

Russian Revolutionary as American Celebrity: A Case Study of Yekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaya

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In early 1905, American newspapers were reporting on the movements and public appearances of 40 Russians then touring the nation on speaking tours.¹ Most of these exotic foreign visitors were soon forgotten, but one carved out a special niche for herself. She became a sensation whose American friends made sure the media continued to follow her exploits for the next 15 years. The story of how Yekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaya became a celebrity—how she became ‘Babushka’ or the ‘Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution’—is the subject of this chapter. Breshkovskaya’s story reminds us both of the central role that women often played in the revolutionary movement and of its transnational aspects. Generations of Russian radicals looked beyond their country’s borders for support. The monies that were raised supported revolutionary activities in Russia and it was assumed that any publicity in the foreign media could shame the tsarist government into changing its policies. Hence, it was important to have sympathetic emissaries; Breshkovskaya wound up being one of the best.

Breshkovskaya, born Yekaterina Verigo in 1844, read a great deal during her childhood and was troubled by the treatment of Russian serfs. In 1863, she left the provinces to study in St Petersburg, but returned home when her mother fell ill. She opened a boarding school for girls, which allowed her to teach peasants for free. In her mid-20s, she married Nikolai Breshko-Breshkovsky, but her outlook was always more radical than his. They separated when Breshkovskaya deepened her engagement in the revolutionary movement. In 1874 she participated in the ‘To the People’ movement, for which she was

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arrested and kept in solitary confinement for many months. She was one of the defendants in the Trial of the 193 in 1877. Unrepentant, she became the first woman in Russia to be sentenced to hard labour in the Siberian mines. After 10 months in the mines, she was exiled. An unsuccessful escape attempt landed Breshkovskaya with further punishment. She was not freed until 1896, after which she travelled around rural Russia to familiarise herself with local conditions. In 1901, she was one of the founding members of the Socialist Revolutionary (SR) Party, the heirs to Russian populism. This chapter focuses on her activities from that point until the early 1920s. On the losing side after 1917, Breshkovskaya lived her final years abroad. She moved to Czechoslovakia in 1924, where she died in relative obscurity in 1934.

During the early years of the twentieth century, Breshkovskaya was a well-known and powerful figure. She differed from other revolutionary heroines in three ways. First, unlike many of her counterparts she did not shun the limelight. Instead, Breshkovskaya sought attention, even when she was in exile. Second, the punishments she received were central to her status. If the regime had executed her, this would have ended her activities; there would have been a public outcry, but this would have passed in time. Instead, her voice was kept alive and her ongoing harsh treatment was referenced in propaganda, thereby turning her into a living martyr. Finally, her trip to the USA distinguished Breshkovskaya from other revolutionary heroines, who did not leave Russia, and she became an international celebrity.

The question of Breshkovskaya's enduring celebrity is approached here by examining her long-term friendships with American supporters who were keen to promote her as a revolutionary icon, by charting her evolution into 'Babushka' in the US print media, and by tracing the creation and use of photographs of her, in other words by looking at the visual side of the persona she created. In this way, we can come to understand how a hardened Russian revolutionary became an American celebrity.

In May 1885, George Kennan left for Russia. After 13 months touring the country, Kennan published a series of scathing articles that proved so shocking that *Century* magazine was banned by the Russian government.² The articles were published in book form under the title *Siberia and the Exile System* in December 1891. The book sold out edition after edition and did much to establish Kennan as an authority on Russia and to tarnish American perceptions of the tsarist regime. It also portrayed Russian revolutionaries as heroic figures. So too did Kennan's exhaustive speaking tours; he delivered more than 800 lectures to a total audience of up to a million people.³

Kennan's writings introduced Breshkovskaya to the English-speaking world. They met when he arrived in Selenginsk, a village close to the Russian border with Mongolia. He was immediately impressed by what he saw in Breshkovskaya's face. His positive opinion grew stronger as the pair conversed and as Kennan came to know her as a cultivated and educated person. He also grasped that her future was bleak since she was likely to die in exile and to be forgotten. Still, '[t]he unshaken courage with which this unfortunate woman

contemplated her dreary future', he opined, 'and the faith that she manifested in the ultimate triumph of liberty in her native country were as touching as they were heroic'.⁴ Decades later, Breshkovskaya teased him in a letter, writing, 'The first time I read your book about Siberia, I laughed much over your saying that I should finish my days in Selenginsk and be buried there.'⁵ Even if he was mistaken about her fate, Kennan's opinions mattered and he never forgot the woman he met in this distant hamlet. He reappeared in small roles throughout her life, lending his celebrity to augment Breshkovskaya's.

Two other mainstays of support for Breshkovskaya were American feminists and 'gentlemen socialists'. Many became devoted friends and they made sure that she remained in the limelight. Both groups first met Breshkovskaya during her 1904–1905 speaking tour.⁶ The tour was funded and organised by the American Friends of Russian Freedom, a society which had been revived after word of the 1903 Kishinev pogrom outraged the American public. One of its vice-presidents was George Kennan; executive committee members included Isabel Barrows and Lillian Wald. Lyman Abbott, Jane Addams and Alice Stone Blackwell served on its national committee.⁷ The New York Branch handled the publicity for Breshkovskaya's trip, while Barrows helped with her English. She also introduced Breshkovskaya to others active in the progressive movement.

