British Travel Writing on the Soviet Union and the Development of Left-Wing Literature of the 1930s

James Davis

Balliol College

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Abstract

Critical accounts of left-wing literature of the nineteen-thirties are reconsidering the travel writing genre. Challenging prevailing views of travel writing as separate from other forms of literary writing, recent work reveals how writers relied on travel writing as an important imaginative resource for their wider literary projects. Contributing to this movement, my thesis examines British travel writing on the Soviet Union in the interwar period (c.1922-c.1938), investigating the overlooked relationship between this travel writing and left-wing literature. By focussing on the literary characteristics of this travel writing, this thesis argues for a more nuanced understanding of the genre's relationship with left-wing literature of the nineteen-thirties. Examining the neglected works of Ralph Fox, Amabel Williams-Ellis and John Lehmann, this thesis traces how their travels to, and travel writing on, the Soviet Union provided them with the experiences and written records that became central components to the development of their distinct literary projects.

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Introduction

Over the interwar period around a hundred thousand international travellers made the journey to the Soviet Union.[1] A majority of these travellers arrived from Europe and North America.[2] Different travellers brought with them different expectations of Soviet society which resulted in different encounters. Western travellers disillusioned with postwar society wanted to see for themselves the Soviet experiment.[3] Female travellers were attracted to the Soviet regime's emancipation of women from the domestic sphere.[4] Black Americans escaped racism and Jim Crow to discover a new world order that appeared dedicated to the promotion of racial equality.[5] Indian travellers mediated their understanding of the Soviet Union in relation to their

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[1] Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*: *Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to Soviet Union 1921-1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 1.

[2] Latin American and African travellers visited in number in the 1950s, see Tobias Rupprecht, *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin: Interaction and Exchange between the USSR and Latin America during the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Maxim Matusevich, *Africa in Russia and Russia in Africa: Three Centuries of Encounters* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2007).

[3] For foundational accounts on the Western traveller, see Sylvia R. Margulies, *The Pilgrimage to Russia: The Soviet Union and the Treatment of Foreigners, 1924-1937* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968); David Caute, *The Fellow-Travellers: A Postscript to the Enlightenment* (London: The Macmillan Company, 1973); Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba, 1928-78* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981). For more recent accounts, see Ludmila Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union, 1920-40: From Red Square to the Left Bank* (London: Routledge, 2007); *Political Tourists: Travellers from Australia to the Soviet Union in the 1920-1940s*, ed. by Sheila Fitzpatrick and Carolyn Rasmussen (Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2008); Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'Foreigners Observed: Moscow Visitors in the 1930s under the Gaze of Their Soviet Guides', *Russian History*, 35.1-2 (2008), 215-235; David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*; *Americans Experience Russia: Encountering the Enigma, 1917 to the Present*, ed. by Choi Chatterjee and Beth Holmgren (Oxford: Routledge, 2013).

[4] On the female traveller, see Angela Kershaw, 'French and British Female Intellectuals and the Soviet Union: The Journey to the USSR, 1929-1942', *E-Rea,* 4.2 (2006) <http://journals.openedition.org/erea/250>; Julia L. Mickenberg, *American Girls in Red Russia: Chasing the Soviet Dream* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

[5] On the Black American traveller, see John L. Gardner, 'African Americans in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s: The Development of Transcontinental Protest', *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 23.3 (1999), 190-200 (pp. 193-197); Kate A. Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters between Black and Red, 1922-1963* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Joy Gleason Carew, *Blacks, Reds, and Russians: Sojourners in Search of the Soviet Promise* (New Brunswick, NJ.: Rutgers University Press, 2008); Maxim Matusevich, 'Journeys of Hope: African Diaspora and the Soviet Society', *African Diaspora*, 1 (2008), 53-85; Athan Andreas Biss, 'Unexpected Frontiers of Black Internationalism: African Americans in Soviet Central Asia, 1930–1976', *Central Asian Affairs*, 2.2 (2015), 189–206; Katharina Wiedlack, 'A Feminist Becoming? Louise Thompson Patterson's and Dorothy West's Sojourn in the Soviet Union', *Feminismo/s*, 36 (December 2020), 103-128; *The Red and the Black: The Russian Revolution and the Black Atlantic*, ed. by David Featherstone and Christian Høgsbjerg (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021).

experiences under British colonialism.[6] This interwar travel phenomenon is best understood as developing through three distinct phases: early travel during the revolution and civil war (1917-23), the development of organised travel (1924-28), and the rise of commercial travel (1929-37).

Early British travellers had to make a long, arduous and sometimes dangerous journey to reach Russia.[7] As a Second Lieutenant of the Royal Flying Corps concluded in 1918, 'The journey to Petrograd is no longer the luxurious trip of the old days of peace'.[8] Scholarship on this first phase of British travel has yet to provide a detailed account of the logistics involved in this journey.[9] British travel accounts from this time reveal that the most well-trodden path to Moscow required leaving London on a train from King's Cross station to Newcastle or Aberdeen.[10] Passenger ferries, which had run before the revolution, transported travellers across the North Sea to Bergen, Norway, where trains transported them to Oslo, Stockholm, Helsingfors (Helsinki), up to the Finnish-Russian frontier and into Petrograd (St. Petersburg).[11]

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[6] On the Indian traveller, see Choi Chatterjee, 'Imperial Subjects in the Soviet Union: M.N. Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, and Re-Thinking Freedom and Authoritarianism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 52.4 (2017), 913-934.

[7] For the most up to date list of first-hand accounts written by Western residents, early travellers and Russian exiles, see Jonathan Smele, *The Russian Revolution and Civil War, 1917-1921: An Annotated Bibliography* (London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 28-60.

[8] E. P. Stepping, *From Czar to Bolshevik* (London: John Lane, 1918), pp. 3-4. By the autumn of 1920, travel to Russia to the journalist Henry Noel Brailsford seemed 'no longer a difficult adventure', see Henry Noel Brailsford, *The Russian Workers' Republic* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1921), p. 5.

[9] Caute writes on early travellers but his account only mentions Finland as the 'most accessible gateway', see Caute, *The Fellow-Travellers*, p. 17. The other foundational accounts start their investigations in the late nineteen-twenties. David-Fox's account of early travel is more interested in the Soviet context, see David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, pp. 30-39.

[10] T. G. Masaryk, *Making of a State, Memories and Observations 1914-1918* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1927), p. 134; Edgar Sisson, *One Hundred Red Days: A Personal Chronicle of the Bolshevik Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931), p. 16; R. H. Bruce Lockhart, *Memoirs of a British Agent* (Putnam: London, 1933), pp. 209-219.

[11] Stephen Graham, *Russia in 1916*, (London: Cassell, 1917), p. i; Stepping, *From Czar to Bolshevik*, pp. 8-21; Emile Vandervelde, *Three Aspects of the Russian Revolution* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1918), p. 7; Arthur Ransome, *Six Weeks in Russia in 1919* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1919), pp. 1-13; British Labour Delegation to Russia, 1920, *Report* (London: Labour Party & Trade Union Congress, 1920), p. 3; W. T. Goode, *Bolshevism at Work* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1920), pp. 10-13; George Lansbury, *What I Saw In Russia* (London: Leonard Parsons, 1920), pp. viii, 1; John S. Clarke, *Pen Pictures of Russia Under the "Red Terror"* (Glasgow: National Workers' Committees, 1921), p. 9; Clare Sheridan, *Russian Portraits* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1921), pp. 40-62; George Buchanan, *My Mission to Russia and Other Diplomatic Memories*, 2 vols (London: Cassell, 1923), II, pp. 249-253; Lockhart, *Memoirs of a British Agent*, pp. 209-219; Bernard Pares, *My Russian Memoirs* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931), p. 387.

Separate visas were needed for Norway, Sweden and Estonia, the latter which needed approval from the British Foreign Office.[12] Another popular route involved continuing from Bergen through the Norwegian fjords, around the North Cape to Murmansk, across the White Sea to Arkhangelsk (Archangel).[13] Those based in Western Europe also travelled through Scandinavia because the Estonian frontier remained open during the First World War.[14] In one exceptional case, the foreign correspondent of *The Baltimore Sun* and undercover American spy based in London, Marguerite Harrison, was not permitted without a visa to enter Russia through Estonia, Finland, France or Germany, so opted for Poland and No Man's Land.[15] In the opposite direction, Russian aristocrats, intellectuals, anti-Bolsheviks and businessmen fled Soviet persecution.[16]

Due to the difficulty of visiting Soviet Russia in the early period, the typical traveller could only enter the country as part of an organisation. As the sculptor Clare Sheridan intuited in 1920 while sailing on a boat to Petrograd with Lev Kamenev,

> There are no pleasure trippers or any of the idle curious on board. Everyone practically is bound for Russia, and we look at one another curiously, wondering what each other's mission is. There are Comrades returning, and there are journalists, traders and bankers;

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[12] Clare Sheridan, *Nuda Veritas* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1936), p. 144.
[13] Stepping, *From Czar to Bolshevik*, p. 4; Clarke, *Pen Pictures of Russia Under the "Red Terror"*, pp. 23-29; Paul Dukes, *Red Dusk and the Morrow: Adventures and Investigations in Red Russia* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1923), pp. 1-29.
[14] Stan Harding, *The Underworld of the State* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1925), pp. 42-65.
[15] Marguerite E. Harrison, *Marooned in Moscow: The Story of an American Woman Imprisoned in Russia* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1921), pp. 11-17.
[16] Sergei Maslov, *Russia after Four Years of Revolution* (London: P. S. King, 1923); Princess Paley, *Memories of Russia, 1916-1919* (London: H. Jenkins, 1924); Basil Gourko, *Memories and Impressions of War and Revolution in Russia 1914-1917* (London: J. Murray, 1918); Aleksandr Fyodorovich Kerensky, *The Prelude to Bolshevism: The Kornilov Rebellion* (London: T. F. Unwin, 1919); Anton Ivanovich Denikin, *The Russian Turmoil; Memoirs: Military, Social, and Political* (London: Hutchinson, 1922). For collections of memoirs by Russian refugees, see Norman Stone, and Michael Glenny, eds., *The Other Russia* (London: Faber & Faber, 1990); Anna Horsbrugh, Elena Snow, Frances Welch, eds., *Memories of the Revolution: Russian Women Remember* (London: Routledge, 1993). For an account of exiled Russia writers, see *Russians Abroad: Literary and Cultural Politics of Diaspora (1919-1939)*, ed. by Katerina Clark, and others (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2013).

> people who hope to get through from Reval, people who probably *will*, and others who certainly will not.[17]

The British government, supporting the Allied intervention and blockade of Russia, sent spies behind Soviet lines with disguises and forged identification documents, as did its American and European counterparts.[18] The Home Office refused Labour leaders permission and passports.[19] Despite these obstacles, Labour and Trades Union delegations did visit in 1917, 1920 and 1924.[20] *The Daily Chronicle*, *The Daily Herald*, *The Daily News*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Manchester Guardian* sent foreign correspondents (*The Times* already employed a resident correspondent Robert Wilton).[21] Outside of these official channels, a number of individuals joined religious and charitable organisations to participate in relief missions, ranging from the American Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the Red Cross, the Society of Friends' War Victims' Relief Committee and the Quakers.[22] The first intellectuals, writers and artists, most famous amongst them Bertrand Russell and H. G. Wells, were also invited by the Bolshevik leadership to investigate conditions for themselves, in the

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[17] Sheridan, *Russian Portraits*, pp 52-53. Italics in the original.
[18] Dukes, *Red Dusk and the Morrow*; Harrison, *Marooned in Moscow*; Lockhart, *Memoirs of a British Agent*; Alexander Bauermeister, *Spies Break Through: Memoirs of a German Secret Service Officer* (London: Constable, 1934). On British intervention in the Russian Civil War, see Richard H. Ullman, *Anglo Soviet Relations, 1917-1921*, 3 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1961-72).
[19] Lansbury, *What I Saw In Russia* pp. vii-viii.
[20] British Labour Delegation to Russia, 1920, *Report*; British Trades Union Delegation, *The Official Report of the British Trade Union Delegation to Russia and Caucasia in November and December 1924* (London: Trades Union Congress General Council, 1925).
[21] Robert Wilton, *Russia's Agony* (London: Edward Arnold, 1918); Ransome, *Six Weeks in Red Russia in 1919*; E. H. Wilcox, *Russia's Ruin* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1919); H. W. Williams, *The Spirit of the Russian Revolution* (London: Russian Liberation Committee, 1919); M. Philips Price, *My Reminisces of the Russian Revolution* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1921); Morgan Philips Price, *Dispatches from the Revolution: Russia 1916-18*, ed. by Tania Rose (London: Pluto Press, 1997); Goode, *Bolshevism at Work*; Lansbury, *What I Saw In Russia*, pp. vii-viii; Michael S. Farbman, *Bolshevism in Retreat* (England: Collins, 1923).
[22] John Pollock, *The Bolshevik Adventure* (London: Constable, 1919), p. x; John Rickman, *An Eye Witness From Russia* (London: People's Russian Information Bureau, 1919), p. 3; Williams Adams Brown, *The Groping Giant: Revolutionary Russia as Seen by an American Democrat* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1920), p. 18; Ralph Fox, *People of the Steppes* (London: Constable, 1925), p. 1. Mickenburg finds that this was the case for early American women travellers, see Mickenberg, *American Girls in Red Russia*, p. 11.

hope of receiving favourable coverage in return in the British press.[23] These first travellers also proved useful for the Soviet regime's embattled domestic position. According to the secretary of the Communist International (Comintern) in 1920, Angelica Balabanoff, the Soviet leadership used the British Labour Delegation 'for propaganda purposes, to make Russians feel that the Commission represented the sympathy, approval, and solidarity with Bolshevism of the English working class'.[24]

The emerging problem of misinformation in relation to the Russian Revolution resulted in many of these early travellers wanting to find out for themselves conditions in the country, and to reach their own conclusions independent of the British government and mainstream press. In 1919, the Russophile and London Library librarian Charles Hagburg Wright spoke for many when he bemoaned in *The Times* how 'In spite of frequent allusion to Russia in the English newspaper, it is generally accepted that remarkably little information relating to the aims and actions of the Bolshevists has reached the country'.[25] David Ayers argues that the literature produced by British travellers to Russia 'embodies a complex climate in which both factual observation and intellectual opinion become in a degree uncertain and exploratory, as commentators attempt to decide exactly what has happened in Russia, arrive at a vocabulary for describing it, and evaluate its global implications'.[26] Journalists of some repute were based in Moscow, most notably Arthur Ransome and Morgan Phillips Price, although the majority of journalists traded in second-hand information and rumour as far out as Berlin.[27] It was commonplace for British travellers to publish travel writing on their return home in the form

[23] Bertrand Russell, *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1920); H. G. Wells, *Russia in the Shadows* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1920), p. 9; Brailsford, *The Russian Workers' Republic*; Sheridan, *Russian Portraits*. David-Fox helpfully uncovers the motivations that informed the Soviet regime's appeals to Western travellers and relief organisations during the famine, see David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, pp. 30-39.
[24] Angelica Balabanoff, *My Life as a Rebel* (London: Harper, 1938), p. 250.
[25] C. Hagberg Wright, 'Bolshevism in Theory', *The Times*, 22 October 1919, p. 11.
[26] David Ayers, *Modernism, Internationalism and the Russian Revolution* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), p. 93.
[27] Stephen Graubard, *British Labour And the Russian Revolution, 1917-1924* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 211.

of travelogues, reports, pamphlets and newspaper articles that purported to reflect an accurate representation of conditions there. This desire for definitive conclusions about the Soviet Union, however, was never fully satisfied and meant that such journeys were repeated throughout the interwar period.

It is important to make clear at this point that the British Left's engagement with Russia in particular did not simply arise out of the revolution in 1917. As Edward McNeilly argues, 'Russia had been a bête noire for progressive politicians since the 1830s', due to consecutive tsars' imperial foreign policies, domestic despotism and unease towards a wartime alliance between the two governments in the First World War.[28] While the British coalition government, conservative press and many strata of society viewed the Bolsheviks as an existential threat to Western civilization, a majority on the Left not only put a great deal of hope in the revolutionary project underway in Soviet Russia, but also sought to resist Britain being pulled into another costly and unnecessary war thousands of miles away, before its people had time to recover from the last. *The Manchester Guardian* criticised the government for placing 'a higher price upon the fostering of civil war in Russia than they do upon securing a decent means of subsistence to the old-age pensioner at home'.[29] When Winston Churchill spoke at Victoria Hall in Sunderland and called the Bolsheviks "fanatics who are the avowed enemies of the existing civilization of the world", one brave audience member amongst the laughter and cheers retorted "It's a lie".[30] In January 1920, Arthur Henderson, former Labour leader and MP for Widnes, affirmed that the Labour Party would resist 'an unnecessary and reckless military adventure' in Russia.[31] It follows then that any proposed journey to Soviet Russia within

[28] Edward McNeilly, 'Labour and the Politics of Internationalism, 1906-1914', *Twentieth Century British History*, 20.4 (2009), 431-453 (p. 445).
[29] 'Sharing the Burden', *The Manchester Guardian*, 20 December 1919, p. 8.
[30] Winston Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: His Complete Speeches, 1897-1963*, ed. by Robert James, 8 vols (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1974) III, p. 2918.
[31] 'Labour and Russia', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 17 January 1920, p. 2.

Labour circles would not be understood within an ideological vacuum, but as inextricably bound to a wider engagement with the working-class material issues of the day.

At the conclusion of the Russian Civil War in 1922, the victorious Soviet regime increased its efforts to entice international admirers to its shores and political cause. In part, Soviet officials harboured feelings of hope and excitement at the prospect of reopening to the outside world and of 'renewing contact with the western labour movement'.[32] The Communist Party (CPSU) also needed to exploit this international curiosity and had good reasons to do so. The Soviet regime had three key priorities: to rebuild infrastructure for rapid industrialisation and modernisation with the help of foreign technical expertise; to achieve diplomatic recognition abroad and thereby security from hostile neighbours; and, in direct contradiction to this diplomatic mission, to cultivate class consciousness globally through 'good propaganda about the Soviet socialist fabric'.[33] These priorities eventually led to a thaw in relations by 1929 under a Labour government, whereby diplomatic ties were renewed after a two-year suspension following the Arcos Affair, while the resumption of the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement of 1924 saw British exports increase from 16.6 % in 1934 to 32.7% by 1937.[34]

British travel to the Soviet Union between 1924 to 1929 took the form of worker delegations, fact-findings expeditions and migration for work.[35] W. R. Creed, a railwayman, declared in 1924, 'When I set out from England from Russia as my destination I did not by any means anticipate anything in the way of a holiday'. He travelled to 'see with my own eyes the actual conditions of the Russian people'.[36] A newly opened rail route carried passengers from

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[32] Balabanoff, *My Life As A Rebel*, p. 240.

[33] Jean-François Fayet, 'VOKS: The Third Dimension of Soviet Foreign Policy', in *Searching for Cultural Diplomacy*, ed. by Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), pp. 33-49 (p. 39).

[34] F. S. Northedge and Audrey Wells, *Britain and Soviet Communism* (Hong Kong: Macmillan Press, 1982), pp. 50-51.

[35] According to Mickenberg, foreign workers in the Soviet Union peaked at around thirty-five thousand during the First Five-Year Plan period, see Mickenberg, *American Girls in Red Russia*, p. 12.

[36] Warwick, Modern Records Centre, National Union of Railwaymen, *Railway Review/Transport Review*, 127/NU/4/1/12-13.

Belgium, through Latvia, to Moscow, which shortened the journey time from multiple weeks to four days.[37] Travellers were now taken by Soviet tour guides to see 'models' of the Soviet experiment, which to those already well-disposed to the Soviet regime seemed to work, at least for Russia.[38] Travel writing remained concerned with securing first-hand information about the working class in the Soviet Union in order to dismantle the image of the 'Bolshevik bogey' found in the capitalist media, yet now with a focus on debating the Soviet experiment rather than defending its survival.[39] Travel writers wrote positively of a society that appeared to have progressed from revolutionary tumult into one organised at every level around the needs of the worker, citing as examples good public hygiene, a modern education centred around science and economics, universities and theatres open for workers, state-owned industries, birth control and liberalised marriage laws.[40]

By the late nineteen-twenties, the Soviet regime had established a transnational network of state-sanctioned and independent political, artistic and cultural organisations to attract sympathetic intellectuals. The creation of the All-Russian Joint-Stock Company for the Acceptance of Foreign Tourists (Intourist) in 1929 with the support from the CPSU aimed to create a profitable Soviet tourism industry by constructing hotels, expanding the domestic workforce in the hospitality industry, and commercialising cultural events.[41] Shawn Connolly Salmon finds that, in a British context, Intourist's partnership with Thomas Cook & Sons

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[37] Warwick, Modern Records Centre, Papers of Percy Collick, Delegation to the Soviet Union (USSR), 1925-1927, 379/PC/2/1/1/4.

[38] On the Soviet regime's use of 'models' for Western travellers, see David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, pp. 98-141.

[39] Warwick, Modern Records Centre, Maitland Sara Hallinan Collection, Pamphlets: Communist Party of Great Britain, 15X/2/103/76.

[40] Modern Records Centre, National Union of Railwaymen, *Railway Review/Transport Review*, 127/NU/4/1/12-13; Warwick, Modern Records Centre, Association of Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen, 101/DA/4/1/7; Warwick, Modern Records Centre, National Union of Railwaymen, *Railway Review/Transport Review*, 127/NU/5/5/8/20ii; Warwick, Modern Records Centre, Trades Union Congress, Russia "Documents", 1924-1930, 292/947/6/44.

[41] David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, pp. 176-83.

provided vital insights into the commercial operations of modern travel.[42] From 1932, British admirers tempted by (and wealthy enough to afford) an Intourist travel package needed only to visit their London office in Bush House to make enquiries. Malcolm Muggeridge did just this and his travel agent happened to be the former miner Harold Heslop, who attended the Kharkov Writers' Congress in November 1930, and went on to become a famous novelist in the Soviet Union.[43]

Intourist advertisements in a British context have not been extensively researched and reveal the scale of its operations and the breath of its target audience.[44] Its advertisements regularly featured in the mainstream and regional papers, as well as in left-wing publications.[45] In 1931, *The Observer* reported on an influx of ten thousand tourists into the Soviet Union that threatened to overwhelm Intourist and result in the rejection of future travel applications due to the potential risk of accommodation and transport problems.[46] The Left Book Club and the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR [SCR] offered package holidays with different rates for its readers according to activities and class of ship and rail travel.[47] In 1933, *The Daily Express*' travel feature ran a 'See Soviet Russia This Year' section advertising May Celebration,

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[42] Shawn Connelly Salmon, 'To The Land of the Future: A History of Intourist and Travel to the Soviet Union, 1929-1991' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, 2008), pp. 43-45.

[43] London, Brunel University Library, Burnett Archive of Working Class Autobiographies, Heslop, H, 3:75. For Harold Heslop's literary fame in the Soviet Union, John Connor, 'Anglo-Soviet Literary Relations in the Long 1930s', in *A History of 1930s British Literature*, ed. by Benjamin Kohlmann and Matthew Taunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 317-330 (pp. 323-324). For an edited selection of Malcolm Muggeridge's diary entries during his stay in the Soviet Union, see Malcolm Muggeridge, *Like It Was: The Diaries of Malcolm Muggeridge*, ed. by John Bright-Holmes (London: Collins, 1981), pp. 13-74.

[44] Salmon's history of Intourist provides a few examples of advertisements in an American context, see Salmon, 'To The Land of the Future', pp. 4-6.

[45] 'To Russia by Air', *Western Daily Press*, 26 February 1935, p. 5; 'Moscow Theatre Festival', *Western Daily Press*, 8 August 1935, p. 6.

[46] Our Own Correspondent, 'Russia and the Tourist: 10,000 Expected This Year the Accommodation Problem', *Observer*, 8 June 1930, p.8; Our Own Correspondent, 'Tourists in Russia: Total of 10,000 Expected Study and Sightseeing', *Observer*, 16 August 1931, p. 6.

[47] Manchester, Labour History Archive and Study Centre (People's History Museum), CP, Miscellaneous non-party organisations, CP/ORG/MISC/8/4; Austin, Harry Ransom Center (HRC), University of Texas at Austin, MS-02436, John Lehmann Collection, Programs, Charitable appeals, funerals, readings, and talks, 1937-1962, undated, container 108.4.

student, medical, summer and theatre tours.[48] That same year, *The Manchester Guardian*'s travel column framed Intourist as the best way for the British traveller to experience a 'modern holiday' and advertised its service until 1939.[49] In *The London Illustrated News*, advertisements ranged from experiencing the worker's state in Leningrad, to travelling the Artic on the Soviet icebreaker *Malygin*.[50]

Between 1932 and 1937, criticisms of the Soviet Union in *The Daily Telegraph* ran next to advertisements titled 'U.S.S.R. SEE IT YOURSELF!', 'NEW TRAVEL LAND' and 'FOR A EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME', with packages including the Leningrad Festival of Arts and the Russian Revolution's eighteenth anniversary celebrations in Moscow.[51] Similarly, *The Times* in 1934 advertised these same tours and events, though it substituted the emphasis of revolution with unique packages such as climbing Mount Elbruz, and with more comforting language of 'WHY NOT RUSSIA FOR YOUR HOLIDAY?'.[52] This extensive advertising next to conservative politics led to some bizarre occurrences. One correspondent for *The Times* reported in 1934 that 'the Intourist travelling agency of the Soviet Government creates a fictitious world and envelops the tourists in an utterly false atmosphere of prosperity and tawdry gaiety, while squalor and hunger are the ordinary lot of the Soviet masses beyond the artificial pale which tourists may not penetrate'.[53] Another announced in 1938 the 'End of

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[48] 'Holiday Travel', *Daily Express*, 10 March 1933, p. 18; 'Holiday Travel', *Daily Express*, 24 March 1933, p. 20.

[49] 'Summer Holidays', *Manchester Guardian*, 21 July 1933, p. 6; 'Display Ad 11', *Manchester Guardian*, 22 February 1936, p. 10; 'Summer Holidays: Attractions at Home and Foreign Resorts', *Manchester Guardian*, 1 July 1938, p. 16; 'Sunny June: Weather Encourages Early Holidays', *Manchester Guardian*, 9 June 1939, p. 18.

[50] 'Travel in Soviet Russia', *Illustrated London News*, 23 April 1932, p. 644; 'USSR The New Travel Land', *Illustrated London News*, 25 June 1932, p. 1069.

[51] 'Classified Advertising', *Daily Telegraph*, 11 June 1932, p. 1; 'Classified Advertising', *Daily Telegraph*, 10 May 1935, p. 3; 'Classified Advertising', *Daily Telegraph*, 24 May 1935, p. 3; 'Classified Advertising', *Daily Telegraph*, 7 June 1935, p. 2; 'Classified Advertising', *Daily Telegraph*, 21 June 1935, p. 3; 'Display Advertising', *Daily Telegraph*, 25 September 1935, p. 15; 'Display Advertising', *Daily Telegraph*, 29 April 1937, p. 12.

[52] 'Multiple Display Advertisements', *The Times*, 2 March 1934, p. 12; 'Tours', *The Times*, 9 March 1934, p. 2; 'Tours', *The Times*, 6 April 1934, p. 2; 'Tours', *The Times*, 13 April 1934, p. 2; 'Tours', *The Times*, 20 April 1934, p. 2; 'Tours', *The Times*, 22 June 1934, p. 2.

[53] From Our Riga Correspondent, 'Tourists Misled in Russia', *The Times*, 6 August 1934, p. 10.

Intourist', despite the newspaper continuing to run its advertisements for another two months.[54] Perhaps less surprisingly, both *The Economist* and *The Financial Times* accepted Intourist money and these advertisements appear adapted to their readerships, with more expensive tours further afield to the steppe and Central Asia.[55] Taken together, these advertisements in the British press reveal the extent to which travel to the Soviet Union was marketed by Intourist in different ways for every section of society, and that the motivations behind travelling could be various.

The Golden Road to Samarkand

A unique opportunity to visit the age-old cities of Central Asia, combined with visits to the lovely Crimean Riviera, the picturesque Caucasus, and other parts of the Soviet Union is offered by a special tour arranged by Intourist.

The Tour will start at Constantinople on the 7th March, thence by Soviet steamer to Odessa, Sevastopol, Yalta, Novorossysk, Tuapse, Sochi, Gagri, Sukhum, Poti and Batum; from Batum via Tiflis and Baku to Krasnovodsk and thence by special train consisting entirely of sleeping cars, with restaurant car and refrigerator, to Askhabad, Bokhara, Samarkand, Tashkent, Lugovaya (where the new Turksib railway begins, linking Turkestan with Siberia), Alma, Ata, and thence through Southern Siberia, via Novosibirsk, Omsk, Sverdlovsk to Moscow where the tour will end on the 10th April.

The cost from Constantinople to Moscow is £222 per person. Travellers may join either at Constantinople or Odessa; in the latter case Intourist will provide free rail travel from Shepetovka (Soviet-Polish frontier) to Odessa.

Further information may be obtained from

INTOURIST, Bush House, Aldwych, London, W.C.2

Thos. Cook & Son, Ltd. MacSmith Travel Co., Glasgow.
Wm. H. Muller & Co., Ltd. John Good & Sons, Hull.
Dean & Dawson, Ltd. Frames' Tours, Ltd.
Pickfords, Ltd. Sewell & Crowther, Ltd.
George Lunn's Tours.

18th Anniversary Celebrations in MOSCOW

On November 7 the Soviet peoples celebrate with the world's greatest mass demonstration, the wonderful achievements in which they are participating. For this event a special tour will leave London on Oct. 30—19 days from £20 inclusive.

Full information from Any Leading Travel Agents, or Intourist Ltd., Bush House, London, W.C.2.

CRUISE TO Russia

AND THE BALTIC

See the land of the Soviets in ease and comfort on our magnificent 20-days' Cruise by the famous 22,000 ton liner,

EMPRESS OF AUSTRALIA

The "Dreamship of Cruises."

First Class Only. Limited Membership.

From Southampton JUNE 27

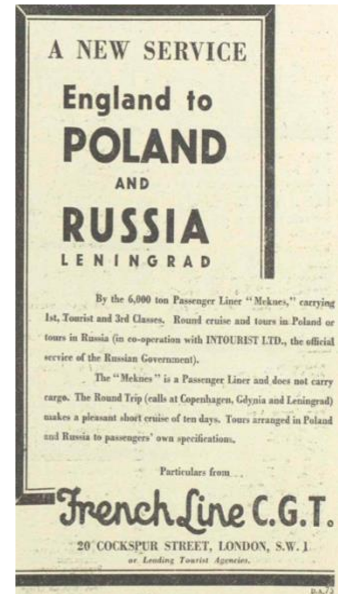
Visiting Oslo, Zoppot (for Danzig), Stockholm, Leningrad (for Moscow), Helsingfors, Copenhagen and Travemunde.

Minimum Rate: 36 Gns.

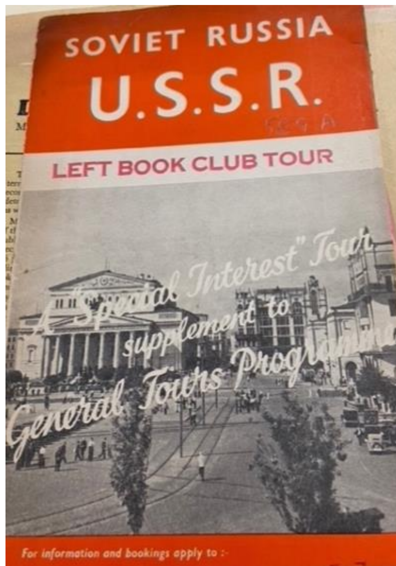
Figures 1-3. 'The Golden Road to Samarkand', 1932, advertisement, from *Economist*, 6 February 1932, p. 299; '18th Anniversary Celebrations in Moscow', 1935, advertisement, from *Daily Telegraph*, 11 September 1935, p. 15; 'Cruise to Russia', 1936, advertisement, from *The Times*, 10 May 1936, p. 30.

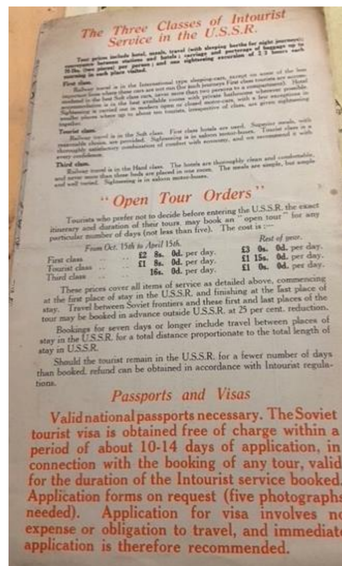
[54] From Our Correspondent, 'End of Intourist', *The Times*, 4 January 1938, p. 12; 'Tours', *The Times*, 10 March 1938, p. 2.

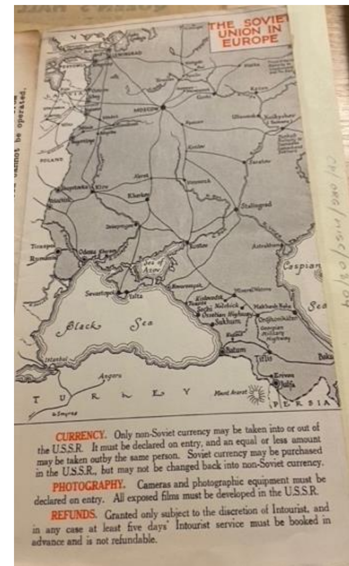
[55] 'U.S.S.R.', *Economist,* 1 November 1930, p. 16; 'A Journey to Central Asia and Turksib', *Economist*, 18 July 1931, p. 153; 'The Golden Road to Samarkand', *Economist*, 6 February 1932, p. 299; 'Multiple Classified Advertising Items', *Financial Times*, 8 November 1937, unnumbered.



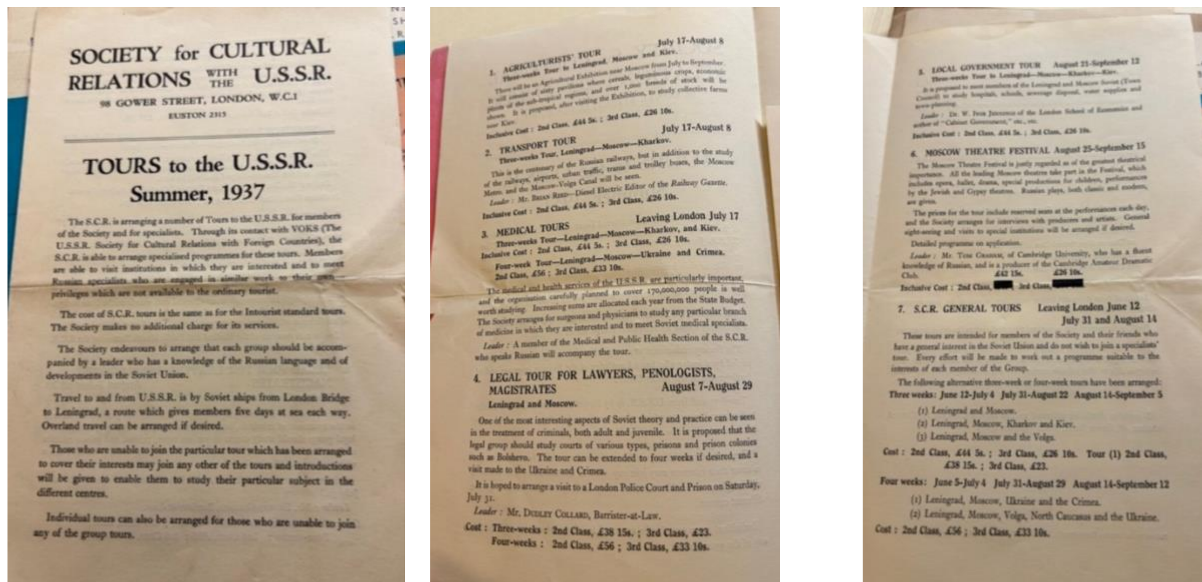
Figures 4-6: 'Travel in Soviet Russia', 1932, advertisement, from *Illustrated London News*, 23 April 1932, p. 644; 'Leningrad Festival of Arts', 1935, advertisement, from *New Stateman and Nation*, 4 May 1935, p. 649; 'A New Service', 1936, advertisement, from *Listener*, 15 July 1936, p. v.







Figures 7-9: Left Book Club, *Soviet Russia Left Book Club Tour Pamphlet*, 1937, from Manchester, Labour History Archive and Study Centre (People's History Museum), CP, Miscellaneous non-party organisations, CP/ORG/MISC/8/4.



SOCIETY for CULTURAL RELATIONS WITH THE U.S.S.R.
98 GOWER STREET, LONDON, W.C.1
EUSTON 2315

TOURS to the U.S.S.R.
Summer, 1937

The S.C.R. is arranging a number of Tours to the U.S.S.R. for members of the Society and for specialists. Through its contact with VOKS (The U.S.S.R. Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries), the S.C.R. is able to arrange specialised programmes for these tours. Members are able to visit institutions in which they are interested and to meet Russian specialists who are engaged in similar work to their own, privileges which are not available to the ordinary tourist.

The cost of S.C.R. tours is the same as for the Intourist standard tours. The Society makes no additional charge for its services.

The Society endeavours to arrange that each group should be accompanied by a leader who has a knowledge of the Russian language and of developments in the Soviet Union.

Travel to and from U.S.S.R. is by Soviet ships from London Bridge to Leningrad, a route which gives members five days at sea each way. Overland travel can be arranged if desired.

Those who are unable to join the particular tour which has been arranged to cover their interests may join any other of the tours and introductions will be given to enable them to study their particular subject in the different centres.

Individual tours can also be arranged for those who are unable to join any of the group tours.

1. AGRICULTURISTS' TOUR — July 17-August 8
Three-weeks Tour to Leningrad, Moscow and Kiev.
There will be an Agricultural Exhibition near Moscow from July to September. It will consist of sixty pavilions where cereals, leguminous crops, economic plants of the sub-tropical regions, and over 1,000 breeds of stock will be shown. It is proposed, after visiting the Exhibition, to study collective farms near Kiev.
Inclusive Cost: 2nd Class, £44 5s.; 3rd Class, £26 10s.

2. TRANSPORT TOUR — July 17-August 8
Three-weeks Tour, Leningrad—Moscow—Kharkov.
This is the centenary of the Russian railways, but in addition to the study of the railways, airports, urban traffic, trams and trolley buses, the Moscow Metro, and the Moscow-Volga Canal will be seen.
Leader: Mr. Brian Reed—Diesel Electric Editor of the *Railway Gazette*.
Inclusive Cost: 2nd Class, £44 5s.; 3rd Class, £26 10s.

3. MEDICAL TOURS — Leaving London July 17
Three-weeks Tour—Leningrad—Moscow—Kharkov, and Kiev.
Inclusive Cost: 2nd Class, £44 5s.; 3rd Class, £26 10s.
Four-week Tour—Leningrad—Moscow—Ukraine and Crimea.
2nd Class, £56; 3rd Class, £33 10s.
The medical and health services of the U.S.S.R. are particularly important, and the organisation carefully planned to cover 170,000,000 people is well worth studying. Increasing sums are allocated each year from the State Budget. The Society arranges for surgeons and physicians to study any particular branch of medicine in which they are interested and to meet Soviet medical specialists.
Leader: A member of the Medical and Public Health Section of the S.C.R. who speaks Russian will accompany the tour.

4. LEGAL TOUR FOR LAWYERS, PENOLOGISTS, MAGISTRATES — August 7-August 29
Leningrad and Moscow.
One of the most interesting aspects of Soviet theory and practice can be seen in the treatment of criminals, both adult and juvenile. It is proposed that the legal group should study courts of various types, prisons and prison colonies such as Bolshevo. The tour can be extended to four weeks if desired, and a visit made to the Ukraine and Crimea.
It is hoped to arrange a visit to a London Police Court and Prison on Saturday, July 31.
Leader: Mr. Dudley Collard, Barrister-at-Law.
Cost: Three-weeks: 2nd Class, £38 15s.; 3rd Class, £23.
Four-weeks: 2nd Class, £56; 3rd Class, £33 10s.

5. LOCAL GOVERNMENT TOUR — August 21-September 12
Three-weeks Tour to Leningrad—Moscow—Kharkov—Kiev.
It is proposed to meet members of the Leningrad and Moscow Soviet (Town Council) to study hospitals, schools, sewage disposal, water supplies and town-planning.
Leader: Dr. W. Ivor Jennings of the London School of Economics and author of "Cabinet Government," etc., etc.
Inclusive Cost: 2nd Class, £44 5s.; 3rd Class, £26 10s.

6. MOSCOW THEATRE FESTIVAL — August 25-September 15
The Moscow Theatre Festival is justly regarded as of the greatest theatrical importance. All the leading Moscow theatres take part in the Festival, which includes opera, ballet, drama, special productions for children, performances by the Jewish and Gypsy theatres. Russian plays, both classic and modern, are given.
The prices for the tour include reserved seats at the performances each day, and the Society arranges for interviews with producers and artists. General sight-seeing and visits to special institutions will be arranged if desired.
Detailed programme on application.
Leader: Mr. [illegible], of Cambridge University, who has a fluent knowledge of Russian, and is a producer of the Cambridge Amateur Dramatic Club.
Inclusive Cost: 2nd Class, £42 15s.; 3rd Class, £26 10s.

7. S.C.R. GENERAL TOURS — Leaving London June 12, July 31 and August 14
These tours are intended for members of the Society and their friends who have a general interest in the Soviet Union and do not wish to join a specialists' tour. Every effort will be made to work out a programme suitable to the interests of each member of the Group.
The following alternative three-week or four-week tours have been arranged:
Three weeks: June 12-July 4; July 31-August 22; August 14-September 5
(1) Leningrad and Moscow.
(2) Leningrad, Moscow, Kharkov and Kiev.
(3) Leningrad, Moscow and the Volga.
Cost: 2nd Class, £44 5s.; 3rd Class, £26 10s. Tour (1) 2nd Class, £38 15s.; 3rd Class, £23.
Four weeks: June 5-July 4; July 31-August 29; August 14-September 12
(1) Leningrad, Moscow, Ukraine and the Crimea.
(2) Leningrad, Moscow, Volga, North Caucasus and the Ukraine.
Cost: 2nd Class, £56; 3rd Class, £33 10s.

Figures 10-12: Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR [SCR], *Tours to the USSR*, 1937, from Austin, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, MS-02436, John Lehmann Collection, Programs, Charitable appeals, funerals, readings, and talks, 1937-1962, undated, container 108.4.

The 'Roaring Twenties' closed with a severe economic downturn leading to the Depression of 1931, a record mass unemployment which hovered around two to three million people, hunger marches, and the fall of Ramsay MacDonald's second Labour government (1929-31).[56] Britain's economy and society fell into crisis. The 'National' government (1931-35) struggled to cope with the economic shocks caused by the Great Depression. Major export industries such as coal, cotton, textiles, steel and shipbuilding contracted.[57] The government left the gold standard, cut public expenditure, restricted access to welfare with the Means Test and increased taxes to address the budget deficit.[58]

[56] John Stevenson and Chris Cook, *The Slump: Britain in the Great Depression* (England: Pearson Longman, 2010), p. 65; Matt Perry, *Bread and Work*: *Social Policy and the Experience of Unemployment, 1918-39* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), pp. 63-69; Stephanie Ward, *Unemployment and the State in Britain: The Means Test and Protest in 1930s South Wales and North-east England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), pp. 116-49.
[57] Stevenson and Cook, *The Slump*, pp. 65-66.
[58] Ward, *Unemployment and the State in Britain*, pp. 94-111; Nicholas Crafts and Peter Fearon, 'Depression and Recovery in the 1930s: An Overview', in *The Great Depression of the 1930s: Lessons for Today*, ed. by Nicholas Crafts and Peter Fearon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 1-39 (p. 24).

These crises undoubtedly contributed to the peak of British travel to the Soviet Union in the nineteen-thirties.[59] Such economic and political volatility highlighted for British left-wing writers capitalism's inherent failure to provide a basic standard of living to workers and, coupled with the rise of Nazism and the perceived success of Stalin's first Five-Year Plan, there was the belief that Western society was rotten at its core, with further decline inevitable. The purpose of many visits at this time thereby remained information-gathering expeditions.[60] Travellers frequently returned with the conclusion that the Soviet model, be it the inner-workings of the Communist Party, the centrally-planned economy, or organisation of labour, worked and could solve the multiple crises unfolding in Britain.

Writers in particular were a key group for the Soviet regime to attract throughout the interwar period, because, in the words of David-Fox, they 'played a special role' in representing the Soviet Union favourably abroad at a time when its allies were few.[61] Their literary craft also enabled them to achieve something in their travel accounts that a politician or commercial tourist could not. Notable writers who travelled over the interwar period include Henri Barbusse, Berthold Brecht, Theodore Dreiser, Lion Feuchtwanger, André Gide, Langston Hughes, Arthur Koestler, Curzio Malaparte, Ethel Mannin, Claude McKay, Naomi Mitchison, Malcolm Muggeridge, Liam O'Flaherty, John Dos Passos, Arthur Ransome, Romain Rolland, George Bernard Shaw, Ernst Toller, Pamela Travers and H. G. Wells. The main organisation attracting intellectuals was the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS). VOKS arranged extensive itineraries, cultural events and cross-cultural exchanges

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[59] Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation* (London: Pimlico Press, 1992), p. 65; Bernard Schweizer, *Radicals on the Road* (London: University Press of Virginia, 2001), p. 5.

[60] This purpose is evident in the chosen titles of travel writing that emphasise the primacy of sight, see Lansbury, *What I Saw in Russia*; Wells, *Russia in the Shadows*; Theodore Dreiser, *Dreiser Looks at Russia* (London: Constable, 1928); Henri Barbusse, *One Looks at Russia* (London: J. M. Dent, 1931); Walter Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia* (London: Routledge, 1936); Andrew Garve, *Russia: With Open Eyes* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1937).

[61] David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, p. 6.

with leading Soviet intellectuals.[62] The British section, the SCR, formed in 1923 and boasted as early members E. M. Forster, Wells and Virginia Woolf, reaching a peak membership of 1,700 in the early nineteen-thirties.[63] As Emily Lygo finds, the SCR played a key role in facilitating contact between British intellectuals and their Soviet counterparts, organising events on various aspects of the Soviet culture, and hosting meetings for British travellers to speak about their experiences of the Soviet Union.[64]

A field of debate has emerged since the Cold War trying to piece together the nature of this contact between Western intellectuals and the Soviet regime. The first accounts published at the height of the Cold War sought to understand why Western intellectuals were uncritical of Soviet society. Sylvia Margulies' *The Pilgrimage to Soviet Russia* (1968) outlines the vast Soviet bureaucracy that controlled the traveller's experience.[65] David Caute's *The Fellow-Travellers* (1973) considers how Enlightenment ideology functioned as a conduit for 'fellow travellers' to understand their Soviet surroundings.[66] The most influential work, Paul Hollander's *Political Pilgrims* (1981), suggests sympathetic Western intellectuals arrived with a pre-conceived and unshakeable faith in the communist project, and went on to display 'highly patterned, virtually uniform attitudes of admiration and enthusiasm toward the Soviet Union'.[67]

Moving into the twenty-first century, however, more recent historical studies complicate some of the presumptions underlying the arguments of these Cold War histories and offer a more nuanced picture of cultural exchange. In a departure from Hollander, Michael David-

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[62] Fitzpatrick, 'Foreigners Observed: Moscow Visitors in the 1930s under the Gaze of Their Soviet Guides', pp. 217-218.
[63] David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, pp. 82-85.
[64] Emily Lygo, 'Promoting Soviet Culture in Britain: The History of the Soviet for Cultural Relations between the Peoples of the British Commonwealth and the USSR, 1924-1945', *Modern Language Review*, 108.2 (2013), 571-596.
[65] Sylvia Margulies, *The Pilgrimage to Russia: The Soviet Union and the Treatment of Foreigners, 1924-1927* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968).
[66] David Caute, *The Fellow-Travellers: A Postscript to the Enlightenment* (London: The Macmillan Company, 1973).
[67] Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba, 1928-78* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 104.

Fox's *Showcasing the Great Experiment* (2012) uncovers a 'sheer breadth and diversity' of attraction to the Soviet Union, finding that 'Almost every Soviet sympathizer kept a key hope or concern especially close to his or her heart'.[68] David-Fox also charts VOKS' changing nature over the interwar period and considers the Soviet perspective on the organisation. Initially managed without party oversight by party and non-party intellectuals alike, VOKS provided jobs, a courier service for sending and receiving materials, and events with Western intellectuals, but from 1928, it was increasingly militantly communist, purged of non-party members, and served as an extension of Soviet state apparatus that closely monitored foreign travellers.[69] Sheila Fitzpatrick utilises the opening of Soviet archives to examine the records of VOKS guides and discovers numerous accounts of dissatisfied travellers and, on the Soviet side, an intellectual class interested in Western culture, an exchange that went beyond the Kremlin's 'sole interest' of manipulating Western opinion.[70] Other useful histories take the form of case studies of individual travellers which are most attuned to the biographical and historical details of encounters with the Soviet Union.[71] This recent focus on the particularities of an encounter is a guiding model for this thesis' historiographical approach.

These historical approaches, however, evaluate this travel writing exclusively as historical writing and overlook it as a literary genre. Questions of genre, narrative and style are left unexplored. This methodological limitation is where literary studies are valuable. Many critics

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[68] David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, p. 4.
[69] Michael David-Fox, 'From Illusory 'Society' to Intellectual 'Public': VOKS, International Travel and Party: Intelligentsia Relations in the Interwar Period', *Contemporary European History*, 11.1 (2002), 7-32.
[70] Fitzpatrick, 'Foreigners Observed', pp. 224-226, 215.
[71] For examples of individual case studies, see Carew, *Blacks, Reds, and Russians: Sojourners in Search of the Soviet Promise*, pp. 115-139, 140-154; Olga Yu Soboleva, and Angus James Wrenn, *The Only Hope of the World: George Bernard Shaw and Russia* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), pp. 135-175; Lynn Mally, 'Hallie Flanagan and the Soviet Union: New Heaven, New Earth, New Theatre', in *Americans Experience Russia: Encountering the Enigma, 1917 to the Present*, ed. by Choi Chatterjee and Beth Holmgren (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), pp. 31-39; Frank Costigliola, 'Kennan Encounters Russia, 1933-1937', in *Americans Experience Russia: Encountering the Enigma, 1917 to the Present*, ed. by Choi Chatterjee and Beth Holmgren (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), pp. 50-66; Jill Dobson, 'A 'fully Bloomed' Existence for Women: Miyamoto [Chūjō] Yuriko in the Soviet Union, 1927-1930', *Women's History Review*, 26.6 (2017), 799-821; Stephen V. Bittner, 'A Problem of Taste: An American Connoisseur's Travels Through the Soviet Union's Black Sea Vineyards and Wineries', *Kritika*, 19.2 (2018), 305-325.

have focussed on the literary characteristics of travel writing. For the purposes of this thesis, David Chirico's recommended 'intertextual' approach to travel writing is particularly useful in foregrounding 'the ways in which textual elements are transformed as they pass across boundaries between one context and another'. By ignoring 'any kind of aesthetic hierarchy' between travel writing and other literary forms, Chirico proposes that it becomes possible to trace how 'similar thematic elements – information about places visited, for example – are preserved or deformed as the pass from one genre to another'.[72] Christopher M. Keirstead's and Janicke Stensvaag Kaasa's contributions to the edited collection *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing* (2019) are also helpful in outlining the influence of travel and travel writing on fiction and poetry respectively.[73] This thesis adopts an intertextual approach to show how writers adapted their travel writing into new forms of left-wing literature.

Alongside these theoretical approaches, studies have also provided critical frameworks with which to identify aspects of travel writing that are distinctive to the interwar period. Paul Fussell's influential *Abroad* (1980) first set the interpretative parameters in suggesting that literary travellers desired to escape the confines of postwar Britian, which resulted in travel writing that resembled the 'picaresque' in the form of the heroic adventure narrative, as well as the 'elegy' in the nostalgic descriptions of non-industrial societies.[74] Later accounts have challenged Fussell's reading by considering a wider sample size of traveller and foregrounding other central literary features. Bernard Schweizer's *Radicals on the Road* (2001) emphasises interwar travel's 'inherently destabilizing, disorientating quality' which made political commitment 'complicated, malleable, and confused'.[75] Stacy Burton's *Travel Narrative and*

[72] David Chirico, 'The Travel Narrative as a (Literary) Genre', in *Under Eastern Eyes*: *A Comparative Introduction to East European Travel Writing on Europe*, ed. by Wendy Bracewell and Alex Drace-Francis (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008), pp. 27-59 (p. 35).

