

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Michael Hughes, Feliks Volkhovskii: A Revolutionary Life. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2024, 356 pages, ISBN 978-1-80511-196-2**

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Michael Hughes's book titled *Feliks Volkhovskii: A Revolutionary Life* offers a carefully researched and judiciously argued biography of one of the more neglected, yet consistently active figures, in the Russian revolutionary movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Feliks Volkhovskii was born in Poltava, Ukraine, on July 1846, and died in London on 2 August 1914, at the age of sixty-eight. In his book, Hughes proposes that, although Feliks Volkhovskii never attained the fame of Lenin or Trotsky, his long career - spanning prison, Siberian exile, emigration in London, and renewed political activity within Russia - serves as a revealing prism for the intellectual, cultural, and organizational development of the anti-tsarist opposition from the 1860s through the eve of the First World War. The book situates Volkhovskii not as a leading actor, but rather as a representative actor: a figure whose wanderings between the political milieus, literary activity, and practical activism illuminate the heterogeneous and contingent character of the Russian radicalism. Hughes's central contention is that biography - meticulously grounded in archival evidence - can recover the texture of revolutionary practice and the motives of participants who did not leave grand ideological manifestos, but did sustain the movement in myriad, often prosaic ways.

The book comprises six chapters (*The Making of a Revolutionary; Prison, Poetry and Exile; Selling Revolution; Spies and Trials; Returning to the Revolutionary Fray; Final Years*), besides the *Introduction* and *Conclusion*, developed along 356 pages. While Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 examine Volkhovskii's life in Russia before his flight to the West, "tracing the genesis of his radical views", Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 explore Volkhovskii's time in Britain in the 1890s, arguing that "while he played an important role in mobilizing international support for the victims of tsarist oppression, he also remained a significant figure in the broader revolutionary emigration through his role in the production and distribution of propaganda"; Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 discuss the last fifteen years of Volkhovskii's life, "when he once again firmly established himself within the ambit of the Russian revolutionary movement" (p. 14).

Hughes bases his book on an impressive range of primary sources – found on archives in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Europe, as well as memoirs, contemporary newspapers and journals, but also a consistent bibliography composed of secondary sources and PhD theses (pp. x–xiv; pp. 291–326). Historiographically, Hughes argues for the intellectual and practical importance of figures like Volkhovskii, whose labor in mediating, translating, and

broadcasting the grievances of the Russian society contributed substantively to transnational awareness and to the infrastructure of revolutionary politics (pp. 3–8). Methodologically, the book combines political biography with cultural and literary analysis, with the argument that Volkhovskii's literary production furnishes a rib of evidence for understanding how revolutionaries sought to mobilize moral sentiment and cultural affinities for political ends (pp. 72–104).

From the very beginning, Hughes describes Volkhovskii as guided by “two instincts, rather than highly articulated principles” that underpinned his ideas and actions for half a century: his little interest in dogma and his loathing of the tsarist social and political order and his commitment to ending the exploitation of the Russian *narod*, the ‘ordinary’ Russian people (p. 8). Then, could Volkhovskii be considered a representative of the Russian *intelligentsia*? But a *narodnik* (populist)? Or was he really a *revolutionary*? To these questions, the answers given by Hughes are as follows: yes, “Volkhovskii was in many ways a ‘typical’ representative of the Russian *intelligentsia*, who came to maturity in the 1860s, and dedicated the rest of his life to undermining the tsarist state and the social and economic order it symbolized and protected” (p. 10); no, “he was not really a *narodnik* in the sense suggested by Richard Pipes, who argued (...) that the term should be limited to a small number of radicals who believed that they should seek to learn from the *narod*, rather than lead them ‘in the name of abstract, bookish, imported ideas’” (p. 11); but his ideas and actions clearly place him within the network of individuals and groups that are conventionally assumed to fall within the broad framework of *narodnichestvo*, the Russian *intelligentsia* of the second half of the nineteenth century believing that “there was a moral imperative on all those who recognized the wretched condition of the Russian *narod* to do everything in their power to ameliorate it” (p. 12); yes, he was a *revolutionary*, even if he was criticized for showing “ideological flexibility and readiness to work with all those seeking to bring about change in Russia” and even if, when writing for a Western audience, he typically emphasized how “revolution represented a natural choice in the face of repression, rather than a commitment to radical social and economic change” (p. 12).