Breshkovskaya developed particularly strong ties to the women who founded and ran settlement houses on America's East Coast. She visited the House on Henry Street at the invitation of Wald, who noted in her memoirs that the 'settlement from time to time affords occasions for conference on Russian affairs between influential Americans and visiting Russians who entertain hopes of reform by other than active revolutionary methods'.⁸ Breshkovskaya was sufficiently politically astute to downplay her support for political violence as she courted American benefactors, who tended to be more moderate liberals than socialists. The championing of Breshkovskaya by Barrows and Wald opened the doors to Helena Dudley's Denison House in Boston, where she stayed for 6 weeks, and Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago, which she visited in January 1905. These women, as well as Alice Stone Blackwell, often accompanied Breshkovskaya when she spoke to ever-larger crowds. The tour was a success with Breshkovskaya garnering interest wherever she went and raising thousands of dollars. She left the USA in March 1905, but she made sure to keep in touch with the women she had met.

Support was also offered by 'gentlemen socialists', affluent young men attracted to socialism and ideas of social change. They publicised their causes in a host of magazines and newspapers, including *Outlook*. From 1893, *Outlook* specialised in public affairs and the cultural world. Its circulation grew rapidly in the 1890s, with subscribers numbering 30,000 in 1894 and 100,000 by 1902.⁹ The magazine regularly covered news from Russia. Kennan was affiliated with it as early as 1898 and spent 3 years as its Washington correspondent. In 1905 he was charged with a new task: covering the Russo-Japanese war. The stories published by the 'gentlemen socialists' about Russian affairs found acceptance at

the magazine because one of its editors, Lyman Abbott, was a member of the Friends of Russian Freedom.¹⁰

What differentiated men like Arthur Bullard, Kellogg Durland, Ernest Poole and William English Walling from other journalists who wrote about Breshkovskaya was their willingness actively to support the Russian revolutionary movement. They were particularly interested in the fates of the members of the SR party whom they met via the network of settlement houses that Breshkovskaya visited.¹¹ Poole interviewed Breshkovskaya for 8 hours at the end of 1904. He then related her life story in an influential article published in the 7 January 1905 issue of *Outlook*.¹² That article caught fire since the Bloody Sunday massacre suddenly thrust a strong spotlight on Russian events. The piece was quoted widely and then reprinted as a pamphlet.¹³ More than 20,000 copies were sold at Breshkovskaya's remaining public appearances.¹⁴ After meeting her, all four men—Poole, Bullard, Durland and Walling—decided to go to Russia in 1905 so they could see the revolution first hand. Poole even arrived with a letter of introduction from Breshkovskaya to smooth his way into revolutionary circles.¹⁵ These men were the first to refer to Breshkovskaya by her nickname 'Babushka', but it did not immediately catch on.¹⁶ Counter-intuitively, only once she left America did she become the 'Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution'.

Breshkovskaya's arrest and subsequent treatment by tsarist authorities was the turning point; it generated a strong sense of injustice and suspicions that the reforms introduced after 1905 were not truly going to change Russian society. Breshkovskaya returned to Russia in June 1905 and spent the next 18 months living underground. Her luck ran out when she was captured in December 1907. Her case was joined with that of Nikolai Chaikovsky. Within days, her arrest and confinement spurred Breshkovskaya's friends abroad into action. Petitions were sent to the Russian Ambassador in Washington and one reached the desk of Russian Prime Minister Petr Stolypin. Stolypin was forced to acknowledge the outcry. In a statement to the Associate Press, picked up by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* as well as by weekly periodicals, Stolypin assured the world that the pair would receive a fair trial.¹⁷ Yet that did not stop people from agitating on her behalf. Isabel Barrows twice went to Russia to plead personally with the Minister to release Breshkovskaya on bail.¹⁸ While international pressure ultimately failed in this regard, people at the time believed that it did still make a difference to her overall situation. In his memoirs, former leader of the SR party Victor Chernov referred to a 1910 article by an English correspondent when he mentioned Breshkovskaya's trial, suggesting that contemporary revolutionaries themselves understood that international contacts were useful.¹⁹ Moreover, Kennan insisted that the sentences Chaikovsky and Breshkovskaya ultimately received were directly influenced by pressure from abroad: 'The result of the trial is a convincing proof that Russian political and penal methods *may* be changed or modified by the pressure of enlightened public opinion in England and the United States'.²⁰