[73] Christopher M. Keirstead, 'Travel and Poetry', in *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*, ed. by Nandini Das, and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 442-455; Janicke Stensvaag Kaasa, 'Travel and Fiction', in *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*, ed. by Nandini Das and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 474-487.

[74] Paul Fussell, *Abroad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 208-210.

[75] Schweizer, *Radicals on the Road*, pp. 3-5.

the Ends of Modernity (2014) identifies how this period's travel writing increasingly aimed to reach 'the stature of literature', resulting in a 'setting aside of documentary discourse (and its mode of asserting truth) for more self-consciously subjective discourses (and their competing claim to different modes of truth)'.[76] Martin Hurcombe's, Angela Kershaw's and Martyn Cornick's *French Political Travel Writing in the Inter-war Years* (2017) argues that this travel writing reflects a search for 'new modes of being'.[77] This thesis benefits from these accounts in building on their findings in the context of British travel writing to the Soviet Union in the interwar period.

An interrelated movement has begun to examine the literary characteristics specific to travel writing on the Soviet Union in the interwar period. As Angela Kershaw suggests, 'While the conventional criticism of *retour de l'URSS* narratives is that they are all the same, it seems that they are in fact characterised by generic variety. Writers chose reportage, travel literature or fiction according to the purpose of the visit and, more importantly, the purpose of the resulting narrative'.[78] Grzegorz Moroz traces how the character of the Soviet guide serves particular narrative functions in different travelogues.[79] Katharina Wiedlick finds how in the travel writing of Louise Thompson Patterson and Dorothy West their gendered experience of the Soviet Union evolved into an emerging feminist consciousness.[80] Jessica Wardhaugh contends that French travel writing reveals how 'Russia was reshaping European notions of borders, measurability, time and history in the interwar period'.[81]

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[76] Stacy Burton, *Travel Narrative and the Ends of Modernity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 32.
[77] Martyn Cornick, Martin Hurcombe, and Angela Kershaw, 'Introduction: Radical Departures and the Politics of Inter-war Travel Writing', in *French Political Travel Writing in the Inter-War Years: Radical Departures*, ed. by Martyn Cornick, Martin Hurcombe, and Angela Kershaw (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 1-25 (p. 11).
[78] Kershaw, 'French and British Female Intellectuals and the Soviet Union', para. 11 of 36.
[79] Grzegorz Moroz, 'Fellow Travellers and Soviet Russia's Guides in 1930s Travel Books by Antoni Słonimski, Robert Byron and Walter Citrine', *Studies in Travel Writing*, 42.1 (2020), 88-101.
[80] Wiedlack, 'A Feminist Becoming? Louise Thompson Patterson's and Dorothy West's Sojourn in the Soviet Union', pp. 103-128.
[81] Jessica Wardhaugh, 'Europe in the Mirror of Russia: How Interwar Travels to the Soviet Union Reshaped European Perceptions of Borders, Time and History', *Contemporary European History*, 32.1 (2023), 97-113.

This thesis contributes to this movement by examining the intertextual relationship between British travel writing on the Soviet Union and left-wing literature in the interwar period. Studies concerned with this specific relationship are rare and so the most significant precedents are to be found elsewhere. Kate A. Baldwin's *Beyond the Colour Line and the Iron Curtain* (2002) is an important guide in uncovering how 'aesthetic and political attachments' of black American writers were affected by their travels to the Soviet Union.[82] Another is David Farley's *Modernist Travel Writing* (2010), which although outside the field of left-wing literature, is helpful in tracing how different modernist writers advanced their aesthetic projects in travel writing.[83] In the specific context of British left-wing literature, Kershaw argues that Naomi Mitchison chose fiction to represent her Soviet visit in *We Have Been Warned* (1935) as part of an effort 'to dramatise a thorny question' of revolutionary violence.[84] Julia Chan finds that Mitchison's experience of witnessing an abortion in Moscow contributed to the development in her novel of 'a new feminist aesthetics'.[85] Following these contributions, this thesis examines how this relationship between travel writing and literature unfolded in the literary projects of three other British left-wing writers.

The three writers that this thesis focuses on are Ralph Fox, Amabel Williams-Ellis and John Lehmann. They all occupied leading roles within left-wing literary culture in the interwar period. Fox was a member of the CPGB, Williams-Ellis an unofficial member, and Lehmann a fellow traveller, meaning that they each stood in different relation to the CPGB and the Soviet Union. Ralph Fox, educated at Magdalen College, Oxford, worked for the CPGB until his death fighting in the Spanish Civil War. Amabel Williams-Ellis, a founding editor of *Left Review*,

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[82] Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain*, pp. 15-16. For Baldwin's more recent contributions, see Kate Baldwin, 'Variegated Hughes: Rereading Langston Hughes's Soviet Sojourn', *Russian Review,* 75.3 (July 2016), 386-401; Kate A. Baldwin, 'Langston Hughes in the Soviet Union', in *Langston Hughes in Context*, ed. by Vera M. Kutzinski and Anthony Reed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 2013-212.
[83] David Farley, *Modernist Travel Writing: Intellectuals Abroad* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2010).
[84] Kershaw, 'French and British Female Intellectuals and the Soviet Union', para. 3 of 24.
[85] Julia Chan, 'The Brave New Worlds of Birth Control: Women's Travel in Soviet Russia and Naomi Mitchison's *We Have Been Warned*', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 42.2 (2019), 38-56.

based her experiments in propaganda writing on her experience of two visits to the Soviet Union. John Lehmann, educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, worked for the Woolfs at the Hogarth Press, published many of the 'Auden generation', and founded *New Writing*. This selection is limited to middle to upper-class writers and is not representative of the wider British Left, however, it still does redirect focus towards neglected writers.

This thesis contributes to our understanding of the literature of the nineteen-thirties by examining how travel to, and travel writing on, the Soviet Union informed the literary projects of three British writers who all had leading roles in left-wing literature and politics in the interwar period. In so doing, this thesis hopes to recover the importance of travel writing as literature for these writers, rather than as a form of escapism or commercial enterprise. More specifically, this thesis aims to show that a nuanced understanding of their travels and travel writing is necessary for a full evaluation of them as imaginative writers. Examining these three literary projects not only provides fresh insights on the decade's writing, but also foregrounds how travel writing could have multiple afterlives across multiple genres. My thesis intends to show how these writers viewed their travel and travel writing as an integral part of their own literary and political projects. Fox's travel writing on Central Asia produced a self-mythologising narrative in which he began to think about ideas of heroism that later developed into a theory of the communist hero. Williams-Ellis relied on her experiences of the Donbas mining district as the basis for an exploration between the changing nature of personal relationships in a revolutionary setting. Lehmann's travel writing functioned as the raw material for his experiments in different forms of left-wing poetry.

Fox, Williams-Ellis and Lehmann were part of a wider left-wing literary movement that looked towards the Soviet Union. There has been recent scholarship on Anglo-Soviet literary relations during the interwar period that reframes our understanding of what specifically attracted foreign writers to the Soviet Union. This reframing challenges past theorisations of a

'world literature' that emanated solely from the capitalist centres of Paris and London, by considering how the Soviet regime established its own competing international literary network. Katerina Clark illustrates how the Soviet project was fundamentally different in nature: non-market based, promoting working-class art and revolutionary literary line, and forming organisations with international affiliates.[86] The Soviet periodical *International Literature* was published in four languages and promoted Soviet literature abroad.[87] John Connor persuasively frames all the above 'as the lodestar of a parallel literary universe: a publishing centre, translation hub and seat of judgement and reward for writers and intellectuals from around the world'.[88] Matthew Taunton's *Red Britain* (2019) traces the manifold ways in which the Russian Revolution and the Soviet Union resonated in British literature and culture in the interwar period.[89] These arguments go a long way to acknowledging a more expansive sense of Soviet influence in British left-wing literature than Andy Croft's suggestion that 'the place was barely mentioned at all'.[90] Beyond the motivations in common with the non-literary traveller, therefore, the Soviet Union offered an exciting alternative literary world that appeared at the cutting edge of revolutionising literature through the promotion of a genuinely proletarian fiction.

Alongside this thesis' central emphasis on the relation between travel writing and literature, this thesis also seeks to uncover the literary and political lives of Fox, Williams-Ellis and Lehmann throughout the interwar period, who have all suffered marginalisation in existing accounts of literature of the nineteen-thirties. When these writers appear in accounts, it is too

[86] Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931-1941* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011); Katerina Clark, 'The Soviet Project of the 1930s to Found a "World Literature" and British Literary Internationalism', *Modern Language Quarterly* (Seattle), 80.4 (2019), 403-25.
[87] Elena Ostrovskaya, and Elena Zemskova, 'Between the Battlefield and the Marketplace: *International Literature* Magazine in Britain.' *Russian Journal of Communication*, 8.3 (2016), 217-29.
[88] Connor, 'Anglo-Soviet Literary Relations in the Long 1930s', p. 318.
[89] Matthew Taunton, *Red Britain: The Russian Revolution in Mid-century Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
[90] Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), p. 28.

often brief, frequently factually inaccurate and lazily reproduces past interpretations. For instance, Cunningham cites Fox several times in his encyclopaedic *British Writers of the Thirties* without delving into detail about his writings, leading to speculative assertions such as, 'There is only one Spender, one Caudwell, one Day Lewis, against a whole slate of Slaters, Foxes, Swinglers, and Amabel Williams-Ellises'.[91] This thesis finds in contrast that Fox, Williams-Ellis and Lehmann had distinct literary projects. In considering Fox, a committed communist since around 1921, it is possible to trace how his travels and travel writing produced a literary project focussed on Central Asia and male heroism. Williams-Ellis is not interested in Fox's exclusively male vision and is rather concerned with pioneering new forms of disguised propaganda. Lehmann's travel writing was part of his working out of a communist poetics. Archival materials reveal that his travel writing intended to capture his working-class male lover's feelings and experiences as the basis for his experiments in left-wing poetry. The first payoff of considering these writers, then, is that it provides us with a new understanding of these single authors in particular, and of the nineteen-thirties as a whole.

How best to approach the nineteen-thirties is another question that has recently been asked in critical literature and that this thesis seeks to address. Leo Mellor's and Glyn Salton-Cox's special issue of *Critical Quarterly* first argued for a move towards a perspective they named 'the long 1930s', which moves beyond the arbitrary periodisation of 1931 to 1939.[92] They instead recommend searching for connections and continuities across the nineteen-twenties and into the nineteen-forties. Charles Ferrall's and Dougal McNeil's *British Literature in Transition, 1920-1940* (2018) argues that 'Reading across the two decades between the wars allows for scholars to trace the continuing pressure of these transitions' in literature and

[91] Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties*, p. 33.
[92] Leo Mellor, and Glyn Salton-Cox, eds., *Special Issue: The Long 1930s*, *Critical Quarterly*, 57.3 (2015).

politics.[93] This was followed by Benjamin Kohlmann's and Matthew Taunton's *A History of 1930s British Literature* (2019), which continued this mission by bringing together research that seeks 'to identify a range of literary and cultural developments that were key to the nineteen-thirties and to use these trends as reference points for a partial remapping of twentieth-century literary and cultural production'.[94] An interrelated project under the banner of 'Late Modernism' seeks to trace how modernism developed into the nineteen-thirties and beyond.[95] For instance, Marina MacKay's *Modernism, War, and Violence* (2017) examines how modernist writers, troubled by the prospect of another war, developed the 'war travel book' in which she uncovers 'an important change of style as writers experiment with documentary and hybrid modes'.[96] My selection of writers represents this longer view that resists a strict binary between twenties modernism and thirties realism. Fox and Williams-Ellis started writing in the early to middle nineteen-twenties, and into the next decade their literary writings are developments, refinement and departures, rather than a radical break. Furthermore, Williams-Ellis and Lehmann were closely associated with the Bloomsbury group and this literary grounding informs much of their writing in the nineteen-thirties.

Finally, another relevant framework for this thesis' enquiry is the attempt to reconstruct the decade's broad range of political commitments. Early accounts of this period frame British left-wing writers as obediently toeing the Soviet socialist realist line, an opinion that writers were sometimes quick to offer themselves in their biographies during the Cold War.[97] But more

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[93] Charles Ferrall, and Dougal McNeill, 'Introduction', in *British Literature in Transition, 1920–1940: Futility and Anarchy*, ed. by Charles Ferrall and Dougal McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 1-25 (p. 5).

[94] Benjamin Kohlmann, and Matthew Taunton, 'Introduction: The Long 1930s', in *A History of 1930s British Literature*, ed. by Benjamin Kohlmann and Matthew Taunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 1-14 (p. 2).

[95] Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction and the Arts between the World Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Marina MacKay, *Modernism and World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[96] Marina MacKay, *Modernism, War, and Violence* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), pp. 85-101 (pp. 86).

[97] R. H. S. Crossman, ed., *The God That Failed* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1950)

recent investigations conversely show the wide range of political commitments, their expression in literature, and overall reach towards a more complex understanding of the relationship between political commitment and literary writing.[98] This thesis finds that while these writers all shared close attachments to the Soviet Union, their political commitments and literary projects diverged. In each case, these writers took something different from their travel writing, be it a linear narrative for a story, a transformation of the self, or a momentary experience that develops into a short story, novel, poem or literary theory. Furthermore, each of these writers' literary projects reflects a broad range of literary, political and cultural influences. Indeed, my reading of John Lehmann's poetry on the Soviet Union in particular develops from Glyn Salton-Cox's project that uncovers the relationship between communism and queerness.[99]

My central thesis is that, for these three writers, travel to, and travel writing on, the Soviet Union informed their literary projects throughout the interwar period. Each chapter develops several interrelated arguments to prove this claim. The first argument is that my writers relied on travel writing as an imaginative resource for other forms of literary writing. This involves identifying the key thematic concerns and literary styles found in their travel writing. Fox is most interested in male heroism, adventure and Central Asia in *People of the Steppes*; Williams-Ellis questions how the revolution leads to new subjectivities in her reports and newspaper articles; Lehmann records scenes, landscape and his lover's reactions in his unpublished travel journals. The next stage is to trace how these writers then transform their travel writing into other literary forms. Travel writing provides Fox with the imagery, arguments and structure for a pro-communist adventure story in the novel *Storming Heaven*. Contact with Kazakh nomadic life evolves in Fox's fiction into a wider anti-capitalist

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[98] Elinor Taylor, *The Popular Front Novel in Britain, 1934-1940* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2017).

[99] Glyn Salton-Cox, *Queer Communism and the Ministry of Love: Sexual Revolution in British Writing of the 1930s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

philosophy of life found in *Storming Heaven* and *This Was Their Youth* (1937).[100] Williams-Ellis also relies on fiction, however, unlike Fox she first uses the short story form with her collection *Volcano*. Her visits to Donbas mining villages and collective farms provide the settings for short stories that are interested in exploring how an individual's subjectivities undergo a revolution. Lehmann annotated his notes of Sikyr's experiences with his own commentary in an attempt to combine a working-class subjectivity with his own poetics.

Another key question repeatedly raised when studying these writers is how their distance from the working class that they claimed to represent problematises their literary projects. Fox saw himself as a member of the communist vanguard and his writings display a confidence in male heroism and Marxist theory. Williams-Ellis assumed that the Welsh working-class miners she met were ignorant in European affairs and the Soviet Union, which led her to develop a literary style intent on raising their revolutionary consciousness. Lehmann became increasingly aware of the vast gulf between different classes while in London working for the Hogarth Press. Personal relationships with working-class men in Vienna offered him the promise of a political communion. Therefore, when Lehmann took Sikyr to the Soviet Union, he did so with the belief that his poetry could benefit from his lover's intuitive reactions to the Soviet Union.

In examining how travel writing impressed itself on the content and form of three writers' literary projects in the interwar period, I achieve a better understanding of the intersection between political commitment and imaginative literature. These writers, all as passionate about questions of literature as radical politics, attempted to pioneer new forms of literature - Fox's conception of the communist hero and the socialist realist novel, Williams-Ellis's theory of history and defamiliarization, Lehmann's revolutionary song and prose poetry, that to them developed literature in a radically new direction. These new forms developed out of these writers' immersion in older literary styles – the eighteenth century novel for Fox, modernism

[100] Ralph Fox, *This Was Their Youth* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1937).

for Williams-Ellis, Georgian poetry for Lehmann. They occupied editorial positions on left-wing literary journals, debated their positions on literature in print, and travelled extensively abroad. They turned to travel writing not only to document their experience of Soviet socialism, but also to understand the new forms of art emanating from it. This body of travel writing provides the best means of understanding the political and literary appeal of the Soviet Union. While their travel writing primarily sought to educate the reader of these changes, their imaginative literature attempted to use content and form in order to entertain, puzzle, enrage and motivate the reader's feelings so as to reach certain political conclusions. Even within this selection of writers, they started with diverging political priorities, literary preferences and experiences of the Soviet Union, meaning that they went on to produce different kinds of imaginative literature.

Studying this forgotten literature is also relevant for the world we find ourselves in today. I started researching this thesis before Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the 24 February 2022. I was first inspired to research this thesis in order to better understand how the experience of travelling to the Soviet Union affected individual writers' literary style and political commitment. This soon evolved into building a wider picture of how these writers worked within an existing network in Britain of cultural and political organisations variously associated with the Soviet Union. Consequently, my thesis is primarily rooted in a particular historical moment, between 1917-39, and does not insist on broader continuities between this period and our own. Indeed, the historian Tony Wood recently in the *London Review of Books* has warned researchers against producing a 'continuity narrative' that links tsarist, Soviet and contemporary Russia, instead suggesting that Putin's 'Russia is a new entity, neither neo-tsarist nor retro-Soviet'.[101] Nevertheless, the invasion of Ukraine necessitated a reconsideration of my

[101] Tony Wood, 'Against Relics: *The Soviet Century: Archaeology of a Lost World*', *Left Review of Books*, 45.14 (13 July 2023), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v45/n14/tony-wood/against-relics>.

research materials. Each of these writers wrote extensively not only on Soviet Russia but also its republics: Fox on Central Asia, Williams-Ellis on Ukraine, and Lehmann on Ukraine and Georgia. Each of my chapters addresses how their travel writing justified the Soviet regime in these countries. They also place these justifications within the wider context of the British Left's support for the Soviet Union

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'The New World and the Old': Ralph Fox, the Adventure Story, and the Development of the Communist Hero, 1922-36

'I feel I must wear my feet out seeing this world'

In the summer of 1922, Ralph Fox, having recently graduated with a first in Modern Languages from Magdalen College, Oxford, travelled on horseback across the length of the Kazakh steppe. Famine and disease still raged after the upheavals of the civil war in the Volga-Urals region, Northern Caucasus, Ukraine and Central Asia.[1] An estimated thirty million people were starving.[2] Deaths from hunger and disease would eventually reach five million.[3] Fox had joined a Society of Friends' relief mission intending to aid the famine-affected South Russian peasantry.[4] In his travelogue *People of the Steppes* (1925), Fox recounts his search for a mission volunteer who disappeared somewhere in Central Asia in possession of a large sum of money intended for the purchase of horses. Starting his expedition in far south-east Russia, he crossed into the newly formed Kirgiz Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic (ASSR), where he eventually found the volunteer in a town by the Aral Sea. The volunteer entrusted Fox to lead a separate party into the Turkestan ASSR, through the Kazakh steppe along the Jaxartes river

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[1] On the Soviet response to the famine, see Jonathan Smele, *The "Russian" Civil Wars, 1916-1926: Ten Years That Shook the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 214-216. On the upheaval in Central Asia, see Adeeb Khalid, *Central Asia: A New History from the Imperial Conquests to the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021), pp. 159-166.
[2] Jonathan Smele, *Historical Dictionary of the Russian Civil Wars, 1916-1926* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), pp. 381-382.
[3] Smele, *The "Russian" Civil Wars, 1916-1926*, p. 215.
[4] Don Hallet, "The Hand That History Dealt', Ralph Fox (1900-1936)', *Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society*, 17 (2009), 110-140 (p. 113).

as far as Kamyslybas, in the hope of trading horses with Kazak nomads. Included in the travelogue is a photograph of Fox on his expedition. Posing hands in pockets, he stands smiling in the Kyzylkum desert, sporting riding boots and a holstered pistol.[5]

Figure 13: Ralph Fox, *The Author at Kamishli Bash*, 1922, photograph, from Ralph Fox, *People of the Steppes* (London: Constable, 1925), p. 65.

This chapter examines how Fox's travels to Soviet Russia and Central Asia informed his views on literature throughout the interwar period, until his untimely death fighting in the Spanish Civil War in 1936. *People of the Steppes* is much more than a factual record of Fox's expedition. He constructs a travel narrative that is a combination of ethnographic record and

[5] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. 1-2, 9, 16, 18, 40, 168, 176, 65.

adventure story. An enthusiastic reader of the adventure novel genre, Fox rewrites his travels into a personal myth in which he, the Oxford undergraduate, transforms into a heroic communist revolutionary of the steppe. Approaching Fox's *oeuvre* with this early travelogue at the centre of our engagement with him as a writer and communist helps us to understand how he utilised his experiences of travel and travel writing in his later novels and literary theory. The first section considers the political and cultural networks that informed Fox's representation of Central Asia in *People of the Steppes*. The second section traces how Fox adapts the imagery, arguments and structure of *People of the Steppes* into the adventure novel *Storming Heaven* (1928).[6] The third section reflects on how Fox's literary writings in the nineteen-twenties allows for a fresh interpretation of his position in left-wing literature in the nineteen-thirties. Existing scholarship typically understands Fox's main contribution, the theory of the communist hero outlined in *The Novel and the People* (1937), as strictly a thirties' phenomenon, when in fact it represents an evolving form of an idea that is rooted in Fox's travel writing more than a decade earlier.[7] The fourth section argues that Fox adapts his earlier travel writing and adventure novel into a socialist realist novel *This Was Their Youth*. Indeed, as Fox informed readers of *Genghis Khan* (1935) more than a decade lafter his first visit, the people of Central Asia 'made an unforgettable impression'.[8]

It was in the nineteen-thirties that Fox became a leading figure in the development of British left-wing literature. He co-founded the British Section of the Writers' International (1934) and *Left Review* (1934-38).[9] He made efforts to found an Indian Section, acting, according to Katerina Clark as a 'mentor figure' in helping Indian writers, especially Mulk Raj Anand, to

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[6] Ralph Fox, *Storming Heaven* (London: Constable, 1928).
[7] Ralph Fox, *The Novel and the People* (London: Cobbett, 1937).
[8] Ralph Fox, *Genghis Khan* (London: John Lane, 1936), p. 2.
[9] British Section of the Writers' International, 'Writers' International', *Left Review*, 1.2 (October 1934), 38; Hallet, ''The Hand That History Dealt', Ralph Fox (1900-1936)', p. 120.

develop their literary talents and find publishers.[10] Between March 1928 and June 1929, he edited and wrote book reviews for *The Sunday Worker*.[11] In July 1929, he left London for Moscow to work as a librarian at the Marx-Engels Institute for three years, making him one of the best informed Englishman on Marxist political theory and Soviet literature. Returning to Britain in August 1932, Fox regularly contributed to *The Daily Worker*, *Communist Review* and *Left Review*, organised CPGB-backed anti-fascist demonstrations in East London, and published several books on British imperialism.[12] His speech at the Writers in Defence of Culture Congress in 1935 left Rebecca West impressed enough that she bought all of his books.[13] Storm Jameson recommended *The Novel and the People* as 'required reading' and cited Fox in her nonfiction writings.[14] Fox also advised the 'shadow committee' of John Lehmann's *New Writing* on Russian and Soviet literature.[15] Alongside this admiration from writers, contemporary communists also approved of his commitment to the CPGB. Michael Gold remembered how 'Fox had done a great deal of the dogged, loyal, day-to-day Communist work that few writers buckle down to'.[16] The British Security Service's file on Fox and *The*

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[10] Katerina Clark, 'Indian Leftist Writers of the 1930s Maneuver among India, London, and Moscow: The Case of Mulk Raj Anand and His Patron Ralph Fox', *Kritika*, 18.1 (2017), 63-87 (p. 70). On Fox's activities in the Indian literary network in London, see also Snehal Shingavi and Charlotte Nunes, 'Bloomsbury Conversations that Didn't Happen: Indian Writing between British Modernism and Anti-Colonialism', in *British Literature in Transition, 1920-1940: Futility and Anarchy*, ed. by Charles Ferrall and Dougal McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 199-216; John Connor, 'Anglo-Soviet Relations in the Long 1930s', in *A History of 1930s British Literature*, ed. by Benjamin Kohlmann and Matthew Taunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 317-330 (p. 319); Delia Jarrett-Macauley, and Susheila Nasta, 'Between the Wars: Caribbean, Pan-African, and Asian Networks', in *The Cambridge History of Black and Asian British Writing*, ed. by Susheila Nasta and Mark U. Stein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 99–115 (pp. 103-104).

[11] Kew, National Archives, KV2, Ralph Winston Fox, KV 2/1377.

[12] National Archives, Ralph Winston Fox, KV 2/1376; National Archives, Ralph Winston Fox, KV 2/1377. Fox's books on imperialism include, Ralph Fox, *Marx, Engels and Lenin on the Irish Revolution* (London: Modern Books, 1932); Ralph Fox, *The Class Struggle in Britain in the Epoch of Imperialism*, 3 vols (London: Martin Lawrence, 1932-1933).

[13] Ralph Bates, 'My Friend, Ralph Fox', in *Ralph Fox: A Writer in Arms*, ed. by John Lehmann, T. A. Jackson, and C. Day Lewis (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1937), pp. 8-9 (p. 9).

[14] Storm Jameson, 'Writing In Revolt: 1. Theory', *FACT*, 5 (July 1937), 9-18 (p. 9). Elizabeth Maslen, *Life in the Writings of Storm Jameson: A Biography* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2014), pp. 166-167.

[15] John Lehmann, *The Whispering Gallery: Autobiography*, 3 vols (London: Longmans, 1955-1966), I (1955), p. 235.

[16] Michael Gold, 'Till We Have Built Jerusalem', in *Ralph Fox: A Writer in Arms*, ed. by John Lehmann, T. A. Jackson, and C. Day Lewis (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1937), pp. 10-12 (p. 10).

Daily Worker's 'What's On' column provide meticulous records of much of this dogged Communist work.[17] His memberships of political organisations included the CPGB, Karl Marx Memorial Committee, East London anti-Fascist Committee and Labour Research Department. He regularly organised meetings and spoke at lectures on behalf of the CPGB across Britain and in Ireland.[18]

Many of Fox's literary and political writings, due to his fluency in Russian and considerable experience of the Soviet Union, arose out of work for British institutions interested in Soviet literary and political cultures. In June 1926, back from his second visit to the Soviet Union, he was caught in a political scandal when the British Secret Service raided the CPGB headquarters and his name appeared in a letter sent from Moscow, in connection with his work on the anti-colonial movement in India.[19] In July 1933, the SCR requested that he give a course of lectures on the subject of Dialectical Materialism in relation to art.[20] In May 1934, R. H. Tawney recommended him for a teaching stewardship on Russia at the School of Slavonic Studies based on his impressive 'insight and judgement' on the country, as well as his four years spent working in the Soviet Union.[21] A. L. Rouse, a fellow *The Daily Worker* contributor, invited him to lecture at Oxford University on communism and Russia.[22] Employed by Routledge, he provided advice on future publications and English translations of Russian literature.[23] When proposing his own project provisionally titled *War and Peace in the Far East*, he emphasised that his contacts in Moscow provided him with the 'general advantage' of having access to official Soviet publications and institutions 'at his disposal'. Fox also translated works by

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[17] Kew, National Archives, Ralph Winston Fox, KV 2/1376; 'Ralph Fox on Workers and Writers', *Daily Worker*, 3 April 1935, p. 4.
[18] National Archives, Ralph Winston Fox, KV 2/1376.
[19] 'Seized Communist Documents', *Manchester Guardian*, 24 June 1926, p. 5.
[20] National Archives, Ralph Winston Fox, KV 2/1377; London, Society for Co-operation in Russian and Soviet Studies (SCRSS), SCR Annual Reports. At the time of writing, the SCRSS has yet to finish organising the SCR archive. There is no mention of Fox's talk in the SCR's digitised minutes spanning 1928-1937.
[21] National Archives, Ralph Winston Fox, KV 2/1377.
[22] National Archives, Ralph Winston Fox, KV 2/1376.
[23] Reading, University of Reading: Special Collections, Letters to and from Ralph Fox, RKP 6/10.

Russian and Soviet Marxists into English for publishers.[24] Working as an editor for the CPGB publisher Martin Lawrence, he would have had access to the English translation of the Soviet literary journal *International Literature* (1933-43). Alongside Frank Quelch and Albert Inkpin, he jointly directed and owned the radical publisher Modern Books. Working in the same premises as Martin Lawrence, they published the British editions of the Communist International's (Comintern) reports, as well as pamphlets on the international revolutionary and anti-imperial movements. Radical politics, combined with extended stays in the Soviet Union, led British Special Branch to consider Fox to be 'on the inside of every important form of Communist activity based in London'.[25]

Fox's death in Spain in late December 1936 left his literary and political legacies relatively protected from associations with Stalinism that haunted other left-wing writers into the next decade. John Lehmann, T. A. Jackson, and C. Day Lewis produced a commemorative volume *Ralph Fox, A Writer in Arms* (1937), which ensured Fox's importance to the emergence of left-wing literature in the nineteen-thirties.[26] Lehmann wrote of Fox's 'intense interest in literature *as literature*'.[27] By this Lehmann meant that Fox refused to adopt the 'cut-and-dried method' of his contemporary Marxists towards literature who 'were really only interested in it insofar as it proved something political'. Rather, when Lehmann and Fox discussed the English novel, their conversations involved Fox 'expatiating on beauties of style and description, or brilliance of character-creation in a way that showed, not only how real and important these things were to him, but also that he had a novelist's instincts himself'.[28] John Strachey declared 'Ralph Fox

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[24] Georgi Valentinovich Plekhanov, *Essays in the History of Materialism*, trans. by Ralph Fox (London: John Lane, 1934); N. I. Bukharin, A. M. Deborin, Y. M. Uranovsky, and others, *Marxism and Modern Thought*, trans. by Ralph Fox (London: Routledge, 1935).
[25] National Archives, Ralph Winston Fox, KV 2/1376.
[26] *A Writer in Arms*, ed. by John Lehmann, T. A. Jackson, and C. Day Lewis (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1937).
[27] John Lehmann, 'Ralph Fox, The Writer', in *Ralph Fox: A Writer in Arms*, ed. by John Lehmann, T. A. Jackson, and C. Day Lewis (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1937), pp. 107-110 (p. 107).
[28] On Fox's interest in 'literature *as literature*' as far back as 1921, see his defence of Percy Bysshe Shelley in Ralph Fox, 'Materialist Misconceptions', *Plebs*, 8.5 (May 1921), 156-157.

was, I think, the most sensitive and gifted of the writers the British Communist movement has yet produced'.[29] *The Daily Worker* broke the news of Fox's death to its readers with the header 'FOX WILL BE SYMBOL'.[30] In *Left Review*, the tribute to Fox read 'the writers of England, writers and citizens, must step in and try to fill the places of these men, both by serving, themselves, in the cause of political and intellectual liberty, and by making known the careers and purposes of the dead'.[31] In April 1951, G. D. H. Cole continued to make Fox known in his retrospective on the British Labour movement in the nineteen-thirties, concluding 'I do know that he was a fighter for the ideals and values which I have been trying to put to you, and that he died faithful to them'.[32] In these eulogies, Fox's contemporaries directed their critical faculties towards transforming Fox into one of the idealised figures of the decade, alongside Christopher Caudwell, John Cornford, and Julian Bell.

Scholarship has built on this legacy. As in the primary literature produced immediately after Fox's death, it has almost become customary to read into Fox something representative of the decade. Samuel Hynes's *The Auden Generation* (1976) commends Fox for raising the standard of Marxist literary criticism, before arguing that it

> came to an end, as the whole art versus propaganda, politics versus poetry debate did. No doubt this was partly due to the withdrawal of the literary Left from communism and action: waiting for the end did not require a theory. But partly it was a direct consequence of the Spanish war; for the two Marxist critics best qualified to continue the argument were Caudwell and Fox, and they were dead.[33]

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[29] John Strachey, 'Ralph Fox: British Communist Killed in Spain', *Manchester Guardian*, 6 January 1937, p. 12.
[30] 'FOX WILL BE SYMBOL', *Daily Worker*, 7 January 1937, p. 1.
[31] 'Ralph Fox: A Tribute', *Left Review*, 3.1 (February 1937), 2.
[32] G. D. H. Cole, *British Labour Movement: Retrospect and Prospect* (London: Fabian Publications 1951), p. 20.
[33] Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, pp. 267-268.

Valentine Cunningham's final chapter of *British Writers of The Thirties* (1988) concludes that the deaths of left-wing writers in Spain meant that '30s hopes crashed down to earth'.[34] Peter Marks' investigation into the relationship between British left-wing writers and Soviet socialist realism concludes that they 'gave up opportunities hinted at' by Fox's Marxist literary theory.[35] Fox's untimely death seemed to parallel the untimely death of left-wing literature in Britain. There is not the same need, therefore, to rescue Fox from critical obscurity as with other left-wing writers. On the surface, Fox already appears a well-established figure in accounts of left-wing literature in the nineteen-thirties. There are numerous discussions on Fox's theory of the communist hero found in *The Novel and the People*.[36] The most convincing is Phillip Bounds' outline of the heterogeneous influences, from D. H. Lawrence to E. M. Forster, that inspired Fox's theory.[37] What though, is known about Fox's other writings?

Despite frequent allusions to Fox in secondary literature, critics usually restrict themselves to studying in detail just one key text, *The Novel and the People*. Engagements with his other literary and political writings are exceptionally rare. In 2017, a lack of chapters and articles dedicated to Fox left Katerina Clark to suggest that he is 'largely forgotten today'.[38] Indeed, he is nowhere to be found in Benjamin Kohlmann's *Committed Styles: Modernism, Politics, and Left-wing Literature in the 1930s* (2014) or Nick Hubble's *The Proletarian Answer to the*

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[34] Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties*, p. 467.
[35] Peter Marks, 'Illusion and Reality: the Spectre of Socialist Realism in Thirties Literature', in *Rewriting the Thirties: Modernism and After*, ed. by Keith Williams and Steven Matthews (London: Longman, 1997), pp. 23-36 (p. 34).
[36] For discussions of Fox's *The Novel and the People*, see H. Gustav Klaus, 'Socialist Fictions in the 1930s', in *The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy*, ed. by John Lucas (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978), pp. 13-41; Marks, 'Illusion and Reality: the Spectre of Socialist Realism in Thirties Literature', pp. 23-36; Philip Bounds, *British Communism and the Politics of Literature*, 1928-1939 (Pontypool: Merlin, 2012), pp. 134-160; Ben Clarke, 'In the Thirties: Upward, Literature and Politics', in *Edward Upward and Left-wing Literary Culture in Britain*, ed. by Benjamin Kohlmann, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 31-51; Taylor, *The Popular Front Novel in Britain, 1934-1940*, pp. 49-53; John Connor, 'Communism and the Working-Class', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the 1930s*, ed. by James Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 113-127.
[37] Bounds, *British Communism and the Politics of Literature, 1928-1939*, pp. 134-160.
[38] Clark, 'Indian Leftist Writers of the 1930s Maneuver among India, London, and Moscow', p. 67.

Modernist Question (2022).[39] And yet, Clark goes too far in her assessment. Fox is not necessarily forgotten. He is, rather, too often selectively remembered. A lack of breadth in existing critical accounts exacerbates the sense that Fox has been forgotten. He is typically situated as a writer of the nineteen-thirties, yet the works cited by critics are really of the narrower period of 1934 to 1937. Studying Fox in this manner leaves out the beginning and middle of his literary and political development in favour of the end. Fox's travel writing and fiction written in the mid-to-late nineteen-twenties, based on his travel writing to Soviet Russia and Central Asia, are left untouched. His literary and political writings in left-wing periodicals in the late nineteen-twenties go unread. Even *This Was Their Youth*, published within the narrower timeline of 1934 to 1937, has been disregarded. Consequently, there are obvious reasons to revisit Fox's literary and political writings in a way that addresses these omissions and limitations. This chapter provides a much needed broader view of Fox's literary development as a specific case study into the 'long 1930s'.[40] Fox's early writing, political commitment and support for the Soviet Union informed his participation in the literary debates and political events in the next decade. These early literary and political writings also respond to a different set of writers, ideas and political arguments unfamiliar to critical accounts of the nineteen-thirties. Therefore, we gain a fuller picture of Fox as a writer in the nineteen-thirties, by considering what and how he wrote in the nineteen-twenties.

'A Journey to the Frontier': The Sovietisation of Central Asia in Travel Writing

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[39] Benjamin Kohlmann, *Committed Styles: Modernism, Politics, and Left-wing Literature in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Nick Hubble, *The Proletarian Answer to the Modernist Question* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022).

[40] On the need for a 'long 1930s', see 'Special Issue: The Long 1930s', ed. by Leo Mellor and Glyn Salton-Cox, *Critical Quarterly*, 57 (2015).

There is evidence of Fox's commitment to communist politics and support for Soviet Russia dating from immediately after the First World War. In 1919, while studying at Magdalen, he joined the local 'Hands Off Russia' committee, a movement organised by labour parties and trade unions throughout Europe that agitated for an end to Allied intervention in the Russian Civil War.[41] He also organised a collection to raise money for a soup kitchen in Russia. When a British Intelligence Service officer later made enquiries regarding another college alumnus's interest in Soviet Russia, Thomas Herbert Warren informed him that this interest 'may be on account of' Fox. In 1920, he helped to found the Oxford branch of the CPGB and probably became a card-carrying member around this time.[42] By 1922, few foreign travellers had visited the Kirgiz and Turkestan ASSRs.[43] No known primary materials relating to Fox's expedition survive today, aside from eleven photographs taken by him included in *People of the Steppes*.[44] In 1924, on his return to Britain, Fox started a doctorate on Oriental History at the School of Oriental Studies (later known as SOAS) at the University of London, under the supervision of the school's director, Edward Denison Ross.[45] By September 1925, however, he had dropped out of his studies to spend a year abroad in Moscow working for the Colonial Department of the Comintern.[46] *People of the Steppes* was published that same year. It remains a valuable text for foregrounding how Fox represented in writing ideas about travel and the Sovietisation of Central Asia, both of which he developed in his later novels and literary theory.

The majority of first-hand travel accounts on the Soviet Union published in Britain over the period 1917-1925 were written by diplomats, military personnel, spies, journalists and relief

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[41] National Archives, Ralph Winston Fox, KV 2/1376.
[42] Oxford, Magdalen College Library, FOX-R FRE, Michael Freeman Ralph Fox Folios; Bounds, *British Communism and the Politics of Literature, 1928-1939*, p. 136.
[43] Sarah I. Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe: Famine, Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan* (London: Cornell University Press, 2018), p. 6.
[44] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. ii, 8, 58, 6, 98, 110, 142, 168, 170, 178.
[45] London, School of Oriental and Asian Studies (SOAS), FOX, Ralph Winston, Student Entry Forms 1923-24 (No. 2032).
[46] National Archives, Ralph Winston Fox, KV 2-1377.

workers.[47] Only a small number of political sympathisers had made the journey to Soviet Russia, returned to Britain, and presented their findings to the public by the time of *People of the Steppes'* publication in 1925.[48] Most of these travellers only saw Petrograd and Moscow.[49] The Soviet regime permitted those who were part of organised labour delegations to tour the surrounding countryside.[50] In the resultant travel writing, the primary concerns included the communists' consolidation of power, the worsening humanitarian crisis, and the British government's role in prolonging the crisis by enforcing a *cordon sanitaire* over Russia. In this context, H. G. Wells in 1920 concluded the Soviet leadership solely capable of restoring order, as 'the only possible Government in Russia at the present time. It is the only idea, it supplies the only solidarity, left in Russia'.[51] Later that year, the first organised Labour Party and Trades Union Congress (TUC) Delegation published a report condemning the British government's 'iniquitous policy of intervention and blockade'.[52] When evaluating the revolution's achievements in their later individual travelogues, however, the delegates failed to achieve a consensus.[53] These debates amongst leading figures in the British labour movement prior to Fox's 1922 visit failed to dampen his own political convictions. One of his first public

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[47] This number is the aggregated entries in the bibliographies, Philip Grierson, *Books on Soviet Russia, 1917-1942: A Bibliography and a Guide to Reading* (London: Methuen, 1943), pp. 16-37; and Harry W. Nerhood, *To Russia and Return: An Annotated Bibliography of Travelers' English-language Accounts of Russia from the Ninth Century to the Present* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968), pp. 139-193.
[48] The number of British left-wing travellers to Soviet Russia with published travelogues between 1917 and 1925 approximately numbered only nineteen. This conclusion is again based on Grierson, *Books on Soviet Russia, 1917-1942*, pp. 16-37; and Nerhood, *To Russia and* Return, pp. 139-193.
[49] Goode, *Bolshevism at Work*; Lansbury, *What I Saw in Russia*; Wells, *Russia in the Shadows*; E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *Soviet Russia as I Saw It* (London: Workers' Dreadnought, 1921); Harry Pollitt, *Serving My Time: An Apprenticeship to Politics* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1940), pp. 135-141.
[50] The British Labour and TUC Delegation, 1920, travelled along the Volga river as far as Saratov, see *British Labour Delegation to Russia, 1920, Report*. The British Women Trade Unionists' Delegation, 1925, travelled from Moscow to the Caucasus, see British Women Trade Unionists, *Soviet Russia: An Investigation By Women Trade Unionists: April to July 1925* (London: Coates, 1925).
[51] Wells, *Russia in the Shadows*, p. 18.
[52] *British Labour Delegation to Russia 1920: Report*, p. 4.
[53] Russell, *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism*; Mrs. Phillip Snowden, *Through Bolshevik Russia* (London: Cassell & Company, 1920); Robert Williams, *The Soviet System at Work* (London: The Communist Party, 1920); Leslie Haden-Guest, *The Struggle for Power in Europe, 1917-1921: An Outline Economic and Political Survey of the Central States and Russia* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1921); Charles Roden Buxton, *In a Russian Village* (London: The Labour Publishing Company, 1922).

interventions in left-wing politics was to rebuke the delegation's findings. In a 28 October 1920 article for the *Communist*, Fox criticised the delegation for condemning the Soviet regime on the basis that 'individual liberty is interfered with', which, in his judgement, made them 'completely out of touch with the development of labour thought today'.[54] Indeed, in response to criticisms of the Soviet regime from across the political spectrum, the CPGB published the pro-Soviet pamphlet *Russia To-Day* (1921).[55] Writing *People of the Steppes* after this first wave of sympathetic travel to Soviet Russia, Fox sought to provide a retrospective of the political and social transformation underway in Central Asia. As Fox acknowledges in his preface to the travelogue, his travel writing attempts to recreate the 'deadly and desperate' sense of struggle of the civil war years, safe in the knowledge that at the time of writing 'the new order is winning at every point of the battlefront and that the enemy is in full retreat'.[56]

Fox was ideally suited to making this argument in support of the Soviet regime, being the only British traveller at that time to venture so far East as into Central Asia.[57] The *Manchester Guardian* journalist Morgan Phillips Price got close, reaching the border town of Orenburg, where he could see 'a great expanse of dry steppe, or sheep-grazing country, stretching unbroken for 2,000 versts to the Chinese frontier'.[58] A British Labour and TUC delegation secretary, Charles Roden Buxton, abruptly left the delegation without the communist guides' approval, to explore the village of Ozero, Samara, where he discovered that, 'No Englishman, as far as I could ascertain, had ever been seen'.[59] The last popular travelogue on the region was Stephen Graham's *Through Russian Central Asia* (1916).[60] The material difficulties of reaching

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[54] Ralph Fox, 'Labour and the Intellectuals: A Criticism of the New Whigs', *Communist*, 28 October 1920, p. 5.
[55] Communist Party of Great Britain, *Russia To-Day: a survey of facts and figures; to all British trade unionists* (London: Communist Party of Great Britain, 1921). Not to be confused with the Friends of the Soviet Union periodical *Russia to-day* (1930-56).
[56] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, p. v.
[57] A British engineer travelled through the Kirghiz steppe between 1914 and 1919, see John Wilford Wardell, *In the Kirghiz Steppe* (London: Galley Press, 1961).
[58] Price, *My Reminiscences of the Russian Revolution*, p. 122.
[59] Buxton, *In a Russian Village*, p. 9.
[60] Stephen Graham, *Through Russian Central Asia* (London: Cassell, 1916).

Central Asia after the revolution and civil war meant that few sympathetic travellers understood the region itself, let alone the Soviet regime's intentions in it. To take one example, Wells, while visiting the Petrograd Soviet, was shown a film of a Baku dancer at the Congress of the People of the East, who could balance knives on his head while performing a 'very rapid and dexterous' dance. After the film, he wanted explaining whether this dancer 'was a specimen Asiatic proletarian or just what he symbolised, but I could get no light on him. But there are yards and yards of film of him'. Left with no answer, Wells evidently took away an understanding from his friend Maxim Gorky, who appeared 'obsessed by a nightmare of Russia going east'. Wells explains to the reader that the Western blockade of Russia would 'drive what will remain of Bolshevik Russia to the steppes and the knife'.[61] Wells was not alone in this opinion. Bertrand Russell, an unofficial member of the British and TUC delegation, similarly feared 'If trade is not reopened, the plans of Asiatic conquest will mature, leading to a revival of Zenghis [Genghis] Khan and Timu'.[62] In the imagination of these writers, Central Asia appears a medieval, lawless and violent place that would corrupt and destroy Western civilisation in Russia. While Wells believed the Soviet regime prevented this move East, others criticised Lenin and his followers as dangerous prophets from the East who brought with them fanaticism and dogmatism that they believed were characteristic of religious belief in the region. For instance, the Labour and TUC Delegation secretary and doctor, Leslie Haden-Guest, likened 'Bolshevism' to 'Mohomedism', likening Lenin to a 'Central Asiatic Mohemet'.[63] These ideas that arose from a limited understanding of Central Asia became useful for certain British travellers to deploy in order to explain the direction of change underway in

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[61] Wells, *Russia in the Shadows*, pp. 80-81, 84, 83. William Empson cited Gorky's view of the 'great danger' for Russia of Central Asia in his study of the pastoral, see William Empson, *Some Version of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 22.
[62] Russell, *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism*, pp. 116, 176.
[63] Leslie Haden-Guest, 'Realities Of Russia', *The Times*, 30 September 1920, p. 11; Haden-Guest, *The Struggle for Power in Europe, 1917-1921,* p. 43.

Russia. To this end, Central Asia existed in this shared imaginary as a land of violence and religious fundamentalism.

Fox mediates his first-person impressions of Central Asia through his communist politics. Throughout the interwar years, British communists accepted at face value the Soviet regime's promise to protect national and ethnic difference, organised within a free federation of Soviet republics that jointly worked towards communism.[64] In June 1920, at the Second Congress of the Comintern, Lenin asserted that,

> The world political situation has now placed the dictatorship of the proletariat on the order of the day, and all events in world politics are inevitably revolving around one central point, *viz.*, the struggle of the world bourgeoisie against the Soviet Russian Republic, around which are inevitably grouping, on the one hand, the movement for Soviets among the advanced workers of all countries, and, on the other all the national liberation movements in the colonies and among the oppressed nationalities, whom bitter experience is teaching that there can be no salvation for them except in the victory of the Soviet system over world imperialism.[65]

Lenin argued that class struggle was intrinsically bound to the national liberation movements resisting Western imperialism. With this struggle clearly defined, Andrew Thorpe finds that the CPGB from 1924 'had a clear task in pursuing anti-colonial activities within the British

[6464] On the Soviet regime's nationality policy in 1917, see 'Appeal to the Muslims of Russia and the East', in *USSR, Sixty Years of the Union, 1922-1982* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982), p. 35; 'Third All-Russia Congress of Soviets, 'Resolution Endorsing the Nationalities Policy of the Soviet Government', in *Decrees of the Soviet Government* (Moscow: Institute of Marxism-Leninism, 1957), p. 351; Carlo Spagnolo, 'Citizenship', in *A Dictionary of 20th-Century Communism*, ed. by Silvio Pons and Robert Service (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), pp. 110-114.

[65] Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, 'Preliminary Draft of Theses on the National and Colonial Questions', in Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *Lenin on the National and Colonial Questions: Three Articles* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1967), pp. 20-29 (p. 23).

