on existing traditions and did not just occur "suddenly". The Saxons also brought a new form of organisation: independent farming in place of the communal form practised by the Celts.

Like other militant Germanic tribes, the Saxons were known for their belligerence, perseverance, courage and discipline. According to Ackroyd, the English nation was born from the combination of the Saxons' pugnacious and individualistic spirit with the established social and religious traditions of the Celts (at the time of the unification of the tribes around Catholicism). The junction of love of freedom and belligerence with communality and caste lent a new and

[9] A.C. Benson, *The Land of Hope and Glory, Arranged to Music by Edward Elgar* (London: Boosey and Co., 1902).

[10] Ackroyd, *The History of England. Foundation*, vol. 1 (London: Pan Books, 2012), 51.

special dimension to the monarch: his decision-making was no longer individual and had to be supported by elders.[11]

The English of today are indeed still built in many ways around the combination of the "impulsive" and sentimental Celt with the "disciplinable", "steady-going", "obedient" and yet "freedom-loving" Saxon.[12] Bringing together Celtic 'emotionality' and Saxon rational 'force' gave rise to the phenomenon of English Protestantism – a religious manifestation that "has the outside appearance of an intellectual system, and the inside reality of an emotional system",[13] with an apparent implication of external rationality, non-mystical religious procedures, and an internal sincere, personal, emotional aspiration to spiritual ascent.

Such a convergence of "impulsiveness" and "force", "impressionability" and "perseverance" engendered the explosive development of mechanisms and mechanisation in England in the 19th century, apart from the constant "anxiety to be up and away"[14] and the legal obedience which dictates that "illegal" is synonymous with "bad".[15] In the middle of the 19th century, Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American philosopher and writer, identified the "vigor of body and endurance", "a passion for utility", "realistic logic" and "true common sense", "scepticism of a theory", respect for facts, and a truly "operational" mechanism as "native traits" of the British mentality.[16] Sir Hiram Maxim, a British engineer and inventor, made a remark in an article in the *London Magazine* in early 1905, with typical respect for the achievements of his people, that the Anglo-Saxon race created the most intense form of Western civilisation, with the ability to quickly foresee being its essential feature, and that

[11] Ibid., 70.
[12] Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, 97–111.
[13] Ibid., 125.
[14] P. Langford, *Englishness Identified. Manners and Character 1650–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 37.
[15] G. Orwell "The English People" [Russian] in G. Orwell, *"1984" i esse raznykh let* (Moscow: Progress, 1989), 311.
[16] R.W.Emerson, "English Traits", in R.W. Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* (New York: Literary Classics of the U.S., 1983), 769, 801, 804, 810.

all early discoveries and inventions that promoted fast movement had been made by the Anglo-Saxons.[17]

It is to the convergence of "impressionability" and pragmatic "force" that the singular English humour, which is as strong today as before, can be traced: the English ban on "earnestness" and being too serious about facts, theories, life and oneself is a means of distancing from anything that can be deemed rigidly structured. In other words, this is a manifestation of the "distaste for artifice and pretension" that is associated with the generally empirical and pragmatic disposition of the British.[18]

The tradition would not change after Danish raids and conquests. Moreover, Edward the Confessor, an Anglo-Saxon king who ruled in England from 1042 to 1066 after the death of the son of the Danish conqueror King Canute, had the title "King of England" (*Rex Anglorum*), and his kingdom's citizens were called "the people of England".

The fifth, newest layer of history and culture in England is associated with the Norman Conquest. The Normans introduced Old French, which would become the language of the ruling classes, nobility, and the literary language of fiction, and contrasted the existing traditions with their gallant, courtly and chivalrous culture. A chasm that would take many years to bridge opened up between the king and his court with their worship of the fair lady and chivalric virtues, on the one hand, and the old Anglo-Saxon nobility and common people, on the other. The Normans also imbued British culture with a penchant for "exquisite luxury", gallantry, and "chivalry".[19]

The Normans reduced the role of the Anglo-Saxon nobility and abolished the institution of elders, thus turning the king's limited power into absolutism. The royal power began to be asserted against the demands of the pope and the interests of the people.[20] In natural

[17] Sir H. Maxim, "The Growth of Speed", *The London: A Magazine of Human Interest* (December 1904): 4.
[18] K. Fox, *Watching the English. The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour* (Boston and London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2008).
[19] Macaulay, *The History of England*.
[20] Ackroyd, *The History of England*, 134.

opposition to the tyrannical rule of the king, the Anglo-Saxon barons who absorbed the communality and traditional nature of Celtic culture and the freedom-loving individualism of the Saxon conquerors persisted with traditions of their own, which led in 1215 to the king's signing of the Magna Carta – the document which gave back the old rights to the king's vassals and which would become the bedrock of the British constitution.

For the English conceptual framework, the particularly close relationship between 'tradition' and 'freedom' – and the importance of its political dimension – can be traced, as well as elsewhere, in the traditional coexistence of Parliament, government and monarch to the present day. The English perception of the 1640–1660 revolution (including its later stage in 1688) as the restoration of the foundations of law-governed society in the face of a monarch striving for absolute power is equally telling. The sentence of Charles I in 1649, who was deemed to have violated the traditional norms of 'parity' between the king, government and Parliament, read "[That the court] did judge him tyrant, traitor, … and public enemy to the good people of the nation".

Thus, the following reflections of their own history and social fabric appear relevant for British self-perception and self-presentation:

1. Integration with other Western European states through the ancient Roman civilisation, Christian (first Catholic, then Protestant) culture, as well as Celtic, Germanic and Norman roots;
2. Inheritance of the traditions of Roman statehood and the imperial mission of bringing order to, culturalising, and civilising other nations;
3. Righteous imperial ambitions;
4. Sanctity and grace of external state power and internal social order, associated with respect for private property, on the one hand, and for the state, on the other;
5. Venerable mutual restriction of the powers of Parliament and the monarch through tradition (following the adoption of the Magna Carta);