Outsourcing Culture: From the Centre to the Periphery

Journalism was the most vivid form of communication at the disposal of the diverse Diaspora communities from Russia, both Jewish and non-Jewish, who frequented Berlin during the early 1920s. It is their very diversity, the kaleidoscopic flux of migrating people and ideologies, and the transitory nature of their initiatives that makes the study of the literary activities they sustained in Berlin such a challenge.

The study of those activities implies two considerations: firstly, that the status of their agents was largely undefined, depending on their varying degree of resistance or conformity to the new governing elites in Soviet Russia, and secondly, their experience in pre-revolutionary Russia, including the languages they had used for the dissemination of their writings—Russian, Yiddish, and Hebrew—which they would normally sustain.

Such a study could take as its point of departure the juxtaposition of various pairs of parameters, as e.g. ‘high-culture’ and ‘low-culture journalism’, ‘cultural contact’ and ‘cultural distance’, ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’, as put forward by Boldt et al.\(^1\) If we decide to prioritize the ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ parameters, we have to realise that the centre of creativity had moved from Metropolis to Diaspora, from Russia to Berlin, the first capital of Russian Emigration, where between 1921 and 1925 most of the creative forces of pre-revolutionary Russia had gathered and established for themselves a space of communication outside their home country. This communication relied on a periphery that consisted mainly of three groups of recipients: those residing in Russia, the Russian communities scattered around at the time in

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Berlin and other centres of Russian emigration, and the foreign audiences, as many groups had chosen the German capital as a hub for proclaiming their manifestos. Some Russian reviews, especially those dealing with Russian visual and performing arts, addressed in their German, English or French supplements members of other speech communities.

During the years 1921–1926, three artistic reviews were released in Berlin addressing both Russian readers and foreign target groups. The first to appear was Жар-Птица [The Firebird], an elegant review focusing on the artistic and theatrical life of Russia abroad; it was published between 1921 and 1926 by Alexander E. Kogan in Russian with German and English supplements. Next was the monthly Театр и жизнь [Theatre and Life], published by Griunberg and Klopotovskii (Leri) between 1921 and 1923 in Russian with German, French and English subtitles; it had a twofold mission: a) the promotion abroad of the Russian performing arts, such as theatre, ballet and cinema, and b) informing readers in Russia Abroad and Russia at Home about the professional life of their protagonists. Articles were well complemented by illustrations and the magazine’s external appearance started in a modest layout but became more elegant with every new issue. The multilingual subtitles suggest that the pictures were meant to be enjoyed by foreign target groups beyond the Russian communities.

The third of these reviews was the ephemeral Златотсвет [Chrysanthemum], which in its content and layout followed in the footsteps of Жар-Птица. It was published in 1924 in Russian, with an almost parallel German edition, by Nikolai Berezhansky, a newcomer to the art publishing scene, who adopted the business practices of his more senior artist-editor colleague A.E. Kogan, far less successfully though, as by 1924 the publishing conditions for foreign investors in Germany had deteriorated, and most Russian readers had moved on.

There were three characteristic features that Жар-Птица, Театр, and Златотсвет shared:

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2 After the first ten issues, the review was revamped. From no. 11 (June 1922) it appeared under the title Театр.
3 I. [sic], “Театр”. Двухнедельный журнал. Редактор-издатель E.Ju. Griunberg’, Новая Россия. Книга, no. 10 (October 1922), 17–18 [translation from the Russian: Sm-f].
4 Ibid.