At this point, much of the American newspaper coverage devoted more column space to Chaikovsky than to Breshkovskaya, and it was his name that appeared in the headlines when the pair came to trial in March 1910. The *New York Times* referred to it as the 'Tchaykovsky Trial' in all of its articles and, when the verdict was announced, the paper's headline read: 'Tchaykovsky Freed, Woman to be Exiled'.²¹ Within days, however, the newspaper reversed its focus. On 13 March, it printed a poem 'Breshkovskaya' by Elsa Barker; that poem spurred both Upton Sinclair and Alice Stone Blackwell to pen letters to the editor praising the piece, although Blackwell tempered her remarks by suggesting Breshkovskaya would have quibbled with one or two lines in the poem.²² A similar transition can be seen in the coverage of the *Washington Post*. It was not until a 9 March 1910 article discussing the verdict that Breshkovskaya became the primary focus of attention; the paper's headline read 'She Defies Russian Court', with 'Mme. Breshkovskaya Boldly Announces Herself Revolutionist' underneath. Chaikovsky, who had pled not guilty and was acquitted, suddenly seemed less heroic than his aged female counterpart, who was exiled to Siberia in perpetuity after owning up to her revolutionary activities and to membership of the SR party. At that moment, she eclipsed Chaikovsky, and arguably any other Russian revolutionary, in the eyes of the American public.

An article by Rose Strunsky further demonstrates this shift. Published in the August 1910 issue of *Forum*, it coincided with Breshkovskaya's long trek to her new place of exile, Kerensk in Eastern Siberia. 'There is a woman of sixty-eight on her way to Siberia to-day', read the opening line. That was the outcome of what Strunsky calls 'Katherine Breshkovsky's trial'. As for Chaikovsky, 'he was acquitted. He chose to deny facts to the Government, or the Government... wished to appear lenient and did not ask embarrassing questions'. Breshkovskaya, however, 'would not let herself be freed.'²³

As reactions to her sentence continued to appear, the first signs emerge that her persona as 'Babushka' was finally taking root in American print media. Strunsky referred to her as 'Grandmother of the Revolution' and so too did another August 1910 article simply entitled 'Babushka'.²⁴ Even earlier, in April, Breshkovskaya's friend Isabel Barrows explained to readers that 'Madame Breshkovsky is called by this familiar term – "little grandmother"'.²⁵ The following year, *Outlook* updated its readers about Breshkovskaya's living conditions in a piece called 'Babushka in Exile' and suggested that 'To Cheer Babushka's Exile', as another headline called out, readers should send her books and magazines.²⁶ However, the remaining two articles *Outlook* devoted to her in 1911 used the more familiar 'Madame Breshkovsky'.

This flip-flopping disappeared entirely in 1913. In November, Breshkovskaya embarked on a bold plan to escape from exile. Dressed in men's clothes, she planned to ride to Irkutsk, a distance of about 1000 km. It took the authorities several days to notice she was missing since a fellow prisoner agreed to impersonate Breshkovskaya. She was finally caught close to her destination and, as punishment, spent the next 18 months in solitary confinement. The foiled escape was reported in the American media and it marked the moment when

the media fully embraced the 'Grandmother of the Russian Revolution' title. The *New York Times* made reference to the name twice while the *Washington Post* used it in a subheading and the main text of its article.²⁷ From this point until Breshkovskaya fell from favour with American audiences in 1919, both newspapers used some form of the nickname in almost every single article that mentioned her. 'Grandmother', 'Babushka' and 'Little Grandmother' were used interchangeably. The same can be said vis-à-vis articles in magazines. When *The Independent* ran a piece reacting to news of her escape, the title was 'The Grandmother of the Russian Revolution'.²⁸ Roughly three quarters of the articles that referred to Breshkovskaya in *Outlook* between 1913 and 1924, including long features in November 1917 and May 1919, called her by the affectionate nickname.²⁹ By the end of 1913, it was apparently inconceivable to think of Breshkovskaya other than as 'Babushka'.

Breshkovskaya did not watch impassively as others created this image for her; she influenced the construct as much as possible via her voluminous correspondence with American friends and supporters. For almost 10 years, she exchanged letters with Kennan, Bullard and Poole. She also wrote constantly to Alice Stone Blackwell, Helena Dudley and Isabel Barrows. While she almost never referred to herself directly as 'Babushka', Breshkovskaya did employ familial language in her letters, particularly those she sent to other women. Two letters from 1911 demonstrate this: the first opens 'Dear, dearest and a thousand times dearest friend and sister, Isabel C. Barrows!', while the second begins 'My sister Isabel, my daughter Alice...'³⁰ That language, as well as the comments she frequently made expressing interest in each woman's family, cast Breshkovskaya directly into a grandmotherly role. In other words, she wrote as if she was actually embedded into their families.

Luckily for Breshkovskaya, her adopted sisters and daughters were also activists keen to keep her in the public eye. Barrows twice informed *Outlook* readers on how to send letters and packages to Breshkovskaya in exile.³¹ In August 1915, when her place of exile was changed to Yakutsk and there were concerns about how she would fare in a harsher climate, Blackwell went on the offensive by releasing the contents of one of Breshkovskaya's letters. The story was picked up by the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and, of course, *Outlook*.³² All three publications underscored her advanced age, 71 years, and the fact that she was losing her sight. Via Blackwell's information, they made it appear as if a harmless and blind old lady was being unnecessarily persecuted by the Russian government. Accounts of Breshkovskaya's decrepitude were overstated, however. Her eyesight may have been poor, but that did not stop her from reading an impressive array of books and magazines while in exile. Wald and Blackwell arranged subscriptions with monies given to them by Jacob Schiff. She received *National Geographic*, *Survey* and *McLure's*.³³