Empire'.[66] Katerina Clark finds that Comintern 'intermediaries' who wrote on Asia 'sought to provide what they saw as a more accurate description of Asia for European and Asians alike, overcoming imperialist exoticism and inflecting their narrative with class analysis and a Marxist perspective'.[67] Fox actively pursued the promotion of worldwide revolution in his work in Indian and Irish anti-colonial networks.[68] His fellow communists predicted that Central Asia in particular would be crucial in this struggle. In *Labour Monthly*, a periodical Fox contributed to several times, Evelyn Roy placed great importance in 1924 on the Soviet regime's position in Central Asia in her two-part essay 'The Revolution in Central Asia'. She argues that 'With a whole ancient world tottering to its fall, the revolution with its message of emancipation would be carried to the very gates of India! British Imperialism, the triumphant survivor of its once deadly rival, felt itself newly menaced, and henceforth became the most inveterate foe of the Revolution in Central Asia – became the backbone and foundation of the counter-revolution'.[69] She later predicts, 'The struggle for power in Central Asia is destined to continue, for the interests at stake are too vast to surrender with ease. But in that struggle, the forces of autocracy and imperialism are on one side, pitted against the ever-increasing army of freedom and emancipation on the other. Who can doubt which will conquer in the end?'.[70] Roy clearly defines the Soviet regime as essentially different in character from European empires. Emancipating Central Asia would prove terminal for the British Empire in India. This conclusion seemed a real possibility in the early nineteen-twenties, despite the Soviet regime's still precarious existence. Highly critical of Soviet communism, a disillusioned Russell found

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[66] Andrew Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow, 1920-1943* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 64.
[67] Katerina Clark, *Eurasia without Borders: The Dream of a Leftist Literary Commons, 1919-1943* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021), p. 8.
[68] On the affiliations between Indian and Irish anti-colonial networks in London, see Kate O'Malley*, Ireland, India and Empire: Indo-Irish Radical Connections, 1919-1964* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).
[69] Evelyn Roy, 'The Revolution in Central Asia: The Struggle for Power in Holy Bokhara. – I', *Labour Monthly*, 6.7 (July 1924), 403-411 (p. 404).
[70] Evelyn Roy, 'The Revolution in Central Asia: The Struggle for Power in Holy Bokhara. – II', *Labour Monthly*, 6.9 (September 1924), 557-566.

that the Soviet regime's 'two policies, of revolution in the West and conquest (disguised as liberation of oppressed peoples) in the East, work in together, and dovetail into a strongly coherent whole'. He warned that 'It is only a question of a few years before India will be in touch with the Red Army. If we continue to antagonize the Bolsheviks, I do not see what force exists that can prevent them from acquiring the whole of Asia within ten years'. The Sovietisation of Central Asia made 'England becoming Bolshevik' seem a real prospect.[71]

Recent secondary literature is much more critical of the Soviet regime in Central Asia in the interwar period.[72] The consensus now is that the Soviet Union was indeed an empire.[73] As Brigid O'Keeffe helpfully surmises, 'In practice, Soviet nationality policy was to work as the civilizational training wheels that would put the presumed-to-be "backward" non-Russian peoples on course to achieve Soviet modernity at an accelerated speed'.[74] Achieving Soviet modernity required more than a rhetoric of freedom and friendship. In the words of Adeeb Khalid, the Soviet regime's treatment of its territories in in Central Asia was 'thoroughly comparable to those of the overseas colonies of European empires'.[75] Most important when reading Fox's *People of the Steppes* is to be aware of the violent fate that befell the Kazakh nomads he describes. Sovietisation completely destroyed this ethnic group. O'Keefe is correct in her assessment that 'A Kazakh nomad may have experienced Soviet rule as little more than brutal dispossession and the collapse of the only world he had ever known'.[76] Forced

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[71] Russell, *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism*, pp. 116, 111-112, 21.
[72] On the Soviet regime in Central Asia, see Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution, 1987); Alun Thomas, 'Kazakh Nomads and the New Soviet State, 1919–1934' (PhD dissertation, University of Sheffield, 2015); Mukhamet Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe: The Story of a Kazakh Nomad under Stalin*, trans. by Jan Butler (London: Stacey International, 2006); Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe*; Alun Thomas, *Nomads and Soviet Rule: Central Asia under Lenin and Stalin* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2018); Brigid O'Keeffe, *Multiethnic Soviet Union and Its Demise* (London: Bloomsbury 2021), pp. 19-49; Khalid, *Central Asia*.
[73] On the Soviet as a form of empire, see *Empire De/Centered: New Spatial Histories of Russia and the Soviet Union*, ed. by Sanna Turoma and Maxim Waldstein (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013; O'Keeffe, *Multiethnic Soviet Union and Its Demise*, p. 17; Khalid, *Central Asia*, pp. 7-8.
[74] O'Keeffe, *Multiethnic Soviet Union and Its Demise*, p. 11.
[75] Khalid, *Central Asia*, pp. 7-8.
[76] O'Keeffe, *Multiethnic Soviet Union and Its Demise*, p. 19.

requisitions of grain, livestock and clothing began as early as the spring of 1920.[77] By the time of Fox's expedition in 1922, the Soviet regime had little control over the Kazakh steppe and Russian communists in the region were feared and loathed.[78] With Stalin's introduction of the First Five-Year Plan, Soviet modernisation meant transforming Central Asia into a regional meatpacking centre for the wider Soviet economy.[79] Repeated collectivisation of the Kazakh nomads' livestock resulted in a 'merciless' famine and approximately 1.5 million deaths.[80] Soviet efforts to irrigate the region resulted in the disappearance of the Aral Sea.[81] According to Xavier Hallez and Isabelle Ohayon, between 1927 and 1932, 'Kazakh society was indeed drained of its institutions and denied an ideological future' after repeated requisitions and repressions.[82] Stalin's terror eventually reached intellectuals in Central Asia in the late nineteen-thirties.[83] Between 1938 and 1939, Danielle Ross finds that the Soviet regime promoted a foundational myth of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic as emerging from the October Revolution in order 'to erase or delegitimise the Kazakh nation-building projects of the pre-Soviet period'.[84] Ultimately, Soviet modernisation eradicated the Kazakh nomads' way of life, culture and landscape, with little to nothing to show for it.[85]

In his foreword to *The People of the Steppes*, Fox promises his readers that 'This book, though it may provide propaganda for those who choose to misunderstand it, is no sense a

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[77] Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, p. 156.
[78] Robert Kindler, *Stalin's Nomads: Power and Famine in Kazakhstan* (Pittsburgh, PA.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), pp. 22-26.
[79] O'Keeffe, *Multiethnic Soviet Union and Its Demise*, p. 30.
[80] O'Keeffe, *Multiethnic Soviet Union and Its Demise*, pp. 30-31; Khalid, *Central Asia*, p. 229.
[81] Maya K. Peterson, *Pipe Dreams: Water and Empire in Central Asia's Aral Sea Basin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).
[82] Xavier Hallez and Isabelle Ohayon, 'Making Political Rebellion "Primitive": the 1916 Rebellion in the Kazakh Steppe in Long-Term Perspective (c. 1840–1930)', in *The Central Asian Revolt of 1916: A Collapsing Empire in the Age of War and Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), ed. by Alexander Morrison, Cloé Drieu, and Aminat Chokobaeva, pp. 256-288 (p. 278).
[83] Khalid, *Central Asia*, pp. 234-236.
[84] Danielle Ross, 'Domesticating 1916: the Evolution of Amangeldi Imanov and the Creation of a Foundation Myth for the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (1916–1939)', in *The Central Asian Revolt of 1916: A Collapsing Empire in the Age of War and Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), ed. by Alexander Morrison, Cloé Drieu, and Aminat Chokobaeva, pp. 327-346 (p. 333).
[85] O'Keeffe, *Multiethnic Soviet Union and Its Demise*, p. 29.

political work'. This first sentence, from a writer who at this time worked on behalf of Comintern and the CPGB's propaganda department, immediately challenges expected criticism to his travelogue as misinterpretation. Fox based these claims to objectively represent Central Asia on his privileged position as a traveller, which meant that 'People, good and bad, of all parties are set down in it just as they appeared to the author, and when they speak it is with their own voice, not with his'. Fox promises to be impartial and reflective, not subjective and argumentative. Later in the travelogue, however, Fox admits to deficiencies in his ability to objectively represent life on the Kazakh steppe. He travelled with an interpreter, knew only one hundred words of Russian at this time, one word of Kirghiz, and could not converse with his technical advisor from Samara.[86] Furthermore, Fox's interchangeable designation of the nomads he encounters as both 'Kirghiz' and 'Kazak' reveals his preference for a Soviet nomenclature that attempted to classify these nomadic peoples along national lines.[87] Combined with these telling limitations and inaccuracies, Fox's foreword also introduces numerous value judgements about Soviet imperialism in Central Asia. He remembers the period 1922-1923 as

> the struggle against the old ideas, against the psychology of the enslaved, against all the evil heritage of the past, which was being fought out in men's minds, in the minds of the Revolutionary, peasant and small trader alike. To-day we can say that the new order is winning at every point on the battlefront and that the enemy is in full retreat.[88]

[86] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. v, 2, 29, 39, 41.
[87] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. 144-153; Khalid, *Central Asia*, pp. 199-215; Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe*, p. ix; O'Keeffe, *Multiethnic Soviet Union and Its Demise*, p. 23. On the difference between the Kirghiz and the Kazakhs, see R. Vaidyanath, *The Formation of the Soviet Central Asian Republics: A Study in Soviet Nationalities Policy, 1917-1936* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1967), pp. 15-18, 20-22.
[88] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, p. v.

In this first retrospective overview of his journey, Fox likens the Soviet frontier to an actual and ideological 'battlefront' where the 'enemy' is left deliberately indeterminate. With this framework established, Fox constructs a distinct pro-Soviet imperialist narrative to represent the Kazakh nomad in a way that legitimises to a British audience the Sovietisation of Central Asia.

Fox structures *People of the Steppes* as a travel account interspersed with ethnographic entries on various aspects of nomadic life. This structure corresponds to Fussell's definition of the interwar travel book insofar as it contains both the 'picaresque' adventure story and 'elegiac' descriptions of nomadic life.[89] The travel account reveals Fox's affection for an idea of travel that is a male adventure fantasy. This precedes his first visit to the Soviet Union and relates to his early literary sensibilities. In his play for the People's Theatre, *Captain Youth* (1922), the main characters hope to escape their industrial hometown to travel with pirates, discover mythical creatures and earn a fortune.[90] When Fox was bedridden with fever in the Kyzylkum desert he longs to return to the picaresque adventure in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*. One of his chapters titles, 'The Crusoes of Barsa Kilmas', is a reference to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.[91] Fox's attraction to this form of travel results in a travel account that focusses on his encounters with Eastern peoples, his recovery from malaria, and his eventual transformation into a person who 'belonged to the steppe'.[92]

Alongside this idea of travel, Fox's desire to diligently record the nomadic people's appearance, customs and view of the world probably relates to his year's doctoral training at SOAS.[93] In 1924, according to Ian Brown, SOAS had the 'explicitly imperial purpose' of

[89] Fussell, *Abroad*, pp. 208-210.
[90] Ralph Fox, *Captain Youth: A Romantic Comedy for all Socialist Children* (London: C. W. Daniels, 1922), p. 6.
[91] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. 62, 119.
[92] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. 69- 83, 46, 133.
[93] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. 135-166.

training colonial and commercial administrators of the British Empire.[94] Fox had no desire to follow this trajectory. There is no evidence currently available to piece together his time at SOAS, but it is possible to draw a parallel between his ethnography and Ross' academic interests. Ross co-wrote the definitive history in Britain of Central Asia and its relationship with Russia, *The Heart of Asia* (1899), which praised Britain in India for ensuring individual and corporate freedoms.[95] In an undated lecture on 'Mongols and Turks', Ross argues that 'Asia comprises such utterly different countries and races that it is absurd for us to speak of Orientals as if they were one huge race with definite characteristics'. He hoped that the rise of travel to Asia would dismantle the British misconception that 'the whole East seemed indistinguishable'.[96] It is in this vein that Fox follows Ross' project insofar as also desiring to acquire detailed knowledge on the various ethnic groups in Central Asia. Their academic relationship also endured into the nineteen-thirties, when Fox acknowledged Ross 'for the constant help and advice he has given me throughout' the writing of *Genghis Khan*.[97] Unlike the other early British travellers such as Wells, Russell and Haden-Guest, who relied on racist stereotype, Fox's account is rooted in direct experience and careful observation.

Despite a shared interest in Central Asia, Fox and Ross held opposed political views. Fox worked towards the overthrow of Western capitalism and imperialism. Detailing the Kazakh nomadic way of life functioned to justify Soviet, not Western, imperialism. However primitive the Kazakh nomads' way of life, the choice 'between the luxury of civilisation and the hardihood of the nomad way, between death by the rottenness of cities and death by the rigours of the steppe', seemed an obvious one. Fox held a deep attraction to certain aspects of nomadic

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[94] Ian Brown, *The School of Oriental and African Studies: Imperial Training and the Expansion of Learning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 1.
[95] E. Dension Ross, *Both Ends of the Candle* (London: Faber & Faber, 1943), p. 165; Francis Henry Skrine and E. Denison Ross, *The Heart of Asia: A History of Russian Turkestan and the Central Asian Khanates from the Earliest times* (London: Methuen, 1899), pp. 408-416.
[96] London, SOAS, PP MS 8, Ross, Box 14.
[97] Fox, *Genghis Khan*, p. x.

life that he discovers in Central Asia. He favours life on the steppe to 'one condemned as a slave to a machine'. Fox drew parallels between the Kazakh nomad's 'merry grossness and rough sensuality' and his 'own Yorkshire countrymen' (Fox was born in Halifax). Fox repeatedly emphasises how a nomadic existence produces an adventurous and free spirit. This attraction permeates the narrative. The narrator as a subject, for instance, remains invisible when describing his surroundings and actions. The reader is only informed that the narrator resembles a 'trading Cossack'. In the first part of the travelogue, narrative time closely adheres to a day and night cycle, resembling 'the eternal rhythm of a wandering shepherd life'.[98] Fox's representation of the Sovietisation of Central Asia, then, simultaneously acknowledges the unfortunate backwardness of the Kazakh nomads, while maintaining a critique of Western capitalism, and also foregrounding those characteristics deemed by Fox to be desirable to the Soviet regime.

It is this last sense in Fox's travel writing that motivates his repeated exoticisation and objectification of the Kazakh nomad's body. This representational strategy enables him to further idealise pre-modern nomadic life in Central Asia, with positive implications for the Soviet regime. When swimming with Kazak women, Fox 'thought for a brief moment we had slipped back into some golden age of bold innocence, or we had in truth come to the lost Prester John's land which travellers in the Middle Ages were for ever seeking'. The urgency of his mission and the famine melts away to be replaced by a medieval myth of an Eastern land conquered by a Christian crusader. Writing of a communist militiawoman's abuse of a Kazak woman, Fox admires how the woman stood 'face dark and mute with that Oriental dignity', rather than interrogate the root of the conflict. He often focuses on the Kazakh nomad's body as a way of interpreting their inner character which is otherwise inaccessible to him. Kazakh youth 'live naked on the steppe, burned by the sun and tanned by the wind, growing strong as

[98] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. 115, 161, 163, 57, 9.

young animals in the way of nature'. He praised Kazakh women as 'beautiful as heroes compared with the sickly inhabitants of our Western cities' with 'a comely body, full round breasts, strong short thighs moulded for love and children, a firm, straight figure that moves with the supple beauty of a wild creature'. Men were 'broad-chested, the muscles rippling beneath the bronzed skins like sunlight to steel'.[99] There is a sense here that, if the Soviet regime inherited these traditions dating back to Genghis Khan, then this physical health and strength would overpower and conquer a Western civilisation in decline, a positive reversion of Wells' fear of the knife wielding dancer. Fox's attention to the male Kazakh body, then, is concerned with how it reflects the new Soviet values.

At the final chapter of ethnography titled 'The Nomad Life', Fox leaves the future of the Kazakh nomads open to question, wondering 'What will become of them and their steppe?'. He proceeds to answer:

> Yet to-day there are signs that the land is taking back its old dominion. Railways with turbine locomotives are revolutionising travel, the motor lorry penetrates where neither steam nor rail can go, even sending a regular service from Tashkent to Kashgar, and over all flies the aeroplane, a force whose wonders are still but dimly guessed at. Will the sea-powers have to yield before the old lords of the steppe? There is a new Russia to-day who dominates all Asia, full of life and young vigour. Will she repeat the conquests of the great Mongols and restore the peoples of the steppe to their ancient heritage? The Russian Revolution and the Asiatic Renaissance have marched side by side from 1905 to 1925, and who can deny that the future is theirs to seize if they can

[99] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. 19, 24, 144, 145.

> find leaders great enough to point the way, if the rest of the world persists in dull hostility and misunderstanding.[100]

In the form of a rhetorical question, Fox reproduces the Soviet regime's promise in Central Asia. After the Westernising influence of tsarism, the revolution is not revolutionary, but restorative, in returning nationhood to these peoples of the steppe. New modes of travel could modernise the entire continent. Fox entirely underestimates the violence and centralisation behind this Soviet modernisation drive. His final confession to the reader that he 'knew and loved the people' jars with imagery and arguments always in the greater service of Soviet imperialism. In 1936, Fox had planned to return to Asia, but his untimely death in Spain meant that he never witnessed evidence of the Kazakh nomads' destruction.

The structure of *People of the Steppes* consolidates Fox's positive vision of the Soviet regime in Central Asia. The travel book begins with Fox's preparations for the travels ahead. Each chapter explores a certain theme related to a stage of his chronological journey. By the end of the travel book, however, Fox's final two chapters and epilogue depart from this chronological account in presenting two snapshots side by side of Moscow before and after his expedition. This structure resists what David Chirico terms the 'generic pressure' of travel writing to reproduce a 'straightforward relationship between the order of events in the signifying narrative and the order of events signified'. Departures from this structure indicate for Chirico that a travel narrative 'is organised according to other principles'.[101] Chapter sixteen, 'Moscow, the Heart of It All', contains Fox's first descriptions of the capital and reveals his organising principle. The reader expects, having followed Fox's expedition through the Kazakh steppe, that he has ended his journey in Moscow. Only on its final page is the reader

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[100] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. 165-166.
[101] Chirico, 'The Travel Narrative as a (Literary) Genre', pp. 55.

in fact informed that Fox is travelling south to begin his expedition. This structure has two significant effects. First, it permits Fox to write of Moscow in the same mode as he already has for the Kazakh steppe, highlighting the cultural continuities between the Soviet frontier and its centre. He likens the Kremlin to 'rose red antique loveliness, yet it is still the vital heart of Russia, the soul of the new country as it was the soul of the old, the monument of enduring Russianness'. There is nothing more specific given as evidence of Moscow for being the soul of the Soviet republics, other than the city's very existence, which 'was a perfect whole, the heart of it all, the capital of the great union of republics that covers half Europe and half Asia'.[102] Second, Fox describes in this chapter his attendance at the trial of the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), where the Soviet regime charged its members for counter-revolutionary activities.[103] This event functions as a stark point of contrast to the corruption in the Kazakh steppe. In Fox's opinion, the trial represents the 'final triumph of revolutionary justice'. He witnesses a 'real dignity in the proceedings' and leaves feeling that this 'was the Revolution in full dress'.[104]

The next chapter, 'Moscow the New Life', jumps in time from the summer of 1922 to the winter of 1923. This allows Fox to present a 'very different' Moscow that focusses on the country's rapid development in line with the Soviet regime's revolutionary programme. As a consequence, Fox is less concerned with abstract ideals found in the previous chapter, and is more concerned with the evident material changes in the capital. The return journey from Samara to Moscow is a full day shorter than the outward leg had been six months before. At the station, books 'by any author of merit' could be purchased. He delights in finding 'What we saw now was quite frankly better than anything I have seen anywhere in Europe, cleaner, brighter, more animated and architecturally more beautiful.' The new Kazan station 'had just

[102] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. 200, 216, 200-201.
[103] Smele, *Historical Dictionary of the Russian Civil Wars, 1916*-1926, pp. 1072-1074.
[104] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. 204, 211-212.

been completed', implying that the Soviet frontier was being brought ever closer to the centre. The epilogue provides the final crossing over the frontier, this time into Western Europe. Fox takes the train to Poland and sees through the train window 'The calm, watching figure of the sentry of the new Russia'.[105]

As well as chronicling the Kazakh nomads' way of life and Moscow's modernisation, Fox also documents the changing literary spirit of the revolution. The status of Russian realist writers had changed in Soviet Russia and differed from mainstream literary opinion in Britain. In a conversation on Russian literature with a group of communists, Fox notes their disappointment at discovering that the most read Russian authors in Britain were Tolstoy and Chekhov. In Soviet Russia, Fox concludes that readers ignored these writers in favour of Pushkin, Gogol and Dostoevsky. When in Moscow, he finds the city 'almost completely cleared of its old literary Gods; the Gods are in exile in Berlin, Belgrade, Rome, Prague or Paris, and, moreover, they have renounced their country in its new aspects'.[106] By 'old literary Gods', Fox meant not the great Russian realists, but heirs to this tradition who fled after the revolution, namely Ivan Bunin and Aleksandr Kuprin. This period between the civil war to the creation of the Soviet Union, between Fox's journey and publication of *People of the Steppes*, represented the beginning of a transitional stage for the development of a new left-wing literature. In 1924, Leon Trotsky remarked that 'If a line were extended from present art to the Socialist art of the future, one would say that we have hardly now passed through the stage of even preparing for its preparation'.[107] Fox considers what a future Soviet literature might look like. He deploys an extended metaphor likening revolutionary writers to a crew of a ship, who 'must make all their discoveries by experience, sail by dead reckoning, but in spite of all that they are bringing the ship home'.[108] This relationship between travel and literary writing informs Fox's writings

[105] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. 217, 241.
[106] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. 85, 227, 228.
[107] Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1971), p. 12.
[108] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. 228.

throughout the interwar period. Fox, the perennial traveller, made his literary and political discoveries through his own experience. With his travel writing now published, Fox's *Storming Heaven* attempts to bring his discoveries about the Soviet frontier home through prose fiction.

'A little fiction mingled with reminiscences': Transforming Travel Writing into the Adventure Novel

In March 1928, three years after the publication of *People of the Steppes*, Fox returned to his record of Soviet Central Asia for *Storming Heaven*. Adapting the imagery, arguments and structure first worked out in his travel writing into an adventure novel enabled Fox to entertain readers while presenting his justification of the Sovietisation of Central Asia. Aside from these two published texts, no other primary literature survives that documents Fox's approach to adapting his travel writing. We can deduce, however, that Fox enjoyed contemporary adventure stories found in travel writing, autobiographies and novels throughout the nineteen-twenties. He often reviewed them for the *Sunday Worker*.[109] In a 22 April 1928 review of Arthur Mason's *Salt Horse* (1928), an adventure novel of an Irish boy's life at sea, Fox identified that the author rewrote source material originally from his earlier autobiography *Wide Seas and Many Lands* (1926).[110] In his opinion, the differences from Mason's 'rich experiences of life' and his fictional retelling of them did not matter. 'Who cares?', he asks the reader, for 'If there is a little fiction mingled with these reminiscences, I for one cannot distinguish it from fact. Neither I should think, can Mr. Mason'. Fox valued here above all Mason's uncompromising realism, a 'grimness', that resulted from plundering from one's autobiography.[111]

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[109] Ralph Fox, 'Pimps and Prostitutes As Human Beings', *Sunday Worker*, 25 March 1928, p. 8; Ralph Fox, 'Glory of Isadora Duncan: Dancer, Revolutionary, Pioneer, and Great Lover', *Sunday Worker*, 10 June 1928, p. 8.
[110] Ralph Fox, 'Liverpool Jack, Hobo Sage of the Sea', *Sunday Worker*, 22 April 1928, p. 8; Arthur Mason, *Wide Seas and Many Lands* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1926); Arthur Mason, *Salt Horse* (London: Jonathan Cape 1928).
[111] Fox, 'Liverpool Jack, Hobo Sage of the Sea', p. 8.

Fox's praise of 'grimness' in 1928 reveals his own aspirations for politically committed fiction rooted in experience. He assesses the American realist tradition to this same standard. In an 8 July review '*The Road to Heaven* Is the Easier One', Fox argues that American fiction 'seems to be marching along two roads'. Travelling on the first road, 'which aims to reach a real picture of American social life', Fox lists Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Jack London, Frank Norris, John Dos Passos and Upton Sinclair. On the second road, 'which shrinks from that effort and seeks a refuge in the adaptation to American conditions of the empty intellectualism of Western European literature', Fox places Ernest Hemingway among its proponents. Fox evaluates each 'first road' writer according to their political commitment. He commends Norris and London for 'their own terrible struggles with reality, the reality of expanding American capitalism'. He accuses Anderson of 'giving up the fight' and judged Lewis to be 'a servile journalist frankly out to make money'.[112] This review foregrounds some of the literary and political influences that appear to have informed the writing of *Storming Heaven*. Fox identifies the need for a realism in literature that accurately represents the reality of working-class life under capitalism. Furthermore, his desire to read the biography of a writer into their fiction invites us to read *People of the Steppes* in *Storming Heaven*.

In this same year, the *Sunday Worker*'s literary section under the combined supervision of Fox and T. A. Jackson continued the work of *People of the Steppes*, in dismantling the commonly-held opposition between the 'Civilised and Savage'.[113] They achieved this by critiquing British imperialism while foregrounding the complex societies of 'primitive peoples'.[114] For instance, A. L. Rouse's article, titled 'Barbarian Invasion Which Gave Birth to

[112] Ralph Fox, '*The Road to Heaven* Is the Easier One', *Sunday Worker*, 8 July 1928, p. 8.
[113] T. A. Jackson, 'Complex Civilisation of the 'Savage'': Differences between 'Primitives' and 'Us' Are of Degrees, Not Kind', *Sunday Worker*, 16 December 1928, p. 8.
[114] Ralph Fox, '*The People of the Twilight*: Childhood of Man', *Sunday Worker*, 13 January 1929, p. 8.

the Modern World', offers a positive account of the collapse of the Roman Empire.[115] Through August and September, Fox writes a series of articles titled 'Beginnings of Things' that examines the origins of civilisation, religion, agriculture, mercantilism and the 'Golden Age'.[116] In his final article, Fox critiques the myth of the Golden Age, instead connecting 'the diffusion of capitalist civilisation' throughout the world to 'the degeneration taking place among peoples as far apart on culture as the Australian and African bushmen, the Pacific Islanders, and the Indian and Chinese village communities'.[117] In December, Jackson claims,

> We now know that the differences between peoples are differences of degree rather than of kind; that variations of behaviour are more begotten by variations of social relation than by radical differences of 'human nature'; that, in short, much that is primitive persists into the thinking (as well as the emotions) of 'civilised' people, while the primitive (whom we used to mis-call the 'savage') has a complex civilisation of his own.[118]

There is a concerted effort from Fox and Jackson to reframe theoretical approaches to non-Western societies. Jackson identifies that a focus on social relations can reveal the 'primitive' aspects of Western civilisation and the 'complex civilisation' of non-Western societies. Fox follows Jackson's argument a few weeks later in suggesting that 'the modern American or

[115] A. L. Rouse, 'Barbarian Invasion Which Gave Birth to the Modern World', *Sunday Worker*, 10 June 1928, p. 8.
[116] Ralph Fox, 'How, When & Where Civilisation Started!', *Sunday Worker*, 19 August 1928, p. 8; Ralph Fox, 'Men Who Made Themselves into Gods!', *Sunday Worker*, 26 August 1928, p. 8; Ralph Fox, 'Corn in Egypt', *Sunday Worker*, 2 September 1928, p. 8; Ralph Fox, 'Where and Why Did Men First Build Ships?', *Sunday Worker*, 9 September 1928, p. 8; Ralph Fox, 'Was Their Ever a Golden Age?', *Sunday Worker*, 16 September 1928, p. 8.
[117] Fox, 'Was Their Ever a Golden Age?', p. 8.
[118] T. A. Jackson, 'Complex Civilisation of the 'Savage'': Differences between 'Primitives' and 'Us' Are of Degrees, Not Kind', p. 8.

Englishman is not more intelligent, probably less so, than the ancient Greek or Egyptian'.[119] Fox's continued interest in 'primitive peoples' is, like Jackson's, rooted in his desire to understand 'the very childhood of man'. He means by this that studying 'the most primitive of human organisations' provides insights into societies that have developed, according to the Marxist theory of historical materialism, into more advanced stages of capitalism and communism. He also argues that the Soviet Union is unique in the world for how 'primitive peoples are respected and safeguarded'.[120]

The years 1926 to 1929 reflect Fox's total commitment to the CPGB and international communism. Forever short of money, he and his wife Madge Palmer moved into six different residences across the west, south west and north west of London. He worked full-time at the CPGB's headquarters at 16 King Street, Covent Garden, which housed the Communist Bookshop. Over this period, he contributed articles to the *Communist*, *The Daily Worker*, *Plebs* and *The Sunday Worker*. In January 1927, he sat on the advisory committee of the Workers' Theatre Movement. In September, he attended the CPGB's annual congress.[121] In October, the CPGB published his *In Defence of Communism*.[122] In January 1928, French police arrested and expelled Fox from the country during his attendance at the French Communist Party's (PCF) National Conference in Paris. In February, a month before the publication of *Storming Heaven*, Fox informed the German writer and fellow communist Alfred Kurella that he had instructed his editor to send 'specimens of the story' to Berlin and Moscow, revealing that Fox during the final stages of writing sought the Soviet regime's feedback. In September 1929, Fox journeyed

[119] Ralph Fox, 'Has Human Intelligence Advanced Since the Pharaohs?', *Sunday Worker*, 30 December 1928, p. 8.

[120] Fox, '*The People of the Twilight*: Childhood of Man', p. 8.

[121] National Archives, Ralph Winston Fox, KV 2/1377.

[122] Ralph Fox, *A Defence of Communism: In Reply to H. J. Laski* (London: Communist Party of Great Britain, 1927).

to the Soviet Union for the third time to work at the Marx-Engels institute, residing in Moscow until 1932.[123]

Storming Heaven is an adventure novel that represents life on the Soviet frontier and in Central Asia with a 'grimness' only alluded to in *People of the Steppes*. The novel is set in 1922, the year of Fox's expedition, yet the atmosphere is now retrospectively imbued with the political ideology of socialist reconstruction. The narrative follows John Johnson, son of an 'island woman and English sailor', who is abandoned at birth in an unnamed town on the American West Coast. After a childhood in an orphanage, he is fostered by Russian anarchists, Shurin and Marusia, and spends his teenage years as a vagabond in a frustrated search to find a 'free life'. The family live in an impoverished working-class neighbourhood where armed policemen and private militias are suppressing the trade union movement. After losing his job, Shurin decides to move his family to Soviet Russia to help with the task of socialist reconstruction. On the journey to Vladivostok, Marusia falls ill and dies, asking Shurin to give John $250 with the demand that he return to America. Taking the money, John leaves Shurin, finds a local bar, and decides to join a theatre troupe led by a peasant named Grisha. The troupe tours westwards, performing magic, music, comedy and theatrical sketches in peasant villages across the Russian Far East province of Amur, until Grisha discovers John's money and expels him from the troupe for deception. Alone in Chita, John travels to Omsk, where he buys a horse and accompanies a communist, Yasha, and a group of Kazak nomads, around the Kazakh steppe. The novel ends in Moscow, where John is sentenced to prison by the Soviet regime for murdering his lover, Neura, in a fit of rage.[124]

Fox's transformation of his travel writing into the adventure novel is unsurprising considering how this genre provided him with the tools necessary to produce a positive image

[123] National Archives, Ralph Winston Fox, KV 2/1377.
[124] Fox, *Storming Heaven*, pp. 22, 36, 37-38, 41, 43, 54, 68-70, 77, 97-97, 99, 106, 158.

of the Soviet Union.[125] Travel writing and the adventure novel share a history and literary conventions. Critics have connected Daniel Defoe's interest in travel writing to the creation of the adventure novel in *Robinson Crusoe*.[126] In the interwar period, the celebrity status of T. E. Lawrence and the popularity of his *Revolt in the Desert* (1927) meant that there existed a readership eager for similar adventure stories.[127] Fox later framed Lawrence in *Left Review* as the '20th Century Hero'.[128] It is clear when reading *Storming Heaven* that Fox weaves his travel writing's pro-Soviet imperialist narrative into the fabric of the adventure novel.

Fox's decision to make the opening environment of *Storming Heaven* an unnamed town on the West Coast of the Pacific at first appears a major departure from *People of the Steppes*. In fact, there too Fox had offered comparisons between Soviet Russia and America. Several of Fox's fellow travellers had 'grown tired of life in free America' and moved to Russia following the Russian Revolution. Fox likened Soviet Russia's development into a 'great modern industrial state' to nineteenth century America, alluding to the rapid expansion of the American frontier up to the West Coast of the Pacific. When leaving the Kazakh nomads in *People of the Steppes*, Fox wondered 'What will become of them and their steppe? Are they doomed to sordid extinction like the red Indians of America? Or does the future still hold for them some fate not altogether unworthy of their past?'.[129] Clearly, in Fox's travel writing, America became a central point of reference in his thinking through of the implications of the Soviet imperialism in Central Asia.

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[125] It is unsurprising for Fox was the only writer to immerse himself in travel writing and adventure novel. Andrea White argues that these two genres functioned as 'shaping discourses' for Joseph Conrad, see Andrea White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 100-115.
[126] Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), pp. 51, 70, 72; Oliver S. Buckton, *Cruising with Robert Louise Stevenson: Travel, Narrative, and the Colonial Body* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2007); Caroline McCracken-Flesher, 'Travel Writing', *in The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Penny Fielding (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 86-101; Richard Phillips, 'Adventure', in *Keywords for Travel Writing Studies* (London: Anthem Press, 2019), pp. 4-6.
[127] T. E. Lawrence, *Revolt in the Desert* (London: Cape, 1927); Green, *Dreams of Adventure*, p. 323; Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 167-190.
[128] Ralph Fox, 'Lawrence the 20th Century Hero', *Left Review*, 1.9 (June 1935), 88-95.
[129] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. 6, 87, 77, 165.

The adventure novel as a genre was well equipped for Fox's articulation of Soviet imperialism. As Martin Green argues in *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (1980), 'for two hundred years and more' the adventure story functioned as 'the energizing myth of English imperialism', providing a generation of men 'the energy to go out into the world and explore, conquer, and rule'.[130] Green concludes that 'the adventure narrative' is best framed as 'the generic counterpart in literature to empire in politics'.[131] The adventure novel provided Fox with the freedom to repurpose his travel writing and to create entirely fictional scenes that together combine into an effective dramatisation of his pro-Soviet imperialist views. He first excites readers so that there is a chance they become amenable to accepting his radical politics. *Storming Heaven* is a paradoxical project, in that Fox the anti-imperialist chooses to implicate himself in a literary form closely associated with imperialism.

Fox develops comparisons between the Kazakh nomad and indigenous American in *Storming Heaven*. Fiction assists Fox in reframing the Soviet regime's position in Central Asia by comparing it favourably to American imperialism. In the opening chapter, the unnamed narrator provides a panoramic view of a town on the West Coast of the Pacific, where 'there is a wide, blue bay, around which the land curves in a green circlet fringed by yellow sand, rising southward at one point to a high bluff'.[132] Panorama enables Fox to move temporally, via memory, back through time to the colonisation of America and the fate of the indigenous Americans. The narrator remembers how, 'In the memory of living men there was a time when only the camp fires burned upon that bluff, and the red horseman alone gazed from it at a declining sun'. Fox's use of 'declining sun' makes the end of the indigenous American correspond to the natural world.[133] The narrator continues,

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[130] Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*, p. 3, 37.
[131] Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p. 59.
[132] Fox, *Storming Heaven*, p. 1.
[133] Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) deploys a strikingly similar use of panorama and 'decline of day' in Marlowe's discussion of the Roman Empire in Britain, see Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 4.

> But the majestic horseman has passed away, supplanted by the pioneers from the East, who bound the continent with steel rails and built a town upon the edge of the bay from whence their ships passed out in search of trade and the riches of Asia.
>
> Man's mind does not move easily, being bound by the forces at his disposal, and the naked Indian who seemed so magnificent and free, seated upon his shaggy pony, gazing from that high bluff over the sea, was in reality bound within the dark and narrow circle of his tents and tribal taboos. He saw no further over the sea than his flimsy canoe could carry him, and he comprehended little more of the land than the beasts which he hunted upon the inland plains.[134]

Fox's history of economic development resulting from American imperialism resembles his vision of Soviet modernisation of Central Asia in *People of the Steppes*. Fox effectively erases the indigenous American's agency, individual personality and political rights. His description of American imperialism in *People of the Steppes* as a 'sordid extinction' is here replaced by 'passed away', once more implying this historical change to be natural, inevitable, even peaceful. Corresponding with Fox's representation of the Kazakh nomad, this opening narrative brings attention to the indigenous American's backwardness, superstition and ignorance. *Storming Heaven*'s rhetorical strategy exploits the distant past as a way of relativising the contemporary moral concerns of colonialism. This history of American colonialism serves as a model for economic development, but the main narrative attempts to describe the recent rise of the present ruling capitalist class. The capitalists 'had won knowledge and knew that Asia was beyond, Asia with its riches, its millions of mankind, who

[134] Fox, *Storming Heaven*, p. 1.

could create for them wealth and cities undreamed-of yet'.[135] In foregrounding the fact that the old ways of life in Central Asia are already under threat from Western imperialism, Fox establishes a framework to interpret the Sovietisation of the region before the reader arrives there.

Following on from this history of American imperialism, Fox, in keeping with the 'first road' American realists he so admired, realistically describes working-class life under American capitalism. Fox satirises the economic inequality and moral corruption of Western society under capitalism by imagining a relentlessly restrictive, violent and surveilled space. John is chased off a beach by a group of bourgeoise children, attacked on the street by a reverend for smoking, and is propositioned by prostitutes. Strikers evade 'machine guns by whole force of the state'. Strike-breakers set fire to the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) Hall and shoot its occupants. John, like the indigenous Americans before him, turns to the sea, this time in the hope of finding a 'new direction for his life'. On his first visit, the sea reflected only a 'blue waste' which was 'always empty'. On the second visit, the 'first gleam of light came to him'.[136] The trope of the picaresque protagonist seeking freedom is updated with an obvious political point: the Soviet Union replaces America as the 'new world' imbued with liberatory potential.

Fox's characterisation of John as possessing features of the Spanish '*picaro*', or in his words a 'vagabond spirit', implicitly justifies the Soviet project of worldwide revolution, by showing and telling the reader how individual projects of liberation outside the communist project are doomed to fail.[137] The character of John has an earlier corollary in *People of the Steppes*, a

[135] Fox, *Storming Heaven,* p. 2.
[136] Fox, *Storming Heaven,* pp. 4-5, 10-11, 33, 9, 16-17, 47.
[137] *Storming Heaven* does not straightforwardly conform to the conventions of the picaresque genre. John corresponds to a Spanish '*picaro*' insofar as he is a 'low born' rouge with a naïve view of the world. His journey to the Soviet Union is picaresque in that it functions as a reason for him to meet a diverse range of characters. However, the narrative is not in the first person and does not possess the irony and humour characteristic of the genre. For studies on literary features of the picaresque genre, see Brean Hammond, 'Defoe and the Picaresque', in *The Picaresque in Western Literature*, ed. by J. A. Garrido Ardilla (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 140-156; Jean Viviès, *English Travel Narratives in the Eighteenth Century: Exploring Genres* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 82-100; *A Companion to the Spanish Picaresque Novel*, ed. by Edward H. Friedman (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2022).

Russian traveller, Vassili Ivan'ich Skorachevski, known as Ole Bill. Fox introduces Ole Bill in the chapter titled 'The Eternal Vagabond'. While Fox recovers from his fever and dreams of reading *Tristram Shandy* and *Tom Jones*, his rest is disturbed by Ole Bill, who regales him with the story of his 'rascal life'.[138] As A. Marcia Morris remarks, 'Russian literary roguery' was a longstanding literary tradition in Russia with which Soviet writers engaged in their picaresque stories, most notably Ilya Ehrenburg's *Julio Jurento* (1922), and Ilya Ilf and Yevgeny Petrov's *The Twelve Chairs* (1928) and *The Little Golden Calf* (1931).[139] Over the next five days, Fox learns that Ole Bill lived on the West Coast of the Pacific, was an IWW member, fought on the side of the miners during a strike, fought the police, and travelled to Japan and Siberia after the Russian Revolution, a narrative that is taken by Fox and reworked as the beginning of *Storming Heaven*. Fox admired Ole Bill's life story, but thought him a 'supreme individualist' in desiring individual freedom, rather than the 'the only true freedom' promised by the Soviet regime.[140]

This two-handed characterisation of Ole Bill is undoubtedly the basis for Fox's characterisation of John. In 1928, Fox still clearly enjoyed reading about the vagabond character. In his review of Mason's *Salt Horse*, he hailed the return of 'one of the greatest characters of recent fiction', Liverpool Jack.[141] His attraction to the character centred around the 'vagabond's philosophy', by which he seems to have meant the restless desire to travel. Keith Booker rightly argues that in *Storming Heaven* Fox represents the early Soviet period 'as informed principally by a struggle between the old and the new'.[142] Fox uses John as a vessel that embodies everything that, in his view, is most desirable in the old way of life, be it as an indigenous American, Russian peasant or Kazak nomad, that struggles to survive encroaching

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[138] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. 19, 70-76, 69-83.
[139] Marcia A. Morris, 'Russia: the Picaresque Reimagined', in *The Picaresque Novel in Western Literature: From the Sixteenth Century to the Neopicaresque*, ed. by J. A. G. Ardila (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 200-223 (p. 219).
[140] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. 70-71, 73-74.
[141] Fox, 'Liverpool Jack, Hobo Sage of the Sea', p. 8.
[142] M. Keith Booker, *The Modern British Novel of the Left: A Research Guide* (London: Greenwood Press, 1998), p. 134; Fox, *People of the Steppes*, p. 84.

modernities. It is in this sense of the relationship between the old and the new that the title *Storming Heaven* is best understood.

The narrator's position in relation to John, however, changes when entering Soviet Russia. Just before Grisha and John go their separate ways, Grisha warns 'You're getting a Russian soul, my lad, and I am warning you in time to drop it'. The narrator notes how John increasingly resembled 'a wandering peasant boy, one of the homeless thousands who wander across the vastness of Russia, coming from nowhere, going nowhere'. Fox's split sympathies that romanticises nomadic life, while maintaining a commitment to the communist movement, have not changed from *People of the Steppes*, and are evident in his description of John wrestling the Kazak nomad youths. In a scene reworked from his travel writing, the narrator describes how 'John was hardened now to the saddle. In the day time, half naked, he would wrestle Cumberland-fashion with the Kirghiz youths, and give as many throws as he took'. After this description, and unlike in his travel writing, the narrator suddenly breaks from John's perspective to remind the reader that the Kazak nomads 'have fits of sullen rage that know no bounds, black and violent as the desert storms'.[143] Fox is caught between two competing inclinations, between his own reminiscences of travelling with the Kazak nomads, and his greater communist political commitment hardened by the First Five-Year Plan, resulting in moments when the narrative appears to almost gets carried away in romantic description, before it quickly reins itself in by the moralising voice of narrator as well as the novel's pro-communist characters.

Fox also adapts his representation of Moscow's urban space in *People of the Steppes* into the final dramatic climax of *Storming Heaven*. This intertextual analysis is indebted to Chirico's recommended method of tracing the connections between travel writing and the adventure novel. He argues that 'without placing the genres in any kind of special aesthetic

[143] Fox, *Storming Heaven,* pp. 95, 100, 114.

hierarchy, the critic can examine the ways in which similar thematic elements – formation about places visited, for example – are preserved or deformed as the pass from one genre to another'.[144] In Fox's travel writing, then, he describes Moscow as 'the loveliest city in the world'. He finds,

> The trams that rattle through the gateways of the Chinese Wall are no such anachronism as those that pass the desolate ruin of the Colosseum. The Chinese Wall is still part of the Russian character, but the Colosseum has no part in the Rome of to-day. All the ruins of Rome are only lonely exiles that do not fit in, like the Gothic towers and churches of Paris. But the Cathedral of St. Basil, the shrine of the Iberian Virgin, the red walls, the exotic blue domes with their golden stars, the gold and silver of the other great churches, these are in no way strangers in the city. Moscow is a perfect whole, the heart of it all, the capital of the great union of republics that cover half Europe and half Asia.

In this extended description, Fox reads his pro-Soviet imperialist narrative into the urban space of the imperial centre. There is a harmonious relationship between the new and the old. The tram system is adapted to fit alongside the existing historical landmarks. Unlike other European capital cities, Fox finds that Moscow's 'Chinese Wall' and churches are central to experiencing the city. The Soviet periphery in the form of the 'Chinese Wall' and 'exotic' churches are in the foreground. This articulation of an urban space without 'strangers' reproduces Fox's earlier arguments regarding the Kazakh nomads, that their way of life will exist in a new form in the Soviet Union.[145]

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[144] Chirico, 'The Travel Narrative as a (Literary) Genre', p. 35.
[145] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. 200, 143, 165-166.

Fox reimagines this Soviet urban space in *Storming Heaven*'s final section titled 'The Chinese Wall'. At this stage in the narrative, John, now in Moscow, falls madly in love with Neura, who rejects his advances. John later discovers Neura sharing a bed with one of his friends, leading to a sudden 'black wave of violence' that overtakes him. The need to 'free himself was choking him' and his solution is to strangle Neura to death. This is the first time that John's preference of violent solutions is directed towards an innocent victim. Fox is suggesting here that the breakdown of John's first meaningful relationship reawakens his traumatic childhood in America. This unexpected ruin of an otherwise sympathetic character is the novel's climactic moment. Fox reworks his ideas of Soviet urban space found in his travel writing to heighten this dramatic climax. Immediately after the murder, John escapes into the cold Moscow night. He disguises himself from the Soviet authorities by hiding amongst beggars 'Under the Chinese Wall'. Two militiamen survey the scene and John overhears their conversation:

> 'The sooner they all get killed off, the better, if you ask me. What good will they ever be to Russia? Scum! Ekh, these wandering peasants with their filth and disease!'
>
> The other sighed. 'Asia, that's what it is, comrade. The curse of the country is the taint of Asia. These thousands of beggars belong to the past and they should be killed off with it, that's my opinion.'
>
> The two strode off, grumbling, taking no notice of John.[146]

With this conversation, Fox inverts the harmonious relationship between Russia and Central Asia that he previously imagined in his travel writing. He retains the idea that the Soviet

[146] Fox, *Storming Heaven*, pp. 234, 269, 289, 290, 291.

periphery thrives in Moscow, yet reframes it through this dialogue as an undesirable invasion. The racist militiamen provide the first, albeit indirect, moral condemnation of John's actions. John now finds himself an enemy of his former communist comrades. His vagabond spirit, rooted in Fox's view of Kazakh nomad life, is implicated with 'the taint of Asia'.[147] The narrative indicates that the militiamen fail to notice John amongst the beggars because he cannot be distinguished from them in terms of appearance or morality.

In the next scene, the narrator describes how 'Other figures gathered' around John 'from out of the darkness, men blind, men mutilated, Chinamen, Kirghiz, Mongols, Tartars, shadowy figures grumbling and laughing and sinking into silence, becoming mere bundles of stinking rags'. This description builds on the militiamen's dialogue in its focus on the beggars' ethnicities, disabilities and threatening movements in and out of the darkness. Now part of this group, John converses with his neighbour, a wandering monk, who bemoans,

> 'The dark people', he was saying. 'They are neither Europe nor Asia. Thieves and prostitutes and murderers, disease-ridden beggars and men of God. Here we are, the dark people beneath the Chinese Wall, gathered from ever quarter of the great plains, from the Wall of China to the Polish forests.'

The monk continues,

> 'Who are you to speak of shame beneath the Chinese Wall? Those who lie here have abandoned shame. We live like lice, we irritate the people, but they cannot scratch us

[147] Fox describes Kazakh nomads as 'given to fits of sullen rage', whereas John suffers a 'black wave of violence', see Fox, *Storming Heaven*, pp. 114, 280.

> off. Here all are equal, all are rotten, there are no continents, no Europe, no Asia, no lords, no servants.'

Before concluding,

> 'We are the old world dying and suffering in agony. We have suffered so much that we are no longer human. The old world is dead and we are only lice living on the blood of new life. In time we shall be wiped out.'[148]

The idea that Fox earlier subscribed to in his travel writing, that Central Asia would lend its positive characteristics to the Soviet Union, is done away with here. In its place, Fox offers a description of life on the city's margins for beggars, refugees and immigrants. These shadowy figures could undermine, rather than enliven, the revolution. The harmonious relationship between Russia and Central Asia is replaced with a dramatic narrative that connects John's descent into committing murder to a city's vagrant urban population. The ease with which Fox leans into a problematic imagery of the East suggests that his desire to write an entertaining adventure story in support of Soviet reconstruction took precedence over his own academic interest in, and emotional attachment to, Central Asia.

Fox's experience of the trial of the SRs in *People of the Steppes* provides the organising principle for *Storming Heaven*'s conclusion. In his travel writing, he describes witnessing the trial from the public gallery and is impressed by 'the Revolution in full dress'.[149] In particular, he praises the trial for 'a real dignity in proceedings' between the defendants and prosecution.[150] It appears to Fox that the SRs on trial 'knew perfectly well that whatever the verdict nothing

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[148] Fox, *Storming Heaven*, pp. 291, 292, 293.
[149] For a recent account of the SR trials, see Matthew Rendle, *The State Versus the People: Revolutionary Justice in Russia's Civil War, 1917-1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 139-180.
[150] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, 212, 211.

very serious was going to happen to them'.[151] Overall, his feeling that the 'tragedy was not too terrible' is the motivation behind rewriting his travel writing into the novel's conclusion.[152] In *Storming Heaven*, after the dramatic climax of John's murder of Neura, Fox sets up a clash between John's wild spirit and the paternalistic Soviet regime in the final courtroom scene.[153] Writing for *The Times Literary Supplement*, Orlo Williams argues that this narrative structure follows 'a real unfolding of modern Russia, from Vladivostock to Moscow'.[154] The trial and imprisonment of John is idealised by Fox to emphasise the Soviet regime's civilising mission. The head of the courtroom tells John to not fear as he is not on trial in America. He is eventually sentenced to eight years of imprisonment.[155] In fairly sentencing John, Moscow thereby remains 'the soul of the new country' as outlined in *People of the Steppes*. Fox's embrace of the adventure novel, however, emphasises a cycle of violence that starts in America and is only stopped by the Soviet rule of law.[156]

This close reading has found numerous connections between Fox's travel writing and his later adventure novel. In Fox's hands, *People of the Steppes* was as an important imaginative resource that provided him with the imagery, arguments and structure for *Storming Heaven*. He had to work out how this travel writing would best serve the kind of story that he wanted to tell. In *Storming Heaven*, there is evidence of striking continuities, significant rewritings and fictional additions. The continuities are clearest in John's characterisation, the pro-Soviet imperialist arguments, and the conclusion in a Soviet court room. The adventure novel genre also allowed Fox the freedom to rewrite his travel writing and to create entirely fictional scenes in order to achieve the greatest dramatic payoff. The rewritten travel writing inverts Fox's ideas

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[151] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, 211. In reality, several of the condemned SRs suffered months of solitary confinement in prison, see Marc Jansen, *A Show Trial Under Lenin: The Trial of the Socialist Revolutionaries, Moscow, 1922* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1982), pp. 170-195.
[152] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, 208, 209, 212.
[153] Fox, *Storming Heaven*, pp. 303-311.
[154] Orlo Williams, '*Storming Heaven*', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 1368 (19 April 1928), 88.
[155] Fox, *Storming Heaven*, pp. 305, 306, 308.
[156] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, p. 200.

of Soviet urban space. The fictional scenes focus on representing the 'grimness' and violence in America. Fox's use of this literary genre, then, enabled him to represent in an entertaining manner a hardening of opposition between the new world and the old, at a time when the Soviet regime's First Five-Year Plan demanded its people make sacrifices in order to overcome its backwardness.

Several communist literary critics reviewed *Storming Heaven*. These reviews typically emphasise the centrality of the revolution to the novel. In *The Sunday Worker*, the headline accompanying T. A. Jackson's review announces 'A *Sunday Worker* Man Writes the Finest British Novel on the Russian Revolution'.[157] Jackson considers in his review how 'the Bolshevik revolution conquered the art world'. As evidence for this claim, he cites the recent translations into English of G. W. Past's film *The Love of Jeanne Ney* (1927) and Nikolai Ognev's *The Diary of a Communist Schoolboy* (1928).[158] Fox not only turns to the revolution for the 'ground themes and inspiration' of *Storming Heaven*, but also represents 'the first British novel writer to have glimpsed the possibilities of this enormous field for artistic exploration'. By 'artistic exploration', Jackson means Fox's ability to find literary and moral value in the revolution and its reconstruction, as distinct from writers 'stale and dead' who continued to write about the chaos of the revolution.[159] *Young Worker*, a subsidiary arm of *Sunday Worker* which targeted the young British worker, selected for print extended extracts of speeches on Bolshevism made by the novel's one communist character, Yasha, who most explicitly gives a voice to Fox's support for Soviet imperialism in the Russian Far East. Yasha deplored the 'rotten kind' of old tsarist officer, for whom the real 'basis of his mysticism' included infidelity, syphilis and vodka drinking. Conversely, his 'idea of life' was 'to waken

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[157] T. A. Jackson, 'A *Sunday Worker* Man Writes the Finest British Novel on the Russian Revolution', *Sunday Worker*, 29 April 1928, p. 6.
[158] *The Love of Jeanne Ney*, dir. by G. W. Past (UFA, 1927); N. Ognev, trans. by Alexander Werth, *The Diary of a Communist Schoolboy* (London: Gollancz, 1928)
[159] Jackson, 'A *Sunday Worker* Man Writes the Finest British Novel on the Russian Revolution', p. 6.

up the world' with 'all Russia to be covered with rail and air routes, factories to build, new things to be discovered, to make men freer'.[160]

Fox's engagement with Soviet Central Asia remains central to his political and literary writings in the nineteen-thirties. In 1935, he advised Routledge on publishing books on Russian ethnology. He also provided the publisher with a synopsis for a proposed book entitled *War or Peace in the Far East*, but the publisher rejected his draft because too many books had recently been published on the subject.[161] His biography on *Genghis Khan* recounts his expedition made thirteen years earlier and develops on his ideal of the Mongol leader in *People of the Steppes* as a civilised and revolutionary conqueror.[162] His *Communism and a Changing Civilisation* (1935) criticises Western imperialism and outlines how in Soviet Union, 'the nomad Kirghiz is considered to have as much right to the elements of civilised life as the worker of Leningrad or Moscow'.[163] In October 1936, his short story *Conversation with a Lama* appeared in *New Writing*.[164] John Lehmann recalled that in the summer of 1936 Fox had made 'final arrangements' to visit Central Asia a second time, before deciding to fight in Spain. Fox confided in Lehmann an explicitly literary purpose behind this proposed return journey. He believed that the 'Eastern atmosphere which he loved so much would fire him to work' on creative writing that developed upon the style and form of *Conversation with a Lama*.[165] While Fox offered an early and sustained engagement with the Soviet frontier, other left-wing writers in the nineteen-thirties attempted in different ways to come to terms with the geographical breadth of the Soviet Union. Amabel Williams-Ellis' short story collection *Volcano* (1931) contains a story of a communist struggling to promote communism as a result of corruption on

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[160] 'Bolshevism! From *Storming Heaven*', *Young Worker*, 29 September 1928, p. 4.
[161] University of Reading, Letters to and from Ralph Fox, RKP 6/10.
[162] Fox, *Genghis Khan*, pp. 1-3.
[163] Ralph Fox, *Communism and a Changing Civilisation* (London: John Lane, 1935), pp. 95.
[164] Ralph Fox, 'Conversation with a Lama', *New Writing*, II, (Autumn 1936), 179-188.
[165] John Lehmann, 'Ralph Fox the Writer', pp. 107-110 (pp. 109-110).

the Soviet frontier.[166] Malcolm Muggeridge's critique of the Soviet Union in *Winter in Moscow* (1934) juxtaposes the ease of life for Western journalists in Moscow with scenes of starvation and murder in Ukraine during the famine.[167]

<u>'He is for the Superman': The Development of the Communist Hero</u>

Fox is best known today for his work of early Marxist literary theory *The Novel and the People*. In this book, he proposes that in future left-wing fiction the key character should be the communist hero. Justifying his argument in the chapter 'Man Alive', Fox formulates an ideal archetype. Economic and political oppression, war and above all Fascism create opportunities for 'everyday resistance', the act of which 'brings about great action of the people and creates heroes, new types of men and women'. Fox represents Georgi Dimitrov's public defence in the Leipzig trial defence of 1933 as the 'highest form' of heroic resistance. Falsely accused of starting the Reichstag fire, Dimitrov functions for Fox as a Socratic figure who defended 'all humanity and its culture against the advance of fascist barbarism'.[168] Dimitrov 'became a symbol of the fight against Nazism' by refuting in court the false charges against him.[169] He returned to the Soviet Union 'like a hero'. Fox concludes, 'this story of the Reichstag arson is an epic of our time which demands that the artist should give it life'.[170] Fox provides the future writer of left-wing fiction with its revolutionary content and epic form.