From an historical and biographical perspective, Hughes traces Volkhovskii's origins in Poltava (then part of the Russian Empire; modern-day Ukraine), his formative years in a mixed cultural environment, and the personal tragedies that shaped his commitments (pp. 17–31). Born into a family of modestly ranked nobility, Volkhovskii grew up on the borderlands of Ukrainian and Russian cultures, in Novograd-Volynskii. But, in 1853, Volkhovskii and his mother moved at his paternal grandfather's estate at Moisevka (p. 23). His early encounters with peasant poverty and the paternal bureaucracy informed a moral outrage that would later orient his revolutionary sympathies (pp. 25–26). Hughes convincingly stresses the formative role of the 1860s *intelligentsia* and the new wave of radical thought — nihilism and populist currents — that produced a generation predisposed to challenge autocracy and social inequality (pp. 31–63).

Hughes places special emphasis on education, as a crucible of political awakening. Volkhovskii attended gymnasium in St. Petersburg and Odessa and, then, he studied law at Moscow University, where he was exposed to the liberal and radical debates unleashed by the Great Reforms of Alexander II (p. 29). The milieu of the 1860s *intelligentsia*—animated by figures such as Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov—provided the intellectual vocabulary of materialism, utilitarian ethics, and service to the people that Volkhovskii would later translate into practical activism (pp. 28–31). Russian youth came to view, accordingly, knowledge as an instrument of social transformation. Volkhovskii's early participation in student circles reflected this ethos of

“conscious service” (*soznatel'noe sluzhenie*) - a term Hughes uses to describe the blend of moral duty and social activism characteristic of the 1860s generation (pp. 28–33).

Volkhovskii's transition from intellectual engagement to organizational activism focuses on his participation in local populist circles (*kruzhki*) that sought to bring education and enlightenment to the peasantry (pp. 35–53). These circles, influenced by the populist (*narodnik*) ethos, emphasized moral education, reading rooms, and rural outreach as vehicles for social transformation. Volkhovskii's activism in this milieu brought him into contact with several figures who would later become prominent revolutionaries. Hughes identifies his involvement with the Chaikovtsy circle, one of the early organized populist groups devoted to moral self-improvement and direct communication with the people (pp. 37–63).

Volkhovskii's arrest and imprisonment (in the Peter and Paul Fortress) during the crackdown on populist circles in the early 1870s, was the result of Volkhovskii's involvement in distributing banned literature and for alleged connections with revolutionary agitators (pp. 39–52). The experience of repression did not break Volkhovskii's idealism; rather, it recast it into endurance and organizational realism. Volkhovskii's reflections from prison - cited by Hughes - reveal a man struggling to reconcile personal suffering with collective purpose. He came to view the revolutionary vocation as a form of moral witness: the individual's sacrifice as proof of truth's power (pp. 47–54). This fusion of personal ethics and political mission would define his later activism.

Following his conviction, Volkhovskii was exiled to Siberia, where he spent nearly a decade (pp. 54–63). Hughes treats exile not as a narrative interlude, but as a formative environment that shaped the intellectual and moral architecture of the revolutionary movement. Siberia became a paradoxical space—both punishment and university. In this harsh environment, Volkhovskii resumed his pedagogical activities, teaching literacy to local settlers and composing literary sketches that reflected on the resilience of the human spirit (pp. 56–59). Hughes interprets these writings as embryonic expressions of a “literary populism”—the effort to merge moral didacticism with narrative art (p. 58).

Volkhovskii's trajectory through imprisonment, Siberian exile, and eventual flight to the West constitutes the narrative spine of the book. Hughes recounts Volkhovskii's multiple arrests and sentences, his decade-long Siberian exile, and the ways in which this long period of enforced marginality shaped his later capacities as organizer, writer, and émigré publicist (pp. 65–104). The exile years are interpreted not merely as a biographical obstacle, but as a formative crucible: a period in which Volkhovskii's literary impulses, his network-building capacities, and his appetite for practical propaganda matured (pp. 65–72).