Breshkovskaya's correspondence also contains regular comments on articles in the feminist *Woman's Journal*, edited by Blackwell, and *Outlook*, meaning she was well aware of what magazines in America were saying about her.³⁴ To give but one example, in October 1916, she told Blackwell, 'I have read your article

about me. It was too much. I feel myself a good soul, nothing more.³⁵ In other letters, she noted reading Walling's *Russia's Message* as well as books and articles by Bullard and Kennan. As she said, 'It is a great satisfaction to read the writings of people whom you know and loved. It is like a conversation.'³⁶

Breshkovskaya's public persona also had a strong visual component. She was believable as 'Babushka' not just because some reporters informed their readers that her revolutionary comrades referred to her that way, or because editors found the name catchy enough to standardise its usage. It fit because photographs of Breshkovskaya showed her looking like a grandmother. From the moment she first met George Kennan in Selenginsk, Breshkovskaya's physical appearance, notably the hardships etched onto her face as well as her advanced age, became a fundamental aspect of her image. For that reason, it is imperative to understand the role that photographs played in creating 'Babushka'.

Breshkovskaya understood the power of photographs. When she was first arrested in 1874, she did all she could to prevent the tsarist authorities from taking a useful mug shot.³⁷ She would only be photographed on her own terms. This stubborn determination to control her image reappears in her correspondence, even when she was in exile. The Russian government was clearly concerned about what photographs of Breshkovskaya were circulating. In a 1911 letter to Blackwell, she noted that, after a search of her living quarters, police officials 'took the photographs showing me with some of my comrades'.³⁸ They may have worried because from time to time Breshkovskaya gifted American friends with photographs that she continued to have taken of herself and her surroundings while in exile. The recipients were the very people who wrote about her in the American press, thereby maintaining her celebrity status, and who pressured the Russian government concerning her situation. In August 1912, she noted in a letter to Barrows that 'I have a terrible photograph of myself, very like indeed. I will send it to your son, but he mustn't be afraid'.³⁹ The following year Breshkovskaya sent a portrait to Bullard and two to Dudley. She could never resist commenting on the images either; usually she underscored her aged appearance. She wrote to Dudley, 'Everyone says I am not so old as the photos make me look. Perhaps it is somehow in speaking and smiling one always seems younger and lively. But when alone and quiet, I must look as old as I do here, though my heart remains always young'.⁴⁰ Once the Provisional Government released her from exile, she made sure to send a photograph she liked to Alice Stone Blackwell. It showed her with a floral tribute she had been given. The accompanying letter included a rare reference to her moniker by Breshkovskaya herself: 'The young comrades cherish the grandmother, and have her surrounded with flowers and red ribbons'.⁴¹

Indeed, the need to influence what pictures of her circulated stayed with Breshkovskaya until the very end of her life. When M.A. Novomeysky, who knew her from her time in exile, visited her in Paris in 1932, she gave him a copy of the picture she had taken to commemorate her 80th birthday, but insisted that her long-time friend Alexander Kerensky was behind the portrait. Pointing to him, Breshkovskaya reportedly said: 'Just look at what he's done to me, made

a world exhibition of me, as if I were an icon of the Mother of God, but I've told him straight, I'm having nothing of the sort on my 90th birthday'.⁴² Breshkovskaya protests too much. As she well knew, the acquisition of celebrity was a participatory process that involved both written and visual materials; it was one that she had long willingly and actively engaged in.

During her first trip to America, Breshkovskaya was photographed by George Grantham Bain, 'the father of foreign photographic news'. He started the Bain News Photographic Service in New York City in 1895 and by 1905, his archive numbered more than a million images.⁴³ Bain's photographs were the ones that American authors turned to frequently when they wanted to include a picture of Breshkovskaya in their works. One of the first to do so was Kellogg Durland. His book, *The Red Reign* (1907), contained the portrait in Fig. 2.1.⁴⁴ Six years later, British author Rothay Reynolds included the same image in his account of Russian events from 1910 to 1912.⁴⁵ Reynolds was deeply influenced by the work of another 'gentleman socialist'. He credited Poole's article on Breshkovskaya, the one originally appearing in *Outlook* and later reprinted in pamphlet form, in his 'Foreword'. Reynolds went on to speak to her in the Peter and Paul Fortress just before she was sent into Siberian exile, and his recounting of her early life and revolutionary activities is clearly a rephrasing of Poole's piece.