Most critics choose to confine their discussions of Fox's theory of the communist hero to the nineteen-thirties, as opposed to extending their analyses back into the previous decade. Examples are numerous. Earliest in this approach is Hynes, who argues that 'Fox was the only

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[166] Williams-Ellis, *Volcano*, pp. 236-248.
[167] Malcolm Muggeridge, *Winter in Moscow* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1934).
[168] Fox, *The Novel and the People*, pp. 114-131, 124, 125.
[169] Leonid Ja Gibjanskij, 'Dimitrov, Georgi', in *A Dictionary of 20th-Century Communism*, ed. by Silvio Pons and Robert Service (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022), pp. 279-283.
[170] Fox, *The Novel and the People*, p. 125.

one who saw Dimitrov's story as an unwritten novel, and examined it in detail as a parable for Marxists, created out of actual history'. Indeed Fox's communist hero, for Hynes, symbolises the end of the 'heroic phase of the 'thirties'.[171] More critical of Fox's trope of the hero is H. Gustav Klaus, who contends that such an emphasis on the individual hero had objections on the continent from Sergei Tretyakov and Bertolt Brecht.[172] Valentine Cunningham's encyclopaedic account of the nineteen-thirties provides no more insight than Hynes in his one-line description of Dimitrov as 'the great human subject'.[173] Peter Marks traces Fox's hero slightly further back to Andrei Zhdanov's demand at the Soviet Writers' Congress of 1934, when the writer became the 'engineer of the soul'.[174] Most recently, Phillip Bounds has written the fullest account yet on the competing literary and political influences that came together to shape *The Novel and the People*, from Dimitrov and T. A. Jackson, to more unlikely modernist sources such as E. M. Forster and D. H. Lawrence.[175] With the exception of Bounds, secondary literature is united in approaching Fox's communist hero through the same, comfortable contexts of the mid to late nineteen-thirties.

In contrast, Fox's contemporaries and a minority of critics in secondary literature interpret *The Novel and the People* as the final development of his earlier writings in the nineteen-twenties. Dona Torr, in *A Writer in Arms* (1937), argues that the Soviet Union should be viewed at 'every stage of the last fifteen years' in Fox's life as a constant source of 'inexhaustible inspiration'. She posits that Fox's travels to the Soviet Union directly informed his concept of the communist hero, discovering there that 'man was becoming "sovereign of circumstance" and showing us the way to enter into our own heritage of liberty'.[176] In his preface to the 1979

[171] Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, pp. 256, 257.
[172] Klaus, 'Socialist Fictions in the 1930s', pp. 13-41 (pp. 19-21).
[173] Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties*, pp. 178.
[174] Marks, 'Illusion and Reality', pp. 23-36 (p. 33).
[175] Bounds, *British Communism and the Politics of Literature, 1928-1939*, pp. 134-160.
[176] Dona Torr, 'Ralph Fox and Our Cultural Heritage', in *Ralph Fox: A Writer in Arms*, ed. by John Lehmann, T. A. Jackson, and C. Day Lewis (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1937), pp. 213-216 (p. 215).

edition of *The Novel and the People*, Jeremy Hawthorn observes that Fox's literary theory 'is of course in part a product of "thirties Marxism", but it is also a work to which Fox's whole life and experience contributed'.[177] Michael Freeman contends that Fox's time at the *Sunday Worker* between 1928 and 1929 provided him with the platform to begin to work out his ideas on literature that 'came to characterise his work and culminate in *The Novel and the People*'.[178] This final section builds on this second approach in tracing Fox's developing concept of the communist hero in *People of the Steppes*, *Storming Heaven* and his neglected writings in the nineteen-thirties. Using Hynes's terminology, in situating Fox at the beginning of his, and the decade's, 'heroic phase', it is possible to trace how his communist hero developed and underwent several revisions throughout the interwar years. These revisions proved necessary, because when writing about heroism, Fox often utilised imagery, arguments and forms that frequently conflicted with orthodox communist politics.

In *People of the Steppes*, Fox doubts the likelihood that communists could ever successfully lead a socialist revolution beyond the Soviet frontier. Writing most extensively on his experience of the Kazak nomad and steppe, he provides little in the way of confident declarations that communist ideology and practice had made significant inroads beyond the Soviet frontier. Reinforcing this argument, Fox's travel writing reproduces the sense of getting lost on a journey. Before the expedition, the Society of Friends' mission only receives 'one mutilated an unintelligible telegram' from the volunteer who disappeared somewhere in Central Asia. Fox starts his expedition by heading to a town named Bouz, which he later finds out is a 'mutilated' mistranslation of Turksoyus. Place names then become meaningless when he travels to 'the tents of the Kazakhs'.[179]

[177] Jeremy Hawthorn, 'Preface', in Ralph Fox, *The Novel and the People* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1979), pp. 4-18 (p. 10).
[178] Magdalen College Library, FOX-R FRE.
[179] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. 2, 15-16, 39. Fox's search for a missing volunteer echoes Marlowe's search for Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*.

Fox's travel writing lacks an explicit communist hero. The first images of the communist cause confronting the reader are empty, battle-scarred landscapes; the graves of red soldiers, a 'tattered red flag', and a skeleton tangled in barbed wire. While Fox represents communists sympathetically, he also highlights uncomfortably unequal relations that separate them from Russian and Central Asian peoples. Having failed to procure free transportation across Turkestan, Fox's companion resorts to fabricating their communist credentials and importance in Moscow in order to scare the stationmaster into providing this service. Another companion condemns leading communists in Moscow for living like millionaires. Fox's identification of a break between communist ideology and his surroundings revolves around his interpretation of the New Economic Policy (NEP). At this critical juncture, with small-scale capitalism permitted within the Soviet economy, his narrative constructs a material reality shaped by NEP, not communist, ideology. Fox records instances of 'the triumph of beastly greed'; rampant private speculation, accumulations of wealth and corruption. Other social reforms would fare no better. 'With the best will in world', he argues that the communists' attempts to abolish amongst the Kazak nomad's purchase of wives will fail, owing to their numerous superstitions, in effect problematising the expansion of the revolution. In his suggestion that 'things were moving, life was stirring again, and a reconstruction, a resurrection if you like, was beginning', Fox offers only tentative and pragmatic conclusions regarding the future of the Sovietisation of Central Asia.[180] Linking reconstruction with resurrection indicates a pragmatic, not heroic, approach to communism, from which *Storming Heaven*, under the influence of the First Five-Year Plan, would depart.

If this transitional moment and frontier geography prevented Fox in *People in the Steppes* from explicitly considering ideas of heroic communism, his language of heroism instead finds expression in his pro-Soviet imperialism. When travelling through the Turkestan ASSR he

[180] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. 16, 42, 28-29, 30-31, 124, 149, 193.

reproduces the Turkish proverb ‘In the land of Turkestan there is no lack of heroes. In every fathom of its soil there lies heroic men’. When describing the bodies of Kazakh men and women, Fox praises them ‘as beautiful as heroes’. In the chapter ‘A Dream of Great Conquerors’, Fox provides an account of a supposed dream that reproduces his arguments for the Soviet regime in Central Asia. This fascination with the ‘Great Conquerors’ aligns with Katerina Clark’s identification of a ‘common obsession’ in early Soviet literary culture of ‘the historic figures of Asia’, who ‘created great civilizations and potentially offered models for establishing a transnational revolutionary culture’.[181] In Fox’s dream, he sits by a fire and listens in on the conquerors Timur and Genghis Khan telling tales about their respective military victories in the West. After this conversation, two of Fox’s travelling companions suddenly begin to transform. One traveller’s figure ‘broadened, the Tatar face became more familiar and I knew that here was Vladimir Lenin’. Another traveller ‘too was altered, his clothes were strange, old Boyar’s costume, and from my history books I remembered pictures of Ivan the Terrible’. Lenin sits down and argues, ‘We are one today’ and that ‘East and West meet again in Moscow’. Khan finds that Lenin ‘has spoken like a man and a child of the steppe’.[182] This dream sequence provides a foundational myth of the Soviet regime in Central Asia. Fox has already by this time written about the desirable attributes of the Kazakh nomad in opposition to Western civilisation. Now, this dream sequence allows Fox to visualise a natural line of succession from past leaders of Central Asia to Lenin and the Soviet regime. Particular national histories become subservient to the universal October revolution.

While there is no explicit communist hero in *People of the Steppes*, aside from the dream sequence comparing Lenin to Genghis Khan, Fox represents certain travelling companions as embodying a masculinity and heroism deriving from their innate ‘Russianness’. No one

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[181] Clark, *Eurasia Without Borders*, p. 17.
[182] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. 54, 141, 144-145, 174-176.

symbolised the 'Russian patriot' more than Ilya Tolstoy. His imposing figure and love of horses for Fox 'were all of his famous grandfather's'. When describing Ilya's masculine physicality, Fox deploys a series of natural metaphors, likening him to 'a splendid animal, a fine-limbed stallion, or even (and what true Russian is not?) a lithe and wily wolf'. As the pair grew closer, Fox articulates Ilya's Russian nature as a 'hero of love' in the mould of Cleopatra and Don Juan. This essential Russianness affects Fox's own conception of his travels. Travelling with a group 'Russian to their very marrow of their vigorous bones', Fox remembers how 'We felt that we too belonged to the steppe, to its roaming peoples, and that the blood of its conquerors was running swiftly in our veins'.[183] This shared experience was evidently also a fond memory for Ilya, as he tried to make contact with Fox. On 10 June 1934, Ilya, having arrived from the United States and staying at the Tregenna Castle Hotel, St. Ives, Cornwall, sent a letter to Fox that read, 'Where are you and what are you doing with yourself?'. Ilya was to visit London in two weeks' time before sailing back to the United States and wrote, 'I would love to meet you and have a reunion'. It is unknown whether this meeting took place.[184] This overarching idea of heroism clearly informs Fox's idea of himself as a man, communist and writer. Fox tells the reader through the mouth of Timur that 'a great conqueror is a great artist'.[185] There is a sense here that Fox's travel writing, his meticulous detailing of the Kazakh nomad's way of life, behaviours and rituals are a form of artistic conquering. Fox feels that he has understood his subject, which allows him to speak on their behalf.

In *Storming Heaven*, Fox transfers the heroism of the Kazakh nomad to his characterisation of John. In the American section, in particular, John does not simply submit to the oppressive structures of capitalism. His innate nature is always in violent conflict with society under capitalism. His schoolmaster compares John to a 'barbarian' who 'cannot see the benefits of

[183] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. 109, 122, 133.
[184] National Archives, Ralph Winston Fox, KV 2/1376.
[185] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, p. 174.

enlightenment'.[186] Yet Fox's realist depiction of America resists this simplistic assessment, in admiring John's 'barbarian' resistance against capitalism's ruling bourgeois ideology of religion, refinement and respectability. This struck one *Birmingham Post* reviewer, who commended Fox's novel for being 'probably the first written from a point of view that can regard the lowest regions of poverty without allowing the effect either of scorn or bitterness, suggested by the qualifying "under", to debase the outlook'.[187]

Fox's Russian hero in *People of the Steppes* evolves into the communist hero in fiction. Fox's sense of travelling the Kazakh steppe as a conqueror is developed in *Storming Heaven* through the introduction of communist characters. These fictional communists, at great personal sacrifice and risk to life, heroically fight for the revolution against the backward and hostile elements on the Soviet frontier. Fox's choice of literary form combined with Soviet Five-Year Plan politics.[188] *Storming Heaven*, as an adventure novel with picaresque elements, adopts a structure common to the genre. Travelling through Siberia, John is eager to discover 'dark and intriguing' mysteries, and the narrative moves from mystery to mystery.[189] As Booker rightly identifies, this 'unstructured and chaotic' narrative 'helps to capture the tumultuous climate of the postrevolutionary Soviet Union'.[190] In *People of the Steppes*, the narrative is more prosaic, resulting from Fox's idealisation of the Kazakh steppe as a timeless space. In fact, Fox is never in any danger travelling with communists. In *Storming Heaven*, Fox represents the Soviet frontier as lawless and uncivilised to maximise the threat to John and the dramatic pay-off when the communists come to the rescue. White army bandits pillage and destroy villages. He also witnesses the rape of a girl committed by a Mormon priest under the

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[186] Fox, *Storming Heaven,* p. 30.
[187] London, Marx Memorial Library, 67048, Ralph Fox, SC, Newspaper Clippings, SC/VOL/RFO/2/3.
[188] During the First Five-Year Plan, Soviet filmmakers introduced the communist hero struggling beyond the Soviet frontier, see Vsevolod Pudovkin, *Storm Over Asia* (Mezhrabpomfilm, 1928); Mikhail Kalatozov's *Salt for Svanetia* (Kalatozov, 1930).
[189] Fox, *Storming Heaven*, p. 65.
[190] Booker, *The Modern British Novel of the Left*, p. 134.

guise of a religious ceremony in an unnamed village on the Eurasian steppe. Numerous set pieces on horrors like these are found throughout the narrative and are connected together by following John's journey to Moscow.[191] This structure enables Fox to exaggerate the violence and disruption on the frontier to an extent not found in his travel writing, in order to justify the Soviet regime's expansion East and into Central Asia.

Fox's heroic depiction of the Soviet regime battling lawlessness and White subversion on the frontier, combined with his idealised depiction of the Kazak nomads, resulted in *Storming Heaven* successfully appealing to readers beyond his immediate radical network. As the *Spectator* suggested, 'there is something for all tastes, and everyone should enjoy it'.[192] Unlike their communist counterparts, most mainstream newspaper reviewers focussed their praise on Fox's portrayal of the Kazakh nomads, not the Bolsheviks. In *New Stateman*, Cyril Connolly applauded 'the contrast between Asian and Bolshevik Russia' as the 'real romance of the book'. He read *Storming Heaven* as part of the picaresque tradition, comparing John to Lazarillo, the protagonist of what is typically defined as the first picaresque novel *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554). Connolly did criticise Fox for departing from the required first-person narrative of the genre which in his view made the opening pages on the indigenous American 'not as real and as hard bitten'.[193] Orlo Williams noted Fox's approval of the 'Bolshevist ideal', but wrote that 'he does not preach or propagandize: his aim is to present the multiplicity of life all over the vast face of modern Russia'.[194] The *Nation*'s Clifton P. Fadiman believed that 'the book lifts like a wave as the souls of the Kirghiz, melancholy, black, romantic, with an intensity far beyond Western conception, are lit up with a strong, sure illumination'.[195] A local reviewer for the *Aberdeen Journal* enthused, 'It is one of the finest examples of the modern picaresque novel

[191] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, pp. 76-86, 216-227.
[192] '*Storming Heaven*', *Spectator*, 19 May 1928, p. 776.
[193] Cyril Connolly, 'New Novels', *New Statesman*, 14 April 1928, pp. 17-18 (p. 18).
[194] Williams, '*Storming Heaven*', p. 88.
[195] Clifton P. Fadiman, 'Streaked with Promise', *Nation*, 7 November 1926, p. 498.

lately produced. It is not for the "prunes and prisms" person but for those who like to look the life of other countries fully and nakedly in the face'.[196] Against this groundswell of positive opinion, in the *Observer* Gerald Gould grumbled, 'Apparently *Storming Heaven* is meant to be a great book; and my only complaint is that it is not a great book'.[197] Some reviewers could not see beyond Fox's political commitment. In the *Saturday Review*, L. P. Hartley criticised Fox for contrasting America's 'wickedness and misery with the nobility and happiness of life under the Soviet Republic'.[198] A *Manchester Guardian* reviewer somehow read John to be 'A Socialist, ill-equipped, sour-tempered, and uncouth, he is the perfect exemplification of the criticism that the only drawback to Socialism is the Socialist'.[199] Taken together, this critical reception of *Storming Heaven* often ignored major aspects of the novel (the American West Coast, the protagonist, Soviet Moscow) and suggests that Fox's vision of the Soviet frontier in Central Asia, based upon anthropological detail and heroic masculinity proved most appealing to an otherwise hostile mainstream literary opinion.

Fox, then, consistently represents a certain relationship between travel, the hero and revolution in his travel writing and fiction of the mid-to-late nineteen-twenties. He routinely conceives of heroes as male adventures in the service of various forms of conquest and political revolution. In *People of the Steppes*, Fox collects together his experiences of the Soviet frontier into a pro-Soviet imperialist narrative in which he inhabited the identity of the heroic conqueror on behalf of the Soviet regime. In *Storming Heaven*, Fox reworks his travel writing to exaggerate the chaos beyond the Soviet frontier, which provided a more effective backdrop for the creation of the communist hero.

Fox's attempts to write on the communist hero continued into the nineteen-thirties in literary writing other than *The Novel and the People*. A correspondence amongst CPGB leaders in 1933

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[196] 'Art, Fiction, Travel, and Folk-Lore', *Aberdeen Journal*, 31 May 1928, p. 9.
[197] Gerald Gould, 'There and Back Again', *Observer*, 19 August 1928, p. 5.
[198] L. P. Hartley, 'New Fiction', *Saturday Review*, 21 April 1928, pp. 500-501 (p. 501).
[199] A. E. C., '*Storming Heaven*', *Manchester Guardian*, 20 April 1928, p. 7.

concerning Fox's recently published biography *Lenin* (1933) reveals that his interest in representing the heroic individual came under severe scrutiny in terms of style and politics.[200] In September of that year, an anonymously authored report circulated within the CPGB. While its author remains unknown, Fox's, and the CPGB's, urgent responses that same month acknowledges 'criticisms were pending from comrades in Moscow', suggesting a Soviet source. The report first outlines what a party member should aim to achieve when attempting a biography of Lenin. A successful biography should reflect a party member's 'care, conscientiousness, verification of parts and formulations, and a strict line'. Fox's *Lenin*, in contrast, 'needs a serious revision in order to correct a number of theoretical mistakes and historical mistakes, pure lapses, the getting rid of petty-bourgeois argumentation'. The report lists over fifty such 'mistakes' throughout the book. One of the its main criticisms concerns how best to represent the individual, particularly those in opposition against the Bolshevik Party. Fox's utilisation of 'psychological analysis' worries the anonymous author, who instead recommends 'that today especially we should use another language with regard to provocateurs, other words nearer the truth'. Criticism extends to Fox writing 'no sharp word with regard to Trotsky', yet discovering 'mistakes made by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin'. With some foreboding, the report suggests that Fox held Trotskyist sympathies. The report concludes, 'it is impossible to publish Fox's book in such form. It will be used by our enemies. It will bring a great deal of confusion into the ranks of the party and the workers. Do we need this?'.[201] This criticism, however, did not reach Fox nor the CPGB until some weeks after the book's publication.

Fox's response to the report reveals the nature of the relationship between a loyal party writer, the CPGB and Soviet Union. He immediately distances himself from the report's

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[200] This correspondence between Fox, the CPGB, and Moscow is found in Manchester, Labour History Archive, Rajani Palme Dutt Papers, CP/IND/DUTT, Papers re Biography of Lenin by Ralph Fox, fol. CP/IND/DUTT/16/04; Ralph Fox, *Lenin: A Biography* (London: Gollancz, 1933).
[201] Labour History Archive, CP/IND/DUTT, fol. CP/IND/DUTT/16/04.

findings with performative exaggeration by acknowledging ‘Comrades who know me will certainly want to know whether I've gone mad to have written such a book. Since clearly such things could only have come from the vilest of counter-revolutionary Trotskyists, for whom there can be no place in the workers' party’. He accepts some of the criticisms as legitimate, which left him ‘willing and anxious to do everything in my power to correct’. Yet at the same time he concludes that ‘the whole manner and method of his report a gross distortion, based in some cases on misunderstanding, in others on deliberating twisting of my words, and in some cases of absolute invention’. Much of Fox’s subsequent defence details at length the inefficient lines of communication between him, the CPGB, and Moscow. Before the book’s publication, he sent proof copies to Harry Pollitt, Robert Williams and Moscow. After one month, he received criticisms from Pollitt and Williams and reintegrated them into the final version. Around this time, a wire arrived from Moscow alerting Fox to this impending report, ‘but nothing came’, so he ‘went ahead’ with the book’s publication. After publication, and two months after the proof copy had been sent to Moscow, Fox received a second wire ‘calling for its withdrawal’. He immediately reports this order to an unaware Pollitt, who recommends he wire back with the message that ‘it was too late’. At the time of Fox’s response to the report, four months after the book’s publication, he still waited on the return of the proof copy with its suggested corrections. If he had been made aware of criticism from Moscow, Fox maintains, ‘I would have held the book up at all costs’, despite increasing pressure from his publisher Gollancz. He also distances himself from the report’s charge of Trotskyism by clarifying ‘the best disciple of Lenin’ to be Stalin.[202]

On 4 October, having considered together *Lenin*, the report, and Fox’s response, Rajani Palme Dutt, a member of the CPGB’s politburo, sent a letter to Pollitt with his own conclusions. In Dutt’s view, Fox had written, despite his best intentions, an ‘ordinary bourgeois type of

[202] Labour History Archive, CP/IND/DUTT, fol. CP/IND/DUTT/16/04.

biography' of the Bolshevik leader. In failing to revolutionise biographical writing, Dutt criticises Fox's approach as 'too narrowly subjective', 'personal' and 'highly impressionistic'. Scrawled on his copy of the report are red ticks besides criticisms relating to Fox's use of psychological speculation. Aligning himself with the report, Dutt likens this speculation to a 'morbid psychological entering into the skin'. This literary style for Dutt produces a 'political perspective' entirely 'alien from our outlook'. In adopting the 'traditional approach' of biographical writing, 'Our hero, his personality, his psychology, his will, fill the picture; the political background appears as a medium for his personality to act upon'. Dutt concludes,

> Lack of political perspective as a whole, of sense of the movement, of the party, of Marxism as a collective outlook and movement; psychological isolating and subjectivising of Lenin and his outlook; poetising and literary approach in place of Marxist political grasp; these seem to me the basic weaknesses of the book, more important than particular mistakes of detail, though inevitably reflecting themselves in mistakes of detail.

Fox had failed to grasp that the revolution demanded a new way of thinking and writing about the individual as part of a collective political struggle. [203] On the 9 October, Pollitt wrote back to Dutt suggesting that while his criticism of *Lenin* was much too harsh on Fox, 'a decision has now been made to the effect, by those who have started this criticism, that in future no Party member shall write a book until it has been approved by the Secretariat, and the line approved by the Agit Prop'.[204] Fox's *Lenin* had singlehandedly led to a change in CPGB policy on party literature.

[203] Labour History Archive, CP/IND/DUTT, fol. CP/IND/DUTT/16/04.
[204] National Archives, Ralph Winston Fox, KV 2-1377.

Despite Fox's attempts to insulate himself from criticism through efforts organising positive book reviews, as the months passed, reviewers criticised Fox's heroic representation of Lenin in similar terms. On December 1933, Jack Common, writing for *Adelphi*, found several limitations in Fox's 'icon-like' depiction of Lenin. Common contends that by focussing so much on Lenin and Stalin, at the expense of Trotsky and the wider Bolshevik Party, Fox overlooked an essential element of the Russian Revolution, that 'Among this group Lenin was *primus inter pares*. That is what it means to be a great communist leader and it is enough'. In failing to frame the revolution in this manner, Common argues that 'Mr. Fox's mistaken adulation leads straight to the notion of Dictator Lenin, compeer of Mussolini, and to Fascist ideology'.[205]

Taken together, this report and subsequent CPGB correspondence confirms the existence of a strict party line when writing about the hero of the Russian Revolution, the implementation of which, however, proved harder to enforce. Previously in 1928, Fox had written for *Sunday Worker* that writing the 'triumphant subject' of Lenin's life should present no difficulty, for all the necessary materials resided in the Marx-Lenin institute.[206] In 1932, having spent three years in the Marx-Engels Institute collecting, as T. A. Jackson termed it, an 'elaborate set of notes' on Lenin's life, Fox, as his rebuttal makes clear, must have been embarrassed that his comrades in the CPGB and over in Moscow found his resultant biography intolerable and unpublishable.[207] This bruising criticism also affected his theory of the communist hero for the rest of the nineteen-thirties, as he tried to theorise a way forward that might better align with Moscow. After this bruising encounter with Moscow and CPGB leaders, Fox certainly better understood the official party line. In 1935, Fox's freelance work for the publisher Routledge

[205] Marx Memorial Library, 67048, Ralph Fox, SC/VOL/RFO/2/3.

[206] Ralph Fox, ''Dictator' To Those Who Not Understand Him … Comrade To the Workers', *Sunday Worker*, 1 July 1928, p. 8.

[207] T. A. Jackson, 'Ralph Fox's Political Writings', in *Ralph Fox: A Writer in Arms*, ed. by John Lehmann, T. A. Jackson, and C. Day Lewis (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1937), pp. 151-156, (p. 153).

reveals a development in his thinking on the communist hero. On the 28 October, Routledge asked Fox for his thoughts regarding the proposed translation of a biography on Maxim Litvinov. He replies that the style is 'flat, dull and often rather ridiculous in its frequent references to Litvinov as a typical "strong man" of the Revolution. At these points the book descends into caricature'.[208] On the 18 November, Routledge thanked Fox for his opinion and informed him that they had declined the book. This newly discovered evidence reveals that Fox's ideas of the hero reacted to the Moscow report and Dutt's criticism, which would provide the basis for his theory of the communist hero in *The Novel and the People*.

'The knowledge of life that was opening': Youth and the Revolution

Fox's *This Was Their Youth* was published nine months after his death in Spain and the publication of *The Novel and The People*.[209] As his last word on the novel, it appears unconnected to his communist politics or literary theory, for it lacks any working-class radicalism or communist hero.[210] Indeed, the book reviewer for *The Daily Worker*, Ralph Wright, sought to manage his readers' expectations. While in Wright's opinion, *The Novel and The People* represents 'one of the best books upon the subject' of Marxist literary criticism, *This Was Their Youth* appears to him 'not ever really finished'. Nevertheless, Wright maintains that 'For left-wing writers there is a great deal to be learnt from the book'. In particular, he values how,

[208] University of Reading, Letters to and from Ralph Fox, RKP 6/10.
[209] Ralph Wright, 'Ralph Fox's Last Novel', *Daily Worker,* 27 October 1937, p. 7.
[210] It is unknown exactly when Fox wrote *This Was Their Youth*. One of Fox's closest associates, T. A. Jackson, was aware of the expected publication of *The Novel and the People*, but not of *This Was Their Youth*, see T. A. Jackson, 'The Books He Wrote', *Daily Worker,* 4 January 1937, p. 4.

> the basis of this story is the class war, and the class war is not mentioned. Instead of being a theory applied to the lives of human beings, it comes to life in them. You see the war in being. You do not want to argue about it, you experience it. And that is exactly where the art of the novelist lies.[211]

Wright does not draw connections between the two posthumous texts and his reading of 'class war' refers to Fox's realist style. Critical accounts fail to discuss this novel and are seemingly unaware of its existence.[212] There is little understanding, then, as to whether Fox put his own literary theory into practice. A close reading of *This Was Their Youth* reveals that Fox's socialist realism remains rooted in an imaginary that develops out of *People of the Steppes* and *Storming Heaven*.

As the title *This Was Their Youth* suggests, the central narrative is concerned with a group of schoolchildren as they live out the last part of their childhoods in an unnamed industrial northern town in 1911.[213] Their world is still one of 'Cowboys and Indians', of fights with grammar school boys, and of nighttime adventures on the moor. Fox sets this coming of age story alongside the lives of the town's adult population. The townspeople's behaviour is conditioned by a conservative social order. The town's obsessive policeman, Sergeant Smitham, patrols neighbourhoods and beats children into understanding 'the painful consciousness of life'.[214] The teachers, themselves won out by bitter disappointments and regrets, expect their students to die in a war abroad, or live in poverty at home. The life of the school's gymnastics teacher, Frank Whittam, provides the novel's significant dramatic hook,

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[211] Ralph Wright, 'Ralph Fox's Last Work On The Novel', *Daily Worker,* 27 January 1937, p. 7.

[212] Bounds, Croft, Cunningham, Hynes and Taylor do not cite it. This thesis is, to my knowledge, the first analysis of *This Was Their Youth*.

[213] Fox, *This Was Their Youth*, pp. 58, 111, 250. Hallet argues that Fox based *This Was Their Youth* on his own childhood in Halifax, see Hallet, ''The Hand That History Dealt', Ralph Fox (1900-1936)', p. 119.

[214] Fox, *This Was Their Youth*, pp. 13, 39, 43. Fox's characterisation of Smitham probably relates to Fox's own experience of police brutality. In January 1936, a police inspector was charged with assaulting Fox in the offices of *The Daily Worker*, see 'The Thorburn Case', *Daily Worker*, 20 January 1936, p. 2.

as his attempts to remarry while his wife remains alive in a 'madhouse' comes under the investigation of Smitham.[215]

Fox is most concerned in *This Was Their Youth* with dramatising the process by which the free-spirited children are civilised into adults who accept and reproduce the existing social order. His choice of narrative structure achieves this goal. Unlike *Storming Heaven*'s narrative that is fixed on one protagonist, *This Was Their Youth* is a realist narrative encompassing multiple characters in order to represent in intimate detail an entire town's social life. Indeed, in *The Novel and The People*, Fox argues that 'The novelist cannot write his story of the individual fate unless he also has this steady vision of the whole'.[216] The omniscient narrator's 'vision of the whole' is fixated in this novel with positioning the children of the town as occupying a liminal space between nature and civilisation. This conception of society owes much to Fox's ideas first articulated in his travel writing and fiction. In *People of the Steppes*, Fox is occupied with integrating the attractive aspects of Kazakh nomadic life into Soviet civilisation. In *Storming Heaven*, Fox dramatises how John, an embodiment of the Kazakh nomad, violently resists capitalist society.

In *This Was Their Youth*, Fox adapts these ideas of his travel writing and previous novel into a British context to critique the process by which 'the astonishing reality of the children' becomes shaped by external conditions. He outlines this argument in a dialogue between two teachers:

> 'Yes, but try to think what a child's mind is like', he insisted. 'It is born in illusion and grows up in a world of its own. Every child lives on its imagination.'

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[215] Fox, *This Was Their Youth*, pp. 48-49, 157-159, 57, 133-148.
[216] Fox, *The Novel and the People*, p. 25.

> 'And that imagination is their first perception of the world', she answered him simply. 'When children play it's make-believe, but make-believe with reality. As they grow up the make-believe and reality grow together. Of course it's through a series of shocks, but the shocks are cause of this growing together. You need a hammer to forge metal.'[217]

This image of the hammer connects to Fox idealised revolutionary writer in *The Novel and the People*, who 'takes the white-hot metal of reality and hammers it out, refashions it to his own purpose, beats it out madly by the violences of thought, to steal a phrase from Naomi Mitchison'.[218] Applied to the British context of Fox's novel, he critiques how social forces in capitalist society 'hammer' children into a form that reproduces the existing social order. Later in the novel, one of the children, Dan, spends an increasing amount of time with an 'enemy' grammar school boy, and they begin to develop a friendship. Together, they travel beyond their neighbourhood and explore the town's working class areas. As they walk through a field, the narrator provides an extended description of horses mating, after which the narrator surveys the scene,

> Over all the wind blew with its smell of peat, its damp hint of distant sea, and on the bosom of this moorland wind the peewits cried and the black wedges of waterfowl winged northward. Dan knew he was growing and rejoiced. But behind the wind, in the town, he had the child's sense of danger, the sure conviction that they would turn against

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[217] Fox, *This Was Their Youth*, pp. 55, 54.
[218] Fox, *The Novel and the People*, p. 29. This corresponds to Stalin's demand for the Soviet writer to be 'an engineer of the human soul', which Fox later cites, see Fox, *The Novel and the People*, p. 102.

> him away from Mat, from young Ginger, from Jenny, away from the knowledge of life that was opening.[219]

The children's 'growing' understanding of sexual intercourse here is intuitively gained from the 'bosom' of the natural world. The depiction of horses freely 'running in a group' is a contrast to the novel's opening scene where Dan encounters adult violence when Smitham shoots a dying horse in the street. The children's escape into nature is only temporary as the civilisation of the 'mean city' is a constant pressure that moulds and separates the children according to class and gender. In other moments in the novel the children fail to resist these social forces. Their relationships with one another are dictated to them by their parents' understanding of class, meaning that a child of 'a small shopkeeper' is not to be trusted. Their imaginations are captured by the opportunity to travel aboard with the Royal Navy.[220]

The implication of Fox's representation of this liminal space that the children occupy in the town is revolutionary insofar as if individuals are products of social forces, then it is possible in the future that they could be remade. As a teacher wonders, 'This town and these hills are the creation of the past. I wonder what sort of town our children whom we teach are going to make for themselves and how they will change the hills'.[221] In one of his final articles for *Left Review* before his death, Fox suggests that the Soviet Union offered an alternative model in its development of a 'new youth'.[222] However, this potential to reshape children in a positive direction is only ever implied in the narrative.

There is nothing in *This Was Their Youth* as explicit as the hero in the Dimitrov mould who is able to remake his environment according to his individual will.[223] In fact, it is Fox's

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[219] Fox, This Was Their Youth, pp. 171-172. This moment echoes the scene in *Storming Heaven* when John looks out to sea towards the 'new world' of the Soviet Union, see Fox, *Storming Heaven*, p. 47.
[220] Fox, *This Was Their Youth*, pp. 171, 11-12, 94, 30, 91.
[221] Fox, *This Was Their Youth*, p. 56.
[222] Ralph Fox, 'A Picture of Socialist Life', *Left Review*, 2.16 (January 1937), 913.
[223] Fox, *The Novel and the People*, pp. 107, 24-125.

attraction to the revolutionary potential of travel outlined in his earlier travel writing and adventure novel that is maintained in these two texts of the nineteen-thirties. In *People of the Steppes*, Fox's expedition to Central Asia results in his transformation into a conqueror.[224] In *Storming Heaven*, John's desire for freedom from poverty and violence is satisfied by leaving America.[225] In *The Novel and the People*, Fox's final theory of travel develops from a reading of André Gide's travel book *Travels in the Congo* (1930).[226] Fox argues that Gide's criticism of French imperialism is a successful attempt 'to perceive the world as it exists in reality, and not merely as it existed in his own consciousness'. Travel writing for Fox enables Gide 'to see, not merely that the outer world exists, which he had always known, but that it can be understood, and that it must be mastered before his individual consciousness finds its freedom'.[227] This freeing of individual consciousness also corresponds in *This Was Their Youth* to the character of the liberal journalist, Alan Brown, who returns to the town for a brief stay after an journalistic expedition to North Africa. His function in the narrative is to provide the reader with insights into the worsening international political situation of which the townspeople are ignorant. After resolving Frank's troubles with the police, Alan returns to Africa and 'the very memory of the windy town among the Yorkshire hills faded from his mind, dissolved in their quiet brilliance'.[228] This mirrors Fox's own decision to leave Britain to fight for international communism in Spain. His death transformed him into a hero for the British Left, and for the CPGB which had only a few years earlier rejected Fox's vision of heroism.

This chapter has shown how Fox's travel writing on Soviet Central Asia affected his literary project throughout the interwar period. He was much more than the writer of *The Novel and the People*. He relied first on travel writing and then the novel to attempt to imagine ways of

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[224] Fox, *People of the Steppes*, p. 133.
[225] Fox, *Storming Heaven,* p. 47.
[226] André Gide, *Travels in the Congo*, trans. by Dorothy Bussy (London: A. A. Knopf, 1930).
[227] Fox, *The Novel and the People*, pp. 27, 28.
[228] Fox, *This Was Their Youth*, pp. 178, 231, 243-244,

overcoming British capitalism and imperialism. Travelling through the Central Asian steppe in 1922 enabled Fox's imagination to flourish free from, and in directions probably perplexing to, the Soviet regime, in particular in relation to Fox's positive vision of Kazakh nomadic life. In *People of the Steppes*, Fox assimilates Kazakh nomadic life into the story of Soviet communism. The Kazakh nomad's independent spirit, strength and hardiness for Fox contains radical possibilities for the future of Soviet communism as well as an antidote against mechanised Western capitalism. This positive vision becomes the basis for an effective anti-capitalist critique in Fox's novels. In *Storming Heaven*, Fox repurposes his experiences of the Soviet frontier into an adventure story that effectively transmits his pro-Soviet imperialist arguments to a British readership. In *This Was Their Youth*, Fox's refines his vision of Kazakh nomadic life into an exploration of the liminal space of childhood in a British context. There is something to admire in Fox's engagement with non-Western peoples. He possesses an openness to difference. He ascribes positive qualities to these peoples that undermines narratives of universal Western superiority. He draws parallels between the Kazakh nomad and his own countrymen. This sustained engagement with Soviet Central Asia leads him to imagining future change in Britain. Ultimately, however, Fox's pro-Soviet communism closes off the radical possibilities open with such an engagement. His pro-Soviet imperialism implicates him in problematic imagery and arguments that dictate to non-Western peoples how to live.

2

‘Not So Easy’: Amabel Williams-Ellis and Experiments in Left-Wing Literature as Propaganda, 1927-38

‘A woman called Ellis Williams ran amok’

Figure 14: Howard Coster, *Amabel Williams-Ellis*, 1938, half-plate film negative, National Portrait Gallery, London.

In 1938, the novelist and feminist Amabel Williams-Ellis sat for a series of eight portraits taken by the photographer Howard Coster. Renowned in the late nineteen-twenties for his portraits of leading male writers such as Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy and Siegfried Sassoon, at the

start of the nineteen-thirties Coster turned his attention to photographing women writers.[1] Between 1933 and 1934, Storm Jameson, Vita Sackville-West, Sylvia Townsend Warner and Rebecca West all had their portraits taken.[2] Coster's portraits were often reprinted in *The Bookman* literary magazine and Penguin paperback editions. When surveying Coster's *oeuvre*, it is clear that he favours either close-up profiles, utilising light to reveal something of a writer's inner being, or staged scenes, that seemingly catch a writer in the midst of creativity. Not selected as one of these first women sitters, Williams-Ellis probably had her portrait taken some time after her husband, the architect Clough Williams-Ellis, sat for Coster in 1936.[3] What is unique in Coster's portraits of Williams-Ellis is that half of them involve her posing in different positions holding the same hardback book with bold lettering on the sleeve that reads *Traitors on Trial*.[4] In one portrait, this book is shut in her hands. In another, it is balanced upright on the arm of a chair. In the third and fourth, the pages are open in front of Williams-Ellis as if she has been disturbed from reading. None of Coster's other portraits rely on this kind of prop, suggesting that Williams-Ellis made a request for the book to persistently reappear. Surely of some significance to Williams-Ellis as a writer, it is some surprise to the present-day reader that this book is an eight-hundred-page 'verbatim report' of the Moscow show trials held between August 1936 to March 1938, translated and published in 1938 by the People's Commissariat of Justice of the USSR.[5]

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[1] For a collection of Coster's photographs in the interwar period, see Howard Coster, *Howard Coster's Celebrity Portraits: 101 Photographs of Personalities in Literature and the Arts*, ed. by Terrence Pepper (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1985).
[2] Howard Coster, *Margaret Ethel ('Storm') Jameson*, 1933, half-plate film negative, National Portrait Gallery, London; Howard Coster, *Rebecca West*, 1934, half-plate film negative, National Portrait Gallery, London; Howard Coster, *Sylvia Townsend Warner*, 1934, half-plate film negative, National Portrait Gallery, London; Howard Coster, *Vita Sackville-West*, 1934, half-plate film negative, National Portrait Gallery, London.
[3] Howard Coster, *Clough Williams-Ellis*, 1936, half-plate film negative, National Portrait Gallery, London.
[4] People's Commissariat of Justice of the U.S.S.R, *Traitors on Trial: Complete Verbatim Report in the Case of the Anti-Soviet Bloc of Rights and Trotskyists Including Bukharin, Rykov, Yagoda, Krestinsky, Rakovsky, Rosengolz, Grinko and Others* (Moscow: People's Commissariat of Justice of the U.S.S.R, 1938).
[5] Howard Coster, *Amabel Williams-Ellis*, 1938, half-plate film negative, National Portrait Gallery, London.

This chapter investigates Williams-Ellis' literary and political ties to the Soviet Union by tracing through the interwar years her development as a writer and political radical. Central to her fictional, journalistic, political and travel writings in the early nineteen-thirties is an effort to find the right literary form with which to disseminate propaganda that did not announce itself as propaganda. Consequently, Williams-Ellis' writings are a worthwhile case study in the complexities inherent in the development of a left-wing literature in the nineteen-thirties. Her first visit to the Soviet Union in 1928 informed her attempts at the beginning of the next decade to formulate a left-wing literature, represent the Russian Revolution in a realistic mode, and satirise life in Britain under capitalism. This multifaceted approach to writing at times departed from orthodox Soviet and British socialist realisms. In *Left Review*, she simultaneously argued that writing propaganda necessitated the use of more popular forms, while writing literature required a combination of new and existing literary techniques. This combination of arguments pleased few of her fellow contributors. After her third visit to the Soviet Union in 1934, as the sole British delegate at the Soviet Writers' Congress, she remained convinced that the literary experiments emanating from Moscow represented the future for British left-wing writers. Following the Congress, Williams-Ellis ceased her own experiments in left-wing literature to instead promote Soviet socialist realism and collective authorship. Her subsumption to Soviet literature paralleled her increasingly uncritical attitude towards the Soviet regime that is evident in Coster's portraits.

Williams-Ellis' desire to refine propaganda writing, her unorthodox theorisations of left-wing literature, and her uncompromising support for the Soviet Union resulted in her occupying several awkward positions in literary debates throughout the 1930s. In moving through left-wing literary circles, she was close to the CPGB, yet never seemed to have been a card-carrying member. Eric Hobsbawm states in his memoir *Interesting Times* (2002) that

Williams-Ellis 'unofficially' joined the CPGB.[6] In her own memoir *All Stracheys are Cousins* (1983), William-Ellis remembers how she 'found it possible and necessary to work with the Communists' after the 'failure of the German Left to unite' had led to the rise of Nazism.[7] These communists rarely wholeheartedly praised her literary or political work. C. Allan Hutt criticised her satire *To Tell The Truth* (1933) for its 'gentle' criticism of capitalism and 'ambiguous' support for the Soviet Union.[8] In April 1935, after Alick West joined the editorial board of *Left Review*, he immediately disapproved of Williams-Ellis' advice to working-class writers that they should to avoid bourgeois abstractions such as 'Home', 'Flag' and 'Mother'.[9]

Beyond this awkward position within left-wing literary circles, in taking propaganda writing seriously as an art, Williams-Ellis was especially vulnerable to the retrospective charges of producing didactic literature and Soviet apologia. As the nineteen-thirties drew to a close, writers debated the experiment of politics in literature. George Orwell, Virginia Woolf and an increasing number of ex-communists repudiated almost all politically inflected literature. In his essay 'Inside the Whale' (1940), Orwell's criticism of a generation of left-wing writers centred around their belief in political abstraction that made them 'gloriously incapable of understanding' reality.[10] It was in this sense that he condemned W. H. Auden's use of the phrase 'necessary murder' in *Spain* (1937) as evidence of a 'person to whom murder is at most a *word*'.[11] By this time, Auden had escaped to America and declared in his poem 'September 1, 1939' that 'the clever hopes expire / Of a low dishonest decade'.[12] Orwell concluded that 'the literary history of the 'thirties seems to justify the opinion that the writer does well to keep out

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[6] Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (London: Allen Lane, 2002), p. 239.
[7] Amabel Williams-Ellis, *All Stracheys are Cousins: Memoirs* (London: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1983), pp. 132-133.
[8] Amabel Williams-Ellis, *To Tell the Truth* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933); Allan Hunt, 'An Ingenious Social Satire', *Daily Worker*, 13 September 1933, p. 4.
[9] 'Contributors' Conference', *Left Review*, 1.9 (June 1935), 366–369 (p. 368).
[10] George Orwell, *Inside the Whale and Other Essays* (London: Gollancz, 1940), pp. 171, 169, 172.
[11] W. H. Auden, *Spain* (London: Faber & Faber, 1937).
[12] W. H. Auden, *Another Time: Poems* (London: Faber, 1940), p. 112.

of politics'.[13] In the same year as 'Inside the Whale', Virginia Woolf republished her paper given to the Workers' Educational Association in Brighton as 'The Leaning Tower' in John Lehmann's *Folios of New Writing*. She deplored how the didacticism of left-wing writers resulted in a literature with 'no characters' and 'full of discord and bitterness, full of confusion and of compromise'.[14]

Arguing against this position, several left-wing writers sought to rehabilitate their own legacies in their critiques of Woolf's essay in the next volume of *Folios of New Writing*. Edward Upward retorted that these writers were 'abler and more serious than most of their detractors'.[15] Louis MacNeice rejected Woolf's interpretation that literature in the nineteen-thirties was 'solely and crudely didactic'.[16] B. L. Coombes suggested that, as a wealthy, upper class woman, Woolf would be 'treated with suspicion' in his mining town and could never successfully represent working-class life.[17] This contested history of the decade came to be dominated by autobiographical writings by ex-communists, most notably in Richard Crossman's collection *The God That Failed* (1950), which established the myth that Western communists followed a common trajectory, from total belief in communism, to total disillusionment.[18] Stephen Spender's *World Within World* (1951) charted one such course and, like Orwell's essay, condemned British communists for the way that their political belief controlled their 'awareness of actuality'.[19] In this hostile atmosphere after the nineteen-thirties, Williams-Ellis reinvented herself as a writer and public figure. Her publications departed from experiments in

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[13] Orwell, *Inside the Whale and Other Essays*, p. 172.
[14] Virginia Woolf, 'The Leaning Tower', in *Folios of New Writing*, ed. by John Lehmann, 4 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1940-41), II, 11-33 (pp. 22-23).
[15] Edward Upward, 'The Falling Tower', in *Folios of New Writing*, ed. by John Lehmann, 4 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1940-41), III, 24-29 (p. 29).
[16] Louis MacNeice, 'The Tower That Once', in *Folios of New Writing*, ed. by John Lehmann, 4 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1940-41), III, 37-41 (p. 39).
[17] B. L. Coombes, 'Underneath the Tower', in *Folios of New Writing*, ed. by John Lehmann, 4 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1940-41), III, 30-36 (p. 31).
[18] *The God That Failed*, ed. by R. H. S. Crossman (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1950).
[19] Stephen Spender, *World Within World* (Kent: Hamish Hamilton, 1951), p. 137.

left-wing literature, to books of fairy tales, science and history for children.[20] In 1972, she became Lady Williams-Ellis after Clough Williams-Ellis accepted entrance into the House of Lords. Unlike many other ex-communist writers, she never provided an autobiographical record reflecting on her commitment to communism and the Soviet Union. The writing that most closely resembled a re-evaluation was the three chapters of her memoir, but they in fact focus more on the failures of the Labour Party and the rise of fascism on the continent.[21]

Williams-Ellis remains a peripheral figure in secondary criticism despite critical interest in reassessing the reputations of left-wing writers. She is a less than fashionable case study given that she was a privileged woman who became a 'class traitor', wrote propaganda that her fellow left-wing writers did not always agree with, uncritically supported the Soviet Union, and ended her life as a member of the nobility.[22] A fire at her family home Plas Brondanw in 1951 means that there is not the same wealth of archival materials as for other left-wing writers. Consequently, she goes unmentioned in several important studies of literature in the nineteen-thirties. She is missing from Angela Ingram and Daphne Patai's *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals* (1993).[23] Janet Montefiore's feminist revision of the decade, *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s* (1996), instead focusses on Jameson, Naomi Mitchison and Townsend Warner.[24] She is also absent from Benjamin Kohlmann's *Committed Styles* (2014), as well as the collections *The History of British Women's Writing, 1920-1945* (2015), and *The 1930s* (2021).[25]

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[20] Amabel Williams-Ellis, and Frederick Jack Fisher, *A First History of English Life*, 4 vols. (London: Methuen, 1940-1949); Amabel Williams-Ellis, and Judy Brook, *Princesses and Trolls: Twelve Traditional Stories Retold by Amabel Williams-Ellis* (London: Barrie, 1950); Amabel Williams-Ellis, and Euan Cooper-Willis, *Laughing Gas and Safety Lamp: The Story of Sir Humphry Davy* (London: Methuen, 1951); Amabel Williams-Ellis, and William Stobbs, *Old World & New World Fairy Tales* (London: Blackie, 1966).
[21] Williams-Ellis, *All Stracheys are Cousins*, pp. 126-156.
[22] Williams-Ellis, *All Stracheys are Cousins*, p. 84.
[23] Angela Ingram, and Daphne Patai, *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals: British Women Writers, 1889-1939* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).
[24] Jan Montefiore, *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s: The Dangerous Flood of History* (London: Routledge, 1996).
[25] Benjamin Kohlmann, *Committed Styles: Modernism, Politics, and Left-Wing Literature in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Maroula Joannou, *The History of British Women's Writing, 1920-1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013); *The 1930s: A Decade of Moden British Fiction*, ed. by Nick Hubble, Luke Seaber, and Elinor Taylor (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

When she is cited, it is almost always in relation to her coverage for *Left Review* of the Soviet Writers' Congress in August 1934, as a point of a departure from which to discuss how other writers, not Williams-Ellis, contributed to debates on left-wing literature.[26]

This chapter builds on a few contributions in scholarship that have broken important ground examining the political and literary life of Williams-Ellis. Andy Croft is an early anomaly in discussing her fiction on several occasions in *Red Letter Days* (1990).[27] David Margolies and Christopher Hilliard have debated Williams-Ellis' role in democratising literature for a working-class readership during her time at *Left Review*.[28] Much more recently, Kristin Ewins's chapter on 'Professional Women Writers' in Benjamin Kohlmann and Matthew Taunton's *A History of 1930s British Literature* (2019) places Williams-Ellis as part of a wider group of writers who 'exposed political incongruities in Britain through the perspectives of other cultures', though her essay simply notes the fact that she visited the Soviet Union.[29] Most recently, Elizabeth West has focussed on Williams-Ellis' interests in children's education.[30]

Why then focus on Amabel Williams-Ellis? First, her fictions and other literary writings over this period can be productively situated in relation to other better known left-wing writers. Second, her early experiments in writing literature as propaganda complicate the dominant arguments about British writing in the nineteen-thirties. Third, she was an important and active figure in her own right in the field of Anglo-Soviet literary, political and cultural relations. Her roles included published author with Jonathan Cape, editor and contributor to *Left Review*,

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[26] To take just two examples of this tendency from one collection, see Valentine Cunningham, 'The Age of Anxiety and Influence; or Tradition and the Thirties Talents', in *Rewriting the Thirties: Modernism and After*, ed. by Keith Williams and Matthew Stephens (London: Longman, 1997), pp. 5-22 (p. 15); Marks, 'Illusion and Reality: the Spectre of Socialist Realism in Thirties Literature', pp. 23-36 (p. 28).
[27] Croft, *Red Letter Days*, p. 225.
[28] David Margolies, 'Literature and Democracy', *Critical Survey* 10 (1998), 73-82; Christopher Hilliard, 'Producers by Hand and by Brain: Working-Class Writers and Left-Wing Publishers in 1930s Britain', *The Journal of Modern History*, 78 (2006), 37-64.
[29] Kristin Ewins, 'Professional Woman Writers', in *A History of 1930s British Literature*, ed. by Benjamin Kohlmann and Matthew Taunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 58-71 (p. 60).
[30] Elizabeth West, *The Women Who Invented Twentieth-Century Children's Literature* (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 212-240.

executive committee member for SCR, and repeat traveller to the Soviet Union. She saw herself, and was seen by members of these interrelated networks, as an authority on Soviet literature. She first visited the Soviet Union in January 1928, with her brother John Strachey, to study the mining villages in the Donbas region. A return to the country followed in July 1931. In August 1934, she travelled to Moscow as the sole British delegate in attendance at the Soviet Writers' Congress.[31] Though this was her last time on Soviet soil, her appearances in Britain at events and talks connected to communism and the Soviet Union only increased. In February 1935, she was invited to speak at a public meeting held by the Bristol branch of the Society for Cultural Relations on the topic of 'Books, readers and writers in the Soviet Union'.[32] In December of that same year, she reported again on Soviet literature at the Congress of Peace and Friendship with the USSR held in London, an event designed to 'break through the barrage of legend and misrepresentation that surrounds the U.S.S.R' for the British public. The programme also contained John Maynard Keynes on agriculture, Cecil Chesterton on women, and Ivor Montagu on film. Notable literary signatories supporting the Congress included George Bernard Shaw, Ethel Mannin, and Townsend Warner.[33] This chapter is one of the first attempts to study in detail Williams-Ellis' literary, political and cultural activities throughout the nineteen-thirties.