The book's most arresting episodes concern Volkhovskii's London years from 1890 onward, during which he became an important node in the transnational networks that linked Russian revolutionaries with sympathetic publics in Britain, North America, and Europe more broadly (pp. 105–148). Hughes details Volkhovskii's activities with the *Free Russia* and the *Society of Friends of Russian Freedom* (SFRF), documenting how he cultivated relationships with British intellectuals, journalists, and literary figures to channel moral and material support back to the revolutionary milieu in Russia (pp. 105–120). Crucially, the book is not treating Volkhovskii simply as an émigré propagandist; instead Hughes situates him as a mediator whose strategies combined public agitation, the distribution of clandestine literature, and the exploitation of Western liberal sympathies for tactical ends (pp. 120–130).

In the final phase of his life Volkhovskii becomes increasingly embedded in the organizational life of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (SR), editing party publications and participating in the Foreign Committee that supported insurrectionary activities in Russia (pp. 191–230). Hughes chronicles this late-career turn to explicit party politics with care, emphasizing that Volkhovskii's gradual pivot toward endorsing forceful measures reflects both his personal radicalization and the broader shifts within Russian radicalism at the turn of the century (pp. 191–205). Hughes concludes the biographical narrative with Volkhovskii's death in London in August 1914 - timed in the book as an emblematic endpoint to a life spent opposing militarism and autocracy (pp. 231–275).

Two dimensions that the Volkhovskii's biography also develops, and mentioned above, are that as a representative of the Russian *intelligentsia*, and the other one – that of a *revolutionary* personality. Themes as populism, exile, transnational networks, literature and identity are becoming relevant in presenting Volkhovskii's personality and activity.

The first chapter of the book – *The Making of a Revolutionary* – showed that Volkhovskii's later international activism and political adaptability were not products of opportunism, but of a coherent moral-political evolution beginning in his youth. Through careful reconstruction of family background, education, repression, and exile, Hughes presents the making of a revolutionary as a human process grounded in ethics, resilience, and the pursuit of justice. So, by the chapter's close, Volkhovskii stands fully formed as a type: the ethical revolutionary-intellectual, whose conviction in moral duty transcends ideology and whose endurance prefigures the durability of Russia's broader revolutionary tradition.

In the second chapter of the book - *Prison, Poetry and Exile* - Michael Hughes offers a nuanced and absorbing account of the two decades that transformed Feliks Volkhovskii from a provincial radical into a cosmopolitan revolutionary and cultural mediator. This period focuses on his enforced exile in Siberia following imprisonment in the 1870s.

At the end of 1875, Volkhovskii was transferred from the Peter and Paul Fortress to the House of Preliminary Detention - where the discipline was more relaxed, providing more opportunities for communication between prisoners (pp. 67-75). During the 1860s and 1870s, much of the prose and poetry Volkhovskii wrote was didactic in character; therefore, he composed a series of didactic tales, reflections, and translations, fragments of which survive in periodicals and archives (pp. 67-73).

Following the Trial of the 193 (1877-1878), Volkhovskii was sent to Siberia (pp. 75-80), where he lived with his second wife and the three daughters in Tiukalinsk and Tomsk (pp. 82-103), moving, after the wife's and one daughter's deaths, to Irkutsk. Hughes's central thesis is that exile (from 1878) - often portrayed as a hiatus in revolutionary activity – was, in Volkhovskii's case, a creative crucible. It was in these years that he developed the skills, networks, and ideological flexibility that would later define his transnational activism. In Tomsk, he worked at *Sibirskaiia gazeta* till its closure (pp. 90-103).