The same picture resurfaces in two other places. It appeared on contemporary Russian postcards, like the one reproduced here. Its existence demonstrates how widely the same image could spread. The picture was also used as the frontispiece for *The Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution*. The volume was rushed into production by its editor Alice Stone Blackwell and appeared in November 1917. Two copies of the book found their way into Babushka's hands and, in a letter to Blackwell, she complained that in the photograph she



Fig. 2.1 Yekaterina Breshkovskaya (Catherine Breshkovsky) (1907)

looked ‘too young and too beautiful’.⁴⁶ After another decade of hardship, Breshkovskaya ‘claimed she was now old, ugly, lacked teeth, had no curls, and found it increasingly difficult to get moving’.⁴⁷

Another photograph apparently from the same series shows Breshkovskaya standing at a desk; the image is not among the Bain News Service holdings at the Library of Congress. A fire in 1908 destroyed much of Bain’s archive; the original glass plate for this photograph may have been among the things lost to that fire.⁴⁸ She is wearing the same dress and collar as in the previous image and the same inkwell is used as a prop on the desk. It was this second photograph that was included in Lillian Wald’s memoirs.⁴⁹

Bain was not the only photographer to point his lens at Breshkovskaya during her trip to America. The creator of the portrait in Fig. 2.2 is unknown but the image almost certainly stems from that time. Here is a contemporary picture postcard version of it. Note that the caption contains her name only in English, and the language used on the back is the same. This is a US postcard created for the American market; I have never seen this particular photograph on a Russian postcard. The same picture did, however, appear in a feature article, ‘The Women of the Russian Revolution’, in *Outlook* in December 1908.⁵⁰ Two years later, the portrait was printed alongside an account of Breshkovskaya’s trial in *The Independent*.⁵¹

These three photographs are consistent with how Breshkovskaya was usually portrayed. Portraits of her circulated in postcard form during her final period of tsarist imprisonment and exile. Even more were issued to celebrate her release in 1917.⁵² The images did nothing to disguise her advanced age since that was part of the revolutionary persona she had honed both in Russia and the USA, and



Fig. 2.2 Yekaterina Breshkovskaya (Catherine Breshkovsky) (1907/8?)

which media stories were always sure to bend to. In them, she was physically non-threatening. The conservative dress that Breshkovskaya favoured did as much as her vagueness of speech to gloss over the fact that her party was responsible for much of the political violence that swept Russia prior to the First World War. Photographs that appeared in the USA were also careful not to include props that might present Breshkovskaya in a politically partisan way. In this, they differed from some Russian materials that made more explicit reference to the revolutionary movement, by showing her holding newspapers with visible headlines or mastheads, for example, or, in the case of one postcard, by incorporating a written appeal from Breshkovskaya, encouraging Russian peasants to vote in upcoming elections, in its composition.⁵³ Given the image she so carefully crafted for foreign consumption, including via these photographs, Americans would have been hard-pressed to associate Babushka with terror.

Released from exile, Breshkovskaya immediately cabled the news to her American friends, Alice Stone Blackwell and Lillian Wald. Her swift return to Petrograd brought her back into the political limelight. It also ensured that new photographs of her were soon in circulation in Russia (Figs. 2.3 and 2.4). While the caption on the first merely notes that Breshkovskaya is free and the picture shows her innocuously sitting in a car, not all of the photographs were so politically neutral. Figure 2.4, for instance, shows Breshkovskaya supporting Alexander Kerensky on the podium as he gives a speech to the assembled crowd (she is the figure with a shawl over her head just behind him). This image has her in the thick of partisan politicking.



Fig. 2.3 Yekaterina Breshkovskaya (1917)



Fig. 2.4 Yekaterina Breshkovskaya with Aleksander Kerensky (1917)

While American authors, editors and publishers generally shied away from such photographs, they did not disappear entirely from the historical record. A portrait of Breshkovskaya holding a placard covered in slogans connected to the SR party was reprinted in the English-language version of Victor Chernov's memoirs (despite the fact that Breshkovskaya herself is not mentioned at all in the text); and a photograph was included in a collage in Ernest Poole's memoirs.⁵⁴ Under the heading 'Pictures taken in Russia in 1917', the one of Breshkovskaya surrounded by soldiers on the Russian front appears at the bottom of the page. Such images, however, seldom found their way into American periodicals. I have only come across two exceptions, both published in *Outlook*. The first, copyrighted by the International Film Service, shows a newly freed Breshkovskaya with a group; the second accompanied a feature article on Breshkovskaya by William T. Ellis.⁵⁵ In this portrait, she is holding a copy of *Delo naroda* and readers are told that 'The newspaper which Mme. Breshkovsky is holding in her hands is "The People's Business", a Revolutionary publication'.

Much more passive images found favour with Americans, notably one that showed Breshkovskaya looking into the camera lens as she apparently finishes a meal. She appears as a kindly elderly lady with the smallest hint of a smile gracing her lips. This was the photograph used as the frontispiece for Rheta Childe Dorr's *Inside the Russian Revolution*, published in November 1917.⁵⁶ The same portrait was included in war photographer Donald C. Thompson's *Donald Thompson in Russia* (1918).⁵⁷ This was despite the fact that Thompson told his wife in a letter dated 23 April 1917 that he had personally

photographed Breshkovskaya that day.⁵⁸ For some reason, Thompson's own portrait was not the one published in his book. The photograph used was copyrighted by Underwood and Underwood. Given that my copy (which came from the archives of the *Baltimore Sun* newspaper) has a stamp dating it to February 1917, it means that it was in the paper's hands months before Donald Thompson even met Breshkovskaya. In 1896 Underwood and Underwood began to make stereoscopic pictures but by the 1910s it was a full-fledged picture service. The firm specialised in pictures of remote places and had a network of operators across the globe.⁵⁹ Because it was expensive and time-consuming to transmit images across the Atlantic by cable, newspapers and periodicals relied on firms like Underwood and Underwood for their pictures.⁶⁰ Hence, it is likely that this portrait of Breshkovskaya was taken in Russia, after an amnesty by the Provisional Government freed all of the country's political prisoners, and that it was distributed in the USA to interested newspapers and periodicals by Underwood and Underwood.