'What stories wait to be told!': Realism and Revolution

[31] Williams-Ellis, *All Stracheys are* Cousins, pp. 113, 139.
[32] 'Readers and Writers in Russia', *Western Daily Press*, 22 February 1935, p. 4.
[33] Manchester, Labour History Archive, Congress of Peace and Friendship with the USSR, CP/CENT/INT/41/10.

It was between the years 1928 and 1932 that Williams-Ellis' approach to literature, politics and the Soviet Union began to shift and radicalise.[34] Before this period, she prioritised aesthetic concerns in *An Anatomy of Poetry* (1922) and *The Pleasures of Architecture* (1924).[35] As with many other British writers, this radicalisation arose from both domestic and foreign concerns. After 1931, Spender remembered feeling 'hounded by external events. There was ever-increasing unemployment in America, Great Britain and on the Continent. The old world seemed incapable of solving its problems, and out of disorder Fascist régimes were rising'.[36] During January and February in 1928, Williams-Ellis visited the Soviet Union for the first time to accompany her brother John Strachey in his investigation of the Donbas region, its mining villages and coalfields, on behalf of the National Union of Mineworkers's newspaper *The Miner* and the Independent Labour Party. They visited at the invitation of the Russian miners' trade union and over the course of their stay studied its organisational structure, the living standards of the miners, and the state of the mines.[37] Strachey later published their findings in the collection *What We Saw In Russia* (1931).[38] Williams-Ellis' awakened interest in politics is evident in the co-written *Why Should I Vote?* (1929), which outlines unemployment figures, depressed wages, falling trade and poverty in Britain as reasons to vote for the Labour Party at the upcoming General Election.[39] In March 1930, she wrote positively of her experience at a Soviet collective farm for *The Spectator* that forced the editor to attach the preface 'Mrs. Ellis's political views are not those of the *Spectator*'.[40] In January 1932, the Oxford October Club for

[34] Williams-Ellis' interest in Marxism can be traced earlier to 1922-1923, when as literary editor of her father John Strachey's newspaper the *Spectator*, she reviewed books on the Australian Labour Party and the labour theory of value, see Amabel Williams-Ellis, 'This Week's Books', *Spectator*, 28 July 1923, p. 13; Amabel Williams-Ellis, 'This Week's Books', *Spectator*, 15 December 1923, p. 27.
[35] Amabel Williams-Ellis, *An Anatomy of Poetry* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1922); Clough Williams-Ellis, and Amabel Williams-Ellis, *The Pleasures of Architecture* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1924).
[36] Spender, *World Within World*, p. 137.
[37] Williams-Ellis, *All Stracheys are Cousins*, pp. 112-115.
[38] Aneurin Bevan, John Strachey, and George Strauss, *What We Saw In Russia* (London: Hogarth Press, 1931).
[39] L. A. Plummer, and Amabel Williams-Ellis, *Why Should I Vote?: A Handbook for Electors* (London: Gerald Howe, 1929).
[40] Amabel Williams-Ellis, 'Life on a Communal Farm in Russia', *Spectator*, 29 March 1930, pp. 10-12.

the Study of Communism advertised Williams-Ellis as a speaker.[41] In December, she demanded the release of hunger march organisers from prison.[42] Looking back at this period she remembered, like Spender, 'millions of unemployed, and neither sticking to market economics nor the Labour Party disastrously led by Ramsay MacDonald seemed able to prevent starvation in the midst of plenty'. Italy, Germany and the Soviet Union, in contrast, all 'seemed to be growing rather than wilting'.[43]

Alongside this political attraction, a sustained interest in science also drew Williams-Ellis to the Soviet Union. While employed at *The Spectator*, she attempted to introduce greater coverage on new scientific discoveries, remembering 'asking at editorial meetings what the *Spectator* had to say about, for instance, Einstein's Theory of Relativity, or about Rutherford's atom splitting, or what Niels Bohr was doing, or the rediscovery of Mendel's work on genetics'. In her memory of the board's reaction, she encountered only 'Sceptical looks all round' from the editorial board, and so 'I gave up in the end – I gave up at editorial meetings, that is. But I wasn't finally beaten'.[44] Instead, she wrote two popular nonfiction books on famous scientific voyages, the *H. M. S. Beagle in South America* (1930) and *Men Who Found Out* (1930).[45] This admiration for male scientific travellers, in particular Charles Darwin, provides another way of understanding Williams-Ellis' travels to the Soviet Union, her desire to record Soviet developments and to publicise her findings to the British public.

These changing political and economic realities in Britain, combined with Williams-Ellis' increasing interest in Soviet scientific socialism, resulted in a hardening political commitment that started to affect her literary writing. Her first fiction of the nineteen-thirties, the short story collection *Volcano*, utilises a realist mode of representation to imagine the individual

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[41] Kew, National Archives, KV 2, Amabel Williams-Ellis, KV 2/784.
[42] Amabel Williams-Ellis, 'Correspondence', *New Statesman and Nation*, 31 December 1932, p. 854.
[43] Williams-Ellis, *All Stracheys are Cousins*, p. 126.
[44] Williams-Ellis, *All Stracheys are Cousins*, pp. 69-70, 70-1.
[45] Amabel Williams-Ellis, *H. M. S. Beagle in South America* (London: Watts, 1930); Amabel Williams-Ellis, *Men Who Found Out: Stories of Great Scientific Discoverers* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1930).

subjectivities of a broad range of individuals in pre-revolutionary Russian and Soviet society. This strategy attempts to humanise the revolution through humanising its people, encouraging the reader to reach an understanding beyond commonplace national, cultural and political stereotypes. Williams-Ellis supplements the collection with two stories with British protagonists in order to address specifically domestic issues of misinformation about, and working-class ignorance of, the Soviet Union. Overall, the most rewarding of these stories contain a modernist sensibility that explores through prose the complex nature of experience, memory, and Anglo-Russian cultural contact. This sensibility, however, is frequently overwhelmed by Williams-Ellis' desire for her stories to relate teleologically to the Soviet project in the present day.

The political motivations informing these literary approaches directly connect to Williams-Ellis' travels to the Soviet Union, as well as her later political canvassing when back in Britain. Her 1928 visit to the Soviet Union provided Williams-Ellis with valuable political capital, and on returning to Britain, she was invited to speak on her experiences at meetings of miners in South Wales. Meetings like these furnished Williams-Ellis with a greater understanding of what workers knew, and wanted to know, about the Soviet Union. In her memoir, she remembers how, 'Before adopting a point of view', the Welsh miners 'wanted to know whether Russia was in fact the Fatherland of the Workers, as many propagandists were assuring them, or the graveyard of all idealistic hopes, as progressives of another kind like Leonard Woolf felt sure'. Between these extremes, in her opinion, most workers were unable to study for themselves the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, or indeed any country, because the unemployment crisis, economic depression, lack of social services, means test and insufficient dole, meant that domestic concerns understandably took precedence.[46] This memory was to a certain extent self-serving and not strictly true. There were cultural centres in South Wales that provided workers

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[46] Williams-Ellis, *All Stracheys are Cousins*, pp. 127-134.

with the means to read literature and to understand Marx and the Soviet Union. As Jonathan Rose's *The Intellectual Life of the British Working-Classes* (2001) finds, the South Wales miners' institutes 'were one of the greatest networks of cultural institutions created by working people anywhere in the world'. By 1934, these institutes numbered over one hundred and held an average stock of three thousand volumes on titles including Greek philosophy, Marxist theory and Romantic poetry. Therefore, Rose argues that 'South Wales was a hotbed of labour militancy where, according to historians of the left, many workers were well-versed in Marxist classics'.[47] There is some evidence that Williams-Ellis knew of such centres. She proposed an exhibition of Russian propaganda films to South Wales arranged by the Friends of the Soviet Union.[48] In any case, her retrospective view remains relevant for this chapter in revealing which events she deemed to be most important in her life during this period. With this considered, then, the political purpose of *Volcano* can be understood as an attempt to address questions about the Soviet Union, to bring to attention the international situation, in short, to make the reader 'look abroad'.[49]

Williams-Ellis' earliest formulation of left-wing literature relates directly to her first visit to the Soviet Union. While studying the Donbas coalfields, she also 'tried to find out, not the merits of modern Russian literature, but how the industry worked'. In April 1928, she records her findings in an article titled 'Authors and Publishers in Soviet Russia' for the *New Statesman*. She praises the 'considerable' number of publishers for aspiring writers, the rapid 'two months' publication process, and the 'very large' publishing programme. She details some of the differences between British and Soviet literatures. Soviet writers found 'amazing' the 'lack of politics' in British literature, because they assumed that writers should possess 'definite views' and play a 'definite part' in politics. Despite 'being unable to read Russian', she

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[47] Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working-Classes*, 3rd edn (New Haven: Yale University 2021), pp. 237, 240-243, 244.
[48] National Archives, Amabel Williams-Ellis, KV 2/784.
[49] Williams-Ellis, *All Stracheys are Cousins*, p. 130.

concluded that 'These writers have turned their backs on analytical psychology. They write about human beings as they have seen them – that is, in violent movement'.[50]

Williams-Ellis' final argument here regarding the new Soviet writer's disregard for psychology in favour of capturing the 'violent movement' of the Russian Revolution is almost definitely taken from a Soviet short story collection, *Flying Osip* (1925), that she admires and cites in the *New Stateman* article.[51] Intended for the 'Western reader', this collection brings together nine authors' stories in an attempt to reveal 'the life, the soul, the dynamic sweep, of New Russia'.[52] The 'violent movement' that Williams-Ellis refers to closely corresponds to the character named 'Flying Osip', who relentlessly 'flies' across the land to fight the Whites.[53] While it is possible to see how *Flying Osip* motivated Williams-Ellis to write her own short story collection on the revolution and to think about the revolution's wider effect on literature, her choices of genre and style in *Volcano* are more theoretically developed and persuasively composed.

In her preface to *Volcano*, Williams-Ellis expands upon these findings to outline the problems in Soviet literature and the potential form of a left-wing literature in Britain. She now warns that Soviet writers have already faced several challenges when writing on both the Russian Revolution and their contemporary situation. First, the memory of 1917 was under dispute with the 'younger generation' accusing writers of a 'perverse interest' in 'phases of the revolution that are long since over'. Second, the tumultuous economic and social changes resulting from the first Five-Year Plan meant that a writer's work could be irrelevant as soon as 'the printing presses thump, and the sheets are stitching into a book'. Her 1928 account of

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[50] Amabel Williams-Ellis, 'Authors and Publishers in Soviet Russia', *New Statesman*, 28 April 1928, pp. 77-78 (pp. 77, 78).

[51] Seifulina Shishkov, Kasatkin, and others, *Flying Osip: Stories of New Russia*, trans. by L. S. Friedland and J. R. Piroshnikoff (London: Allen & Unwin, 1925).

[52] Alexander Chramoff, 'Introduction', in Seifulina Shishkov, Kasatkin, and others, *Flying Osip: Stories of New Russia*, trans. by L. S. Friedland and J. R. Piroshnikoff (London: Allen & Unwin, 1925), pp. 7-18 (p. 14).

[53] Ivan Kasatkin, 'Flying Osip', in Seifulina Shishkov, Kasatkin, and others, *Flying Osip: Stories of New Russia*, trans. by L. S. Friedland and J. R. Piroshnikoff (London: Allen & Unwin, 1925), pp. 21-34 (p. 25).

the Soviet publishing industry is reworked here as shaping the form of the country's literature. Williams-Ellis' perception of a rapidly advancing country, both in industry and in literature, left her to conclude that the 'modern Russian reader' would soon find the Western literary canon irrelevant, suggesting 'our modern authors are no good. Ernest Hemingway is as remote as Anthony Trollope. The gap has grown very wide, and, as Russia becomes more settled, it becomes more and more difficult to bridge'.[54]

This belief in a widening gap between Western and Soviet literatures was proclaimed by other left-wing writers throughout the 1930s. In August 1935, when writing of the 'coming of the new man' free from the constraints of capitalism, André Gide was 'confidently awaiting' the moment in the near future when the Soviet writer, 'stealing a march on reality, will precede it, stretch out his hand, blaze the trail for its advance'. In contrast, Western writers 'may have to wait a long time' for this same moment.[55] That same month, Christina Stead observed how Soviet writers 'do not face our problems' of book burnings, 'rigorous censorship', and 'brutal expressions of class conflict' that left-wing writers had to negotiate alongside attempting to write.[56] Jack Lindsay still identified this gap in a 1937 survey of recent fiction for *Left Review*. In his mind, left-wing literature in Britain reflected 'pangs of adolescence' in the genre, whereas Soviet literature represented a 'fully mature world'.[57] He presented Nikolai Ostrovsky's *The Making of a Hero* (later *How the Steel Was Tempered*) as an ideal for its 'entirely objective' narration which 'makes one proud to be a human being'.[58]

At the end of the preface, Williams-Ellis provides a closing meditation on what literature could do, and what *Volcano* did do, differently from history when approaching the Russian Revolution and the Soviet Union. She first highlights the deficiencies in how this period was

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[54] Williams-Ellis, *Volcano*, pp. 12-13.
[55] André Gide, 'The Individual', *Left Review*, 1.11 (August 1935), 447-452 (pp. 451-452).
[56] Christina Stead, 'The Writers Take Sides', *Left Review*, 1.11 (August 1935), 453-462 (pp. 453-454).
[57] Jack Lindsay, 'Book Review: Socialists in Fiction', *Left Review*, 3.2 (March 1937), 108.
[58] Nikolai Ostrovsky, *The Making of a Hero* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1937).

'taking shape at the hands of historians'. Historians relied upon 'generalization, omission, and intelligent guessing' to create 'an orderly series of occurrences'. Realistically representing individuals moving through revolutionary Russia required an understanding of the subjective experience of revolution. In her view, 'the Russian Revolution crashed into the middle of every day. It was so close, and so enormous, that only a scrap could ever be seen at any given time or place'. She imagines the struggle to survive in this period:

> Now it was to get food. Now to fight locusts, now to go out and fetch firewood when the sheepskin coat had gone, and there was sixty degrees of frost. Now there was a drought; now a flood. Now a camel died, and now two brothers quarrelled. Through and over this, violence swept roaring like a forest fire.[59]

The struggle to survive forced the Russian people to exist in a chaotic present. The tasks were never-ending, the climate hostile to life, familial relationships fractious and violence erupting.

In the third part of her preface, with the historical pattern now problematised, Williams-Ellis seeks to answer the question 'What history?'. She deems it necessary to provide a short history of the Russian Revolution and the Soviet Union that contextualised the short stories to follow. She relies upon a familiar historical chronology of the major events of the Russian Revolution from 1905 to 1931. Her short history is sympathetic to the communist cause. The communists formulated 'the creed of modern Russia' in 1921, of which these 'New ideas' are still travelling to the Soviet Union's easternmost reaches by the time of *Volcano*'s publication. This desire to write of an 'infinite combination of characters, fates, and opinions', closely aligned to the great events of the Russian Revolution already familiar to the British public. She

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[59] Williams-Ellis, *Volcano*, pp. 10, 10-11, 11. For a history on the Russian Revolution from this time, see James Mavor, *The Russian Revolution* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1928).

hopes here that her original contribution is to reimagine these great events of history through the perspective of the individual. She suggests that her target readers were

> those whose minds wanders sometimes in looking at a great chart of upheaval, who suddenly smell the burning, or feel uncertain ground. They are for those who remember 'getting-the-boat-off-the ground,' those who lose sight of a principal line that drives and soars under the majestic recording needle of history, and, thus remembering or conjecturing, catch sight of an odd scene cramped into a blank of the graph.[60]

Williams-Ellis here elaborates upon the difference between history and literature. Readers of histories could take comfort in their understanding of revolution through the possession of historical patterns, charts and graphs. Readers of literature were left unsatisfied by these same documents. Charts and graphs in her mind leave readers to imagine the experience of revolution for themselves, resulting in an immersive sensory reaction. Literature captures what history missed. It satisfies the reader's imaginary and emotional longing of experiencing the revolution for themselves, by reproducing the thoughts and feeling of characters, rewriting major events and creating new scenes. In framing *Volcano* against the historical pattern, Williams-Ellis indicates that her fiction satisfies both an intellectual curiosity and emotional engagement. This project is also distinct from later Popular Front historical novels that focussed on anti-fascist politics and English history.[61]

Storm Jameson agreed in her review of *Volcano* with the main arguments Williams-Ellis advances in her book's preface; that historical, journalistic and literary modes of writing the revolution were fundamentally different in approach and result. Jameson likens the historian

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[60] Williams-Ellis, *Volcano*, pp. 13, 13-16, 14, 16, 17.

[61] On the Popular Front historical novel, see Montefiore, *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s*, pp. 139-159; Taylor, *The Popular Front Novel in Britain, 1934-1940*, pp. 93-137.

and reporter to archaeologists who provided the bones to the artist who brings them alive. In her opinion, Williams-Ellis should be considered a short story writer of the 'first rank' because

> The stories are remarkable for the quality of the imagination displayed by them. Mrs. Williams-Ellis' mind moves in a strange world with apparent ease, and yet without losing sight of its strangeness. The vision is a double one – she describes an unfamiliar setting as if she were a native and as if she were seeing it for the first time.[62]

There are reasons to interrogate this review, not least because Williams-Ellis later described Jameson as a 'political mentor'.[63] The concept of 'double vision' itself is opaque and raises several questions. According to what criteria is imagination to be evaluated? How can Williams-Ellis write like a native and a stranger at the same time in practice? It appears that Jameson is identifying two states of seeing that interact with one another. The first is a realistic mode of representation that transports the British reader into Russian and Soviet particularities during revolutionary upheaval. The second is the maintenance of Russian and Soviet particularities as peculiarities.

Despite these perceived merits, one central tension complicates Williams-Ellis' literary project: what is it possible to imagine? As Janet Montefiore rightly suggests, 'the historical novel claims of its characters a representative truth, which is of course implicitly contradicted by the fictionality of the characters themselves'.[64] Williams-Ellis confesses to the reader, 'I have only written about what I could, and not what I would'. Several subjects and groups are left out. For instance, 'there is nothing about the fleet, or armoured trains, or village sorcerers, or the *corps de ballet*. Again the Whites are inadequately represented, though it is obvious that

[62] Storm Jameson, '*Volcano*', pp. 266-267.
[63] Williams-Ellis, *All Stracheys Are Cousins*, p. 128.
[64] Montefiore, *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s*, p. 143.

a much more romantic volume might be written about their adventures'. Williams-Ellis is unable to inhabit every individual subjectivity. Imaginative failures, and thereby omissions, occur with those individuals most vehemently in opposition to the revolution. This dividing line between what is, and is not, possible to imagine contains convenient political implications for the pro-Soviet writer, which are swiftly passed over and dressed up as an opportunity. The final exclamation, 'What stories wait to be told!', disguises Williams-Ellis' own limitations as a politically committed writer as much as it seems to suggest a genuine, objective interest in the history.[65]

Celebrating the subjective imagination reveals that Williams-Ellis is doing something more than reproducing what she witnessed on her travels to the Soviet Union. In her later memoir, she reveals that she drew on her experience of a mining town in the Donbas region in 1928 for the characters, plot and setting for the eighth story in her volume, 'Comrade Spetz'.[66] She also visited and wrote an article about life on a Soviet collective farm in 1930, which informs the setting for the story 'Those High School Children'.[67] It is only in this memoir that she makes the connection between her visits and the stories clear. The original reader of *Volcano* would not have known that its author was by this time a repeat traveller to the Soviet Union. While there are no surviving extra-textual materials that provide additional insight into her motivations behind the writing of *Volcano*, there was an obvious political advantage in choosing to not make reference to herself as a traveller to the Soviet Union, as she often did in her political and journalistic writings. Her experiences would have on the surface complemented her argument that she was realistically representing the individual's experience of the Russian Revolution and the Soviet Union. To admit to as much, however, would foreground her political commitment to the Soviet Union, reveal that her stories functioned as

[65] Williams-Ellis, *Volcano*, pp. 16-17.
[66] Williams-Ellis, *All Stracheys are Cousins*, pp. 113-114.
[67] Amabel Williams-Ellis, 'Life on a Communal Farm in Russia', pp. 10-12.

propaganda, and in turn problematise her formulation of writing according to a realistic mode. In this respect, Williams-Ellis departs from the majority of travellers who wrote fiction, travel writing, and journalism based on their visits to the Soviet Union.

For instance, in 1936, the artist, writer and fellow *Left Review* contributor Pearl Binder foregrounded from the outset of her non-fiction short story collection *Misha and Masha* (1936) that she was a traveller. Her four-sentence preface was written 'from Moscow'. There was a literary point to this inclusion. Binder shared Williams-Ellis' desire to write realistic and sympathetic portraits of Soviet people. She informed the reader that travel shaped her writing and drawing, stating, 'These eight people are chosen at random. They and their life-stories are fact, the names only, in a few cases, being fictitious. The drawings depict contemporary Soviet life'.[68] This preface thereby legitimises the content of Binder's short stories and drawings. Her writing, for Ralph Fox, resulted in 'a truer picture of Socialist life than is to be found in the works of scores of "investigators" into social and economic development. We hear a great deal about the new man and new woman, but so far no one has succeeded in describing them for us'.[69] Fox perceives a key difference between the travel writer and other types of traveller, which we might see as related to Williams-Ellis' critique of the historical pattern. The travel writer is perceived as able to capture the entire lived experience of the individual, whereas the social and economic investigator is blinded by statistical information.

In turning now to the short stories themselves, *Volcano* is most productively read as a reaction against the limitations of historical investigation, a recreation of the complex experience of travel, and a contribution to the establishment of a new fictional form. It was in this final sense that Williams-Ellis wanted her central 'Volcano' metaphor to be understood. For if 'The Volcano has thrown up a new formation with a stratification of its own', the

[68] Pearl Binder, *Misha and Masha: Stories and Drawings* (London: Gollancz, 1936), p. i.
[69] Ralph Fox, 'A Picture of Socialist Life', *Left Review*, 2.16 (January 1937), 913.

implication is that *Volcano*, with is dust jacket sporting a montage of Soviet people, modern industry and architecture, embodies a new way of living life and writing fiction. Williams-Ellis likens her short stories to 'hot potatoes' that 'were roasted in that volcano' of revolutionary tumult.[70] Both *Volcano* and *To Tell The Truth* were published by Jonathan Cape which could boast numerous non-fiction titles on the Soviet Union, including Liam O'Flaherty's *I Went to Russia* (1930), Louis Fischer's *The Soviets In World Affairs* (1930), Maurice Hindus's *Humanity Uprooted* (1929) and *Red Bread* (1931), Bernard Pares's *My Russian Memoirs* (1931), Bruce Hopper's *What Russia Intends* (1931), Mikhail Ilin's *Moscow Has A Plan* (1931).[71] Cape's print run of books on the Soviet Union at this time was not unusual in the publishing industry, with most major publishers in Britain possessing at least a selection. Between 1930 and 1935, Gollancz approximately published twenty-nine titles, Allen & Unwin and Martin Lawrence twenty-seven, the Hogarth Press eight and Routledge three.[72]

The ambitious structure of the collection reflects Williams-Ellis' attempts to provide a comprehensive range of snapshots of the revolution across time and space. It consists of seven vignettes (her terminology 'shreds' or 'hot potatoes') and four short stories of longer length. Each story is placed in a chronological order (1905, 1916-17, 1917, 1918-19, 1919, 1918-19, 1919-20, 1921-22, 1927-28, 1930, undated), and is organised around major events (First World War, murder of Rasputin, civil war, famine, first Five-Year Plan). In spatial terms, Williams-Ellis leaps between named places (St. Petersburg, Bois de Boulogne in Paris, the Volga, Moscow), to vague areas (somewhere in the Baltic provinces, Eastern front, Siberian border),

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[70] Williams-Ellis, *Volcano*, p. 17.
[71] Liam O'Flaherty, *I Went to Russia* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930); Louis Fischer, *The Soviets In World Affairs* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930); Maurice Hindus, *Humanity Uprooted* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929); Maurice Hindus, *Red Bread* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931); Pares, *My Russian Memoirs*; Bruce Hopper, *What Russia Intends* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931); Mikhail Ilin, *Moscow Has A Plan* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931).
[72] This number is the aggregated entries in the bibliography, Grierson, *Books on Soviet Russia, 1917-1942*.

to locations invented ('Yelenskaya') or with no discernible geographic marker (a village, the countryside).[73]

The narrative style of *Volcano* is designed to bring the British reader closer up against Russian and Soviet particularities, while maintaining these particularities as peculiarities. The style of narration is not utilised in the same manner in every story. For instance, the opening story 'At The Shuvaloffs' is Williams-Ellis at her most modernist in her deployment of a first-person narration that seeks to provoke an uneasiness within the reader about how narratives themselves come to be constructed. Reproducing the complexity of experience and memory brings the reader's attention to misinformation in Britain about the Russian Revolution. The story opens at some unknown time, between 1905 and 1913, and place, possibly in England. An unnamed narrator has been invited over for tea with an English aristocrat, Lady Joyce Hilliard, who promises to tell the story of a peasant uprising in 1905, which she experienced first-hand during a holiday at a Baltic country estate. The ensuing conversation effectively reflects the impressionistic texture of individual experience. The narrator finds Lady Joyce's scattered memory and imprecise style of narration lacking, asking herself why she 'couldn't explain more as she went along?'. Her retelling is repeatedly broken up by the narrator's interjections demanding extra details regarding a specific feeling, character, or conversation, bemoaning in an aside that 'Lady Joyce Hilliard would take it for granted that it was her Russia I knew'.[74] Williams-Ellis foregrounds the British traveller as the first source of information on the revolution in *Volcano*, but she suggests that while Lady Joyce is immersed in her memory of her travels, the process of communicating them clearly to others is nearly impossible.

After problematising this first-hand understanding of the uprising, Williams-Ellis then reveals how Lady Joyce's narrative limitations betray a political allegiance to her class. Lady

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[73] Williams-Ellis, *Volcano*, pp. 42, 74, 117, 334, 345, 23, 211, 80, 189, 87, 269.
[74] Williams-Ellis, *Volcano*, p. 23.

Joyce speaks no Russian and we are informed that she relied upon her Russian aristocrat hosts as mediators between her and the peasants. Williams-Ellis creates an increasingly impressionistic narrative to reproduce these barriers of language, culture and class. Lady Joyce assumes that the peasants are aggressive with their unintelligible 'shouting', 'jostling and pushing' and 'battering'. Unable to communicate with them, she finds that they 'didn't seem real' and were likened to 'woodcutters in fairy stories'. Twice does she question her hosts as to what the peasants demanded, and is greeted at first with silence, and then hearsay, with one countess labelling them 'misled children'.[75]

There is no resolution to this unsatisfactory narration. Instead, at the story's conclusion, Lady Joyce recalls how nothing had changed on a return trip in 1913, when she sees the aristocrats in their rebuilt country houses and the peasants in their 'awful little hovels'. The story ends with the narrator leaving the tea unsatisfied, wanting to talk about the atrocities against the peasants, before concluding 'What purpose would it have served to tell Lady Joyce such things?'. The narrator, who has never travelled to Russia, sees through Lady Joyce's narrative, but cannot persuade her to consider an alternative point of view.[76] The primacy of the traveller's individual experience prevents a common understanding. In this story, therefore, Williams-Ellis criticises a certain class of traveller whose privilege prevents them from fully comprehending the reality of peasant life and the nascent desire for a revolution.

Williams-Ellis again considers the limitations inherent to the individual's experience and memory of the revolution in the fourth story 'Bois de Boulogue', about a family of Russian aristocrats who bemoan their exile in Paris. The narrative is less effective than 'At The Shuvaloffs' because Williams-Ellis is more concerned here with drawing attention to the discrepancy between the family's interpretation of their exile and their comfortable reality. The

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[75] Williams-Ellis, *Volcano*, pp. 25, 25-26, 34, 36, 40-41.
[76] Williams-Ellis, *Volcano*, pp. 40, 41.

unnamed mother bemoans ‘at the best Michael is gone and our home is gone’. When a friend exclaims ‘How you suffered! Terrible!’, the narrative undermines this claim with ‘They went on talking, strolling along the gravel in the lemon-coloured sunlight’. On their drive home, the ‘limousine flowed back with them; it flowed like cream out of a silver jug’.[77] This combination of verb choice and heightened sense of colour pervades the entire narrative in an attempt by Williams-Ellis to convince the reader that this family lost nothing as a result of the revolution.

Williams-Ellis returns to the Anglo-Russian divide caused by differences in language, culture, and socio-economic position in ‘Comrade Spetz’. In this story, she imagines a romantic relationship developing between a British traveller, Pierce, and a Russian communist, Lydia, in a time of revolutionary upheaval. Resolving this divide, the text’s argument centres around the individual simultaneously developing personal relationships and a political commitment. This relationship led Jameson to rank ‘Comrade Spetz’ as ‘perhaps the best story in the book’ for the way Williams-Ellis ‘marks the differences between Russian and English by looking at Lydia Rosenstein through the mind of the young Englishman, Pierce’.[78] Jameson’s interpretation, however, fails to mention that this productive exploration of individual difference is ultimately in the service of a conclusion that unsuccessfully attempts to harmonise Pierce’s and Lydia’s personal relationship with a wider political commitment to the revolution.

In the first section of the story, Pierce is an outsider in Russia, much like Lady Joyce, albeit more self-consciously attuned to ‘feeling foreign’. There is no obvious political commitment informing his visit to Russia. He expects to return to Britain to start work as an engineer, refusing ‘to discuss his reasons for having wanted to come to Russia’.[79] The second section is a reworking of Williams-Ellis’ 1928 visit to the Donbas mining region into a heroic narrative following the reconstruction of a fictional mining village ‘Yelenskaya’ and Pierce’s growing

[77] Williams-Ellis, *Volcano*, pp. 75, 78.
[78] Jameson, ‘*Volcano*’, p. 267.
[79] Williams-Ellis, *Volcano*, pp. 119, 127.

political commitment.[80] Pierce's engineering expertise is found out by the village leader and he is told, 'If you are a friend of Russia he will have you'. What follows is an exploration of the tension between the demands placed on Pierce by the village. At first, Pierce 'still felt remote from Yelenskaya and its fate'. Yet over time, his desire merges with the town's, represented by the moment when he takes off his tweed suit in favour of a working clothes.[81]

This growing political commitment is at the same time as Pierce and Lydia's relationship emerges, almost from nowhere. In fact, the sudden imposition of their relationship into the narrative is unbalanced. No work is put in at the beginning of the story by Williams-Ellis to make their relationship convincing. The reader first hears of their attraction when Lydia enters Pierce's dreams, prompting their first kiss and an implausible declaration of love. A structural problem arises out of Williams-Ellis' attempts to balance the narrative between focussing on Pierce's growing political commitment, and his and Lydia's developing relationship. And yet, her subsequent exploration of how their relationship evolves supplies the emotional depth:

> But the more they loved one another, the more they realised their remoteness. Pierce did not even try to make Lydia see his mother in her Sussex village, a rich, soft woman, a little eccentric, weaving silks on a hand-loom, apprehensive and vigorous, cultivated and critical, yet altogether unversed and ignorant. And yet he desperately wanted Lydia to understand everything that had ever happened to him. So he promised himself that someday he would show her.

Pierce is plagued with anxiety regarding the potentially irreconcilable cultural remoteness between himself and Lydia as their personal relationship develops. If he is unable to make her

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[80] Williams-Ellis, *All Stracheys Are Cousins*, p. 113.
[81] Williams-Ellis, *Volcano*, p. 157, 161, 171.

understand his culture, past, or home, then this difference threatens their relationship. Yet there is a sense here that Pierce himself cannot see his own home clearly. The number of adjectives used in the one line to describe his mother, some of which conflict with one another as much as they are attempts to clarify, suggests that Pierce corrects his memory as he remembers. The only way to gain or regain this understanding is to return home. And yet, Pierce's hopeful conclusion is immediately undercut by his difficulties in understanding Lydia's personality and culture, admitting, 'If he had to remain strange to Lydia she was strange to him, even though it was her country they were in'.[82]

Disruptive cultural encounters with Russian or Soviet people was a reoccurring motif in left-wing literature written by British travellers to the Soviet Union. Ralph Fox's *Storming Heaven* (1928) and Harold Heslop's *The Crime of Peter Ropner* (1934) explore how Russian women caused psychological turmoil within their Western, male protagonists, leading them to both commit murder.[83] Naomi Mitchison's *We Have Been Warned* (1935) represents a more developed exploration of the Western individual struggling to reconcile their own beliefs with the collective demands of the individual in the Soviet Union.[84]

In the story, 'Listen, Kolya!', Williams-Ellis uses third-person narration to reimagine and re-evaluate a major historical event familiar to the British reader, the plot to assassinate Rasputin. This narration is restricted to representing the event from the perspective of a seemingly peripheral figure, a working-class child and maid named Sonia. In her work for a countess who aids the plotters, the events leading up to the assassination play out in the background of Sonia's life. The narrative instead follows her work in a St. Petersburg mansion and time spent at home in poverty with her family. If a reader took Williams-Ellis' recommendation to read the stories in chronological order, they would notice clear intertextual

[82] Williams-Ellis, *Volcano*, pp. 177-180, 182.
[83] Fox, *Storming Heaven*; Harold Heslop, *The Crime of Peter Ropner*: A Novel (London: Fortune, 1934).
[84] Naomi Mitchison, *We Have Been Warned*, 2nd edn (Kilkerran: Kennedy & Boyd, 2012), pp. 217-332.

parallels between 'At The Shuvaloffs' and this story. The privileged space of the country estate occupied by Lady Joyce and the Russian ruling class is revisited here from the radically different perspective of a working-class child. This new perspective provides additional details to Lady Joyce's account, including insights into the wealth disparities of different classes. Sonia's mother stood 'all night, sometimes half the next day, in those bread queues'. In these times of famine, she had to steal '*Pate de fois gras*, truffles, bottled mushrooms, and littles pots of *Confiture St. James*' from the countess in order to feed her family. The countess is completely oblivious to these struggles, too busy getting dressed in 'her special grey shoes with the extra high heels … her pearls, the spider web brooch'. In this story, then, there is a level of specificity and materiality entirely missing from the previous story.[85]

Williams-Ellis' choice of a working-class child protagonist in 'Listen, Kolya!' carries with it several useful literary functions. First of all, a combination of Sonia's class position and naivety means that she is an outsider looking into the conspiracy to murder Rasputin which contributes to the story's sense of drama, mystery and intrigue. Williams-Ellis immerses the reader in these intrigues, before revealing that this experience entirely misses the wider working-class revolutionary ferment in St. Petersburg leading up to the 1917 revolution. Sonia's naivety serves the story's conclusion, where the significant revelation of Rasputin's assassination turns out to be an anti-climactic one. At the story's conclusion, Sonia seeks to confide in her brother Kolya about the assassination. She frets that 'Any day now I might get shut up in prison now. I feel you must know!'. He retorts, 'Little Fool! Little Dupe! That Barina of yours! nor her three officers! nor her password! nor her mysteries! will ever do anything – so for God's sake shut up!'. As a worker at the Putilov works, Kolya predicts, 'Something else is coming. Something very big!'. To prove his point, he steals a policeman's cap and throws it

[85] Williams-Ellis, *Volcano*, pp. 46, 42-3, 44.

into a canal without any retribution.[86] This unexpected conclusion effectively draws out an understanding in both Sonya and the reader that the working class have reached a state of revolutionary consciousness. Williams-Ellis' next novel *To Tell The Truth* focussed on raising the revolutionary consciousness of the British working class.

'A wolf in sheep's clothing': Defamiliarization and Revolution

Williams-Ellis turned her attention to Britain in her next novel *To Tell The Truth*. She wrote according to the same political purpose but in a different form. This shift was explained by her in a 27 July 1933 letter to Allan Hutt, the book reviewer for the *Daily Worker*. Having learnt from her brother John Strachey that he had discussed *To Tell The Truth* with Hunt before its publication, she asked 'if, in reviewing, you wouldn't give away too definitively what is, I hope, the fact, i.e. that it [*sic*] a wolf in sheep's clothing'. The 'wolf in sheep's clothing' meant the 'propaganda sufficiently unaccustomed and concealed' so that the reader would not 'regard it as a propaganda book at all'.[87] Williams-Ellis reinterpreted the well-known saying as the saying which best captures the underlying political strategy behind her approach to writing politically committed fiction. Effective propagandising was the art of disguise. False prophets were replaced by prophets of revolution, who desired to conceal their arguments so as to manipulate the reader to arrive, seemingly independently, at the same anti-capitalist and revolutionary point of view. Williams-Ellis' request for no spoilers suggests that she thought the effectiveness of the novel's political arguments rested upon the reader's mind encountering them without prior warning.

[86] Williams-Ellis, *Volcano*, pp. 60, 61, 72.
[87] Manchester, Labour History Archive, Allan Hutt Papers, CP/IND/HUTT, fol. 1.

In his 2 August reply, Hunt pressed Williams-Ellis to clarify exactly what she expected from him. He wrote back that 'I must say that in general I was very pleased, although there are some passages which I do not think hit home'. Responding to her request for a wolf-free review of *To Tell The Truth*, he inquired 'I am not quite clear what it is you want me to do in reviewing the book. Am I to pretend that it is really a sheep and conceal the wolf completely?'. This confusion led him to seek a 'chance of talking this over' with Williams-Ellis 'some time before' the book's publication.[88] While no record of a meeting survives, in the 13 September issue of *Daily Worker*, Hunt's review appeared. He ignores Williams-Ellis request, subtitled the review 'Learning Reality', and spoiled every stage of the satire. His failure to disguise Williams-Ellis' authorial intent reflects the tensions of attempting to write propaganda in an experimental novelistic mode. In his review, Hunt criticises the novel for how its 'handling is too gentle, and in the early part some of the phrasing about the Soviet Union (though it is satirical) is certainly ambiguous'.[89] By revealing the novel's central conceit against Williams-Ellis' wishes, Hunt not only implies that her 'ingenious' form diluted the arguments in favour of revolution in Britain, but that it also leaves open the possibility for interpretations unfavourable to revolution and the Soviet Union. The central tension in Williams-Ellis' literary project is the possibility that her disguised propaganda was too successful. Posing a similar question in Williams-Ellis' terms, what if her readers misidentified the wolf in sheep's clothing to be a sheep?

To Tell The Truth takes the form of a satire that exposes and criticises British society under capitalism. The novel is set in an imagined future when the West and the Soviet Union begin to end hostilities and trade with one another. The narrative follows Pavel Pedersson, a young communist, as he travels abroad for the first time. Andy Croft correctly remarks that the novel 'turned the conventional anti-Soviet travelogue on its head'.[90] Initially part of a Soviet

[88] Labour History Archive, Allan Hutt Papers, CP/IND/HUTT, fol. 1.
[89] Hunt, 'An Ingenious Social Satire', p. 4.
[90] Croft, *Red Letter Days*, p. 225.

delegation to Denmark, Pavel discovers that Soviet propaganda entirely misrepresents life under capitalism. Much to the consternation of his fellow delegates, he consequently becomes disillusioned with the Soviet Union. The second half of the narrative revolves around Pavel's investigation of working class life in Britain. His political and cultural prejudices lead him to misinterpret his surroundings in humorous ways. He supposes that 'completely black' statues commemorate Britain's colonial history and a crowd of football fans are mistaken as rebellious workers.[91] With the sheep's clothing draped over the narrative in the form of a naïve protagonist, there is a subtle shift in narration to enable the wolf to emerge in the form of legitimate criticisms of British society under capitalism. Williams-Ellis' continued interest in writing propaganda that did not announce itself as propaganda relies upon the technique of defamiliarization to critique capitalism in Britain. The reader is caught off-guard, as they were in 'Listen Kolya', in experiencing a reality restricted through the eyes of a naïve youth. In this novel, the reader is forced to see their own country and reality with fresh eyes. Although this method is associated with Viktor Shklovsky and his 1917 essay 'Art as Technique', which was a reading of Leo Tolstoy's prose that identified a 'method of seeing things out of their normal context', there is no evidence that Williams-Ellis knew his work, although defamiliarization was a staple of British modernist fiction.[92] As Williams-Ellis herself noted as a disclaimer to Hunt, this strategy was 'unaccustomed' in left-wing literature at the time.[93]

Williams-Ellis' attempt to make Britain strange, however, should not be seen in isolation. There was a broader movement in fiction, travel writing and journalism in the nineteen-thirties where left-wing writers sought to provoke a greater awareness of working-class poverty amongst policy makers and middle-class readers. In fiction, Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* (1933) and Walter Brierley's *Means-Test Man* (1935) focussed on the individual

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[91] Williams-Ellis, *To Tell The Truth*, pp. 91-92.
[92] Viktor Shlovsky, 'Art As Technique', in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 3rd edn (Chichester, Sussex: John Wiley, 2017), pp. 8-15 (p. 11).
[93] Labour History Archive, Allan Hutt Papers, CP/IND/HUTT, fol. 1.

experience of social and economic hardship in a realistic style, without any overt political message.[94] Heslop wrote from his own experiences as a miner in *The Gate of a Strange Field* (1929), *Goaf* (1934) and *Last Cage Down* (1935). Simon Blumenfeld described the Jewish East End of London in *Jew Boy* (1935).[95] In journalism and travel writing, middle-class writers published travel accounts of these unfamiliar worlds. Aldous Huxley in 1931 wrote two articles for the *Nash's Pall Mall Magazine* on the foreignness of North East England. The first, 'Abroad in England', opens by addressing the seemingly contradictory title:

> Abroad in England? Yes, abroad; for varying degrees we are all foreigners even in our own country. How little of this England of which we are citizens, how absurdly little, for anyone of us, is "home"! Each of us inhabits his own world, a world whose boundaries are fixed, for him and for those who are like him, by temperament, by upbringing, by opportunity. Fixed almost irrevocably.

He hoped to alert readers to the failings of the educated class in London, how they dealt in 'generalisation' and 'abstraction' without having 'taken the trouble to come and look for themselves at the particular facts'.[96] This presentation of working-class life was taken a step further by George Orwell, who tramped alongside the homeless. His early journalism 'The Spike' (1931), 'The Clink' (1932) and 'Common Lodging House' (1932) describes the numerous difficulties of living precariously at the edge of society.[97] Full length books followed in *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) and *The Road To Wigan Pier* (1937).[98]

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[94] Walter Greenwood, *Love on the Dole: A Tale of the Two Cities* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933); Walter Brierley, *Means Test Man* (London: Methuen, 1935).
[95] Simon Blumenfeld, *Jew Boy* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935).
[96] Aldous Huxley, 'Abroad in England', *Nash's Pall Mall Magazine*, 87.456 (May 1931), 16-84 (p. 84).
[97] George Orwell, *Essays* (London: Everyman's Library, 2002), pp. 8-15, 21-29, 30-32.
[98] George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (London: Gollancz, 1933).

To Tell The Truth is an experiment in the raising of consciousness of the working class through fiction. Like *Volcano*'s Lady Joyce, and the exiled family in Paris, experience and memory is mediated by pre-existing political, cultural and economic prejudices in *To Tell The Truth*.[99] In this case, Pavel's limited knowledge of Britain, and his presumptions regarding the reality experienced by the British people, are the source of much of the novel's humour. An omniscient third-person narration describes Pavel's travels through Britain. These descriptions follow a typical formula. A particular aspect of British society and culture is described first from the heightened perspective of Pavel, before a conflicting reality is presented by the narrator to the reader. In one particularly amusing instance, Pavel hears snatches of conversation from a crowd in London and mistakenly believes that 'Kick off, 2.30' refers to the English proletariat's plans to stage a revolution. The narrator downplays his excitement at this idea, informing the reader that the crowd is nothing more than football fans discussing the time of an upcoming derby football match between Arsenal and Tottenham Hotspur. This simple misunderstanding is taken to an absurd degree by Williams-Ellis, as the word 'Spurs' makes Pavel assume 'Cavalry! Cossacks! Calvary to ride down the workers!'. He is stunned by the bravery shown by the these revolutionaries and determines it to be a well-known 'English characteristic'. The source of humour here is the differences between Soviet and British life, that Pavel expects to find his new surroundings conforming to the teachings of Marx and Soviet propaganda. His reactions to British culture are scattered throughout the narrative. He is shocked by the 'ferocious strength' of a cup of tea. A parrot seems to say 'Pretty Policy!' rather than 'pretty Polly'.[100] These reactions are not revolutionary by themselves. Rather, Williams-Ellis creates these scenes to set up the critique of capitalism to come later. Pavel's experience of familiar aspects of British culture has two main rhetorical purposes. First,

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[99] It is also possible to read *To Tell The Truth* as a sequel to the story in *Volcano* titled 'Those High School Children', in which an eager komsomol (also named Pavel) enjoys life on a collective farm and is interested in travelling to America, see Williams-Ellis, *Volcano*, pp. 269-328.
[100] Williams-Ellis, *To Tell The Truth*, pp. 92, 104.

his fresh look at British culture is a source of humour and allows the reader to experience it for the first time. Second, it makes clear to the reader that Pavel is experiencing British culture outside of the view of his Soviet delegation.

Pavel's naivety and cultural prejudice prepares the ground for Williams-Ellis to mount a critique against contemporary capitalism in Britain, leaving the reader to reconsider their own country with fresh, more critical eyes. After Pavel's misunderstanding with the football fans, his American travel companion Hake first admonishes Pavel for assuming revolution in Britain is imminent, explaining 'Demonstrations – spinach! Don't think politics are allowed to disarrange life over her the way football or a race meeting is!'. He then informs Pavel of a recent case where 'The mayor is out playing golf, and some stones get knocked off the top of his garden wall and three communists get jailed for six months'. Just as Pavel's yearning for revolution in Britain is revealed to be ridiculous, Williams-Ellis inserts a relatively plausible criticism of the British judicial system. As the narrative unfolds, Hake's attempts at 'furthering Pavel's political education' are presented as problematic because the American is no expert on the country. A group of workers mention the Means Test that had resulted in a family's eviction, leaving Hake puzzled as he 'knew a little about English law', before being informed himself that the landlord could raise the rents once the family was removed. In another instance, the narrator explains how the police arrested a man after he failed to commit suicide due to ill-health and high rent. As the omniscient narrator, not Pavel, describes these far-fetched stories, the reader assumes that this tragedy is true. After the most comical misunderstanding with the football fans, there is a subtle shift whereby Pavel's foreignness conversely provides him with a penetrating insight. The narrator informs the reader, 'And yet the foreigner is not so wrong as the other natives assure him he is. There are typicalities and resemblances that only the foreigner can see – resemblances that the native, intent on distinguishing difference, fails to observe'. Pavel is transformed into a less naïve character just at the time as the narrator reveals

Britain to be in a state of crisis. By the novel's conclusion, Pavel returns to the Soviet Union, the narrator giving the justification,

> 'His Russia might be poor still and clumsy and rough as a colt … But neither hope, nor skill, not life, was being wasted. Slowly all these wants would be fulfilled, because they all had their faces turned the same way and they were awake'.[101]

Hunt's objection to the novel becomes clear. There is no enthusiastic endorsement of the version of the Soviet Union that he and *Daily Worker* disseminated. Rather, Williams-Ellis frames the regime as the least worst alternative. Williams-Ellis' closing argument here is that while the Soviet Union could not yet compete with the West, the regime was at least admirably working towards social progress, though she leaves unmentioned the specifics of this development.

Contemporary reviews likened Pavel to a noble savage without acknowledging the political purpose behind this characterisation. In *The Bookman*, a P. Weston Edwards criticised the novel's 'faults of structure and method' which made it 'unlikely to appeal to any but the already converted'. In their mind, the novel's 'error is obvious at once. The temptation to deal in black-and-white is irresistible, and the resulting book is sure to depart widely from those mixed motives and uncertain characters that make the greys of real life'.[102] There is no evidence that Weston Edwards read or reviewed *Volcano*. H. J. Massingham in *The Sunday Times* characterised 'Pavel playing the part of Voltaire's noble savage, confronted with the moral pretensions and diseased actualities of society', before spending the rest of his review wondering if an uncorrected printing error had resulted in the novel being set in 1943 rather

[101] Williams-Ellis, *To Tell The Truth*, pp. 94, 103, 99, 102, 99, 96, 97, 106, 201.
[102] P. Weston Edwards, 'To Tell the Truth', *The Bookman*, 85.507 (December 1933), 455.

than 1933.[103] Orlo Williams in *The Times Literary Supplement* was more perceptive in commending Williams-Ellis for a 'good variation on the "Noble Savage" idea', while noting the 'underlying sting' of her satire.[104]

Williams-Ellis was not the only left-wing writer to defamiliarize Britain in order to radicalise its population. In January 1935, Edward Upward wrote a short story 'The Island' for *Left Review*. 'The Island' takes the form of a travel brochure advert that advertises revolutionary action. Benjamin Kohlmann finds that the story 'aims for a prophetic tone which rejects both the past (and its 'nostalgia') and the present ('as you saw it ... today') in favour of a Communist future'.[105] This 'prophetic tone' of a Communist future departs from Williams-Ellis, who deliberately underplays the achievements of communist revolution as realised in the Soviet Union. In contrast, Upward writes in the second person to directly seize the reader's attention, imitate a conversation, and urge for revolutionary action. The narrative opens with the question 'What are you fond of?' and lists typical leisure pursuits, such as enjoying the weather, girls, or the cinema. The reader is then directed to 'Look across the real water' to an unspecified 'island'. At first, nothing appears unique about this the island, 'the sand is unarguably sand, the earth is earth, the limestone limestone'. What follows is an interpretation of the potential reactions of the readers to this sight. They are not 'wholly convinced' by this picturesque image of a holiday. They are instead preoccupied 'about rates and rents, or about feeding and clothing your children, or holding your jobs down'. In juxtaposing this idealised image of an island with the reader's daily struggles to survive, the narrator then exclaims, 'To hell with this slave now with that slave-life, that life not fit for beasts, down with it, drown it, throw it casually away'. At this moment the island undergoes transformation. There is evidence

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[103] H. J. Massingham, 'Ten Years Hence', *The Sunday Times*, 3 September 1933, p. 8.
[104] Orlo Williams, 'To Tell the Truth', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 1649 (7 September 1933), 590.
[105] Benjamin Kohlmann, 'Writing of the Struggle: An Introduction to Edward Upward's Life and Works', in *Edward Upward and Left-wing Literary Culture in Britain*, ed. by Benjamin Kohlmann (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 1-19 (p. 7).

that the island previously inhabited 'Celtic, Roman, Saxon, Norman' histories. And yet, Upward refuses to fall into nostalgia in idealising a vision of a past England. He instead likens the island to England.[106] In momentarily particularising the island as Britain, Upward ensures that the reader feels connected to changing their own reality. Williams-Ellis' own experiment in making Britain strange again, then, did prepare the ground for Upward to develop this style according to a different political strategy.