The third chapter - *Selling Revolution* – begins with Volkhovskii's flight from Siberia to North America, in 1889. In the eight months he spent in Canada, Volkhovskii was “extraordinarily energetic in campaigning to raise sympathy for the victims of tsarist oppression” (p. 107); he was giving lectures about the harsh treatment of prisoners by the Russian government and numerous local newspapers published interviews with him about his experiences in Russia (p. 108). Volkhovskii arrived in London, from Canada, in the summer of 1890 (p. 110). London, for years,

had provided a refuge for political exiles fleeing tsarist Russia. The city housed various radical circles - anarchists, populists, Marxists - each competing for limited resources and attention.

*The Society of Friends of Russian Freedom* (SFRF) was created by Sergei Stepniak with the hope that it would shape the attitudes of a section of the British establishment towards Russia. Volkhovskii collaborated with the *Society of Friends of Russian Freedom* – by lecturing on behalf of the SFRF, and contributed to *Free Russia* (pp. 115-124), a bilingual periodical dedicated to exposing Tsarist autocracy. *Free Russia* blended reports of repression - executions, censorship, exile - with broader reflections on liberty, justice, and education. Volkhovskii's editorials balanced factual reporting with emotive appeal. Hughes notes that he avoided the shrill tone of revolutionary manifestos, preferring a measured rhetoric designed to win sympathy rather than fear (p. 121).

Volkhovskii's lectures also served an educational function. He sought to inform British audiences about the structure of Russian society - the bureaucracy, censorship, and rural poverty - while linking these realities to universal principles of justice. Volkhovskii also contributed essays to British and American journals, addressing topics such as Russian education, censorship, and the condition of women (pp. 105-148). In addition, Volkhovskii translated Russian literature and revolutionary documents into English, introducing them to Western audiences. Hughes regards this activity as a form of soft propaganda, subtly linking Russian moral idealism with Western humanitarianism.

Hughes's account underscores his skill in translating Russian suffering into a moral narrative comprehensible to British sensibilities. Exile and emigration had transformed Volkhovskii from a moral populist into an international advocate of liberty, a cosmopolitan revolutionary - no longer confined by Russian frontiers, but embedded in the global circuits of dissent. Volkhovskii's ethical populism - his belief in service, empathy, and education - remained intact. What changed was his understanding of scale: revolution was no longer only a Russian enterprise but part of a broader struggle against despotism and inequality. Volkhovskii's cosmopolitanism, however, was tempered by realism; he understood the limits of Western sympathy and the risk of dependency on foreign patronage.

Through writing, translation, and public lecturing, for Volkhovskii communication was revolution: persuasion, empathy, and cross-cultural education constituted the groundwork without which direct action would remain isolated. Therefore, Volkhovskii became a revolutionary who transformed exile into advocacy and suffering into solidarity.

In the fourth chapter - *Spies and Trials*, Hughes shifts the narrative focus from émigré publicity and cultural mediation to the darker choreography of state repression and counter-subversion. The chapter examines how the *Okhrana* (the tsarist secret police) and related security organs attempted to neutralize revolutionary networks through surveillance, infiltration, and judicial spectacle, and how revolutionaries - including Volkhovskii and his circle - responded tactically and rhetorically. Hughes frames trials and police operations as arenas in which political legitimacy was contested: the state sought to demonstrate the criminality and danger of radical dissent, while revolutionaries tried to turn legal proceedings into platforms for propaganda and moral vindication (pp. 150–155).

Hughes describes the institutional growth and methods of the *Okhrana* in the 1880s–1890s. He documents how the security services expanded their operations at home and abroad - employing informants, postal intercepts, undercover agents, and the increasingly professionalized practice of dossier-keeping - to map émigré networks, smuggling routes for pamphlets, and

clandestine financing (pp. 152–158). The author emphasizes the international dimension of policing: the Okhrana cultivated contacts with foreign police forces and used diplomatic channels to seek extradition or to pressure host governments, complicating the relative safety of exile that earlier chapters had described (pp. 154–157).