Thompson and Dorr were not the only Americans to seek out Breshkovskaya to get her views on the Russian revolution. Old friends Arthur Bullard and Ernest Poole visited her in the Winter Palace where she was staying after her return from exile. Neither man wrote about their talks at the time, but Poole mentioned them in his memoirs 20 years later.⁶¹ New acquaintances included Bessie Beatty, correspondent for the *San Francisco Bulletin*, who travelled on the Trans-Siberian Railway, arriving in Petrograd in June 1917. She visited Breshkovskaya several times at the Winter Palace and her impressions fit nicely with Babushka's public persona: 'Always I came away with the sense of having been on the heights, close to something big and fine', wrote Beatty, 'with a grandmotherly kiss upon my cheek and the memory of a friendly hand-clasp'.⁶² Beatty's book included a photograph and prose passages that emphasised Breshkovskaya's connections to America.⁶³ She made sure to tell her foreign guests that letters from American friends had sustained her during her last term in exile. Breshkovskaya had similar conversations with Louise Bryant, who arrived in Russia in August 1917. According to Bryant, 'She mentioned many well-known writers here [in the USA], and called them "her children"'.⁶⁴ Her desire to befriend the curious younger American woman is evident in the handwritten message on the photograph of Breshkovskaya that was used as the frontispiece in Bryant's book: 'The old Breshkovsky who wishes to be ever a friend of you'. Both Beatty and Bryant respected Breshkovskaya for her stature as a revolutionary heroine and looked to her to contextualise events as they were unfolding in Russia. She was an authority figure, an opinion leader, whose impression mattered in the months leading up to the Bolshevik seizure of power. However, her fortunes were about to take a new turn, one which finally saw events pass her by and the dimming of her celebrity status.

Returning to America after the Bolshevik seizure of power, Breshkovskaya assumed she could slip into the role of expert witness in order to tell Americans what was really going on in Russia. She claimed to still speak accurately for the Russian masses.⁶⁵ She arrived in Seattle on 19 January 1919, where she was met

by Helena Dudley and a host of reporters. Her new project sought to raise money for Russian war orphans, but she devoted as much energy to criticising Lenin's regime. On the 26 January, she gave an interview to a *New York Times* correspondent.⁶⁶ A follow-up article 4 days later coincided with her arrival in New York, where a crowd of several hundred, including Alice Stone Blackwell, greeted her at Grand Central Station. In her interviews that day, Breshkovskaya again critiqued the Bolshevik government.⁶⁷ Her base in New York was the Henry Street Settlement House. Here she was surprised by a visit from George Kennan. The two embraced and exchanged kisses.⁶⁸ A very successful evening at Carnegie Hall followed. Kennan was present at Breshkovskaya's lecture, which raised almost \$11,000 for the war orphans.⁶⁹ This talk was the highpoint of her trip, but things soured quickly as she moved on to Washington.

On 14 February, she testified before Senator Lee Overman's subcommittee on German propaganda and Bolshevism, warning of the dangers that the latter presented.⁷⁰ Breshkovskaya was one of more than two dozen experts—most of whom disagreed with her—called to answer the senators' questions, yet her appearance on Capitol Hill was ignored by mainstream newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. *The Post*, for instance, which had mentioned her expected attendance at a dinner in Washington in mid-February, did not refer to Breshkovskaya again until 1923.⁷¹ *The Times* printed only a short article about her 6 April speech in Providence, Rhode Island—one that was disrupted by protestors and required intervention from the police to quiet the hall—before falling silent.⁷² Even such a traditionally sympathetic periodical as *Outlook* paid less attention to Breshkovskaya. After warmly welcoming her to America in an article on 12 February, the magazine ignored her until the end of March.⁷³

Undeterred, she penned several articles and a longer appeal to the American people. These items were quickly repackaged into two pamphlets: *A Message to the American People* and *Russia and the World*.⁷⁴ They were published by the Russian Information Bureau in the USA, a semi-official mouthpiece of the Russian Provisional Government established in 1917.⁷⁵ Under the stewardship of its director, A.J. Sack, the Bureau tried to strengthen economic ties with the USA and, after the October Revolution, sought to block official recognition of the Soviet government. Its stances on key issues matched Breshkovskaya's own but certainly did not reflect the attitudes of many in feminist circles or on the political left in the USA who welcomed the social experiment begun by the Bolsheviks.⁷⁶ Few Americans had ever understood how deeply partisan Russian revolutionary politics were, nor could they when emissaries like Breshkovskaya had deliberately downplayed the differences between parties for years.