'It is not the business of the artist to propagandize': *Left Review* and Revolution

> But we each had to admit that the task of writing in our own language with spirit when we were writing about the newer political ideas is in fact very difficult.[107]

In October 1934, one year after the publication of *To Tell The Truth*, Williams-Ellis outlined the immediate task for left-wing writers in an article titled 'Not So Easy' for the *Left Review*'s first issue.[108] This overlooked article amounts to her most substantive contribution to the relationship between propaganda and literary writing in the nineteen-thirties. As her choice of title foregrounds, the movement faced several critical obstacles. While in New York as part of an American Inquiry Commission investigating the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany, she participated in an off-duty meeting with three other revolutionaries from America, France and Germany to discuss the state of the international communist revolution.[109] In her summary of the meeting the most urgent concern to address was the 'worst disease' of a poorly circulating working class press. After sharing stories about the threats made against readers, suppression of suppliers, and the difficulties of a lack of money, the American identified failing 'to get out

[106] Edward Upward, 'The Island', *Left Review*, 1.4 (January 1935), 104-110 (pp. 104-105, 108, 110).
[107] Amabel Williams-Ellis, 'Not So Easy', *Left Review*, 1.1 (October 1934), 39-41 (p. 39).
[108] Williams-Ellis, 'Not So Easy', p. 39.
[109] Williams-Ellis, *All Cousins Are Stracheys*, p. 147.

a paper that folk wanted to read!' to be the root cause behind this poor circulation. Williams-Ellis concurs with their assessment. Left-wing writers who relied upon 'technical jargon' and 'political technicality' in their political propaganda 'put off' the 'unconvinced worker' from learning about revolutionary politics. She cited as overused political abstractions 'Deviation', 'Victimization', 'Task, 'Mass Struggle' and 'Ideology'. The German responded 'It may be difficult to write about modern politics in popular language, but it has got to be done. It is absolutely necessary'. A new style of writing political propaganda beyond a 'phraseology of the left' was needed. Political abstraction itself remained necessary for Williams-Ellis as an essential tool of communication for revolutionaries well-versed in Marxist theory. She likened professional political writing to science writing in how both forms avoided the use of 'ordinary language' in an attempt to not 'write inaccurately'.[110] Political writing reworked into more popular forms of propaganda had the potential to reach a far wider audience.

At this point in the article, Williams-Ellis presents her own theory of left-wing literature. Literary writing, as with propaganda, had to work out effective methods to promote communist revolution. A large part of this working out required the application of Marxist theory in the field of literature. She explained to readers of *Left Review* that

> We seek to move our readers, to make them see what we see, to show them a world that seems to them inchoate in the focus of a definite and intricate pattern. All art has in it an element of science, that is to say, the fitting on to a particular section of the real world of a hypothesis. Our hypothesis is Dialectical Materialism. We formalize; we make a pattern; we put the thing seen into a particular focus. The fact that our pattern is – as patterns go – new, is both our difficulty and our opportunity.[111]

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[110] Williams-Ellis, 'Not So Easy', p. 39.
[111] Williams-Ellis, 'Not So Easy', p. 39.

Literary writing this time is likened to a science. Dialectical materialism, 'a body of theory taken to be true of concrete reality', functioned as the writer's starting point.[112] Such an approach promises to provide the writer with an objective organisation of the material and social forces in contemporary society. Like the propagandist, the writer needs to infuse this objective ordering of reality with an emotional range and depth to 'move' the reader's sensibilities. This formulation also had an impact on form. In *Volcano*, Williams-Ellis formulated a theory of historical fiction that sought to recreate the 'inchoate' world of Russia in revolution, whereas *To Tell The Truth* represented her own attempt to 'formalize' a 'pattern' of contemporary capitalism in Britain. Her use of pattern in this case suggests something different from the historical pattern criticised in *Volcano*. According to Williams-Ellis, knowledge of dialectical materialism provided left-wing writers with access to a systemisation of reality that could be successfully disseminated to the reader. In a departure from *Volcano*, she now dismisses individual experience as underdeveloped, 'inchoate', and therefore less effective than this dialectical pattern.

While Williams-Ellis identifies an 'opportunity' for experimentation in left-wing literature, she argues in favour of charting a middle-course between inheriting novelistic techniques and looking for new forms to meet the demands of the revolution. She asks the reader 'Should we ask ourselves how the best writers of the past and the present have gone about it when they wanted to make us see, and feel, and hear their world?'. Writers of the 'new point of view' who 'are all for abandoning the old technique' inadvertently neglect the potential utility of literature as propaganda. A total revolution in content and form could conversely alienate the reader. As well as formalising the pattern of dialectical materialism in literature, Williams-Ellis warned

[112] *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. by Tom Bottomore, and others, 3rd edn (Oxford Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 121.

writers to consider how a work of art 'is not complete until it has been received'. The danger with a total revolution in literature for Williams-Ellis was that experimental fictional forms would remain 'incomplete because they mean something only to the creator'. A balance needed to be found between existing techniques and formal innovations. Political propaganda could be more easily transmitted through existing language and techniques as they were already familiar to the reader. Williams-Ellis remained aware of the potential limitations of utilising existing forms. She advocated for one suitable formal innovation that connected back to the obscure 'phraseology of the left' in propaganda writing. In literature, words such as 'Home', 'Flag', and 'Mother' were 'overused'. They now signified 'infamy' and 'boredom' which produced in the reader a 'slight nausea'. Left-wing writers, for Williams-Ellis, should think carefully when using existing forms in their attempts 'to convey a new idea'.[113]

This entwined theory of writing propaganda and left-wing literature reflects Williams-Ellis' concerns in the middle of the nineteen-thirties. Over this period, she urged her fellow writers to leave daily political organisation and administration to their less literary comrades and to get back to the important task of charting this new course in literature. Williams-Ellis, unlike Fox, thought that writers made 'third-rate politicians' meaning that their political work was often a 'waste of time'.[114] There is a sense here that writing for Williams-Ellis is a more pressing and prestigious activity than political administration. Writers would be better placed to utilise their writing skills on behalf of achieving a socialist revolution in Britain. To this end, propaganda and literary writing needed to become more effective in disseminating political messages.

Secondary scholarship focussing on Williams-Ellis' contributions to *Left Review* has found her contributions lacking in literary and political sophistication. Critics argue that her coverage of the Soviet Writers' Congress fails to understand the theoretical tenets of Soviet socialist

[113] Williams-Ellis, 'Not So Easy', pp. 40, 41.
[114] 'Paris Congress Speeches', *Left Review*, 1.11 (August 1935), 469-475 (pp. 474-75).

realism. H. Gustav Klaus is clearly perplexed by Williams-Ellis' account of the Soviet Writer's Congress when asserting, 'strangely enough in her report she neither mentioned the concept of Socialist Realism nor gave much space to the other leading theme, the taking-over and critical revaluation of the bourgeois literary tradition, and one cannot help wondering whether she fully understood what was on the agenda'.[115] John Connor has it that she was 'perfectly convinced' by everything that she saw at the congress.[116] Critics have also debated the success of her other major contribution, the literary competitions for working class readers of *Left Review*. David Margolies reads *Left Review*'s literary competitions as a 'programme that had significant democratic implications'. Despite this positive account, Margolies neglects Williams-Ellis' role when attributing credit for this achievement, in favour of nameless 'editors' who supposedly all equally 'encouraged readers to become writers themselves'.[117] Christopher Hilliard disproves this generalisation and frames these competitions as Williams-Ellis' own 'pet project' that was criticised by *Left Review* contributors for being problematically hierarchical in form and stylistically wanting in results; they were eventually phased out from the magazine entirely.[118] While these interpretations of Williams-Ellis' contributions to *Left Review* are not necessarily wrong, critics neglect the long view of her political and literary career. In considering this long view, it becomes clear that her contributions to the magazine were in fact extensions of her working out how to improve the effectiveness of literature as propaganda.

Following Williams-Ellis' formulation of left-wing literature in 'Not So Easy', *Left Review* contributors and readers at length debated the relationship between art and propaganda. Clear in these later discussions was that her formulation pleased almost no one. In advocating for literature as propaganda, as well as the use of established techniques, she occupies an

[115] Klaus, 'Socialist Fiction in the 1930s', p. 17.
[116] Connor, 'Anglo-Soviet Literary Relations in the Long 1930s', p. 321.
[117] Margolies, 'Literature and Democracy,' pp. 73-82, 74.
[118] Hilliard, 'Producers by Hand and by Brain', p. 44.

unorthodox position. Only Douglas Garman was closely aligned Williams-Ellis' desire to use established forms in the writing of left-wing literature. Garman agreed with Williams-Ellis when arguing that 'it is of the greatest importance that we should make the fullest possible use of the literature of the past, so that by reorientating our experience of it to a revolutionary view-point we can make it serve as the basis for a newly revitalised and really contemporary form of expression'.[119]

This desire to utilise old forms for the purposes of writing literature as propaganda was an unpopular view in the pages of early issues of *Left Review*. In this environment, Slater felt it necessary to write, 'I imagine that is accepted by readers of *Left Review* that "literature is propaganda". But I am not sure that we emphasise often enough that the most lasting and persuasive propaganda is literature'.[120] A number of contributors proceeded to crudely evaluate past literature in relation to a central tenet of historical materialism, that 'class position, so defined, determines characteristic consciousness or world view of its members'.[121] In literary criticism, this thesis practiced without sophistication meant that class position determined established techniques. Spender later suggested that communist critics exhibited a 'profoundly hypocritical attitude' in how they 'patronized Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Balzac, Blake, and anyone else they cared to discuss'.[122] In his survey of Malory, Milton and Shakespeare titled 'Art and Propaganda', Edgell Rickword asserted 'It is misleading to talk of works of art without reference to the social environment as well as the actual age in which they were produced'. He identifies Milton as a member of the 'rising bourgeois' and traced how his class status had a 'drastic effect' on *Paradise Lost*.[123]

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[119] Douglas Garman, 'Controversy', *Left Review*, 1.5 (February 1935), 179-183 (p. 181).
[120] Montagu Slater, 'The Purpose of *Left Review'*, *Left Review*, 1.9 (June 1935), 359-365 (p. 361).
[121] *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, p. 209.
[122] Spender, *World Within World*, p. 251.
[123] Edgell Rickword, 'Art and Propaganda', *Left Review*, 1.2 (November 1934), 44-45 (p. 44).

While several contributors agreed with Williams-Ellis' view of literature as propaganda, they conversely argued for a clean break from established forms, so that a genuinely proletarian culture might flourish. Alec Brown represents the extreme of the view that writing should be made understandable for the working class, in asking, 'WHOM ARE WE WRITING FOR AND HOW?'. He advocated for a complete proletarianisation of fiction in his proposed slogan 'LITERARY ENGLISH FROM CAXTON TO US IS AN ARTIFICAL JARGON OF THE RULING CLASS; WRITTEN ENGLISH BEGINS WITH US'.[124] Simon Blumenfield agreed with Brown, arguing that 'The workers are no longer content to sit back and lap up blindly the honeyed phrases of the classical stylists who warned us off as intruders, saying that was have no place in Literature. On the contrary, Literature belongs to us. The next phase is Literature of the working class'.[125]

Other writers disagreed with any kind of equivalence that flattened literature into propaganda. Randall Swingler suggested, 'it is not the business of the artist to propagandize, that art cannot be limited by the imposition of a political creed'. He argued that a writer is most effective when 'he is undergoing experience and exercising his faculties in genuine interrelation with mankind'. In this sense, left-wing literature would depart from modernist literature in moving beyond 'individual interests and closely circumscribed emotions'.[126] Cecil Day-Lewis also warned 'that the imaginative writer who simply uses characters to express a political philosophy will find that he has produced, not a novel or a play, but an illustrated text book'.[127] Therefore, in situating Williams-Ellis' formulation of left-wing literature alongside other *Left Review* contributors, it becomes clear that her unusual combination of concerns, from

[124] Alec Brown, 'Controversy', *Left Review*, 1.3 (December 1934), 75-80 (pp. 76-77).
[125] Simon Blumenfield, 'Controversy', *Left Review*, 1.3 (December 1934), 75-80 (p. 80).
[126] Randall Swingler, 'Controversy', *Left Review*, 1.3 (December 1934), 75-80, (p. 78).
[127] Cecil Day-Lewis, 'Controversy, *Left Review*, 1.4 (January 1935), 125-129 (pp. 128-129).

improving the effectiveness of propaganda, to relying upon existing techniques, resulted in her occupying an unorthodox position never likely to be popular.[128]

The timing of Williams-Ellis' article 'Not So Easy' is also worth considering. While there is no evidence detailing the exact date of composition, the article appears in *Left Review* a month after the Soviet Writers' Congress, yet a month prior to her account of the congress. When Williams-Ellis returned to Britain from the Soviet Union for the third time in 1934, she remained convinced that the literary experiments emanating from Moscow represented an ideal model for left-wing writers to follow. According to Philip Bounds, it is clear that 'what most attracted her to Soviet culture was the impression the leading authors had all secured a mass audience'.[129] Her account of the ten days spent in attendance at the Soviet Writers' Congress focusses on describing an idealised relationship between the Soviet writer and reader. The *Spectator* deemed Williams-Ellis' experience valuable enough that they commissioned an article a week after the event. In this article, she decides to not take up space repeating technical literary discussions, which in her opinion 'could be imagined as taking place in any conference of writers', and instead the reader's attention instead on the extra-textual, 'unique' interludes. These moments included a miner's deputation who spoke to the audience of their enjoyment of books, and children from Eastern Siberia who wrote of their lives and presented the results directly to Maxim Gorky.[130] They made such an impression on Williams-Ellis that she included identical examples in a new article for *Left Review* a month later.[131] As she remembered in her memoirs, she wanted to reflect in these articles an impressionistic account of the event as a

[128] As the decade progressed, Williams-Ellis' maligned position later appeared more popular. In the July 1936 issue of *Left Review*, its coverage of the French Section of the International Association of Writers for the Defence found René Etiemble and André Malraux argue for writers to think more carefully about the 'heritage of the past', see Derek Kahn, 'International Writers in London', *Left Review*, 2.10 (July 1936), 481-491 (pp. 484-485); André Malraux, 'Our Cultural Heritage', *Left Review*, 2.10 (July 1936), 491-496.
[129] Bounds, *British Communism and the Politics of Literature, 1928-1939*, p. 78.
[130] Amabel Williams-Ellis, 'Moscow's Aunts to Writers', *Spectator*, 7 September 1934, p. 320.
[131] Amabel Williams-Ellis, 'Soviet Writers' Congress', *Left Review*, 1.2. (November 1934), 17-28.

spectacle, writing what 'had pleased and refreshed me - reader participation, the crowds, and the air of festivity'.[132]

Although for William Empson in *Some Version of the Pastoral* (1935), 'What seems clear from the varying accounts of the position of authors in Russia is that no one definition is generally accepted', other left-wing writers shared Williams-Ellis' idealised view of the relationship between the Soviet writer and their readers.[133] Montagu Slater wrote with bitter indignation that 'only in the U.S.S.R. is it in practice possible for writers to turn from their typewriters for six months and take with a sigh of relief a six month spell in the factory'.[134] Andre Gide asserted that

> The U.S.S.R. to-day offers us an unprecedented sight, one of immense unhoped-for and may I say, exemplary importance. Here is a land where the writer can connect directly with his readers. Instead of swimming against the current as we must, he has only to allow himself to be carried by the tide. In the reality around him he can find at once inspiration, a method and the immediate echo of his work.[135]

In the Soviet Union, there appeared to be no division between the writer and reader. Their roles could reverse instantaneously. While in the pages of *Left Review*, debates raged between writers on the nature of left-wing literature, this conflict did not seem to exist between in the Soviet literary world. A Soviet writer possessed a direct connection to their reader, without any hierarchy or misunderstanding.

Coinciding with this awareness of the relationship between the Soviet writer and reader, there emerged a tendency in literary criticism in Britain that turned its critical eye on the reader.

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[132] Williams-Ellis, *All Stracheys Are Cousins*, p. 139.
[133] Empson, *Some Version of Pastoral*, pp. 17-19.
[134] Montagu Slater, 'Controversy', *Left Review*, 1.3 (December 1934), 127.
[135] Gide, 'The Individual', p. 451.

Williams-Ellis' interest in this subject is most apparent in a 1932 review for the *Manchester Guardian* of two of the 'best and most of diverse' works of literary criticism published that year.[136] The first was Q. D. Leavis' *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932), a study of the development of the reading public and its contemporary state; the second was Virginia Woolf's *The Common Reader: Second Series* (1932), a collection of essays on literature intended for the non-specialist reader.[137] Williams-Ellis judged that these two books, when taken together, represent a 'breaking down' and a 'building up' of literary criticism. This review relied upon essentialist notions of gender but remains useful for the purposes of charting her developing sense of the relationship between writer and the reader. She frames this intervention of two women literary critics in terms of a 'distinctly feminine contribution to thought or feeling'. Leavis' writing seemingly exhibited a masculine tendency towards 'catabolism', breaking down, in the way she relentlessly revealed the 'ridiculous rubbish' that newspaper editors in particular produced for the reading public to enjoy. On the other hand, Woolf 'seemed to represent accurately the best side of feminine anabolism' in her desire to raise the standard of reading amongst the reading public through an accessible writing style.[138] Elements of Williams-Ellis' journalistic and literary output can be seen as contributing to this literary criticism. By 1934, she found herself at the heart of debates in *Left Review* relating to the working-class reader's place in left-wing fiction in her literary competitions.

Williams-Ellis' literary competitions in *Left Review* attempted to democratise writing and work towards the idealised relationship between the Soviet writer and reader that she had discovered during her multiple visits to the Soviet Union. Beginning in October 1934, Williams-Ellis hoped to provide novice working-class writers with a platform in *Left Review*

[136] Amabel Williams-Ellis, 'Books and Readers: Two Women Critics', *The Manchester Guardian*, 9 December 1932, p. 8.
[137] Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932); Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader*: *Second Series* (London: Hogarth Press, 1932).
[138] Williams-Ellis, 'Books and Readers', p. 8.

to write, and in doing so, 'learn by each other's attempts and each other's criticisms'. This ambition can be seen as a logical extension of her project in *To Tell The Truth*, where she attempts to open the eyes of her readers to the material realities of working-class life. Indeed, as a writing prompt for the first round of the competition, she recommends the section in *To Tell The Truth* where Pavel and Hake encountered a family's eviction by the bailiff and policeman.[139] It could be argued that in the first competition, Williams-Ellis' choice of writing prompt appears self-serving, in positioning Williams-Ellis as an expert and her writing as the best model for the working-class writer to learn from and imitate. But, alternatively, one could interpret that her choice as Williams-Ellis desire to encourage submissions not only to represent working-class life, but to explicitly combine it with a critique of capitalism.

In December, Williams-Ellis discussed the results of the first competition. It is difficult to assess how these submissions reproduced, or departed from, *To Tell The Truth*, because Williams-Ellis' judgement, commentary and use of paraphrase leaves little of the original writing untouched, and there is no *Left Review* archive. We can ascertain, however, some details about different writers' approaches to the task. One submission changed the details of the eviction to correspond to the life of a miner, where a lifetime in the pits led to the development of silicosis which made work impossible.[140] Two submissions shift the narrative perspective to focus on the bailiff and policeman's inner-thoughts, in an attempt to imagine how capitalism's enforcers rationalised their work. Despite these productive results, Williams-Ellis deemed that many of the submissions 'too closely followed' her sample, although she did not take responsibility for this result.[141] After this first competition, a shift in format followed that changed the hierarchical relationship between Williams-Ellis and the novice writer. In March, the second competition asked for descriptions of a working day, as a way of placing 'fresh

[139] Williams-Ellis, 'Not So Easy', p. 40.
[140] Amabel Williams-Ellis, 'Our Readers Get to Work', *Left Review*, 1.3 (December 1934), 71-74, (p. 71).
[141] Williams-Ellis, 'Our Readers Get To Work', p. 72.

material' in the hands of the 'novelist writing to-day'.[142] The professional writer now took inspiration from the working-class writer, leading to a change in format where submissions were now printed unedited.[143] These competitions, whatever their faults and limitations, attempted to bridge the divide that still existed in Britain between the writer and reader and to get someway closer to the idealised relationship that appeared to exist between the Soviet reader and writer.

'One of the most exciting stories to ever appear in print': Soviet Socialist Realism and Revolution

Williams-Ellis' longstanding idealisation of the relationship between the Soviet writer and reader, shared by other left-wing writers, provides one explanation as to why she ceased her own independent literary experiments in the middle of the nineteen-thirties. She came to recommend Soviet socialist realism as an unrivalled model of collective authorship which grouped together individual testimonies into a narrative that depicted the wider social reconstruction underway in the Soviet Union. In 1935, she wrote a preface to the English translation of *The White Sea Canal* (1935) that eagerly champions the book as a valuable example for British left-wing writers to follow.[144] Cynthia A. Ruder has expertly pieced together the histories of both the canal and the original Soviet text, rightly describing the latter as 'a volume notorious in the annals of Russian literature'. The Stalin White Sea Canal functioned as the landmark infrastructure project of the First Five-Year Plan. Between 1931 and 1933, the canal's rapid construction required the exploitation of at least one hundred

[142] Amabel Williams-Ellis, 'Report on the Competition', *Left Review*, 1.6 (March 1935), 217-220 (p. 217).
[143] Vera Kay, D. J. D, and H. H. D, 'An Encounter', *Left Review,* 1.9 (June 1935), 370–377.
[144] Amabel Williams-Ellis, 'Introduction', in Maksim Gorky, and others, *The White Sea Canal: Being an Account of the Construction of the New Canal between the White Sea and the Baltic Sea* (London: John Lane, 1935), pp. i-xi (pp. x, ix, x).

thousand forced prisoner labourers, equipped with the most basic tools such as pickaxes, hatchets and wheelbarrows. The Joint State Political Directorate (OGPU) guards continuously watched these prison labourers and interpreted dropping a hammer as an act of political subversion. It has been estimated that as many as twenty-five thousand prisoners died over the twenty month period of construction. When Stalin visited the finished canal in July 1933 he remarked that it was 'shallow and narrow'. In stark contrast to both this nightmarish history and Stalin's own disappointment, *The White Sea Canal* told an entirely different story. One month after Stalin's visit, a contingent of one hundred and twenty Soviet writers were sent to write a history of the canal's construction using testimony from prison labourers as well as the OGPU guards. A thirty-four-person writing collective headed by Maxim Gorky subsequently produced this text. Ruder finds that these Soviet writers faced several problems that parallel the experience of British travellers to the Soviet Union. This writing collective was 'manipulated mostly through half-truths and outright lies' and deemed the canal a glorious achievement in human and engineering terms.[145] Through hard labour, 'Whites', 'kulaks' and former criminals successfully 'reforged' themselves into devotees of the communist cause.[146]

Williams-Ellis lies outside the main focus of Ruder's investigation, who admits 'Less is known about Amabel Williams-Ellis'.[147] This chapter has already examined in detail her earlier literary, political and journalistic works which provide several insights into why she recommended this Soviet propaganda. *Volcano* and *To Tell The Truth* had to a certain extent disguised her support for the Soviet Union. While each text broadly sympathised with the revolution and Soviet regime, she included criticism of the Soviet regime that was a necessary part of her literary methods and political strategy. In *Volcano*, Williams-Ellis recreated the

[145] Cynthia A. Ruder, *Making History for Stalin: The Story of Belamor Canal* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1998), pp. xi, 21-25, 28-29, 33, 34, 51.
[146] Maksim Gorky, and others, *The White Sea Canal: Being an Account of the Construction of the New Canal between the White Sea and the Baltic Sea* (London: John Lane, 1935), pp. 305-307, 113-140, 340.
[147] Ruder, *Making History for Stalin*, p. 194.

actual experience of revolutionary rupture. As such, in 'The Relief', a story of Russian soldiers fighting on the Eastern front, a mutinous communist is outright condemned by another soldier 'If you was to have a hole shot in your skin for everything you didn't know, if you was to have done it … God, they'd use you for straining the leaves off the tea afterwards'. In 'On the Bank of the River', Williams-Ellis framed the political 'cleansing' of clinicians as the chief source of tension for the story's protagonist Lisa. As a party committee investigates one student, Kostia, the narrative goes back in time to trace how his own father had been falsely accused of exploitation and had 'the label *kulak* on his back'.[148] Criticism of the Soviet regime found in *To Tell The Truth* is to different rhetorical ends. The Soviet regime is represented by Williams-Ellis in wholly negative terms. Pavel 'banged his head on the table' in reaction to the extent of false Soviet propaganda about capitalism and the West. Another delegate, 'almost choking', cried 'It's all fake! It's all fake!' Following Pavel's criticism of the Soviet regime, the delegation debates whether Pavel should be expelled from the party or shot for 'counter-revolutionary activity'.[149] By incorporating criticism of the Soviet regime into her narrative, Williams-Ellis distanced Pavel from the Soviet regime, thereby positioning him as a naïve, but ultimately objective, investigator of conditions in Britain.

Williams-Ellis' literary judgement appears temporarily suspended in her introduction to *The White Sea Canal*'s English translation. She declares the story to be 'one of the most exciting stories to ever appear in print'. Using page number references, she directs the reader to particular stories. Four of these contain stories of sabotage, or 'wrecking'. She found these four stories 'extraordinarily interesting' in revealing the rationale behind seemingly irrational acts of sabotage. Her reading of these stories amounts to the idea that the saboteurs' actions resulted from self-interest. In thinking the old regime and capitalism likely to return, they 'drew a

[148] Williams-Ellis, *Volcano*, pp. 73, 347, 350.
[149] Williams-Ellis, *To Tell The Truth*, pp. 21, 22, 69.

perfectly comprehensible conclusion' that sabotage would lead to reward.[150] Williams-Ellis' satisfaction with reading a blanket rationality onto a whole group of people points to her earlier limited imagination in the preface to *Volcano*.[151]

In addition to these attractive political solutions, *The White Sea Canal*'s unusual literary form, with contributions from over thirty-four writers, answered some of Williams-Ellis' own questions regarding the Soviet model of writing. She wrote 'I, as a writer, have often asked, and to which I had not until now managed to get a comprehensible answer. What – I wanted to know – is this method that Russian writers have of writing a book as a group? What is "group composition"?'. This literary fascination is an extension of Williams-Ellis' longstanding interest in the relationship between the Soviet writer and reader. It is the sense that personal testimony is taken seriously by the writer. 'Finally, this tale', she concludes, 'gives us the thing of which no reader ever tires, a series of exquisitely observed, sometimes comic, and sometime tragic stories of vivid individual experience'.[152] Yet in taking personal testimony seriously, the individual voice disappears and only one voice emerges. Now the writer has been entirely subsumed into a collective to reflect Soviet achievement. In December 1935, Williams-Ellis provides some further thoughts on this book during a talk on Soviet literature at the Peace and Friendship Congress with the USSR. She defines for the audience the method of 'group production', how the writers 'pooled their resources' and 'edited each other's work' which resulted in 'a certain sense of unity and a certain completeness which I think could not have been achieved by any other method'. Individual responses are transformed by the hands of a group into propaganda. What attracts her to this method is the closer 'relation of authors with their public' which appeared 'quite different from the relation of authors with their public, where they mainly try to guess what the public likes through work of reviewers, and are out of

[150] Williams-Ellis, 'Introduction', pp. x, ix, x.
[151] Williams-Ellis, *Volcano*, pp. 16-17.
[152] Williams-Ellis, 'Introduction', pp. ix, xi.

touch with the actual reading public'. Therefore, besides approving of the political content of the book, she is also attracted to a perceived literary innovation. She closed her speech with the remark 'I think myself that the change in the life of the U.S.S.R. will probably be for the good of literature'.[153]

Most of the heroes and authors of this book did not survive the political purges of 1937-38. At the time of publication, the wider reception of *The White Sea Canal* in Britain was overwhelmingly negative for literary and political reasons. In the *Observer*, the travel writer Bosworth Goldman criticised the book's new literary method, arguing 'the result lacks cohesion and is undoubtedly difficult for the ordinary reader to follow.[154] *The Sunday Times* compared Williams-Ellis' 'enthusiastic introduction' to other reports on the number of prisoner labourers and concluded, with evident irony, that 'the main purport' behind 'the "new and peculiar" Russian method of "group composition"' was 'to show that, in spite of some instances of early reluctance or laziness, all were eventually inspired with a burning enthusiasm for their work'.[155] Even in the Soviet Union, *The White Sea Canal* could not be described as a success. As the literary historian and contributor to the book D. S. Mirsky later recalled, the book had 'a fairly short shelf life', taken out of circulation in 1937 as a result of Stalin's purges of the book's heroes.[156] While it might seem on the surface that there is a seismic shift in Williams-Ellis' approach to literature over this time, in fact, this development can be read as her dissatisfaction with her own experiments in literature as propaganda, and an acceptance of a Soviet solution.

Looking once more, then, at Coster's photographs of Williams-Ellis in 1938, the motivations behind her being pictured with *Traitors on Trial* become somewhat clearer. In an

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[153] Labour History Archive, Congress of Peace and Friendship with the USSR, CP/CENT/INT/41/10.
[154] Bosworth Goldman, '*The White Sea Canal:* Claim and Counterclaim', *Observer*, November 17, 1935, p. 5.
[155] ''Group Composition' in Russia', *The Sunday Times*, 15 December 1935, p. 8.
[156] Gerald Stanton Smith, *D. S. Mirsky*, *A Russian-English Life, 1890-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 249.

August 1938 review titled 'Moscow Mystery' for the magazine *Fortnightly Review*, Williams-Ellis recommends the book

> For a reader who is surprised, disgusted or enthralled by the way in which human beings behave, for a reader who enjoys a good detective story, famous trials, political theory, *Paradise Lost*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, or *Macbeth*, the perfect book is the Verbatim Report of the recent Moscow Trials.[157]

In making this recommendation, she participates in an ongoing debate on the British Left regarding the veracity of the Soviet regime's 29 July 1936 charge that former leading figures conspired together in 'terroristic activity of the Trotskyist-Zinovievist counter-revolutionary bloc'.[158] Unusually for pro-Soviet propaganda on the trials, her intervention did not directly defend the Soviet regime's findings, but instead praised the event for how it provided new content for the field of left-wing literature.

The wider British Left's responses to the Moscow trials were various and changing. Paul Corthorn surveys how these responses changed across each round of the trials to argue that they 'marked a pivotal juncture as the Labour party and the wider Left struggled to form their own non-Soviet identity'.[159] In this struggle, responses ranged from condemnation, confusion, to outright support. In 1937, Bernard Pares reviewed for *Manchester Guardian* the verbatim report of the second round of trials. After a 'serious study' of the book, he concluded that the charges of wrecking made against the defendants had been 'proved up to the hilt'.[160] Peter Deli

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[157] Amabel Williams-Ellis, 'Moscow Mystery', *Fortnightly Review* (August 1938), 184-193 (p. 184).
[158] Central Committee, 'Concerning the Terroristic Activity of the Trotskyist-Zinovievist Counter-Revolutionary bloc', in *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939*, ed. by J. Arch Getty and others (London: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 250-257.
[159] Paul Corthorn, 'Labour, the Left, and the Stalinist Purges of the Late 1930s', *The Historical Journal*, 48 (2005), 179-207 (p. 207).
[160] Bernard Pares, 'The Trial In Moscow', *Manchester Guardian*, 7 March 1937, p. 12.

finds that the editors of *Daily Herald* and *New Statesman* were 'completely baffled by confessions' and consequently failed 'to analyze the confessions and the speeches of the accused and prosecutor in the Moscow court room'.[161] This same limitation is found in the *Manchester Guardian*'s coverage.[162] In 1938, the same year as Williams-Ellis' photoshoot and review, a Commission of Inquiry into the Charges Made against Leon Trotsky, headed by John Dewey, concluded the 'Moscow trials to be frame ups' and the defendants 'not guilty'.[163] In March, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) denounced the trials as a 'bestial crime'.[164] It then sent a letter of protest to the Soviet embassy for Stalin which was promptly returned by Ivan Maisky.[165]

In contrast to this uncertainty and criticism, most British communists defiantly supported the Soviet regime's handling of the trials. The CPGB's support took the form of propaganda pamphlets, books, and travel accounts. Following the assassination of Sergei Kirov in 1934, W. G. Shepherd's *The Truth About the Murder of Kirov* (1935) rebuked the accusations made by the wider British Labour Movement that 'there was terror in the U.S.S.R.'.[166] Living in Moscow as a correspondent for *Daily Worker*, he urged the ''leaders' of the British working-class' to visit the Soviet Union in order to put this question directly to its citizens.[167] Leon Feuchtwanger was one such convert. In his travelogue *Moscow 1937*, his attendance at the second round of trials resulted in him being 'forced to accept the evidence of my senses, and my doubts melted away as naturally as salt dissolves in water. If that was lying or prearranged,

[161] Peter Deli, 'The Image of the Russian Purges in the *Daily Herald* and the *New Statesman*', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20 (1985), 261–82 (p. 281).
[162] 'Yesterday's Evidence at the Trial', *Manchester Guardian*, 26 March 1937, p. 12; 'Conspiracy with Fascists to Defeat Soviet Union', *Manchester Guardian*, 3 March 1938, p. 9; 'How Maxim Gorky's Death Was Brought About', *Manchester Guardian*, 9 March 1938, p. 12.
[163] John Dewey, *Not Guilty: Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Charges Made against Leon Trotsky in the Moscow Trials* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1938), p. xv.
[164] 'I.L.P. Denounces Moscow Trial "A Bestial Crime", *Manchester Guardian*, 10 March 1938, p. 12.
[165] 'Moscow Trials: Ambassador Returns I.L.P. Protest", *Manchester Guardian*, 17 March 1938, p. 12.
[166] W. G. Shepherd, *The Truth About the Murder of Kirov* (London: Modern Books, 1935), p. 11.
[167] Shepherd, *The Truth About the Murder of Kirov*, p. 16.

then I don't know what the truth is'.[168] In 1936, D. N. Pritt published two sympathetic reports on the Moscow trials.[169] According to Spender, when he asked Upward about the trials, he responded, 'What trials? I've given up thinking about such things ages ago'.[170]

Later memoirs, most notably Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* (1974-78), and historical scholarship, have since admonished the communist view of both the trials and the Soviet Union.[171] Stalin orchestrated these trials to purge his political rivals and to further consolidate his power in the Communist Party. This period known as the Great Terror became 'a war for all against all'.[172] It is estimated that around one and a half million people were executed and three to four million were exiled to labour camps as a direct result of this mass terror.[173] The accused were typically imprisoned, interrogated and tortured before their public trial, confession and execution by firing squad. Their relatives were either expelled from the party, sent to labour camps or shot.[174]

In these portraits, Williams-Ellis is clearly publicly positioning herself on the side of British communists and the Soviet Union. Yet her essay in support broke from the dominant style of the political pamphlet. After reading the reports of the trials, she surmised that the capitalist press thought the charges brought by the Soviet regime against former leader party figures were 'definitely unbelievable'. The reason Williams-Ellis connects this literature to the political trials was that both seemed to provide insight into the extremes of 'how humans behave'.

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[168] Leon Feuchtwanger, *Moscow 1937* (London: Gollancz, 1937), p. 135.
[169] D. N. Pritt, *The Zinoviev Trial* (London: Gollancz, 1936); D. N. Pritt, *The Moscow Trials* (London: Anglo-Russian Parliamentary Committee, 1936).
[170] Spender, *World Within World*, p. 212.
[171] Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, 3 vols (London: Collins & Harvill, 1974-1978).
[172] J. Arch Getty, Oleg V. Naumov, and Benjamin Sher, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939* (London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 468.
[173] Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (London: Pimlico, 2008), pp. 485-86; Stephen G. Wheatcroft, 'More Light on the Scale of Repression and Excess Mortality', in *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives*, ed. by J. Arch Getty and Roberta T. Manning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 275-90 (p. 290); Getty, and others, *The Road to Terror*, p. 589.
[174] Stephanie K. Decker, 'The Role of Public Confessions in Show Trials: An Analysis of the Moscow Show Trials', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 32 (2019), 459-77.

Indeed, the remarkable breadth of literary reference throughout this essay reveals how Williams-Ellis uses literature to justify her political commitment. The 'strange case' of the Moscow trials led her to 'think of other cases, in fact or fiction'. She finds a parallel to Nikolai Bukharin's confession and Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, where both Bukharin and Raskolnikov 'had everything to lose by confessing it, and confessed'. Leon Trotsky's 'pitiless spirit' was 'matched' to Lucifer in *Paradise Lost*. There was, in her opinion, 'no general theory that will fit all these men', an interpretation inverse to her view of prison labourers in the *White Sea Canal* introduction, and which relates back to her attempts at writing of individual subjectivities in *Volcano*. After reading *Traitors on Trial*, Williams-Ellis concludes,

> It seems to me that those of us who are writers of fiction, of poetry, or of drama, are failing in our duty (one aspect of which is, I take it, to try to make this mad world comprehensible) if we turn our backs on such contemporary themes. What a source of a book for a Webster, a Ford, a Milton or a Shakespeare![175]

This is Williams-Ellis' final surviving word on the Soviet Union. Literary and political concerns become entwined. Unlike her satirical character Pavel, her own naïve belief in the Soviet regime and the legitimacy of the trials feeds into her opinion that this event possessed all of the contemporary themes needed for modern literature. In the end, however, Williams-Ellis never attempted herself to use the trials as source material. With the Nazi-Soviet Pact signed a year later, her opinions on the Soviet Union, that had been shared widely and frequently in the first half of the nineteen-thirties, suddenly went quiet.

[175] Williams-Ellis, 'Moscow Mystery', pp. 184, 185, 186, 193.

After the Second World War, Williams-Ellis withdrew from debates about the Soviet Union. She disappears from the SCR's minutes.[176] In her memoir, she states that during the postwar period she wrote 'mostly for children'.[177] Many of these books were published between the nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties.[178] She eventually returned to 'Russian' culture with the co-edited collection *Russian Fairy Tales* (1965).[179] This collection marks Williams-Ellis' retreat from engaging with the Soviet Union in favour of an ahistorical and depoliticised vision of Russia. Her preference for the Soviet relationship between the writer and reader in the nineteen-thirties represents a fatal mistake for her literary project. And yet, Williams-Ellis' serious consideration for the popular reader remains a redeemable feature of her work. She identified something wrong in the didactic style of thirties' publishing culture, made a concerted effort to understand reading practices, and attempted to bring down hierarchical distinctions between the writer and reader. This attention to the popular reader continued into the post-war period. She published educational materials intended for mainstream audiences, albeit this time without the disguised political propaganda or radical left-wing politics.[180]

[176] London, Society for Co-operation in Russian and Soviet Studies (SCRSS), SCR Annual Reports.
[177] Williams-Ellis, *All Stracheys are Cousins*, pp. 173.
[178] Williams-Ellis and Brook, *Princesses and Trolls*; Amabel Williams-Ellis, *The Arabian Nights* (London: Blackie, 1957); Amabel Williams-Ellis, *Fairy Tales from the British Isles* (London: Blackie, 1960); Williams-Ellis and Stobbs, *Old World & New World Fairy Tales*.
[179] Moura Buberg and Amabel Williams-Ellis, *Russian Fairy Tales* (London: Blackie, 1965).
[180] Williams-Ellis, *Men Who Found Out*, Amabel Williams-Ellis, *Changing the World: Further Stories of Great Scientific Discoveries* (London: Lane, 1956).

3

'New flowers of new life': John Lehmann and the Soviet Influence on British Left-Wing Poetry, 1932-42

'Come and see for yourself'

On the 27 April 1934, the poet and publisher John Lehmann left Vienna with his lover Tony Sikyr for a month-long stay in the Soviet Union. Lehmann's scattered journals record the pair's first impressions of Soviet-style communism.[1] They see the May Day celebrations in Moscow, the collective farms of Rostov Oblast and people holidaying on the Crimean coast.[2] Travelling through famine-ravaged Ukraine Lehmann admires the countryside. Only a year prior, the journalists Gareth Jones and Malcolm Muggeridge secretly journeyed into Ukraine and confirmed rumours of deserted villages, mass starvation and dead bodies.[3] The white cottages, meadows, streams, pine trees and lilacs in this desolate land remind Lehmann of his time at the

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[1] Princeton, Princeton University Library (UL), Department of Special Collections, Manuscripts Division, C0746, Lehmann Family Papers, Series 4: Journals, box 73, fol. 8; Austin, Harry Ransom Center (HRC), University of Texas at Austin, MS-02436, John Lehmann Collection, Notebook (Rough Draft for Prose Poems), container 15.6.

[2] HRC, MS-02436, Notebook (Rough Draft for Prose Poems), container 15.6.

[3] Gareth Jones, 'Famine Rules Russia', *Evening Standard*, 31 March 1933, p. 7. Muggeridge's articles were published under, A Correspondent in Russia, 'The Soviet and the Peasantry I: Famine in North Caucasus', *Manchester Guardian*, 25 March 1933, p. 13; A Correspondent in Russia, 'The Soviet and the Peasantry II: Hunger in the Ukraine', *Manchester Guardian*, 27 March 1933, p. 9; A Correspondent in Russia, 'The Soviet and the Peasantry III: Poor Harvest in Prospect', *Manchester Guardian*, 28 March 1933, p. 9; Moscow Correspondent, 'The Soviet Countryside I: Second Agrarian Revolution', *Manchester Guardian*, 17 October 1933, p. 9; Moscow Correspondent, 'The Soviet Countryside II: Some Cossack Villages', *Manchester Guardian*, 17 October 1933, p. 9. On Jones and Muggeridge's journeys to Ukraine, see Ray Gamache, *Gareth Jones* (Cardiff: Welsh Academic Press, 2013); Teresa Cherfas, 'Reporting Stalin's Famine: Jones and Muggeridge', *Kritika* 14.4 (July 2013), 775-804. On the Soviet regime and Western journalists coverage of the Ukrainian famine, see Whitman Bassow, *The Moscow Correspondents* (New York: William Morrow, 1988), pp. 63-91; Ray Gamache, 'Breaking Eggs for a Holodomor: Walter Duranty, the *New York Times*, and the Denigration of Gareth Jones', *Journalism History*, 39.4 (January 2014), 208-218. On the Soviet regime in Ukraine more broadly through the interwar years, see Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (London: Hutchinson, 1986).

University of Cambridge.[4] After spending one morning admiring a grain elevator, Lehmann and Sikyr enjoy lunch and a sweet wine with their Intourist guide. It appears to their eyes that the 'new socialist town' has reached into 'the depths of Ukraine'.[5] In a postcard to his mother Lehmann declares, 'I certainly have never made a trip so interesting, every single moment seemed to yield some new experience'.[6] He was particularly struck by '1) workers' clubs, 2) living for the future, 3) no unemployment, 4) pride in work, 5) Crimea'.[7] On their way back to Vienna, 'back to the old world', Lehmann records how Sikyr, a worker at a shoe factory, 'feels like a bird sent back to its cage'.[8] This rarely discussed archival material indicates that Lehmann saw great value in keeping copious copies of his and Sikyr's personal impressions as 'raw material' for other forms of literary writing.[9] He said as much in April 1935 during a visit to Soviet Georgia and the Caucasus. In a letter to the *Left Review* editor Tom Wintringham, Lehmann confirms that 'The Caucasus was extremely interesting & provided some good material, I think, for future work'.[10]

This chapter considers this 'future work'. Following the pattern of previous chapters, Chapter 3 traces how Lehmann's direct experiences of the Soviet Union, as set down in his travel writing, marked his poetry and prose in the nineteen-thirties. Focussing on these overlooked literary writings sheds new light on Lehmann's development as a writer. But Lehmann is distinct from most other British left-wing literary travellers to the Soviet Union, in

[4] Princeton UL, C0746, Series 4: Journals, box 73, fol. 8.
[5] On the Sovietisation of Ukrainian education and literature during and after the First Five-Year Plan, see Matthew Pauly, *Breaking the Tongue: Language, Education, and Power in Soviet Ukraine, 1923-1934* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), pp. 235-339; Olena Palko, *Making Ukraine Soviet: Literature and Cultural Politics under Lenin and Stalin* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), pp. 147-184.
[6] HRC, MS-02436, Letters (Outgoing Correspondence), Lehmann, Alice (MRs. R. C.), 1930-1938, 1934, container 33.1.
[7] HRC, MS-02436, Collection of Copies of Poems and Prose Pieces, 1934, container 117.10.
[8] Princeton UL, C0746, Series 4: Journals, box 73, fol. 8.
[9] Lehmann uses the term 'raw material' in a correspondence with the author John Sommerfield to mean the collection of experience for literature, see HRC, MS-02436, II. Letters (Outgoing Correspondence), Soc – Soz, container 39.9, and HRC, MS-02436, III. Recipient (Incoming Correspondence), Sommerfield, John, undated, container 82.3.
[10] Kew, National Archives, KV 2, John Frederick Lehmann, 1934-1941, KV 2/2254.

choosing to transform his travel writing into poetry, not the novel or short story. Indeed, this chapter is different from the preceding chapters in showing how travel writing had multiple afterlives across multiple genres. The first section foregrounds how the Soviet Union affected Lehmann's poetry before his first visit in the spring of 1934. The second section traces the literary significance of Lehmann's transformation of travel writing into poetry between 1934-37. The final section investigates Lehmann's composition of his travelogue through Soviet Georgia and the Caucasus, *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks* (1937), revealing how his poetry on the Soviet Union in turn affected his later published travel writing.[11] Taken together, these sections reorientate Lehmann closer to Moscow than critics have suggested, without ignoring his close Bloomsbury connections.

Lehmann's network of friends and his publishing experience accelerated his entry into left-wing literary and political circles in the early nineteen-thirties. In the autumn of 1930, Lehmann started what would become a two-year apprenticeship at Leonard and Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press.[12] He was well placed to secure this role because of his close connections to the Bloomsbury Group. He was younger brother of the successful author Rosamond Lehmann, and best friends at Cambridge with Woolf's nephew, Julian Bell, and the former Hogarth Press employee, George "Dadie" Rylands, who recommended Lehmann's poetry to Woolf.[13] As part of his work for the Hogarth Press, Lehmann initiated a correspondence in June 1931 with Stephen Spender and Christopher Isherwood, attempting to secure their work alongside Auden's for publication.[14] Spender and Isherwood came to rely on Lehmann as a publisher for

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[11] John Lehmann, *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks* (London: Cresset, 1937).
[12] John Lehmann, *The Whispering Gallery: Autobiography I* (London: Longmans, 1956), pp. 164-172, 184; John Lehmann, *Thrown to the Woolfs* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1978), pp. 7-37; Adrian Wright, *John Lehmann: A Pagan Adventure* (London: Duckworth, 1998), pp. 51-63.
[13] Lehmann, *The Whispering Gallery*, pp. 140-142, 164; Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (New York: Knopf, 1997), pp. 600-603. On Lehmann's relationships with Spender and Isherwood, see Wright, *John Lehmann*, pp. 54-59.
[14] Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS. Spender 55, Larkin-Lehmann, 1930-1998, fols 2-3; Yale, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 344, Christopher Isherwood Correspondence with John Lehmann, 1931-1973, box 1, folder 1.

their poetry, a supplier of newly published books, and a source of contact details for writers. Lehmann's work for Hogarth Press eventually led him to assist editing and contributing several poems to Michael Roberts' poetry collections *New Signatures* (1932) and *New Country* (1933), which almost immediately came to define a new generation of poets.[15]

Roberts justified grouping together these young poets in *New Signatures* because of a shared 'new impulse'.[16] According to Samuel Hynes, Roberts 'wasn't really writing about them individually. Rather, he was describing the mood of the historical moment in which they all lived, and as an expression of that mood it is accurate enough'.[17] Nevertheless, what Roberts meant exactly at the time caused some confusion, particularly for Isherwood. After receiving a request from Roberts for a contribution to *New Signatures* that reflected 'the "new spirit" in literature, politics', Isherwood wrote to Lehmann asking 'what is the new spirit? Search me. Poor old Marx would hardly be described as new'.[18] He confided in a letter to his fellow contributor William Plomer, 'I just feel frankly scared. What *is* the new spirit?'.[19] After the final 'scramble' to publish *New Signatures*, Lehmann in a February 1932 letter stated to Roberts that he had 'hardly formed a critical opinion about it'.[20] Lehmann later that September felt 'a change was coming over many young poets' but did not elaborate further.[21] Looking back at the thirties, Cecil Day Lewis in *The Buried Day* (1960) suggested that this poetry 'was not a movement at all'.[22] Critics after Hynes have argued that Roberts' prescribed grouping flattens

[15] Michael Roberts, ed., *New Signatures: Poems by Several Hands* (London: Hogarth Press, 1932); Michael Roberts, ed., *New Country; Prose and Poetry by the Authors of New Signatures* (London: Hogarth Press, 1933). On Lehmann's correspondence with Roberts between 1931 to 1933, see Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, 13145/1-97, Papers of Michael Roberts, Thirty letters and eight postcards of John Lehmann., 1931-1935, 13145/40.
[16] Michael Roberts, 'Preface', in *New Signatures: Poems by Several Hands*, ed. by Michael Roberts (London: Hogarth Press, 1932), pp. 7-20 (p. 17).
[17] Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, p. 78.
[18] Yale, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 344, box 1, folder 1.
[19] Peter Parker, *Isherwood: A Life Revealed* (London: Picador, 2004), pp. 219-220. For Isherwood's correspondence with Roberts, see Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, 13145/1-97, Papers of Michael Roberts, Letters, 1932-1934, concerning *New Country*, 1933., 1932-1934, 13145/8.
[20] National Library of Scotland, 13145/1-97, Thirty letters and eight postcards of John Lehmann, 1931-1935, 13145/40.
[21] HRC, MS-02436, Notebook (autobiographical reminiscence), container 15.2.
[22] C. Day Lewis, *The Buried Day* (New York: Harper, 1960), pp. 216-217.

out the substantial differences between these thirties poets.[23] On the periphery of this group, Lehmann himself only exhibited something resembling a commitment to left-wing politics around the time of *New Country*. In the autumn of 1932, encouraged by Woolf and Isherwood, Lehmann left his life as a publisher in Bloomsbury for the life of a poet in Vienna.[24] While literary aspirations led Lehmann abroad, once there he soon followed Isherwood and Spender in engaging in sexual liaisons with young working-class men together with participation in left-wing politics.[25] In Vienna, Lehmann experienced organised working-class life for the first time in the tenement housing complex Karl Marx Hof.[26] He moved between London, Paris, Vienna and Berlin acting as a courier for underground anti-fascist and anti-war movements. The British Secret Service (MI5) struggled to ascertain whether Lehmann in this role had any 'intercourse with suspicious persons or with Communist Party members'.[27] However, British-based communist autobiographies do not mention him.[28] Lehmann's support for communism at this

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[23] On the limitations of Roberts' and early secondary literature's grouping together the poets of the nineteen-thirties, see Ian A. Bell, 'Hugh MacDiarmid: Lenin and the British Literary Left in the 1930s', in Gary Day and Brian Docherty, eds., *British Poetry, 1900-50: Aspects of Tradition* (Ipswich: St. Martin's, 1995), pp. 151-168; R. P. Draper, *An Introduction to Twentieth Century Poetry in English* (London: MacMillan, 1999), pp. 98-115; Harry Ricketts, 'Out of Mrs Colefax's Drawing Room: Poets and Poetry Between the Wars', in *British Literature in Transition, 1920-1940: Futility and Anarchy*, ed. by Charles Ferrall and Dougal McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 33-50 (p. 45). Lehmann later believed there to be 'a great many other strands in the poetic make-up of these writers, and a great diversity among them', see HRC, MS-02436, Poet- Poetr, container 16.5.