Volkhovskii's personal experience of surveillance comprises episodes in which his correspondence was monitored, in which courier networks were compromised, and in which trusted acquaintances were revealed as agents or *agents provocateurs* (pp. 152–162). The psychological effect of this pervasive monitoring - paranoia, tactical suspicion, and the constant need for vetting - becomes a thematic focus: surveillance altered the social relations of the revolutionary movement, undermining trust while pushing activists toward more clandestine, compartmentalized structures (pp. 159–163).

Volkhovskii's own role in these dynamics is double: he was both a target of infiltration and, in exile, an actor who had to respond to the consequences - restructuring networks, tightening communications, and deploying counter-intelligence practices where possible (pp. 166–170).

The public trials were political instruments used by both state and opposition. Hughes reconstructs several notable prosecutions - some involving fellow revolutionaries, some implicating networks connected to Volkhovskii's circles - and shows how trials served at least three functions: for the state, they were instruments of deterrence and moral condemnation; for the movement, they could be opportunities for propaganda, martyrdom, and mobilization (pp. 172–176). Volkhovskii's contributions here were often indirect, but meaningful: as an émigré publicist he coordinated press campaigns to draw attention to specific cases, provided background materials to counsel, and helped to drum up international pressure when trials threatened to result in execution or harsh sentences (pp. 180–183).

Volkhovskii's posture in the debates over political violence, as Hughes presents it, was complex and somewhat ambivalent. He recognized the moral pitfalls of violent tactics, but also grasped their political logic in certain contexts; his own public statements sought to balance moral sensitivity with a pragmatic understanding of repression's force, attempting to preserve international sympathy while not alienating militant constituencies (pp. 185–189).

In this chapter, Hughes demonstrates that the Okhrana's methods and the judicial spectacles it produced were central to the political landscape in which Volkhovskii and his contemporaries operated. The result is a textured account of how law, policecraft, and publicity together shaped the dilemmas, tactics, and ethical debates of Russian revolutionary actors in the late nineteenth century (pp. 149–189).

The fifth chapter - *Returning to the Revolutionary Fray* - represents a turning-point chapter in the biography of Feliks Volkhovskii. It marks the moment when the long-exiled revolutionary, shaped by imprisonment, Siberian deportation, and the moral culture of the Russian *intelligentsia*, reenters organized political activism after years in which survival, personal integrity, and moral witness had defined his role more than direct political engagement.

The creation of the Agrarian-Socialist League, at the beginning of 1900, included a number of former fundists, Volkhovskii being one of its founding members (p. 199). The principal focus of the Agrarian-Socialist League was on developing propaganda for circulation in Russia, and its aim was to broaden 'the revolutionary movement in general and the workers' movement in particular, by attracting the working masses of the countryside' (p. 200). The objective was 'the removal of the tsarist government - as the principal obstacle to the freedom of the *narod* and the

handing over of the land to the working people' (p. 202). The League's intention was to give a good deal of attention to relations with the *Socialist Revolutionary (SR) Party* in Russia, while Volkhovskii believed that the League should maintain its non-party character (pp. 202-203). But the League and the SR Party started to cooperate closely in the spring of 1902, and a more formal federation took place a few months later (p. 203). Volkhovskii helped contribute to the editing of the *Narodnoe delo*, which appeared irregularly in 1902-04 as a publication of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, a publication targeting the 'urban and rural workers' (pp. 207-208), and where he published short stories, poems and fables (pp. 208-212). Volkhovskii's contribution to the neo-*narodnik* revival before 1905 was not limited to journalism and propaganda, as he also became involved in procuring false passports for individuals wanting to travel to and from Russia illegally (p. 212). Therefore, Volkhovskii, although he welcomed *Socialist Revolutionary (SR) Party's* defense of peasant interests and moralized socialism, he remained uneasy about systematic violence and clandestine organization.

Hughes mentioned that Volkhovskii continued to contribute to the *SR Party's* propaganda work during 1905, although his activities were constrained also by his poor health. The 1905 Revolution in Russia re-legitimized the exiles morally - they were suddenly relevant again - but it also revealed their obsolescence. Younger militants operating inside Russia viewed émigré moralism as sentimental and politically ineffectual.