By the time Breshkovskaya left America for France on 28 June 1919 she had learnt that celebrity was fickle. Her warnings about the Bolsheviks fell on deaf ears and she was now largely ignored by the mainstream media. In socialist quarters she was roundly criticised for her views; it was even openly suggested that she allied herself with American capitalists. An article in *The Liberator*, a monthly magazine edited by Max and Crystal Eastman, was particularly cutting:

The woman whom once all we American lovers of freedom honored as the heroic protagonist of Russia's toiling and suffering millions, is now being exhibited to us, by a propaganda lecture-bureau financed by John D. Rockefeller and Cleveland H. Dodge, as the mouthpiece of the interventionists and reactionaries who are plotting to overthrow Russian liberty.⁷⁷

Albert Rhys Williams, whose writings are typical of American commentators who supported the Soviet government, deemed Breshkovskaya 'hopelessly out of step with the Revolution'.⁷⁸ Even old stalwarts such as Lillian Wald and Alice Stone Blackwell disagreed with Breshkovskaya's interpretation of events. While Breshkovskaya's celebrity never totally disappeared—American newspapers and magazines occasionally referred to her activities until her death in 1934—as a political force, she was spent.

NOTES

1. Arthur W. Thompson and Robert A. Hart, *The Uncertain Crusade: America and the Russian Revolution of 1905*, Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970, p. 37.
2. Frank L. Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1741–1930*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1958–1968, pp. 213–32.
3. Frederick F. Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship, 1865–1924*, Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1990, p. 177.
4. George Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System*, vol. II, New York: The Century Co., 1891, p. 122.
5. Catherine Breshkovsky, *The Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution: Reminiscences and Letters of Catherine Breshkovsky*, ed. Alice Stone Blackwell, Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1917, p. 154.
6. For detailed discussions of the tour, see Jane E. Good, 'America and the Russian Revolutionary Movement, 1888–1905', *Russian Review*, vol. 41, no. 3, 1982, pp. 273–287; and Jane E. Good and David R. Jones, *Babushka: the Life of the Russian Revolutionary Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaya (1844–1934)*, Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1991, pp. 78–90.
7. Travis, *George Kennan*, p. 273.
8. Lillian D. Wald, *The House on Henry Street*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1915, pp. 232–3.
9. On *Outlook*, see Mott, *History of American Magazines*, vol. III, pp. 281 and 422–35.
10. David Foglesong, *The American Mission and the 'Evil Empire'*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 28.
11. Foglesong, *American Mission*, p. 39.
12. Ernest Poole, 'Katherine Breshkovsky: a Russian Revolutionist', *Outlook*, 7 January 1905, pp. 78–88.
13. Ernest Poole, *Katharine Breshkovsky 'For Russia's Freedom'*, Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1905.
14. Arthur W. Thompson, 'The Reception of Russian Revolutionary Leaders in America, 1904–1906', *American Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 3, 1966, p. 461.
15. Ernest Poole, *The Bridge: My Own Story*, New York: Macmillan, 1940, p. 149.

16. The nickname was first used in print by Kellogg Durland in the 29 March 1905 issue of the *Boston Transcript*.
17. 'Stolypin Receives American Petition', *New York Times*, 23 December 1907; 'Petition Cabled to Stolypin', *Washington Post*, 27 December 1907; 'Assurances of a Fair Trial', *Outlook*, 4 January 1907.
18. Isabel C. Barrows, *A Sunny Life: the Biography of Samuel June Barrows*, Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1913, p. 240. See also Isabel C. Barrows, 'Madame Breshkovsky in Prison', *Outlook*, 5 March 1910.
19. V.M. Chernov, *Pered burei*, New York: Izdatel'stvo imeni Chekhova, 1953, p. 130.
20. Italics in the original. George Kennan, 'Russia's Injustice', *Outlook*, 2 April 1910.
21. 'Tchaykovsky Freed, Woman to be Exiled', *New York Times*, 10 March 1910.
22. The poem was reprinted widely. See, for example, in *Current Literature*, vol. XLVIII, no. 5, 1910; and *Little Grandmother*, pp. 333–335.
23. Rose Strunsky, 'Siberia and the Russian Woman', *Forum*, August 1910. Strunsky errs when she says Breshkovskaya was 68; she was only 66.
24. 'Babushka', *Outlook*, 20 August 1910.
25. Isabel C. Barrows, 'After the Verdict', *Outlook*, 16 April 1910.
26. 'Babushka in Exile', *Outlook*, 28 January 1911; and 'To Cheer Babushka's Exile', *Outlook*, 18 February 1911.
27. 'Escapes Siberia as Man', *New York Times*, 10 December 1913; and 'Woman Exile Foiled', *Washington Post*, 10 December 1913.
28. 'The Grandmother of the Russian Revolution', *The Independent*, 18 December 1913.
29. 'The Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution: an Interview with Her and a Message from Her', *Outlook*, 21 November 1917; and "'Babushka': a Personal Impression of Catherine Breshkovsky", *Outlook*, 14 May 1919.
30. *Little Grandmother*, pp. 170 and 166.
31. Barrows, 'To Cheer Babushka's Exile'; and Isabel C. Barrows, 'For Madame Breshkovsky', *Outlook*, 13 May 1911.
32. 'Noted Woman Exile Now Sent to Arctic', *New York Times*, 15 August 1915; 'Picks Hardest Exile for Breshkovskaya', *New York Times*, 23 August 1915; 'Aged "Grandmother of Revolutions" Sent to Arctic Prison Hut by Russia', *Washington Post*, 23 August 1915; and 'The Czar's Cruelty to Katharine Breshkovsky', *Outlook*, 25 August 1915.
33. Marjorie N. Field, *Lillian Wald: a Biography*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008, p. 230.
34. *Little Grandmother*, p. 179; and Warren B. Walsh, 'Some Breshkovskaya Letters', *American Slavic and East European Review*, vol. 4, nos. 3–4, 1945, pp. 137 and 139.
35. *Little Grandmother*, p. 299.
36. *Little Grandmother*, pp. 163–4, 238 and 253.
37. Yekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaya, *Hidden Springs of the Russian Revolution*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1931, p. 67.
38. *Little Grandmother*, p. 188.
39. *Little Grandmother*, p. 234.
40. *Little Grandmother*, p. 265.
41. *Little Grandmother*, p. 324.
42. M.A. Novomeysky, *My Siberian Life*, London: Max Parrish, 1956, p. 42.