[24] Yale, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 344, box 1, folder 2. Lehmann, *The Whispering Gallery*, p. 207.

[25] For a valuable account on Lehmann's time in Vienna, see Robert Vilain, 'An Englishman Abroad: Literature, Politics, and Sex in John Lehmann's Writings on Vienna in the 1930s', in *Interwar Vienna*: *Culture between Tradition and* Modernity, ed. by Deborah Holmes, and Lisa Silverman (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2009), pp. 246-266.

[26] HRC, MS-02436, Notebook (autobiographical reminisce), folder 15.2; HRC, MS-02436, Notebook (rough draft for prose poems), folder 15.6; Lehmann, *The Whispering Gallery*, p. 208. Spender had a similar revelation when visiting the Karl Marx Hof, see Spender, *World Within World:* p. 191. On life in 'Red Vienna' in the nineteen-thirties, see Helmut Gruber, *Red Vienna: Experiment in Working-Class Culture 1919-1934* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Deborah Holmes, and Lisa Silverman, eds., *Interwar Vienna*: *Culture between Tradition and Modernity* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2009); Richard Cockett, *Vienna: How the City of Ideas Created the Modern World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023), pp. 70-99.

[27] National Archives, John Frederick Lehmann, 1934-1941, KV 2/2253..

[28] Communist autobiographies consulted include, Pollitt, *Serving My* Time; Hugh MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet: A Self-study in Literature and Political Ideas* (London: Methuen, 1943); Spender, *World within World*; T. A. Jackson, *Solo Trumpet: Some Memories of Socialist Agitation and Propaganda* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1953); Ivor Montagu, *The Youngest Son: Autobiographical Sketches* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970); Stephen Spender, *The Thirties and After: Poetry, Politics, People (1933-75)* (London: Fontana, 1978); Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*.

time is best understood as an emotional one, rather than as a result of any significant grounding in Marxist theory as was possessed by Fox and, albeit to a lesser extent, Williams-Ellis. In June 1933, Lehmann described his politics to the editor of the communist literary periodical *Storm*, Douglas Jeffries, as ‘too much from a lost-Cambridge-lamb point of view, though my sympathies are all with *Storm*’.[29] By this admission, Lehmann appears self-conscious that his political commitment is in some way insufficient, a sensitivity that will mark his later poetry on the Soviet Union. By February 1934, the fall of workers’ enclaves in the Austrian Civil War radicalised Lehmann to the extent that he believed ‘that the solution and troubles with which we were faced lay in Marxism, even Moscow’.[30]

Jeffries probably put up with this particular lost Cambridge lamb because of his wealth. Lehmann had inherited a ‘significant’ sum of money after his father’s death in 1929. He attached in his letter to Jeffries a donation of £25 (£1,362.91 in today’s money) to help *Storm* expand and develop. The *Left Review* editor Wintringham soon heard of this donation and sent a letter that same month to Lehmann’s friend and tenant Nancy Cunard, asking her if she knew whether Lehmann wanted to invest, presumably in the *Daily Worker*.[31] In August 1934, the *Daily Worker* book reviewer Allen Hutt asked Lehmann for an extraordinary £850 (£48,146.57 in today’s money). Lehmann replied, unsurprisingly, that he ‘simply could not take on a liability unaided’ and recommended forming a syndicate of investors, or asking Harry Pollitt, the CPGB General Secretary, ‘for the party to become ultimately responsible for the figure’.[32] Lehmann’s relationship with British communists, then, started off as patronage. It was not until 1934 that Lehmann emerged as an established figure on the British Left with his own public profile, after

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[29] National Archives, KV 2, John Frederick Lehmann, KV 2/2253
[30] Lehmann, *The Whispering Gallery*, p. 216.
[31] National Archives, KV 2, John Frederick Lehmann, KV 2/2253.
[32] National Archives, KV 2, John Frederick Lehmann, KV 2/2254

his journalism on Vienna during the Austrian Civil War, poetry based on this experience in *The Noise of History* (1934), and first visit to the Soviet Union.[33]

Alongside this public profile, Lehmann's skills as a shrewd literary facilitator also enabled him to position himself in-between British left-wing and Soviet literary cultures. Katerina Clark has recently described Lehmann in these terms, 'as an intermediary between British leftist literature and Soviet literary institutions'.[34] Clark restricts her assessment to Lehmann's work for *New Writing* (1935-39), but his engagement with Soviet culture and literature ran much deeper. Between 1934 and 1937, Lehmann's poetry on the Soviet Union found publication in the *Listener*, *Left Review*, *Poetry* (Chicago), *New Republic*, and the anthologies *This Year's Poetry, 1935* and *Poems of Tomorrow*.[35] In June 1935, he established *New Writing* with Isherwood and Fox – the latter, as we have seen in Chapter 1 – was one of the foremost interwar CPGB activists with strong links to Moscow.[36] He employed the communist Alec Brown as a Russian translator and expert on Soviet literature.[37] In the autumn of 1936, Lehmann travelled to the Soviet Union for a third time to attend the Moscow theatre festival

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[33] John Lehmann, *The Noise of History* (London: Hogarth Press, 1934).
[34] Clark, *Eurasia without* Borders, p. 289.
[35] John Lehmann, 'New Ways, New Life', *Listener*, 11.284 (20 June 1934), 1031; John Lehmann, 'Crowds and Shadows', *Listener*, 9.219 (22 March 1933), 439; John Lehmann, 'A Little Distance Off', *Listener*, 7.174 (4 May 1932), 640; John Lehmann, 'Three Sketches', *Left Review*, 1.4 (January 1935), 99-101; John Lehmann, 'His Hands', *Left Review*, 2.1 (October 1935), 240; John Lehmann, 'In Two Cities', *Poetry* (Chicago), 46.6 (September 1935), 322-323; John Lehmann, 'On with the Dance', *New Republic*, 81.1048 (January 1935), p. 215; John Lehmann, 'Waking from Snow', *New Republic*, 81.1052 (January 1935), 330. John Lehmann, 'Crimea Red', *New Republic*, 80.1037 (October 1934), 267-268; John Lehmann, 'John Lehmann', in *The Year's Poetry 1935: A Representative Selection*, ed. by Denys Kilham Roberts, Gerald Gould, and John Lehmann (London: John Lane, 1935), pp. 108-11. John Lehmann, 'A Little Distance Off', in *Poems of Tomorrow: An Anthology of Contemporary Verse*, ed. by Janet Adam Smith (London Chatto & Windus, 1935), p. 57; John Lehmann, 'Crowds and Shadows', in *Poems of Tomorrow: An Anthology of Contemporary Verse*, ed. by Janet Adam Smith (London Chatto & Windus, 1935), p. 55.
[36] HRC, MS-02436, II. Letters (Outgoing Correspondence), Isherwood, Christopher, 1935-1976, undated, container 31.2; HRC, MS-02436, III. Recipient (Incoming Correspondence), Fore-Fq, undated, container 54.8 On Fox's literary and political activities throughout the interwar years, see Chapter 1.
[37] HRC, MS-02436, III. Recipient (Incoming Correspondence, Brop-Bub, container 47.6. Brown also had strong opinions on the naming of Lehmann's periodical, writing, 'But who on earth thinks of this [sic] names. *The Bridge* was not too bad, but, my god, *New Writing*…Nothing more sectarian could be imagined. Just like *Left Review*. Not very dialectical. What we aim at being in this present paralytic society is not "left" or "new" writing, but "the" writing. *The Bridge* was good, because a bridge we are, and we are the only people to make the bridge to the new world. But *New Writing*…why not call it "INFANT WILES AND INFANT SMILES"! In fact, Blake is full of lovely titles on those lines.

and to revisit Tbilisi to find out for himself how Georgian writers worked within the prescribed Soviet socialist realism.[38] Once in Moscow, he met the editors of the Soviet literary journal *International Literature*.[39] This meeting started a mutually beneficial literary correspondence in which Lehmann provided literary criticism and British working-class writers to publish, while the journal sent him Soviet writers in return.[40] In *New Writing* and its later reiteration *Penguin New Writing* (1940-50), Lehmann featured translations of numerous Soviet writers, most notably Vassily Grossman and Mikhail Sholokhov.[41] It is important to foreground here that Lehmann did not uncritically accept Soviet propaganda for *New Writing*. In an undated telegram to the Soviet Information Bureau, Lehmann exclaimed,

> Essential point out my readers highly critical intelligentsia therefore useless to send light propaganda stories or articles also doctrinaire theoretical works unsuitable stop suggest as most important high literary quality human angle and historical continuity.[42]

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[38] HRC, MS-02436, Additional Acquisitions, Assorted Russian Materials: Map, Pamphlets, Postcards, Telegram, 1936-1937, undated, container 105.10.

[39] HRC, MS-02436, The Whispering Gallery, container 21.4; HRC, MS-02436, II. Letters (Outgoing Correspondence), Soc-Soz, container 39.9.

[40] Clarke, *Eurasia without Borders*, pp. 289-290; George Garrett, *Ten Years on the Paris: The Autobiography and Letters of George Garrett*, ed. by Mike Morris, Tony Wailey, and Andrew Davies (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), pp. 220, 224, 227; HRC, MS-02436, The Whispering Gallery, container 21.4; HRC, MS-02436, 'Misc correspondence to Isherwood, Laski' and others. Includes press card and photos, 1931-1974, undated, container 116.5.

[41] Nikolai Ognev, 'Sour Grapes – And Sweet', *Penguin New Writing*, 1 (1940), 99-107; Mikhail Sholokhov, 'The Father', *Penguin New Writing*, 3 (February 1941), 55-64; Nikolai Tikhonov, 'Story with a Footnote, *Penguin New Writing*, 5 (April 1941), 95-120; Mikhail Zoshchenko, 'The Housing Crisis', *Penguin New Writing*, 7 (June 1941), 125-129; Yuri Olyesha, 'Love', *Penguin New Writing*, 9 (September 1941), 94-106; Nikolai Tikhonov, 'Morale', *Penguin New Writing*, 11 (November 1941), 88-106; Mikhail Zoshchenko, 'A Liberal Profession', *Penguin New Writing*, 12 (April 1942), 97-101.

[42] HRC, MS-02436, II. Letters (Outgoing Correspondence), Soc-Soz, container 39.9.

In 1939, MI5 barred Lehmann from working at the Ministry of Information (MOI) because of his suspected homosexuality, leftist sympathies, and ties with the Soviet Union.[43] Once the two countries became allies in 1941, however, Lehmann's relationship with *International Literature* proved invaluable. The MOI reversed their decision and 'kindly put its facilities unreservedly' to Lehmann's attempts to foster a relationship with the journal.[44] He sent one article per month on the state of the literary and artistic world in wartime Britain. In 1942, he produced a series of broadcasts for the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) on the Soviet Union on topics including the Soviet resistance against the Nazis, Russian spas, the Caucasus and the Black Sea.[45]

It is often forgotten that Lehmann's public profile as a prolific travel writer helped to advance his reputation as a poet and publisher. Lehmann contributed travel writing on Vienna, Soviet Russia and Soviet Georgia to the *New Stateman and Nation, Left Review*, *Geographical Magazine* and *Highway*.[46] When the reader turned to Lehmann's biography at the front of *New Writing*, this travel writing was foregrounded as a key part of his literary activity, probably in an attempt to legitimise the periodical's aim to reflect the international currents in literature.[47] He also published travelogues on Soviet Georgia (*Prometheus and the Bolsheviks*), and Austria (*Down River* (1939)).[48]

Focussing on how Lehmann's travel writing affected his other literary writings addresses two limitations in secondary literature. This chapter seeks to answer how Lehmann's poetic

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[43] National Archives, KV 2, John Frederick Lehmann, KV 2/2254. On Lehmann's barring from the MOI, see James Smith, 'Surveillance, Security, and Wartime Propaganda: John Lehmann at the BBC', *Modernist Cultures* 17.3-4 (2022), 319-343.

[44] National Archives, KV 2, John Frederick Lehmann, KV 2/2254; HRC, MS-02436, III. Recipient (Incoming Correspondence), Son-Soz, container 82.4.

[45] HRC, MS-02436, Broadcast: P-R, container 5.3.

[46] John Lehmann, 'Caucasian Notes', *New Statesman and Nation*, 14 September 1935, pp. 341-342; John Lehmann, 'Change in the Caucasus', *Geographical Magazine*, 11.2 (December 1935), 125-141; John Lehmann, 'Letter from Tiflis', *Left Review*, 3.1 (February 1937), 8-17; John Lehmann, 'The Seven Soviet Arts', *Left Review*, 3.9 (October 1937), 558-560; John Lehmann, 'Epic and the Future of Soviet Arts', *Left Review*, 3.10 (November 1937), 580-583.

[47] John Lehmann, ed., *The Penguin New Writing* (Hardmondsworth: Penguin, 1940).

[48] John Lehmann, *Down River: a Danubian Study* (London: Cresset, 1939).

style developed between the period 1934 to 1937. Although studies of poetry in the nineteen-thirties are a helpful point of departure in evaluating aspects of Lehmann's poetic style, they focus on the beginning of the decade and ignore this middle period, which gives a misleading account of his literary career.[49] Lehmann remains today, in the words of Robert Villain, 'one of the fainter stars in the constellation that literary history calls "the Auden generation"'.[50] This chapter is part of a wider effort to illuminate neglected aspects of Lehmann's literary work. Christopher Hilliard's *To Exercise Our Talents* (2006) pieces together how Lehmann supported working-class writing.[51] Françoise Bort's chapter 'A New Prose' (2013) persuasively suggests that Lehmann's *New Writing* 'introduced a new kind of prose narrative – a hybrid form of autobiography and reportage, in which personal sensibility combined with political consciousness and historical understanding'.[52] Glyn Salton-Cox's *Queer Communism* (2018) is a valuable reading of a neglected aspect in Lehmann's life and literary career, in comparing ideas of queerness in the novels *Evil was Abroad* (1938) and *In the Purely Pagan Sense* (1976).[53] This chapter continues this recent movement by revealing how Lehmann's travel writing to the Soviet Union affected his own political commitment and literary development in the first half of the nineteen-thirties, and went on to inform this other literary work.

Second, this chapter re-examines Lehmann's relationship with the Soviet Union. Until very recently, secondary literature has glossed over this part of Lehmann's life. Paul Fussell in *Abroad* (1980) is unaware that Lehmann travelled there.[54] Valentine Cunningham in *British Writers of the Thirties* (1988) brings Lehmann into the Soviet orbit, although focusses too much

[49] Hynes, *The Auden* Generation, pp. 75, 132, 140-144.
[50] Vilain, 'An Englishman Abroad', pp. 246-266 (p. 247).
[51] Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents*, pp. 102-103, 107, 135-143. The Harry Ransom Center holds Lehmann's correspondence with the working-class writers Gordon Jeffries and B. J. Coombes, see HRC, John Lehmann Collection, folders 25.9, 50.9, 64.
[52] Françoise Bort, 'A New Prose: John Lehmann and *New Writing* 1936-1940', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, ed. by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 669-687 (p. 669).
[53] Salton-Cox, *Queer Communism and the Ministry of Love*; John Lehmann, *Evil Was Abroad* (London: Cresset, 1938); John Lehmann, *In the Purely Pagan Sense: A Novel* (London: Blond & Briggs, 1976).
[54] Fussell, *Abroad*, p. 11.

on Lehmann's fascination with tanned boys in Moscow, and the poet's most naïve proclamations about the Soviet regime.[55] Downplaying Lehmann's ties with the Soviet Union allows D. E. S. Maxwell to provocatively erect a literary wall that separates Lehmann's literature from radical politics and the Soviet Union, seeing it as 'much more of Bloomsbury than the Politburo'.[56] More valuable than these accounts is Adrian Wright's biography *John Lehmann* (1998), which is the first and only study of Lehmann's life that utilises the Harry Ransom Center's John Lehmann Collection.[57] Even then, Wright for some reason only accounts for Lehmann's first 1934 visit to the Soviet Union. Opinion has started to shift with Katerina Clark's *Eurasia Without Borders* (2021) which is the first to suggest that Lehmann had stronger leanings towards Moscow than had previously been believed.[58] It will be suggested in this chapter that Lehmann presents an interesting case study that productively blurs the lines between modernist and left-wing literary movements in the nineteen-thirties, or as Maxwell characterises it, between Bloomsbury and the Politburo.

'Departure curled up in us': The Soviet Influence on British Left-Wing Poetry

The Soviet influence on Lehmann's poetry between 1932 and 1937 is often forgotten. So far, accounts of his poetry are incomplete, tending to stop after *The Noise of History* (1934), reducing him to the role of publisher and the editor of *New Writing* for the rest of the nineteen-thirties, before returning to his post-war *The Sphere of Glass* (1944).[59] These contributions all ignore the literary, political and cultural links between Lehmann and the Soviet Union.

[55] Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties*, pp. 183, 397.
[56] D. E. S. Maxwell, 'Brave Old World: The Autobiographies of John Lehmann', in *John Lehmann: A Tribute*, ed. by A. T. Tolley (Ottawa, Canada: Carleton University Press, 1987), pp. 69-75 (p. 71).
[57] Wright, *John Lehmann*, pp. 75, 147-148.
[58] Clark, *Eurasia without Borders*, pp. 289-290.
[59] A. T. Tolley, *The Poetry of the Thirties* (London: Gollancz, 1975), p. 135; Hynes, *The Auden* Generation, pp. 132-141; Christopher Levenson, 'The Poetry of John Lehmann', in *John Lehmann: A Tribute*, ed. by A. T. Tolley (Ottawa, Canada: Carleton University Press, 1987), pp. 43-59 (p. 50); David Perkins, *A History of Modernist Poetry*: *Modernism and After* (London: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 113-114.

Maxwell's and A. T. Tolley's seminal studies on Lehmann's poetry both only acknowledge the impact of European fascism.[60] Christopher Levenson bases his entire analysis of Lehmann's poetic development on *Collected Poems* (1963), an incomplete record of his poems published in the nineteen-thirties.[61] To my knowledge, there have been no recent discussions on Lehmann's poetry. Yet this oversight of Lehmann's political and literary affiliations with the Soviet Union is unsurprising, for it follows the poet's own careful revisionism of the decade. By the time of his post-war arts journal *Orpheus* (1948-49), Lehmann publicly criticises Soviet literary critics for their 'blind acceptance of the Moscow-inspired doctrine of Socialist realism'. He elaborates,

> The truth is that their view of art – and of life – is so appalling to anyone nourished in the traditions of the West, constitutes so gross a denial of all the values which the finest minds of our civilization have learnt through centuries of conflict and reflection to distinguish and assert, that all we can want is to turn our back – and let them keep it. And from the bottom of our hearts we wish they would do the same with us.[62]

In keeping with this revised judgement, Lehmann's edited collection of poetry between 1930 and 1951, *The Age of the Dragon* (1951), 'excluded' those poems with which 'the contrast between the hopes or faith they enunciate and the realities of the last ten years is too painfully glaring'.[63] In the first volume of his autobiography, *The Whispering Gallery* (1955), Lehmann distances himself further from the 'unscrupulous and ruthless' Stalinist communism that had led to show trials, political liquidations and the gulag. Recalling his travels to the Soviet Union,

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[60] D. E. S. Maxwell, *Poets of the Thirties* (London: Routledge, 1969), p. 19; Tolley, *The Poetry of the Thirties*, p. 135.
[61] Levenson, 'The Poetry of John Lehmann', p. 59. If one were to rely on one collection, a more suitable choice that includes poetry between 1934-1939 is John Lehmann, *Forty Poems* (London: Hogarth Press, 1942).
[62] John Lehmann, 'Forward', *Orpheus*, 2 (1949), v-vi.
[63] John Lehmann, *The Age of the Dragon: Poems 1930-1951* (London: Longmans, 1951).

he recast himself as Kafka's K., and Moscow as a nightmarish realisation of *The Castle* and *The Trial*. According to his memory, the Soviet literary world remained only notable for its 'ignorance and lack of sophistication'. Despite Lehmann's disillusionment, he maintained in 1955 that, from 1934, 'Poetry itself took a back place but I did not abandon it'.[64] On BBC radio in May 1963 Lehmann wrote and performed in a duologue which took the form of an imagined conversation between himself and his younger self (the latter played by Denys Hawthorne), this format enabling Lehmann to upbraid his younger self for political naivety.[65] Nonetheless, Lehmann's channelling of the Soviet Union through his poetry had certainly taken place. Moving past Lehmann's controlled legacy and spotted memory, this chapter returns to the interwar period to reconstruct how his travels to the Soviet Union affected the development of his poetry.

In 1932, Lehmann decided that leaving the Hogarth Press and travelling abroad would help to develop his poetry. Reading the recent Hogarth editions of Rainer Maria Rilke compounded this feeling.[66] In particular, Lehmann responds to Rilke's suggestion in *The Notebook of Malte Laurids Briggs* (1930) that 'verses are not, as people imagine, simply feelings (we have enough of those); they are experiences. In order to write a single verse, one must see many cities, and men and things'.[67] Imagery and ideas connected to travel, the journey, frontier, railway and mountains became in the words of Hynes 'insistent metaphors' in literature and poetry of the nineteen-thirties.[68] Working in the Woolfs' cold and damp Bloomsbury basement office no doubt intensified this longing to be elsewhere.[69] In Virginia Woolf's criticism of the Auden group of poets, titled *A Letter to a Young Poet* (1932), she questions how her 'Dear John'

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[64] Lehmann, *The Whispering Gallery*, pp. 179, 287-288, 290-291, 324.
[65] HRC, MS-02436, Broadcast: C-D, container 4.6.
[66] Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge*, trans. by John Linton (London: Hogarth Press, 1930); Rainer Maria Rilke, *Poems*, trans. by J. B. Leishman (London: Hogarth Press, 1934); Lehmann, *The Whispering Gallery*, p. 198.
[67] Rilke, *The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 19; Lehmann, *The Whispering Gallery*, p. 198.
[68] Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, p. 229.
[69] Lehmann, *Thrown to the Woolfs*, p. 9; Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, pp. 600-603.

expects to write poetry about the real world when he still needs 'to get out, into the world of other people'.[70] Isherwood pleads with Lehmann in October 1932 to join him in Berlin, justifying the request with, 'I'm sure it would be better for your writing than the Bloomsbury world'.[71] Cecil Day-Lewis declared in *A Hope for Poetry* (1934) that the Romantic poets had managed to reach 'perfection' by travelling into the 'wilderness', Wordsworth up the mountain, Coleridge on the sea, Keats crossing the frontier.[72] Auden, MacNeice and Isherwood produced travelogues.[73] Travel promised Lehmann access to these creative possibilities, unable to be imagined in Bloomsbury, and all the more alluring as he observed them already being grasped by his contemporaries.

Lehmann's notebook from 1932 reveals a young poet living through an intense period of personal and artistic crisis. 'All last year', Lehmann wrote of 1932, 'I felt stuck in my poetry'. He gave numerous reasons for this impasse. Writing poetry itself became a struggle. He found little spare time to write while working for the Hogarth Press. He despaired at how his contemporaries had 'already practically exhausted' every new poetic form. Feeling left behind, Lehmann began to learn about politics and economics, with the help of Leonard Woolf. He studied Marxist revolutionary literature, including D. S. Mirsky's *Lenin* (1931) and Maurice Dobb's *On Marxism Today* (1932), as well as the 'new literature' emerging from the Soviet Union, such as Fedor Gladkov's *Cement* (1929) and Sergei Tretyakov's *Roar China* (1931).[74]

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[70] Virginia Woolf, *Letter to a Young Poet* (London: Hogarth Press, 1932), pp. 5, 21.
[71] Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 344, Christopher Isherwood Correspondence with John Lehmann, 1931-1973, box 1, folder 1.
[72] C. Day Lewis, *A Hope for Poetry* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1934), p. 1.
[73] W. H. Auden, and Louis MacNeice, *Letters from Iceland* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937); Lehmann, *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks*; Louis MacNeice, and Nancy Sharp, *I Crossed the Minch* (London: Longmans, 1938); Lehmann, *Down River*, W. H. Auden, and Christopher Isherwood, *Journey to a War* (London: Faber & Faber, 1939). For analysis on *Letters from Iceland* and *Journey to a War*, see Tim Youngs, 'Auden's Travel Writings', in *The Cambridge Companion to W. H. Auden*, ed. by Stan Smith and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 68-81.
[74] HRC, MS-02436, Notebook (rough draft for prose poems), container 15.6; D. S. Mirsky, *Lenin* (London: Holme Press, 1931); Maurice Dobb, *On Marxism Today* (London: Hogarth Press, 1932); Fedor Gladkov, *Cement* (London: Martin Lawrence, 1929), Sergei Tretyakov, *Roar China: An Episode in Nine Scenes* (London: Martin Lawrence, 1931).

This initial exposure to radical literature jolted Lehmann's sense of self and opinion of his early poetry. Values inherited from Eton and Cambridge were now shameful and 'fatal to me as individual or as poet'. Poetry exploring personal feelings 'wasn't good enough'. The poetry Lehmann aspired to write in the future would be

> a more active poetry, a poetry of discovery, drawing strength from a closer contact with people and things outside me. With the happiness and sufferings and hopes of peasants, railway workers, soldiers, unemployed boys and starving girls, all those whose lives I hardly know anything of.

Lehmann had not, however, wholly convinced himself to embrace this vision of common humanity by 1932. He was conscious of the obstacles for an upper-class poet who wished to cross the class divide. His generation of poets had a 'dilemma'. Their values, habits and tastes were 'fairly firmly embedded' in the existing culture. Lehmann could uproot himself to live with the workers, but he would still be 'totally unfitted to think as they think'. And yet, in his mind, 'to stand between two worlds' was not a solution. Travelling promised to solve these contradictions. Lehmann felt that the young poets had a sense of 'departure curled up in us'. A few years later, he sketched an unpublished self-portrait focussing on his crossing of the English Channel. As 'the cliffs of his native land gradually blurs', Lehmann imagines his family's voices 'in earnest post-mortem over the remains of his abandoned self, emerging fantastically from the whisper and hiss of the spray'.[75] Travel led to Lehmann's changing sense of self.

As part of this restless desire for departure, Lehmann and his contemporaries seemed to find clear answers to their political uncertainties in the Soviet Union. Lehmann, Edward Upward

[75] HRC, MS-02436, Notebook (autobiographical reminiscence), container 15.2.

and William Plomer all travelled to the Soviet Union, while other poets of the Auden group consumed the revolution through culture, primarily via the medium of Soviet film.[76] Laura Marcus has written on the introduction of Soviet cinema into Britain in the nineteen-twenties and its influence on British writers, finding that these films were successful in 'projecting images of a different kind of landscape and a different organization of society'.[77] As Lehmann recalls in 1936,

> The new Russia began to penetrate more deeply even into the sheltered mental world of the English intellectual. The artistic triumphs of the great Soviet films, of *Mother*, *The General Line*, *Storm Over Asia*, *Earth*, and several others, not only impressed the younger intelligentsia with their aesthetic excellence and innovation, but also affected them by the emotional appeal of a civilization with new values.[78]

These 'new values' – the elimination of primitive ways of life, the common man's role in the revolution, anti-colonialism, collectivisation – influenced the development of British left-wing poetry and prose in the early nineteen-thirties. Cecil Day Lewis's *From Feathers to Iron* (1931) refers to modern machinery deployed for the benefit of all ['a grain- / Elevator in the Ukrainian plain'].[79] In 'Letter to a Young Revolutionary', Day Lewis blurs the lines between reality and art in his praise of *Earth*, informing the reader that 'Dovjenko is a great director, but he couldn't

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[76] Piecing together the thirties poets' interest in the Soviet Union is beyond the scope of this chapter. Plomer read in translation Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Gorki and Bunin, which made Russia seem immediately familiar to him, see William Plomer, *At Home: Memoirs* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1958), pp. 17-25; Auden and Isherwood could quote from heart the beginning of Ilya Ehrenburg's 'The Sons of Our Sons' (1919), see Christopher Isherwood, *Christopher and His Kind* (London: Minerva, 1993), p. 15.

[77] Laura Marcus, 'The Tempo of Revolution: British Film Culture and Soviet Cinema in the 1920s', in *Russia in Britain, 1880-1940: From Melodrama to Modernism*, ed. by Rebecca Beasley and Philip Ross Bullock, pp. 225-240 (p. 228). On thirties writers responding more generally to the medium of film in the interwar years, see Laura Marcus, 'Literature and Cinema', in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 335–358; Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford ; Oxford University Press, 2007); Laura Marcus, *Dreams of Modernity: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Cinema* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[78] John Lehmann, 'Some Revolutionary Trends in English Poetry: 1930-1935', *International Literature*, 2.4 (April 1936), 60-83 (p. 62).

[79] Cecil Day Lewis, *From Feathers to Iron* (London: Hogarth Press, 1931), p. 48.

make peasants act that ecstasy'.[80] Spender's 'The Funeral' imagines the death of a Soviet hero who is celebrated by his peers for his success 'in making driving belts'.[81] William Empson finds a 'beauty' in the Soviet film *The General Line*.[82] Remembering life in Berlin with Isherwood, Spender later remembered,

> Whenever we could we went to see those Russian films which were shown often in Berlin at this period: *Earth*, *The General Line*, *The Mother*, *Potemkin*, *Ten Days That Shook the World*, *The Way into Life*, etc. These films, which form a curiously isolated episode in the aesthetic history of this century, excited us because they had the modernism, the poetic sensibility, the satire, the visual beauty, all those qualities we found most exciting in other forms of modern art, but they also conveyed a message of hope like an answer to *The Waste Land*.[83]

In 'A Little Distance Off' (1932), Lehmann likens the poetic process to an isolated artist who transforms their raw experience into 'The complete shape of art, the harmony / And pattern of a film'.[84] In October 1935, Lehmann again remembers how these Soviet films had a 'great influence on me just as I left Cambridge'.[85] *Earth*, in particular, with its idealisation of collectivisation, harmonious relationship between communists and the natural world and slogan 'sing new songs about a new life' reverberate throughout Lehmann's poetry in the nineteen-thirties. Celebrating Soviet collectivisation without reservation placed these young poets most squarely against those writers in Britain, who defined their anti-communism, as

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[80] Cecil Day Lewis, 'Letter to a Young Revolutionary', in *New Country*, ed. by Michael Roberts (London: Hogarth Press, 1933), pp. 25-42 (p. 27).
[81] Spender, 'The Funeral', in *New Signatures: Poems By Several Hands*, ed. by Michael Roberts (London: Hogarth Press, 1932), p. 95.
[82] Empson, *Some Version of Pastoral*, p. 6.
[83] Spender, *World Within World*, p. 132; Marcus, 'The Tempo of Revolution', p. 228.
[84] John Lehmann, 'A Little Distance Off', *Listener* 7.174 (4 May 1932), 640. Drafts of this poem are found in HRC, MS-02436, Notebook (poetic work), container 15.4.
[85] John Lehmann, 'Biographical Notes', *International Literature* 1.10 (October 1935), 102.

Matthew Taunton finds, through opposing collectivisation and offering alternatives such as the smallholding.[86] The pervasiveness of this Soviet influence led one disgruntled *Poetry* (Chicago) reviewer to liken Day Lewis' verse to 'most current revolutionary verse in that it is skimmed off the top of the mind, where certain ideas without necessary or permanent links, e.g. (Russian) Communism and mechanization, float contiguously in the broth of history'.[87]

Lehmann's first contributions to British left-wing poetry taken from the 'broth of history' appear in *New Signatures* and *New Country.*[88] After a focus on descriptions of the natural world in *A Garden Revisited* (1931) influenced by the English landscapes and spiritual revelations found in Edward Thomas, Lehmann attempts to write a different sort of poetry that 'concerned itself more and more with actual events and the modern world'.[89] Critics have since identified the results of this transition as a prevailing pessimistic attitude and an envisioned future of apocalyptic destruction by modern technologies ('This Excellent Machine').[90] For the purposes of this section, it is important to identify how these poems also reveal a countervailing optimism based on a preconceived ideal of the revolution, which Lehmann carried with him into the Soviet Union. Before Lehmann had ever visited the Soviet Union, his allegorical 'Looking Within' in *New Signatures* reflects on the personal, literary and political rewards of escaping the West and travelling to the Soviet Union.[91] The poem opens,

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[86] Matthew Taunton, *Red Britain: The Russian Revolution in Mid-Century Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 162-215.
[87] Stanley J. Kunitz, 'Between Two Worlds', *Poetry* (Chicago) 47.3 (December 1935), 158-162 (pp. 160-161).
[88] John Lehmann, 'John Lehmann', in *New Signatures: Poems By Several Hands*, ed. by Michael Roberts (London: Hogarth Press, 1932), pp. 73-77; John Lehmann, 'John Lehmann', in *New Country; Prose and Poetry by the Authors of New Signatures*, ed. by Michael Roberts (London: Hogarth Press, 1933), pp. 227-230.
[89] John Lehmann, *A Garden Revisited, and Other Poems* (London: Hogarth Press, 1931); Lehmann, 'Biographical Notes', 102. For studies on *A Garden Revisited*, see Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, p. 75.
[90] For discussions on Lehmann's poetry in these two collections, see Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, p. 76.
[91] John Lehmann, 'Looking Within', in *New Signatures*, ed. by Michael Roberts (London: Hogarth Press, 1932), pp. 73-74 (p. 73). In an analogous fashion, William Empson's poem 'Note On Local Flora' focusses on a tree housed in Kew Botanic Gardens that can 'ripen only in a forest fire' and 'thirsts for the 'Red Dawn', see William Empson, 'Note On Local Flora', *New Signatures*, ed. by Michael Roberts (London: Hogarth Press, 1932), p. 70.

> Looking within, I find no hint of green.
>
> They say Spring comes in countries over there
>
> With much-desired sleek buds and burst of leaves,
>
> Release of sap, new songs; but travel's hard,
>
> For though we try the bridges or the pass
>
> The frontiers of this state are closely guarded,
>
> Raised rifles daunt, and the government persuades
>
> All's best at home, - go, cultivate the fields.[92]

The narrator 'looking within' on the first line suggests a search in one's own mind for something. The iambic pentameter of the second clause leaves the 'I' unstressed and reinforces the view of this search being a failure. The longed for 'green' is traditionally associated with ideas of rebirth, spring and growth. This meaning is confirmed on the next line with the rumours of 'Spring', Lehmann's way – alongside the later use of 'Eastward' – of obliquely referencing the Soviet Union. The first use of 'green' also connects this seasonal change to individual change. In lines two to four, and throughout the poem, Lehmann deploys a combination of alliteration, consonance and sibilance to reinforce the idea that the natural world, the individual and poetry all move together in one harmonious rhythm.

Having drawn on the bucolic pastoral tradition to frame the Soviet Union as a critical counterpoint to this unnamed country which is also himself, Lehmann's narrator is 'looking within' to survey the latter's oppressive state machinery, reliance on violence and destruction of the countryside in a manner later found in Williams-Ellis's *To Tell The Truth* (1933) and Edward Upward's *The Island* (1935).[93] Internal strife is reflected in the external world. The

[92] John Lehmann, 'Looking Within', p. 73.
[93] Williams-Ellis, *To Tell the Truth*; Upward, 'The Island'.

country's landscape is described in apocalyptic terms; the land 'water-less', 'barren', 'empty', 'splintered', and destroyed by 'poison gas'; the trees 'Point black and jagged'. There are echoes of First World War poetry in this imagery. With nowhere left to run, and rumours of spring abroad, the narrator urges his countrymen to 'take the train / Eastward to land where scattered grain gives root'. As their escape over the frontier would be dangerous, the narrator promises,

> But you'll be hours in flight by then, you'll find
> A farm beyond their writ, where naked trees
> Like columns to uphold the new-built world
> Show gummy buds of leaves aflame in sun,
> As frosts of Winter yield, and furrowed earth
> Assents to labor of young harvest ears.[94]

This vision reveals that Lehmann's attraction to the idea of the collectivised farm informs the tone and description of his imagined Soviet countryside. Spender later commented that Lehmann's early poetry often relied on natural imagery as a buffer that 'will suffice to hold at bay the contemporaneous horrors'.[95] This charge was often levelled at Georgian poetry.[96] The natural world in this poem signifies prosperity. The changing of the seasons reflects political change. The use of assonance at the beginning and end of the final two lines reinforces the poem's internal sense of harmony. This call to escape the country resonates with Day Lewis' earlier demand in *Transitional Poem* to escape an 'Eden' that seeks 'To build smooth tradition

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[94] Lehmann, 'Looking Within', p. 74. Lehmann's drafts of this poem are found in HRC, MS-02436, Notebook (rough workbook of poems), container 15.8.
[95] Stephen Spender, 'Repudiating the Georgians', in *Stephen Spender and the Thirties*, ed. by A. Kingsley Weatherhead (London: Associated University Press, 1975), pp. 83-99 (p. 91).
[96] George Walter, 'Loose Women and Lonely Lambs: The Rise and Fall of Georgian Poetry', in *British Poetry, 1900-50: Aspects of Tradition*, ed. by Gary Day and Brian Docherty (London: MacMillan Press, 1995), pp. 14-36 (pp. 23-25).

/ Out of Time's recession / And centuries of dew' by transforming the rebel into an 'English lawn'.[97] At this stage in Lehmann's poetry, the Soviet Union signifies the last bastion against enormous odds. References to it galvanise those with nothing left. The narrator observes their own country's decline, but is not an active agent in social change. There is instead a complexity in the narrator's positioning. The narrator persuades, on the basis of rumour rather than personal experience, that their countrymen risk their lives to escape. There is a sense here that the narrator is hoping against hope that the Soviet Union really is as he describes. Stuck within this limited narrative perspective, the reader never finds out what the narrator's countrymen think or feel themselves about the East or the narrator. This is further compounded by Lehmann's use of allegory, which makes contemporary events timeless, providing an archetypal story, rather than narrative grounded in history. Such a style led a *Poetry Review* reviewer to conclude, rather unfairly, that 'Mr. Lehmann is not haunted, like most of his contemporaries, with the Real World of outcast unemployed and voices prophesying war'.[98]

While 'Looking Within' is the only occasion in *New Signatures* that Lehmann makes obvious reference to the Soviet Union, it can still be read alongside his other poems in the collection. The harmonious imagery and rhythm, for example, appears to offer a solution to the poet's problem of achieving truth in poetry as outlined in 'To Penetrate That Room'. In this poem, a narrator again looks inwards,

> To penetrate that room is my desire,
>
> The extreme attic of the mind, that lies
>
> Just beyond the last bend in the corridor.
>
> Writing I do it. Phrases, poems are keys.

[97] C. Day Lewis, *Transitional Poem* (London: Hogarth Press, 1929), p. 27.
[98] Ronald Fuller, 'The Poetry of John Lehmann', *Poetry Review*, 27 (1936), 15-21 (p. 17).

On this occasion, the narrator's interior journey through their mind does not have an external corollary. The narrator fails to reach the room that holds 'truth at last / Deep in a lumber chest'.[99] The inspiration for this is again likely to be Day Lewis' study of the mind in *Transitional Poem*, 'Those Himalayas of the mind / Are not so easily possessed'.[100] When reading 'Looking Within' and 'To Penetrate That Room' one after the other, the Soviet revolution promises to open up this chest with the 'Release of sap / new songs'. Crossing over the frontier for Lehmann not only promised the transformation of the self, but also valuable experiences that could further develop his poetry.

Between the publication of *New Signatures* in February 1932 and Lehmann's departure for Vienna later that autumn, Lehmann, Spender, Auden and Day-Lewis' poetry received constructive criticism from Woolf in *A Letter to a Young Poet*. According to Emily Kopley, the context surrounding the letter is best explained as Woolf seeking 'in her criticism to diminish the status of verse and elevate the status of prose, in particular the novel, even as she encouraged the young writers by publishing their work and occasionally praising them in personal letters'.[101] Woolf took issue with the young poets' project of representing 'the actual, the colloquial'. After citing Lehmann's poetry, Woolf held that 'The Poet is trying honestly and exactly, to describe a world that has perhaps no existence except for one particular person at one particular moment'. The value of poetry for Woolf was in its opacity. Woolf recreates the process of writing and reading poetry as, 'He strains to describe, we strain to see; he flickers his torch; we catch a flying gleam. It is exciting; it is stimulating'. Woolf suggests therefore that 'you cannot write about the actual, the colloquial, Mrs. Gape or the Channel boat or Miss Curtis on the omnibus, without straining the machine of poetry'. In Woolf's own words, 'the

[99] John Lehmann, 'To Penetrate That Room', in *New Signatures*, ed. by Michael Roberts (London: Hogarth Press, 1932), p. 75.
[100] Day Lewis, *Transitional Poem*, pp. 59, 69.
[101] Emily Kopley, *Virginia Woolf and Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 243-274 (p. 244).

poet breaks his machine because he will clog it with raw fact'. These reservations aside, Woolf advises Lehmann that if he still hopes to write about the everyday, then he needs 'to find the right relationship, now that you know yourself, between the self that you know and the world outside'.[102] Lehmann responded in a letter to Woolf suggesting that her argument 'seemed at variance with her own bold striking out for revolutionary experiments a dozen years before'. Woolf replied, 'I do feel like the young poet is rather crudely jerked between realism and beauty, to put it roughly'. She concedes, however, that 'I'm not satisfied at all with the Letter, and would like to tear it up or entirely re-write'.[103] In another letter to Lehmann, Woolf hoped that *A Letter to a Young Poet* would lead to 'flocks, volleys' of responses and the start of a productive debate with the young poets.[104] While this failed to materialise, this correspondence does suggest that Lehmann wanted his poetry to extend the project of modernism, rather than to return to nineteenth-century realism or Georgian poetry.[105] Lehmann had not by 1932 acted on this desire, but his travels to Europe would accelerate this shift.

Once Lehmann arrived in Europe in 1933, his participation in left-wing politics, personal experience of fascism and contact with working-class organisation reorientated the poet away from 'the sheltered atmosphere of bourgeoise England', and towards communism and Moscow.[106] Lehmann acted as a 'liaison' for anti-war and communist organisations supportive of the Soviet regime.[107] In Paris, he met with Henri Barbusse, worked for his Committee Against the War and Fascism, and contributed to his newspaper *Monde*.[108] In May, Lehmann

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[102] Woolf, *A Letter to a Young Poet*, pp. 11, 18, 18-19, 21.
[103] Virginia Woolf, 'Letter', in *Thrown to the Woolfs*, pp. 30-31.
[104] Austin, Harry Ransom Center (HRC), University of Texas at Austin, MS-02436, Virginia Woolf Collection, Lehmann, John, 1931-1935, box 1, folder 8.
[105] On the young poets' responses to Woolf, see Kopley, *Virginia Woolf and Poetry*, pp. 250-259.
[106] John Lehmann, 'Biographical Notes', pp. 100-102. Lehmann later recalls economic depression, a weak Labour Party, and the rise of fascism, as factors for his generation's search for answers in communism and Moscow, see Lehmann, *Whispering Gallery*, pp. 216-219.
[107] National Archives, KV 2, John Frederick Lehmann, KV 2/2253; Lehmann, *The Whispering Gallery*, pp. 221, 232; Smith, 'Surveillance, Security, and Wartime Propaganda', 321-322.
[108] National Archives, KV 2, John Frederick Lehmann, KV 2/2253; Lehmann, *The Whispering Gallery*, pp. 221; Smith, 'Surveillance, Security, and Wartime Propaganda', 321-322. Four years before Lehmann, Barbusse

outlined his radicalised political views via a *Storm* questionnaire. 'Fascism is the supreme enemy of the future', he wrote, which could 'sink their differences' with European imperialism 'for an attack on the USSR'.[109] Lehmann's proposed solution to this threat 'is the creation of a world state where the capitalist class has been eliminated'. In 1935, Lehmann claims, 'I was above all brought over towards the Revolution by the fact that I was living in Central Europe and in contact with workers and workers' organizations'.[110]

Out of his experiences of underground political life, Lehmann published his second collection of poetry, *The Noise of History*, which collects together his poetry written between 1932 to the summer of 1934, after his first visit to the Soviet Union.[111] Readings of *The Noise of History* often disregard the nature of this composition.[112] This composition is an integral feature to highlight because Lehmann desired to show how his poetry 'follows the course of a gradually developing point of view'.[113] This development is not explicitly elaborated upon by Lehmann in his author's note, however, it is clearly affected by his first visit to the Soviet Union. 'Part I' begins with Lehmann's contributions for *New Signatures* and *New Country*. 'Part II' includes Lehmann's experiments of writing prose poetry in 1933 to recreate his personal experiences of Red Vienna's downfall. This is a significant stylistic departure from Lehmann's previous poetry. Gone are the impersonal mode of address and the bucolic descriptions of nature, in favour of an imaginative style of reportage centred around a narrative 'I' who witnesses first-hand the public and private horrors of fascism; fleeing refugees in 'Spring Light', violence and antisemitism in 'Waiting', the loss of friendship in 'After the Fire', underground resistance in 'Five to Twelve'.[114] Lehmann attempts through this new form to

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visited the Soviet Union and praised collectivisation, industrialisation, and the south coast of Crimea, see Barbusse, *One Looks at Russia*, pp. 33, 63-68, 71.

[109] National Archives, KV 2, John Frederick Lehmann, KV 2/2253

[110] Lehmann, 'Biographical Notes', p. 101.

[111] Lehmann, *Thrown to the Woolfs*, p. 45.

[112] Hynes' analysis of *The Noise of History* does identify the importance of this composition, although does not make the Soviet connection, see Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, p. 141.

[113] Lehmann, 'Author's Note', in *The Noise of History*, p. i.

[114] Lehmann, *The Noise of History*, pp. 11-34, 37-56, 37-38, 39-40, 49, 55.

draw more directly from his own direct experiences to the benefit of the poetry. These poems now encompass his own emotional responses to external events, the physical and emotional characteristics of the Viennese people, a variety of scenes and dramatic linear narratives.

The Soviet influence on *The Noise of History* is apparent in Lehmann's attempts to reconceptualise the problem of poetic truth and the poet's role in society in its final 'Part III', which contains a four-part series of poems titled 'The Years of Illness'.[115] The fourth part of this poem previously appeared in the *Listener* in June 1934, just a month after Lehmann's first visit to the Soviet Union.[116] His desire to write poetry, then, did not suddenly evaporate, as it might seem according to the critical consensus. The nature of this influence is described by Lehmann in October 1935 in *International Literature* as a newfound 'belief now that a poet must help, as far as he can, in however small way, *actively*, and nor merely confine to the role of spectator'.[117] His prose poetry from 1933 to early 1934 in *The Noise of History* reflects this passive point of view. In contrast, 'The Years of Illness' marks a transitional moment when Lehmann tries to write poetry that engenders social change. The first poem begins,

> All poison seeps from here.
>
> The mirror shows the individual face,
>
> And, marked like spots of fever
>
> Persistent studies of the mind and heart[118]

[115] Lehmann, *The Noise of History*, pp. 59-62. Drafts of poems in this collection are located in HRC, MS-02436, Notebook (rough drafts for stories and prose poems), container 15.7.
[116] Lehmann, 'New Ways, New Life', p. 1031.
[117] Lehmann, 'Biographical Notes', p. 102. Lehmann later remembers, with some regret, 'I began to feel that even my poetry was a frivolity unless in some way it was useful to the anti-fascist and anti-war cause', see Lehmann, *The Whispering Gallery*, p. 220.
[118] Lehmann, *The Noise of History*, p. 59

These opening lines are on the surface a simple description of a figure suffering from an illness. And yet, considering Lehmann's newfound belief, these lines also function as a criticism of poetry, the 'mirror' that restricts itself to exploring the thoughts and feelings of the individual. The individual is 'All poison'. Their condition has already been picked apart and diagnosed by 'Persistent studies of the heart and mind'. Lehmann distances himself from his own poetry in this vein, such as 'To Penetrate That Room', which focussed on the individual's inability to attain truth.[119] Rather than Lehmann ending in this enclosed room, as he had done in 'To Penetrate That Room', the narrative now moves outside to the ruins of a city. On the road, there is

> The private Daimler rolling private lust,
> Or subtler, after many years acclaimed,
> The eccentric style of writing;
> But this is illness, and brings illness

The hidden figure in their automobile is insulated and indifferent to the city's illness. They are busy with 'private lust' or something 'subtler' like an 'eccentric style of writing'. The narrator concludes that such writing further contributes to the city's illness as it is 'cut off from the greeting hands' of the people.

In the second and third poems, Lehmann uses two extended metaphors of the natural world to articulate 'A new phase of thinking'. In the first, the narrator likens their changing sense of self in relation to the people, to that of a tree:

[119] Lehmann, 'To Penetrate That Room', p. 75; John Lehmann, 'After the Final Shutting of a Door', in *New Signatures: Poems By Several Hands*, ed. by Michael Roberts (London: Hogarth Press, 1932), p. 76.

Not 'I who, fail, or wither,

Become the tree, so the tree dies with me';

But 'I fail or fall, - elsewhere

Though this branch dies the tree breaks on to light,'

To be content, thinking

From the life-thrusting sap more thousand leaves will
grow.[120]

Lehmann is advocating a reconfiguration of poetry through this imagery. Individual incident must give way to mass struggle, individual feeling must be replaced with a collective optimism in the future. Manuscript analysis of this poem reveals that many of the changes Lehmann makes in the drafting process involved replacing verbs with more dynamic variations ('gathers' to 'seeps'; 'life-changed' to 'life-thrusting', etc.) in an effort to create a greater sense of condensed motion and possibility for radical change.[121] This faith in the movement of the masses is some way from his position held only a year earlier. In 'Crowds and Shadows' (1933), for instance, the narrator found the crowd an impediment, rather than an inspiration. Searching for something undefined in the crowd, the narrator bemoaned 'Nothing I find, but beggars asking alms / Among the crowds and shadows of the street'.[122]

The fourth poem offers a glimpse into 'New Ways, New Life'. As the final poem in *The Noise of History*, it reflects Lehmann's changing views about the role of poetry as of the summer of 1934. It concludes,

Then, as the mirror fades,

[120] Lehmann, *The Noise of History*, p. 60.
[121] HRC, MS-02436, Notebook (rough drafts for stories and prose poems), container 15.7.
[122] Lehmann, 'Crowds and Shadows', p. 439.

> The individual features are altogether lost
>
> Where over virgin plains railway's built,
>
> New windows open in the city Spring,
>
> Or the crowd roars among the charging horses;
>
> As if from the top of a mountain
>
> The years of illness seem minute and far,
>
> A valley rubbish-heap among the sun-swept ranges.[123]

The individual as previously conceived in poetry becomes 'altogether lost'. The mirror 'fades', replaced with a 'New window open' into a future world. Lehmann transforms his and Sikyr's experience of May Day celebrations in Red Square into a rallying call from line five. An anti-war activist before a communist fellow-traveller, Lehmann in his travel writing describes the procession of Soviet tanks as 'enormous and terrifying machines like prehistoric beats'. It was Sikyr who 'is immensely excited, and says he could never have imagined anything like it, that Moscow is undoubtedly the place to come to'.[124] Lehmann's change of poetic orientation was almost certainly driven by his personal relationship with Sikyr. In keeping with his argument outlined throughout 'The Years of Illness', Lehmann begins to relate his own experience with Sikyr's, which will be seen in the next section to be a consistent dynamic that develops in his other poetry on the Soviet Union.

The Noise of History's reception was broadly negative. As Hynes concludes, 'the problem was one of audience: in 1934, literary critics were not ready for the Reichstag fire, and the Communist Party was not ready for literature'.[125] One opinion that Hynes neglects though, and which Lehmann himself would have regarded most highly, was Isherwood's. In October 1934,

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[123] Lehmann, *The Noise of History*, p. 62.
[124] Princeton UL, Department of Special Collections, Manuscripts Division, C0746, Lehmann Family Papers, Series 4: Journals, box 73, fol. 8.
[125] Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, p. 144.

Isherwood wrote to Lehmann outlining his thoughts on this collection.[126] He valued the prose poetry most, because 'when you are the most objective you are the most successful', hoping that 'for all our sakes, you will go on and on experimenting with this medium; because I'm sure you've got on to something which will yield more and more, the more you work it'. Directing Lehmann towards a possible next project, Isherwood suggested 'I should like an immense volume; a complete history of Europe, done in this way. It is essentially a modern form, a kind of sublimation of the newspaper. I can't imagine anything better for dealing with the subjects which interest us both'. As Isherwood advised, Lehmann continued his experiments in this most modern medium. The next section explores Lehmann's poetry on the Soviet Union in the mid nineteen-thirties.