In the opening part of the sixth chapter - *Final Years* - Hughes presents Volkhovskii's beliefs that, during the 1905 Revolution in Russia, both workers and peasants had 'shown splendid capacities, in solidarity, in organising, in self-sacrifice for an ideal'; that he was confident that what he called 'autobureaucracy' was dead, and that while the regime might seek to fight to regain its lost power, 'it will be unable to establish its rule with any steadiness again'; and that the old peasant demands for 'Land and freedom through a good Tzar' had been replaced by a desire for 'Land and freedom through democratic self-government and nationalisation of land' (p. 232).

When Volkhovskii returned to Russia in 1906, despite his age and poor health, he edited publications aimed at soldiers and sailors (*Soldatskaia gazeta / The Soldier's Gazette*) and he was active in the *SR Party's* Military - Organisation Bureau, created in the summer of 1906 (pp. 234-238). As the *SR Party* recognized that the government would try to use the army and navy to put down any mass uprising so and that the agitation among soldiers and sailors should have a revolutionary non-party character that focused on broad issues, rather than demanding full commitment to the SR program, at his return in London, in spring 1907, Volkhovskii became the principal editor of a new newspaper targeted at readers in the army and navy, *Za narod (For the People)*, which was smuggled back into Russia (pp. 236-237). *Za narod*, like *Soldatskaia gazeta*, was printing information about what was taking place across Russia and included a significant amount of literary material, poems and short stories (p. 240). On one side, Volkhovskii has focused on promoting revolutionary sentiment within the tsarist army and navy, and on the other, he was increasingly concerned about the rise of 'militarism' across Europe (p. 242). In the following years, *Za narod* continued to take a 'non-party' revolutionary line, carrying reports of disturbances across Russia, and printing letters from revolutionaries of all political colours (p. 249), while Volkhovskii continued to publish poetry and short stories. In the same time, Volkhovskii was also involved in the production of several numbers of *Narodnoe delo: sbornik*, that was published irregularly by the *SR* press between 1909 and 1912 (p. 250).

On the occasion of signing of the *Anglo-Russian Convention* in August 1907, designed to reduce imperial tensions between the two countries in central Asia, establishing clear spheres of influence (p. 254), Hughes focuses on presenting both the opposition (as *SFRF* and *Free Russia*) and the supporters of the improvement of Britain's relationship with Russia. *Free Russia* continued to print numerous articles reporting abuses committed by the tsarist government, as well as condemning its neglect of the welfare of the people (p. 257). Volkhovskii wrote numerous articles in which he accused the Tsar for being "the effective head of the Black Hundreds regarding the bands of thugs who carried out anti-Jewish pogroms across European Russia" (p. 257), so he concluded that "Russia was an unsuitable diplomatic partner for Britain given the despotic character of its government" (pp. 258-259). Volkhovskii continued his campaign against closer Anglo-Russian political and economic relations, in the last years of his life (pp. 271-272).

Between 1912 and 1914, Volkhovskii's health deteriorated rapidly. His last essays, published in small émigré journals, combined memoir with reflection on ethical endurance (pp. 264-270). Volkhovskii died in London in 1914, "the day after Berlin declared war on Russia and two days before Britain declared war on Germany" (p. 275), attended by a few close friends and members of the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom. Hughes reconstructs the funeral - modest, yet dignified - as a ritual of moral solidarity that gathered British liberals, Russian exiles, and younger revolutionaries, all acknowledging in him a link between two epochs.

After his death, three distinct memorial trajectories are presented: among the liberal émigré community, Volkhovskii became an emblem of moral steadfastness, while obituaries in *Free Russia* and *The Times* portrayed him as the conscience of the Russian revolution - a man who had suffered without hatred; the Soviet cultural historians selectively reintegrated Volkhovskii into their narrative of revolutionary lineage, in the following decades, but they sanitized his biography, downplaying his London years and pacifism, while emphasizing his early Siberian martyrdom; in the West, interest in Volkhovskii waned until the late twentieth century, when historians seeking to reconstruct transnational networks of dissent rediscovered his writings. Hughes situates his own work within this rediscovery, aiming to recover not only factual biography, but the emotional and ethical vocabulary of nineteenth-century radicalism (pp. 274-277).