43. 'George Grantham Bain: Pioneer News Photographer Dies Here at the Age of 79', *New York Times*, 21 April 1944, p. 19; and Kenneth Kobré, *Photojournalism: the Professionals' Approach*, 5th edn, Boston, MA: Focal Press, 2004, p. 366.
44. Kellogg Durland, *The Red Reign: the True Story of An Adventurous Year in Russia*, New York: Century Co., 1907, opposite p. 490. The glass plate original is currently housed in the Bain News Service collection at the Library of Congress. Available online: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/ggbain/item/ggb2004002642/> (accessed May 2015).
45. Rothay Reynolds, *My Russian Year*, London: Mills and Boon Ltd, 1913, opposite p. 148.
46. Letter quoted in Good and Jones, *Babushka*, pp. 158–9.
47. Good and Jones, *Babushka*, p. 159.
48. Kobré, *Photojournalism*, p. 366.
49. Wald, *House on Henry Street*, opposite p. 242.
50. Leroy Scott, 'The Women of the Russian Revolution', *Outlook*, 26 December 1908. Scott was another writer with ties to the settlement movement. See Thompson, 'Reception', p. 454.
51. 'The Trial of Russian Revolutionists', *The Independent*, 17 March 1910.
52. Examples can be seen in Alison Rowley, 'Popular Culture and Visual Narratives of Revolution: Russian Postcards, 1905–1922', *Revolutionary Russia*, no. 1, vol. 21, 2008, pp. 18–22; and Alison Rowley, *Open Letters: Russian Popular Culture and the Picture Postcard, 1880–1922*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013, pp. 228–9.
53. See Rowley, 'Popular Culture', pp. 21 and 22.
54. Victor Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution*, New York: Russell and Russell, 1966, opposite page 144; and Poole, *The Bridge*, opposite p. 230.
55. 'Madame Breshkovsky Free Again and in Petrograd', *Outlook*, 23 May 1917, p. 149; and William T. Ellis, 'The Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution', *Outlook*, 21 November 1917, p. 459.
56. Rheta Childe Dorr, *Inside the Russian Revolution*, New York: Macmillan, 1917.
57. Donald C. Thompson, *Donald Thompson in Russia*, New York: Century Co., 1918, opposite p. 142.
58. Thompson, *Thompson in Russia*, p. 146.
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63. Beatty, *Red Heart*, p. 162.
64. Louise Bryant, *Six Red Months in Russia*, New York: George H. Doran Company, 1918, p. 106.
65. Catherine Breshkovsky, *A Message to the American People*, New York: Russian Information Bureau in the USA, 1919, p. 12.
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67. 'Exposes Bolshevik Misrule in Russia', *New York Times*, 30 January 1919.
68. Travis, *George Kennan*, p. 363.
69. 'Sees Free Election Russia's First Need', *New York Times*, 11 February 1918.

70. Full text of 'Bolshevik propaganda. Hearings before a subcommittee of the Committee on the judiciary, United States Senate, Sixty-Fifth Congress, third session and thereafter, pursuant to S. Res. 439 and 469, February 11, 1919 to March 10, 1919', available online: https://archive.org/stream/cu31924030480051/cu31924030480051_djvu.txt (accessed May 2015).
71. 'Mrs. Catt to be Dinner Speaker', *Washington Post*, 9 February 1919.
72. 'Rout Bolshevik Rioters', *New York Times*, 7 April 1919.
73. 'A Russian Revolutionary of the Old Type', *Outlook*, 12 February 1919; and 'Madame Breshkovsky's Tribute to the Czechoslovaks', *Outlook*, 26 March 1919.
74. Catherine Breshkovsky, *Russia and the World*, New York: Russian Information Bureau in the USA, 1919.
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76. See Julia L. Mickenberg, 'Suffragettes and Soviets: American Feminists and the Specter of Revolutionary Russia', *Journal of American History*, vol. 100, no. 4, 2014, pp. 1021–51.
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