Hughes's synthetic interpretation of Volkhovskii's legacy illustrates that Volkhovskii's life demonstrates that the revolutionary's ultimate task was not conquest, but testimony; unable to secure political triumph, he preserved moral coherence, proving that endurance could itself be a historical force. By studying figures like Volkhovskii helps us to understand how moral vocabularies migrate across political systems - how the language of conscience forged in Siberian exile could, generations later, animate international law and human-rights discourse. Volkhovskii's life - stretching from the populist ferment of the 1860s, through the birth of global modernity - illustrates the transformation of radicalism from national rebellion into transnational ethics.

Through his final synthesis (pp. 278-288), Hughes closes not only a biography, but a moral epoch. The narrative that began with youthful rebellion against autocracy ends with serene fidelity to conscience - an evolution that mirrors the trajectory of Russian ethical radicalism itself. Volkhovskii's legacy, then, lies in transforming revolution into remembrance, politics into pedagogy, and suffering into solidarity. Last, but not least, Volkhovskii's life story can be placed in the nineteenth-century *intelligentsia's* moral experiment, an effort to align private conscience with social responsibility, and ethical integrity with political necessity.

In conclusion, from the perspective of the themes (populism, exile, transnational networks, literature, identity) that can be considered relevant in presenting Volkhovskii's personality and activity, Volkhovskii can be placed, firstly, within the long and varied tradition of Russian populism (*narodnichestvo*). But his commitment to the *narod* was moral and pragmatic, and his primary loyalty was to the amelioration of peasant suffering, rather than to a fixed ideological program. Secondly, exile was both a condition and a resource, as it became an analytic frame for understanding how revolutionaries adapted tactics to audience expectations, while continuing to pursue insurgent ends. Thirdly, as regards the transnational networks, the book documents the interactions between the Russian émigrés, the British philanthropists and intellectuals, the American journalists, and other European radicals; these networks functioned as channels for funds, printed materials, and moral support, and they created a discursive space in which Russian grievances could be made legible to Western publics; therefore, this transnational activism was not merely supplementary, but central to sustaining revolutionary energies inside the empire. Fourthly, Volkhovskii's literary production - poems, stories, criticism - was a tool of social persuasion, a means to cultivate sympathy for victims of tsarist repression, and a vehicle to theorize political change in forms acceptable to different publics. Fifthly, referring to Volkhovskii's political identity, it is more pragmatic than doctrinal; rather than belonging to one fixed ideological camp, Volkhovskii's commitments were shaped by personal experience, moral disgust at social injustice, and a willingness to adapt tactics to the exigencies of repression and exile. Volkhovskii's late-life alignment with the Socialist Revolutionary Party should not be read as a doctrinal conversion, but as the culmination of long-standing inclinations: an emphasis on the peasantry, a belief in direct action, and a practical focus on building institutional mechanisms (publications, committees) that could support insurrectionary activity. Last but not least, the way in which Volkhovskii cultivated Western public opinion was not an end in itself, but a means to secure concrete resources - funds for relief, channels for smuggling literature, and diplomatic pressure that might constrain tsarist repression.

Michael Hughes's *Feliks Volkhovskii: A Revolutionary Life* is an important corrective to histories that privilege only the most famous revolutionaries or that view émigré activity as peripheral to the story of Russian radicalism. Hughes demonstrates that figures like Volkhovskii - through a lifetime of imprisonment, exile, publication, and organizational labour - helped to sustain the ideological and practical infrastructure of opposition to tsarism. The book's combination of archival richness, interpretive modesty, and thematic breadth (populism, exile, transnationalism, literature, and identity) makes it a valuable contribution to the historiography of pre-1917 Russia. As a consequence, the book represents an important tool not only for the researchers and students interested in the Russian history, but also for those interested in social movements and transnational politics, as Hughes's work illustrates the practical mechanics of diaspora activism and the politics of sympathy at the end of XIXth and the beginning of the XXth century.