'Your power over the world around me': Transforming Travel Writing into Poetry, 1934-37

'What can poetry be?', Lehmann asks in his 1933-34 poetry notebook. He is aware of how poetry 'seems to disappear' when confronted by mass unemployment, class war and prison camps. To survive in this increasingly threatening world 'poetry must become louder, clearer, wider in scope and appeal'. Lehmann recommends 'a poetry that becomes conscious of world movements, that can feel the blood flowing through the veins of a city, the unity of the life of a continent, and see the individual in perspective in the mass struggles'.[127] These confident proclamations depart from the pessimism and anxiety characteristic of his time in London. Two years amongst the workers in Vienna and the Soviet Union have empowered Lehmann to now believe himself capable of advancing poetry in a new direction.

[126] Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 344, Christopher Isherwood Correspondence with John Lehmann, 1931-1973, box 1, folder 3.
[127] HRC, MS-02436, Poetry notebook, 1933-1934, container 16.7.

Contemporaries of Lehmann had also questioned the position of poetry in the modern world. In 1933, Spender proposed, 'Of human activities, writing poetry is one of the least revolutionary'. Spender believed that the contemporary poet in Britain, however rebellious, could never escape the inheritance of 'bourgeoise tradition' and so withdrew into the 'ideal worlds' of their imagination.[128] The potential revolutionary impact of the eye-witness account provided an answer for how they could contribute to the revolution. These young poets conceived newly of poetry as ascending out of a moment, of an event, of a sense of the now.

Lehmann hoped to resolve this problematic relationship between poetry and the revolution by transforming his and Sikyr's eye-witness accounts of the Soviet Union into poetry. On the first page of his poetry notebook, Lehmann writes a reminder to collect together his 'Soviet moments', suggesting that these experiences in particular possessed a certain texture that gestured in new directions.[129] The term 'moments' recalls one of Spender's defences of poetry as 'the language of moments in which we see ourselves or other people in their true relation to humanity or nature'.[130] Travel writing to this end functions as a necessary starting point in Lehmann's poetic process, recording what he deemed to be the most important 'moments' to be further interrogated for their ultimate significance. This starting point connects to Lehmann's favourite Georgian poetry, which, in Robert H. Ross's evaluation, was also marked by the poet seeking 'to see again with his own eyes and to feel with his own emotions'.[131] Choosing to transform this travel writing into poetry enabled Lehmann to distil his and Sikyr's experiences, as well as their relationship, into their most concentrated forms. In 1935, Spender notes in an article draft titled 'The Future of Poetry', that 'poetry is the only branch of

[128] Stephen Spender, 'Poetry and Revolution', in *The Thirties and After: Poetry, Politics, People (1933-75)*, ed. by Stephen Spender (London: MacMillan, 1978), pp. 48-53 (pp. 48, 50)
[129] HRC, MS-02436, Poetry notebook, 1933-1934, container 16.7. Lehmann's other personal writings, such as postcards, exhibit no literary ambitions and so reveal an entirely different set of experiences. In one postcard, Lehmann writes to his mother about the terror of exploring the Kiev catacombs, see HRC, MS-02436, Letters (Outgoing Correspondence), Lehmann, Alice (MRs. R. C.), 1930-1938, 1934, container 33.1.
[130] Spender, 'Poetry and Revolution', p. 52.
[131] Robert H. Ross, *The Georgian Revolt: Rise and Fall of a Poetic Ideal, 1910-22* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), p. 260.

knowledge that can form a synthesis of our experiences so overwhelming, so obscure and paralysing'.[132] Lehmann condenses the images, feelings and sensations of his time with Sikyr in the Soviet Union into poetry that over the space of a few lines seeks to create an internal harmony, impossible to achieve in prose, that promises to transform Sikyr's individual perspective into a reflection of wider class struggle for a mass audience.

Work had to be done by Lehmann to transform this raw material of his and Sikyr's experiences into poetry. In the top left corner of the first page of Lehmann's journal typescript of his spring 1934 expedition to the Soviet Union are notes in Lehmann's handwriting that appears to indicate his initial thoughts about how to use his travel writing in future work. The key lines read '[attitudes to be implicit: or only explicit in @ T's comments]'; 'contrast before & after'; 'certain incidents spread out into easier prose'; 'portrait sketches of people all thought out'; ' – space, space'.[133]

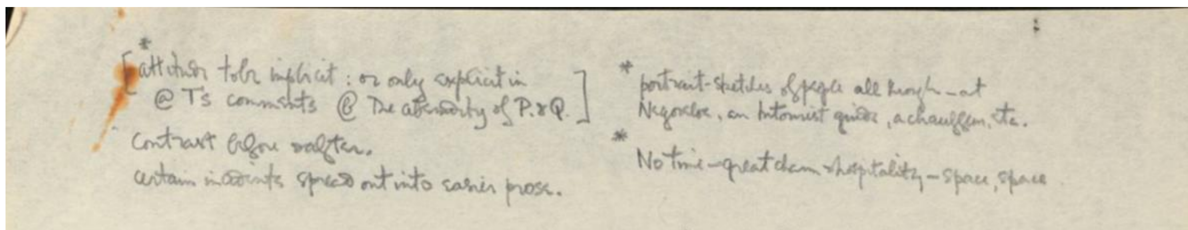

Figure 15: Princeton UL, Department of Special Collections, Manuscripts Division, C0746, Lehmann Family Papers, Series 4: Journals, box 73, fol. 8.

Lehmann felt he needed to make his own attitudes 'implicit' and Sikyr's 'explicit'. In so doing, he attempts to circumvent the thorny problem, widely articulated by Woolf, Spender, Lehmann, and many others, of bourgeois writers attempting to get inside the working-class experience.

[132] Austin, Harry Ransom Center (HRC), University of Texas at Austin, MS-3936, Stephen Spender Collection, Notebook (Rough Draft for Prose Poems), container 4.4.
[133] Princeton UL, Department of Special Collections, Manuscripts Division, C0746, Lehmann Family Papers, Series 4: Journals, box 73, fol. 8.

In another journal entry, Lehmann remembers how, over the course of their visit to the Soviet Union, 'my companion's favourable opinions confirmed my own – in some cases he abolished my own doubts by his spontaneous appraisal and approval'. Lehmann defers his own views to that of the authentic working-class experience. 'His instinct', Lehmann says of Sikyr, 'would be far surer than my own about many of the things that we should see – he knew what work in a factory was like, for instance. As I should judge inevitably from a still bourgeois standard, he could judge as a proletarian'.[134] In Lehmann's account of events, Sikyr was always a sympathetic observer. Sikyr was 'astounded' with the seeming rewards of Soviet socialism, for instance, with the factory's absence of bosses, their employment of women, and their recreational facilities.[135]

Lehmann was not alone in believing that the proletariat provided the key to unlocking authentic socialist realism. As Charles Madge declared, 'proletarian writers arrive at socialist realism naturally, instinctively, both despite their lack of education and because of it'.[136] Edgell Rickword informed Lehmann that the miner B. L. Coombes could develop into a worthwhile writer only if 'he sticks to the life he knows'.[137] Poets in the nineteen-thirties, as Scott Lyall helpfully foregrounds in the case of MacDiarmid, hoped to create a style that could 'communicate more widely with a working-class readership'.[138] Orwell in *The Road to Wigan Pier* did 'not think it is possible' to be 'really intimate' with the working class.[139] Lehmann's

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[134] HRC, MS-02436, Notebook (Rough Draft for Prose Poems), container 15.6.
[135] On the reality of working in a Soviet factory under Stalinism, see Kevin Murphy, *Revolution and Counterrevolution: Class Struggle in a Moscow Metal Factory* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), pp. 186-223. On the changing nature of work under Stalin, see Stephen Kotkin, 'Coercion and Identity: Workers' Lives in Stalin's Showcase City', in *Making Workers Soviet: Power, Class, and Identity*, ed. by Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Ronald Grigor Suny (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2018), pp. 274-310. On workers' responses to the purges of their managers, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'Workers against Bosses: The Impact of the Great Purges on Labour-Management Relations', in *Making Workers Soviet: Power, Class, and Identity*, ed. by Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Ronald Grigor Suny (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2018), pp. 311-340.
[136] Charles Madge, 'Writers Under Two Flags', *Left Revie*, 2.5 (February 1936), 228-230 (p. 230).
[137] HRC, MS-02436, III. Recipient (Incoming Correspondence), Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., 1936-1941, container 66.7.
[138] Scott Lyall, 'MacDiarmid, Communism and the Poetry of Commitment', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Hugh MacDiarmid*, ed. by Scott Lyall and Margery Palmer McCulloch (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 68-81 (p. 72).
[139] Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, p. 147

poetic development in the middle of the nineteen-thirties grapples with this problem and his travel writing to the Soviet Union is clearly an attempt to create poetry by a worker for the workers. Lehmann took Sikyr's lead when deciding what aspects of experience to make explicit in his poetry. Lehmann consciously foregrounds Sikyr's 'proletarian' perspective of the Soviet Union in his travel writing which becomes a kind of narrative persona for Lehmann to inhabit. It is important to clarify here that this does not mean that Lehmann entirely sublimates his own viewpoint. Lehmann modifies his perspective to respond to Sikyr's, which is a dynamic that shifts across this body of poetry. Sikyr functions as Lehmann's constant poetic muse, providing the poet with the confidence to experiment in developing a new poetry. That Lehmann was not content to encourage Sikyr to write his own poetry immediately raises questions regarding the radical possibilities of his poetics.[140]

Lehmann's poetry on the Soviet Union took two forms: the 'prose poem' and the 'revolutionary song'. Lehmann originally conceived of his poetry coming out of his 1934 trip to the Soviet Union as part of an ambitious project that he hoped would 'capture the complexity of life and of consciousness'.[141] Developing Isherwood's recommendation, Lehmann wanted to bring together multiple genres – diary entries, letters, prose poems, revolutionary song, imagined newspaper extracts – into one book that reflected modern life. Each genre for Lehmann had a specific function. Diaries provide insights into an individual's thoughts, conflicts, and experiences; letters show an individual connected to a wider social group; prose poetry as a panorama of the external world; revolutionary song imbues a message of optimism for the working class and revolutionaries; newspaper extracts capture the background to places and events in Europe and all over the world. While this 'immense volume' was never finished, there are materials relating to this project in Lehmann's poetry notebooks.[142]

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[140] Lyall, 'MacDiarmid, Communism and the Poetry of Commitment', p. 71.
[141] HRC, MS-02436, Poetry notebook, 1933-1934, container 16.7.
[142] Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 344, Christopher Isherwood Correspondence with John Lehmann, 1931-1973, box 1, folder 3; HRC, MS-02436, Poetry notebook, 1933-1934, container 16.7.

Lehmann's move by the spring of 1934 towards this project, towards a style of poetry that, in Isherwood's terms, sublimated the features of journalistic reportage, occurred at the same moment when British left-wing writers more generally began to emphasise the revolutionary potential of the eye-witness account. Hynes argues that in Britain 'the emergence of the document as a literary category' emerged after the First Soviet Writers' Congress.[143] A crucial part of this project involved documenting everyday life and work. In *Left Review*, Williams-Ellis, who had attended the Soviet Writers' Congress, started a literary competition encouraging working-class readers to write from their experiences.[144] Montagu Slater argued that 'Descriptive reporting has a revolutionary impact. (We have invented a jargon name for it, reportage.) Certainly to describe things as they are is a revolutionary act in itself'.[145] Early Marxist literary criticism in Britain evaluated English literature according to a similar standard. T. A. Jackson suggested that Charles Dickens was 'the greatest master of reportage'.[146] Lehmann's most significant and well-known contribution to this documentary movement came later with *New Writing*. He travelled across Europe and Soviet Georgia searching for short, realistic prose. H. A. Mason's review for *Scrutiny* found that the 'best writing' found in *New Writing* 'is that of the *reporter*'.[147] Julian Symons later concluded that Lehmann introduced a form of 'documentary propaganda' through *New Writing*.[148] Lehmann's poetry from 1934 can be in fact read as an initial idea that would eventually evolve into *New Writing*.

Lehmann's first attempt to translate his and Sikyr's perspective into poetry is found in his journal entries on the Crimean Peninsula. In the original travel account, Lehmann and Sikyr spend five days in Yalta and the surrounding area. Lehmann writes of hilltop views and marvels

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[143] Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, p. 216.
[144] For Williams-Ellis' literary competitions in *Left Review* as an integral part of her own literary and political development, see Chapter 2, pp. 128-139.
[145] Slater, 'The Purpose of a *Left Review*', p. 361.
[146] T. A. Jackson, 'Dickens: The Radical', *Left Review*, 3.2 (March 1937), 88-95 (p. 92).
[147] H. A. Mason, '*New Writing*', *Scrutiny*, 5.1 (December 1936), 315-316 (p. 315).
[148] Julian Symons, *The Thirties: A Dream Revolved*, 4th edn (London: House of Stratus, 2001), p. 51.

at the 'the wide, endless blue expanse of the sea'.[149] Having only seen the sea for the first time a few weeks earlier, 'T. is wild with delight and wonder'. Lehmann records the types of plants, 'cypresses', 'Purple-Judas trees', 'Golden Rain', 'wild roses', doing the same for ethnicities, 'Tatar', 'Russian', and 'Greek'. Sikyr is bought a Tatar cap and 'is rendered blissfully happy, can't be separated from it'. Sitting on their hotel room's balcony, 'T. dons a bathing suit, and we sun ourselves'. Yalta appears 'below us'. They watch the sea change a 'rose evening colour'. In the evening, they see the 'proletarian crowds that swarm along the streets not so long reserved for princes and the richest bourgeois'. In the evening, 'T. and I take a boat, and row out to sea'. A scribbled note in the margin reads 'enlarge on this romantic landscape'.

Lehmann condenses these experiences into an unpublished prose poem that holds a revolutionary message within the living body of Sikyr. Attached to Lehmann's draft of this unfinished poem are notes that provide insights into the poet's intentions. One reads, 'On the balcony, T. – Hold this moment'. Lehmann's attraction to Sikyr is overwhelming and the lover is transformed into an object of veneration. The narrator describes in detail a 'gold-haired' young man's body as he poses by a window that looks out to the sea and a mountain range. As the man looks out towards the mountains, 'the sun came out of shadow and streamed over his dark-brown cheeks and throat as his forearms laid across the sill'. In another note, Lehmann states how 'This is the reality' and 'This is the future'. What does he mean by this? The 'reality' is the description of the unfolding scene as it unfolds in chronological time. The 'future' is alluded to in the staging of the natural world. The young man is representative of all men and the sun's movement and contact with the man's body is suggestive of a bright future. The next section follows the man through the night, paddling 'naked in the canoe, dancing under the trees, and many poses before diving'. Lehmann's memory of Yalta is compressed here into a

[149] Princeton UL, Department of Special Collections, Manuscripts Division, C0746, Lehmann Family Papers, Series 4: Journals, box 73, fol. 8.

composite sketch, again with a focus on Sikyr's body. Separate experiences over days immediately follow one another. The effect is to heighten the sense of the body's movement in darkness. The next paragraph moves to the perspective of an unnamed 'I' who remembers this sunlight as 'the revelation of spiritual love'.[150] In this unpublished poem, Lehmann transforms Sikyr into the subject of a homoerotic, dreamlike vision. There is nothing explicitly working class or Soviet about this poem. Rather, Lehmann's experience of travelling with Sikyr to the Soviet Union enables him to use his private, sexual relationship with Sikyr to create a poem that contains a revelation about the strength of the male body and its role in the creation of a better future.

Based on this same travel writing material on Yalta, Lehmann's revolutionary song 'Crimea Red' performs a different function for a public audience.[151] Published by *New Republic* in October 1934, Lehmann's first published poem explicitly about his 1934 visit narrates the transformation of the Crimean Peninsula into the holiday destination for the entire Soviet Union. The poem opens,

> Their masses whiten the shore,
>
> As the green-splashed blue water turns to rose
>
> And Ai-Petri creeps over the sun,
>
> Tatars and Russians, Mongols, Turks,
>
> Twirling spring flowers through the twilight,
>
> Rippling out laughter, ease.[152]

[150] HRC, MS-02436, Poetry notebook, 1933-1934, container 16.7.
[151] Drafts of this poem are found in HRC, MS-02436, Notebook (rough drafts for stories and prose poems), container 15.7.
[152] Lehmann, 'Crimea Red', pp. 267-268.

The sea and Ai-Petri mountain form the same setting as the prose poem. The differences arise in the way that Lehmann attempts to adapt his travel writing to represent the masses as the subject, rather than an Sikyr as an individual. In his travel writing, Lehmann's physical distance, on top of hillsides, travelling in an Intourist car and people watching from balconies, finds poetic expression in a bird's-eye narrative. There is no 'I' nor 'We' as found in *The Noise of History*, rather 'Their' and 'They'. While Lehmann's narrators are rarely ever direct, confrontational, or combative as in Auden's 'Financier, leaving your little room … The game is up for you and for the others', in his poetry on the Soviet Union the narrators are hidden as subjects.[153] There is no interplay or contamination between the private and public worlds that is found in the prose poem, where the revelatory power of the male body draws in the narrator. Now, the masses come to dominate the private sphere to reflect their shared past struggle, present harmony and future political action. Lehmann promotes the idea that the Soviet Union is a unified nation of peoples, closely corresponding to one of his key findings that 'If I have ever seen real happiness and confidence radiating from people in *masses*, it was then'.[154] Lehmann develops on his representation of Sikyr's individual body when describing the crowd acting as one collective movement, the repetition of the 'tw' sound on line five, and the winding down speed of the final line. Lehmann enlarges his positive vision of Sikyr into an impersonal view of the Crimean peninsula that romanticises the lives of workers in the Soviet Union.

Lehmann's preoccupation with Sikyr's body re-emerges in 'His Hands' (1934), about a vagrant who lifts himself out of a life of petty crime and poverty through working in a Zernograd factory, which becomes a much more interesting piece of writing when read alongside his travel writing and prose poem. In Lehmann's journal, Sikyr is 'curious, more curious perhaps to see what a Soviet factory is like'. Lehmann consistently records Sikyr's

[153] W. H. Auden, 'XXIX', in W. H. Auden, *Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1930), pp. 87-89 (p. 88).
[154] Lehmann, 'Letter from Tiflis', p. 10.

reaction in his descriptions of these factories. After one visit to an automobile factory on the outskirts of Moscow, Sikyr's 'interest has been extremely lively all along, says he can now see how a worker here can really have pride in his own work, comes into his own'. When Lehmann and Sikyr are toured around a workshop in Zernograd, they meet 'a soft-eyed and soft-smiled peasant boy, one of the 'wild boys' claimed from the stations, etc., whose parents had been engulfed by the civil war'. This positive impression of a Soviet factory and a chance encounter with a peasant boy are the source material transformed by Lehmann into 'His Hands'. Lehmann's more ambivalent responses in his travel writing to Soviet industrialisation are not transformed into poetry. Lehmann writes of Zernograd, 'dying churches everywhere, forlorn and corpse-like'. A note besides this comment reads, 'What Moscow will be in five years. Living for the future – T contrasts'.[155] Lehmann disregards his own findings and reminds himself of Sikyr's optimistic perspective. His travel writing functions as a dialogue between him and Sikyr. His poetry seeks to reconcile their divergent perspectives, rather than to interrogate the gap between them further.

Lehmann began writing 'His Hands' in the autumn of 1934.[156] It only found publication, first in *Poetry* (Chicago) in September 1935, and a month later in *Left Review*.[157] On first reading this poem appears to contain an orthodox socialist realist message in its depiction of a vagrant's transformation into a factory worker. The narrator tells us how this vagrant, Petro, used to be a 'Barefoot, grotesque beggar and thief'. Moving into the present, Petro now stands 'beside his new-installed machine'. The relationship between Petro and his machine is represented by Lehmann as personal, sensual and liberating. In fact, this representation takes

[155] Princeton UL, Department of Special Collections, Manuscripts Division, C0746, Lehmann Family Papers, Series 4: Journals, box 73, fol. 8.
[156] Drafts of this poem is found in HRC, MS-02436, Notebook (rough drafts for stories and prose poems), container 15.7.
[157] Lehmann, 'Two Cities', pp. 322-323; Lehmann, 'His Hands', p. 240. For the drafts of this poem, see HRC, MS-02436, Collection of Copies of Poems and Prose Pieces, 1934, container 117.10. Early drafts of this poem provide 'Zernograd' as the narrative's setting, however, in the *Poetry* edition it has changed to 'Leningrad', perhaps in an effort to make the political messaging even clearer.

much from the homoerotic imagery of Lehmann's earlier untitled prose poem. Pavel 'Moved, in a lover's caress, / his oil-black fingers over his machine'. Later, 'In whose blood-throb he feels his hands / Moving over the responsive iron'. The final line looks beyond Pavel to see how he moves 'with a thousand others out of dark'.[158] This harmonious image is clearly inspired by Lehmann's vision of Sikyr's dancing in the darkness at Yalta. Blurring the movement of Sikyr with the machine is a departure from Lehmann's previous portrayal of the relationship between human and machine as antagonistic and destructive ['This Excellent Machine'].[159] Lehmann's poetics, even at its most overtly propagandistic and pro-Soviet, is rooted in his relationship with Sikyr.

Another unpublished prose poem expresses how Lehmann's love for Sikyr affected his experience of Soviet city life. The poem opens with a proclamation of love. 'Yes, it is you', the narrator declares, 'who have unlocked the fountain again, whose channels were for so long stopped, it is you who have made the music start playing again'. This intoxicating love feeds into the narrator's feeling of 'wonder' as he observes their surroundings on the way towards the 'heart of the city' where he is 'caught in a sudden desire to dance'. The beauty of the urban environment, the shop signs, lamps, a beggar, roofs and chimneys all feed into the poet's feeling of ecstasy, of communion with the dispossessed. Remembering this experience in the final stanza, the narrator realises that 'only you can be responsible for what has happened, and stand amazed at your power over the world around me'.[160] Lehmann's love for Sikyr is projected into a general love for the Soviet worker.

Much of Lehmann's poetry on the Soviet Union, then, is most productively read with the knowledge of his love for Sikyr. The naïve ideals and optimism of his poetry are bound up in

[158] Lehmann, 'In Two Cities', pp. 322-323.
[159] John Lehmann, 'This Excellent Machine', in *New Signatures*, ed. by Michael Roberts (London: Hogarth Press, 1934), p. 77. For the drafts of this poem, see HRC, MS-02436, Notebook (rough workbook of poems), container 15.8.
[160] HRC, MS-02436, Poetry notebook, 1933-1934, container 16.7.

his personal feelings for Sikyr's enthusiasm for Soviet life, which they both wrongly believed had been authentically presented to them. As his travel writing demonstrates, Lehmann relied upon Sikyr's experience as raw material for his poetry. Sikyr functioned as the thread that runs through every one of these poems. As he wrote in another poem dedicated for Sikyr, 'And more than all, though you and I / Divided in our life-streams flow, / Still hold us in love's unity'.[161] It is a bleak irony that this poetry rooted in the liberatory power of homosexual love was written in the Soviet Union in 1934, the same year that Stalin made homosexuality illegal.

Lehmann's desire to represent '– space, space' is also consistently reflected throughout his travel writing and poetry. His idea about Soviet space was his preferred way of writing from the perspective of the proletariat. In his journal, Lehmann describes the natural landscapes of an 'empty steppe' where 'only the wind is heard'.[162] The importance Lehmann placed on the vastness of Soviet space was a common theme held by committed Western travellers. His political mentor, Henri Barbusse, claimed in his travelogue *One Looks at Russia* (1931) that the Soviet Union can be best surmised 'as a whole in two words – distance and spaciousness'.[163] Lehmann surmised it with just one, 'space'. The very nature of Lehmann's experience of South Russia and Ukraine, and the resultant representation of Soviet spaces in writing, connects to the continued upheaval of collectivisation. Between 1932 and 1933, as Sheila Fitzpatrick outlines, poor harvests resulted in widespread famine, leaving 'towns swamped with new arrivals from the villages, housing was drastically overcrowded, and the rationing system was close to collapse'. In December 1932, the Soviet regime issued internal passports to prevent peasants escaping the countryside.[164] Lehmann and Sikyr's privileged position as committed Western travellers insulated them from this restriction on free movement as well as the

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[161] HRC, MS-02436, Poetry notebook, 1934-1936, container 17.1.
[162] Princeton UL, Department of Special Collections, Manuscripts Division, C0746, Lehmann Family Papers, Series 4: Journals, box 73, fol. 8.
[163] Barbusse, *One Looks at Russia*, p. 2.
[164] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 41, 43.

tremendous hardships of the peasantry. As a result, the concept of Soviet space in Lehmann's poetry remains liberating and not oppressive, a remedy to the stifling sickness of Vienna, a landscape to travel through at speed by rail and car, a people-less blank canvas to be filled with his and Sikyr's own feelings, communist politics and nature descriptions. This sentiment is best expressed in one of Lehmann's unpublished prose poems on Ukraine in 1934 titled 'Trees', in which the first line reads, 'Green trees: that, when I think of the cities of the Soviet Union, is one of the first ideas that come into my mind'.[165]

Travelling through the landscapes of South Russia, Ukraine and Georgia by train and motorcar affected Lehmann's use of narrative perspective, imagery and rhythm in his poetry. Karl Schlögel and Rodney Livingstone in *The Soviet Century* (2023) suggest that 'The railway lines became the tracks of the Revolution'.[166] In January 1935, Lehmann's 'Waking from Snow' attempts to combine his experience of Sikyr playing in the snow, with their day's journey by train from Azerbaijan to the Black Sea coast.[167] The passenger-narrator watches from inside their train carriage as the scenery changes from 'The swarming crossroads, the litter of houses / Spring close round the rails'. Similarly to 'Looking Within', the emergence of spring can be read as a metaphor for the revolution. As the train continues,

> A thousand gardens white with fruit blossom
>
> Wash up to the carriage window,
>
> A wave, an explosion of life
>
> Bursting under the unexpected sun.[168]

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[165] HRC, MS-02436, Collection of copies of poems and prose pieces, 1934, container 117.10.

[166] Karl Schlögel, and Rodney Livingstone, *The Soviet Century: Archaeology of a Lost World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023), p. 778.

[167] HRC, MS-02436, I. Works, N, container 13.4; Lehmann, 'Waking from Snow', p. 330; Lehmann, 'Change in the Caucasus', pp. 125-141.

[168] Lehmann, 'Waking from Snow', p. 330.

The natural world and by extension the revolution spills into the passengers' carriage. Lehmann's use of 'bursting' is closer in purpose to that found in 'Looking Within' than the 'Travel Bureau'.[169] Framing the poem inside a train carriage again reproduces the distance between the observer and the observed. People appear from such a distance to 'Lie still, like buds just opened', thereby the human effectively melts into the natural. In the final stanza, the train penetrates deeper into the Caucasus:

> Earth, waking from snow
> Where the train curls down from the pass,
> Has broken the green fall of the slopes
> With an upthrust of crocuses, white and purple.[170]

In his travel writing for the British public, Lehmann describes the 'gigantic problem' the Soviet regime faces in dealing with the Ossetians, Ingush, Hevsurs and Svanetians, who occupy this 'wild country'.[171] Lehmann uses the Soviet countryside to first represent and then solve this problem:

> Of the explosion of men's lives released from snow
> The spring of hand and heart and mind
> That still delays.[172]

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[169] 'They say Spring comes in countries over there / With much-desired sleek buds and burst of leaves', see Lehmann, 'Looking Within', p. 73; 'No track returns through time to what has been / No wagon-lit is scheduled to the place / Where twigs begin to cloud with whorls of green, / And purple flags are bursting from their case', see Lehmann 'Travel Bureau', in *Cambridge Poetry, 1930* (London: Hogarth Press, 1930), p. 43.
[170] Lehmann, 'Waking from Snow', p. 330.
[171] Lehmann, 'Change in the Caucasus', p. 141.
[172] Lehmann, 'Waking from Snow', p. 330.

There is a sense here that the revolution, as yet incomplete, is coming. Lehmann here utilises his memory of Sikyr, his own experience of travel, and his preferred mode of nature writing in combination to reflect an experience of Soviet Georgia that conveys an optimistic message.

In January 1935, Lehmann continued his experiments in prose poetry with 'Three Sketches' (1935).[173] This was his first contribution to *Left Review* and first piece of travel writing intended for a radical readership. Clearly Lehmann's earlier poetic development and praise from Isherwood the previous year fed into how he approached the travel writing form. In the first sketch, Lehmann is consciously 'sublimating' journalistic reportage to create a highly stylised, Marxist-inflected prose poem. Attempting to recreate the general feeling of the 'thickening nightmare' of crisis in the capitalist world, Lehmann broadly outlines the shared action of all parliaments, all workers, all private armies, all stock exchanges. It reads like a collection of newspaper headlines. Each sentence in staccato fashion provides a new image that barely follows from the last. Intensifying this feeling is a 'confusion of voices'. After reading the first sketch in *Left Review*, Isherwood found the subject and medium 'interesting', but outlined several criticisms,

> You are too anonymous, you keep yourself too much in the background, I think. And I'm sure that, in your particular kind of work, that is a mistake. Everything is so generalised and discreet. Why can't you say what country you are writing about, who you are, why you are there, etc.?.[174]

Isherwood identifies one of the problems with Lehmann's new style of poetry. The framework that Lehmann outlines in his poetry notebook, between the individual's personal experiences

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[173] Lehmann, 'Three Sketches', pp. 99-101.
[174] Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 344, Christopher Isherwood Correspondence with John Lehmann, 1931-1973, box 1, folder 3.

and the wider collective facing down fascism and marching towards communism, leads to a public poetry that erases the poet's individual voice and experiences. Isherwood had not read Lehmann's 'Red Crimea' or 'His Hands' so had not registered Lehmann's desire to try to represent the experience of the proletariat in general through Sikyr, rather than himself as an individual.

Between 1934 and 1935, Lehmann repeatedly sent letters to Wintringham when he felt his friend was slow to publish his poetry in *Left Review*. In December 1934, he pushed in one letter for the immediate publication of 'Three Sketches' because he felt that 'they're sufficiently topical for it to be a pity for them to be delayed too long'. In another May 1935 letter, as Lehmann prepared to return home from Moscow, his relationship with *Left Review* editors appears fractious. He was 'feeling sore' that 'In Two Cities' had still yet to feature. His duty, 'as great as that of a father to his child', was to see his poetry 'decently treated', meaning published. He would send his writings elsewhere if not for the 'further loss of time'. Lehmann signed off his letter, rather melodramatically, with the charge that the editors of *Left Review* are 'cutting me off from the only audience I want to reach' (echoes here of 'cut off from the greeting hands' in 'The Years of Illness').[175] A postscript under Lehmann's signature informs Wintringham that Sergey Dinamov, the editor of *International Literature*, wanted to translate his poetry into Russian. Lehmann appears willing to exploit his leverage with Soviet literary networks to pressurise *Left Review* into rushing his poetry into publication. This strategy did not work, however: 'In Two Cities' was published five months later.

In April 1936, Lehmann wrote a critical essay on 'Some Revolutionary Trends in English Poetry: 1930-1935' for the Soviet literary journal *International Literature*.[176] Looking back

[175] National Archives, KV 2, John Frederick Lehmann, KV 2/2254; Lehmann, 'The Years of Illness', p. 110.
[176] Lehmann, 'Some Revolutionary Trends in English Poetry', 60-83. In June 1938, Hugh MacDiarmid read this article and wrote to Lehmann to elaborate why he did not feature in *New Country*, see Hugh MacDiarmid, 'To John Lehmann', in *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid*, ed. by Alan Bold (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984), pp. 593-595.

over this recent history, Lehmann, with a publisher's instinct for self-promotion, insisted that 'from the revolutionary point of view', the young poets recently graduated from Oxford and Cambridge (known today collectively as the 'Auden group') represented 'the most significant development in modern English literature'. When evaluating the major poets of the 'Auden group', alongside himself in a strange use of the third person, Lehmann concluded, 'The revolutionary theme is strongly in evidence, but the nature and aim of this revolution remain as vague as the destination to which the poet is continually setting off by a very impatient train, or other modern means of travel'. Evidently unsatisfied with his own recent poetry on the Soviet Union, Lehmann draws from 'Waking from Snow' to suggest that British left-wing poetry 'still delays' its own development. After visiting the Soviet Union, Lehmann, in his own words, has 'shown an increasing preoccupation with, and sympathy for, the revolution, though he has some way to go before he has solved the problems of presentation which this involves for his poetry'. These problems of presentation urgently needed solving. To this end, Lehmann suggests that the poets of the 'Auden group' 'should be the heralds, perhaps the leaders of a new and powerful revolutionary literature in England'. If these poets failed in their task, 'England will have to wait for new, different writers to rise, as there are already signs of their doing, but without the help that such intellectuals can give, from the ranks of the proletariat itself'.[177] Lehmann evidently felt that the help that he gave in the form of poetry on the Soviet Union, led by and for those like Sikyr, did not yet represent the next development of British left-wing poetry.

'I have decided to join the Party!': The Soviet Georgian National Epic, 1937

[177] Lehmann, 'Some Revolutionary Trends in English Poetry', pp. 60, 74-75, 81, 83.

After returning from his second visit to the Soviet Union in the winter of 1935, Lehmann continued to participate in left-wing literary and political networks interested in Soviet culture. His poetry on the Soviet Union appeared in two of the year's anthologies, his own edited *This Year's Poetry*, as well as Janet Adam Smith's *Poems of Tomorrow*.[178] Between 1936 and 1937, he wrote articles on Soviet literature for *Left Review* readers, and on British left-wing literature for *International Literature* readers.[179] He started preparations for his own literary magazine *New Writing*.[180] In January 1936, he became an active member of the SCR, hosting a society poetry reading event with the Soviet poets Aleksandr Bezymensky, Ilya Selvinsky and Semyon Kirsanov.[181] In late August 1937, Lehmann booked a month-long SCR tour to the Soviet Union during the Moscow theatre festival.[182] This advertisement promised a 'specialised programme' benefitting from contact with VOKS, which allowed 'interviews with producers and artists'.[183] A surviving collection of theatre programmes Lehmann kept show us that he attended the Bolshoi Theatre's performances of Ivan Dzerzhinsky's opera *Quiet Don*, and Vasily Vainnen's ballet *Flames of Paris*.[184] After the festival, Lehmann visited for the second time Tbilisi and the Caucasus. In June 1937, only three months after this third visit, Lehmann published an account of this journey in the form of a travelogue titled *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks*.[185]

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[178] Denys Kilham Roberts, Gerald Gould, John Lehmann, eds., *The Year's Poetry 1935: A Representative Selection* (London: Bodley Head, 1935), pp. 108-112; Janet Adam Smith, ed., *Poems of Tomorrow: An Anthology of Contemporary Verse* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), pp. 55-56.
[179] Lehmann, 'Some Revolutionary Trends in English Poetry', pp. 60-83; John Lehmann, 'Should Writers Keep to Their Art?', *Left Review*, 2.16 (January 1937), 881-885; John Lehmann, 'The Seven Soviet Arts', *Left Review*, 3.9 (October 1937), 558-560; John Lehmann, 'Epic and the Future of Soviet Arts', *Left Review*, 3.10 (November 1937), 580-583.
[180] National Archives, KV 2, John Frederick Lehmann, KV 2/2254
[181] London, Society for Co-operation in Russian and Soviet Studies (SCRSS), SCR newspaper clippings.
[182] HRC, MS-02436, Additional Acquisitions, Assorted Russian Materials: Map, Pamphlets, Postcards, Telegram, 1936-1937, undated, container 105.10; HRC, MS-02436, Programs, Charitable appeals, funerals, readings, and talks, 1937-1962, undated, container 108.4.
[183] HRC, MS-02436, Programs, Charitable appeals, funerals, readings, and talks, 1937-1962, undated, container 108.4.
[184] HRC, MS-02436, Additional Acquisitions, Assorted Russian Materials: Map, Pamphlets, Postcards, Telegram, 1936-1937, undated, container 105.10.
[185] Lehmann, *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks*, pp. 1, 27, 145.

At this stage, Lehmann had transformed his and Sikyr's experiences of the Soviet Union into poetry, prose poetry and journalistic reportage. Choosing the travelogue enabled him to now write with greater flexibility a linear narrative centred around his own personal experiences. Until now, the only account of *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks* is a brief summary from Lehmann's biographer, Wright, who defines the travelogue's final dream sequence, when the ancient Prometheus declares himself a member of the Communist Party, as 'the promulgation of a personal vision, promising far more than a nationalistic utopia'.[186] In contrast to Wright, the rest of this chapter explores how *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks* is more than any one singular vision. This travelogue is rather indebted to Lehmann's poetic development, an emerging style of writing reportage in the nineteen-thirties, a shared British left-wing cultural heritage, and a particular political and cultural moment in the Soviet Union. Lehmann's account of his travels through Georgia constructs an idea of a people, society and culture successfully integrated within the Soviet Union, in much the same way as Fox promoted a vision of the Soviet Central Asia in *People of the Steppes*. Unravelling this construction reveals a narrative seeking to reproduce the Soviet regime's desire to revive the national epic form in its Socialist Republics.

Lehmann's visit to Soviet Georgia between August 1936 to March 1937 makes Lehmann one of the last British left-wing writers to travel to the Soviet Union in the interwar period.[187] Increasing political uncertainty in Europe contributed to an overall reduction in British travel to the Soviet Union in the late nineteen-thirties.[188] One of the major political controversies surrounding the Soviet Union therefore came by way of France, with the publication of Andre

[186] Wright, *John Lehmann*, p. 90.
[187] National Archives, KV 2, John Frederick Lehmann, KV 2/2254. Ethel Mannin had made the journey earlier in 1936, see Ethel Mannin, *South to Samarkand* (London: Jarrolds, 1936).
[188] The SCR minutes for 1938 notes that, 'Owing to the uncertainties of the European position, fewer people visited the Soviet Union', see London, Society for Co-operation in Russian and Soviet Studies (SCRSS), SCR minutes. In the late nineteen-thirties, British Left travel writers to the Soviet Union included Walter Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia* (London: Routledge, 1936); Violet Connolly, *Soviet Tempo: A Journal of Travel in Russia* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1937); Pat Sloan, *Russia Without Illusions* (London: Muller, 1938).

Gide's *Back from The USSR* (1937), which was critical of the Soviet regime.[189] In return, Soviet and sympathetic British writers relentlessly attacked Gide. As Gide noted in his sequel, *Afterthoughts* (1937), the book's reception 'brought me a great many insults'.[190] *International Literature* flung one such insult Gide's way, publishing an article titled 'The Laughter and Tears of André Gide', ridiculing the book for its 'contradictions and deliberate untruths' and the writer for his 'unstable emotions'.[191]

Soviet writers sought to develop a Marxist theory of reportage which prevented what they viewed as misinterpretations of the Soviet Union. Georg Lukács offers the most sustained engagement with this development. In an article titled 'Reportage or Composition' (1932), Lukács suggests that a successful Marxist reportage 'establishes a connection, appropriate to its special aim, between the universal and the particular'.[192] In Lukács' theorisation, 'the particular', an isolated fact, should always be represented in relation to 'the universal', the fact's wider cause and consequence. Discussions regarding these theories emanating from Berlin and the Soviet Union arrived in Britain via the pages of *International Literature*.[193] Echoing Lukács, the film maker Ivor Montagu likens Gide's travels through the Soviet Union to 'An Idealist Lost in a Forest'. In Montagu's opinion,

> The trouble with Gide is the same as that with every sincere good-wishing visitor who gets in a muddle over the Soviet Union. He fails to reject all *a priori* imponderables, and realise that if you abstract anything out of the only reality, the ever changing,

[189] André Gide, *Back from the U.S.S.R*, trans. by Dorothy Bussy (London: Secker & Warburg, 1937).
[190] André Gide, *Afterthoughts: A Sequel to Back from the U.S.S.R* (London: M. Secker & Warburg, 1937).
[191] 'The Laughter and Tears of André Gide', *International Literature*, 1.6 (January 1937), 109-113 (pp. 110-113).
[192] Andor Gabor, 'Egon Erwin Kisch: Landing in Australia', *International Literature*, 1. 4 (April 1936), 107-111.
[193] Gabor, 'Egon Erwin Kisch', 107-111.

> flowing whole universe, you won't get a right idea of it unless you take into account its environment in reality, forwards and backwards in time into the bargain.[194]

This air of condescension not only reveals the general intolerance of criticism of the Soviet Union, but also reaches for a different kind of reportage from that first articulated by Lukács. This beginning to think about a Marxist reportage closely resembles the desire amongst Lehmann and the other young poets to reflect 'the individual in perspective in the mass struggles'.[195] Lehmann's composition of 'Red Crimea', for instance, reflects this shift in transforming his and Sikyr's experiences into a poem about the Soviet workers struggling towards a collective future.

The attention in Britain on the new Soviet constitution of 1936 also required Lehmann to refocus on Soviet Georgia as a nation in its own right, rather than the peopleless countryside of his earlier poetry which functioned as a blank canvas with on which to project his feelings and politics. This new Soviet constitution promised the 'Equality of rights of citizens of the U.S.S.R., irrespective of their nationality or race, in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, social and political life, is an indefeasible law'.[196] A month later, *International Literature* reported what this new constitution meant for literature. V. P. Stavsky, the General Secretary of the Soviet Writers' Union, celebrated how national heroes from across the Soviet Union, such as 'Prometheus of ancient Greece and of Amiran of the Caucasus, of the heroes of the Finnish Kalevala and of the Georgia *The Man in the Panther's Skin*', have become 'the titans of the

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[194] Ivor Montagu, 'The USSR Month by Month: Half Way Back', *Left Book News* 1.11 (March 1937), 279-284 (p. 280).
[195] HRC, MS-02436, Poetry notebook, 1933-1934, container 16.7.
[196] Anglo-Russian Parliamentary Committee, *The New Soviet Constitution* (London: Anglo-Russian Parliamentary Committee, 1936), p. 27.

epic of the Russian people, of whom we are proud, become popular and are appreciated by the toilers of our country'.[197]Aleksey Tolstoy echoed Stavsky in his belief that

> Just as the text of the Constitution engraves and formulates the entire creative path of the Revolution, exactly so must Soviet literature imprint in architectonic finished forms and artistic works of novels, plays and poems, the countenance of the country, a new, strong, young countenance which, as I have already mentioned, appears as a colorful picture through the lines of Constitution, which pushes itself into the foreground of the life of the world, in spite of the cawing of the fascist crows.[198]

Tolstoy argues here that the constitution's successful establishment of new laws for the Soviet republics should serve as a guide for the development of Soviet literature. Indeed, in the months leading up to and beyond the publication of *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks*, *International Literature* regularly produced full-length features on the Soviet regime's encouragement of national art.[199]

Throughout the interwar period, many on the British Left believed the Soviet regime's claims that it protected and encouraged equality across its nations. KINO Films (1935) distributed films focussing on the development of these Soviet republics.[200] One *League Against Imperialism* pamphlet in 1935 claimed that the Soviet regime had 'solved the national problem' by giving 'full freedom to all subject peoples to decide their destiny as they pleased'.

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[197] V. P. Stavksy, 'Writers' Speeches at the Eight (Special) All-Union Congress of Soviets', *International Literature*, 1.6 (January 1937), 3-6 (pp. 3-4).
[198] A. N. Tolstoy, 'Writers' Speeches at the Eight (Special) All-Union Congress of Soviets', *International Literature*, 1.6 (January 1937), 3-6 (p. 5).
[199] 'Writers' Speeches at the Eight (Special) All-Union Congress of Soviets'; Soviet Chronicle, 'The Festival of Georgian Art in Moscow' , *International Literature*, 2.3 (March 1937), 102-104; Shota Rustaveli, 'The Knight in the Tiger's Skin', *International Literature*, 2.8 (August 1937), 3-38; Shota Rustaveli, 'The Georgian Epic', *International Literature*, 2.8 (August 1937), 39-47.
[200] Manchester, Labour History Archive and Study Centre (People's History Museum), CP, Miscellaneous non-party organisations, CP/ORG/LIST/MISC/4/4.

The pamphlet continued, ‘Never has there been in the history of the world a country presenting such a variety of national units, all based on national self-expression, and all in a state of continuous growth’.[201] In November 1936, Ivor Montagu in *Left News* denied claims of ‘Red Imperialism’, instead citing as evidence the Soviet regime’s efforts at ‘cultivation of national differences’. Montagu concluded that the Soviet Union had ‘already established on one part of the earth the brotherhood of races’.[202]

This political climate shaped Lehmann’s direct experience and later representation of Soviet Georgia as outlined in *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks*. In autumn 1936, while in Tbilisi, Lehmann sent a letter into *Left Review* asking ‘Did you read the new Soviet Constitution?’. He continues, ‘If you did, you’ll know that Georgia now has been made an independent republic on an equal footing with any other republic in the Soviet Union’. Like Montagu, he dismisses ‘Red Imperialism’ and urges the reader ‘Come and see for yourself’.[203] *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks* reflects Lehmann’s growing interest in the Soviet regime’s treatment of Georgia, which makes this travelogue distinct from his earlier travel writing and poetry. Between 1934 and 1935, his travel writing focussed on educating Sikyr, economic changes and natural landscapes. His poetry reimagined the South Russian and Ukrainian countrysides as vast, empty spaces in which to reflect his relationship with Sikyr and the wider significance of the revolution. Lehmann is less concerned at this moment with the particularities of life in the Soviet republics. By 1937, Lehmann writes more specifically on ‘the Bolshevik solution to the problem of national minorities’. The book is set in Georgia, with mostly Georgian characters, and long discussions of Georgian art and literature. It wants to be a Georgian story. Moscow only features at the beginning, as Lehmann’s train departs the Moscow station. The Bolsheviks

[201] Manchester, Labour History Archive and Study Centre (People’s History Museum), CP, Miscellaneous non-party organisations, CP/ORG/MISC/10/05.
[202] Montagu, ‘The USSR Month by Month’, 156. Ivor Montagu, ‘The USSR Month by Month: Red Empire’, *Left Book News*, 1.6 (November 1937), 153-156 (pp. 153, 156).
[203] John Lehmann, ‘Letter from Tiflis’, pp. 8, 15.

come second in the title. Consequently, the motivation underlying this travelogue is to find, as Lehmann terms it, 'whether the new system of life the Bolsheviks are creating had a universal, and not merely a Russian significance'.[204]

This political interest combined tellingly with Lehmann's interest in the state of British left-wing and Soviet literatures. In the two-year period between visits to the Soviet Union, Lehmann made several public statements on the future of British left-wing literature. In September 1935, Lehmann drafted an article for *Left Review* and *International Literature*, recommending 'a movement away from obscurity, private jokes, ambiguous political implications, to a wider kind of anti-fascist kind of writing, unequivocal, with an appeal that can reach many thousands more than their present writing can, encumbered as it is with the remains of Eliotism and surréalisme'.[205] By this time, Lehmann favours the Popular Front's strategy of anti-fascist politics combined with a transparent style of writing.

Literary concerns continued to pull Lehmann to the Soviet Union in 1936. In 1934, Lehmann visited because of a desire to root his new poetry in Sikyr's perspective. By 1936, Lehmann acquires a greater understanding of Soviet culture, literature specifically, in order to feature the best of it for *New Writing*. As he had written a year earlier to T. H. Wintringham, 'I am anxious to get materials as soon as possible. Particularly from promising Left Rev. writers'.[206] Under the careful supervision of an Intourist guide in Tbilisi, Lehmann attended the local theatre, art gallery, and regularly met with Georgian cultural elite to discuss recent developments in their respective art forms.[207]

Contemporaneous travellers to the Soviet Union also debated how the Soviet solution to the 'nationality problem' affected culture. In November 1937, Paul Robeson for *Left Review*

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[204] Lehmann, *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks*, p, i.
[205] National Archives, KV 2, John Frederick Lehmann, KV 2/2254; Lehmann, 'Some Revolutionary Trends in English Poetry', 60-84 (pp. 82-83).
[206] National Archives, KV 2, John Frederick Lehmann, KV 2/2254.
[207] Lehmann *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks*, pp. 89-102

celebrated 'the fruit of a National Policy which had completely transformed the vast Soviet Union'. Having attended an Uzbek opera in Moscow that spring, Robeson remembered, 'Before me was a theatre of coloured people from the East, which had created opera in its own form – a form which must have served this people for centuries. But it was filled with the substance of their present-day life'. The story of the opera involved women under the dual oppression 'of Moslem Custom and Great Russian serfdom', before realising their freedom with the help of 'the representatives of the New Russia'. This provided Robeson with a concrete example of a successful development of a national culture. Economic transformation enabled 'a new order of social relationships' which in turn gave rise to new forms of indigenous art.[208]

Turning to *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks*, Lehmann's foreword immediately foregrounds the travel narrative's fictionality. The reader is prepared to expect not 'a book of full and exact history, or of exhaustive facts' about Soviet Georgia.[209] Instead, Lehmann allows himself 'a certain license of rearrangement and invention', due to the short turnaround from his visit to publication. This 'certain licence' in practice means that all of his characters are 'imaginary, apart from those Georgian poets who are mentioned by name'. Furthermore, there is no way of knowing for certain which of Lehmann's three visits he is describing. While Lehmann relies on his imagination, he maintains that his descriptions are nevertheless 'recreated from observation' and so remain in accordance with reality. Lehmann further clarifies that this license 'has not been with the conscious aim of embellishing or distorting my impressions'. And yet, Lehmann provides no explicit justification as to why he chooses to fictionalise his travels in this manner. This is somewhat surprising, for Lehmann's position appears a move away from his earlier preference for 'unequivocal' writing, as well as the claims to reflect direct experience made by almost all British left-wing travel writers to the Soviet Union. Indeed, the

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[208] Paul Robeson, 'National Cultures and the Soviet Union', *Left Review*, 3.10 (November 1937), 577-579 (pp. 577-579).
[209] Lehmann, *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks*, p. i.

Left Review reviewer of the travelogue, Gore Graham, concluded that 'It is perhaps unfortunate that there are not more facts, for facts – even, on occasion, statistical facts, - can be exciting'.[210] Lehmann wrote to the German writer and CPSU member Alfred Kurella that he 'was trying to write something a little livelier than the usual Russia Travel book'.[211]

This reliance on fictionality is in part rooted in the 'nationality problem'. Lehmann goes on to state, 'I originally went to the Caucasus, not only because the country attracted my imagination, but also because I felt that in that extraordinary mixture of peoples and civilizations one would see more clearly whether the new system of life the Bolsheviks are creating had a universal, and not merely a Russian significance'.[212] This question develops the one posed more tentatively by Fox a decade earlier in *People of the Steppes*. Both Fox and Lehmann fit within Hynes' classification of travel writing in the nineteen-thirties, transforming 'their travels into interior journeys and parables of their times, making landscape and incident – the factual materials of *reportage* – do the work of symbol and myth – the materials of *fable*'.[213] How Lehmann transformed his travels into symbol and myth is the subject of the last pages of this chapter.

Another reason is found in Lehmann's manuscripts. Lehmann's early drafting of *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks* in his 1934-35 notebook reveals that he originally leaned much more into fiction.[214] It could only be so when Lehmann held such a fondness for the Caucasus, writing a play about the Prometheus myth in his youth.[215] Lehmann's preference to fictionalise his travelogue is because this allowed him to repurpose unused poetry and prose that he had already written from 1934. The first draft of something resembling *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks* takes the form of a fictional letter to a friend called Paul, who is the same character

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[210] Gore Graham, '*Prometheus and the* Bolsheviks', *Left Review*, 3.8 (September 1937), 494-495 (p. 495).
[211] HRC, MS-02436, II. Letters (Outgoing Correspondence), Kr-Kz, container 32.2.
[212] Lehmann, *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks*, p. i.
[213] Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, p. 228.
[214] HRC, MS-02436, Poetry notebook, 1934-1936, container 17.1.
[215] HRC, MS-02436, I. Works, C-Ch, container 5.10.

who appears in *Evil Was Abroad*. Sitting in a garden gazing at Mount Elbrus, the narrator writes 'My head is so stuffed with all kinds of impressions, with hundreds of new sights and sounds and ideas, that I don't know where to begin'. He decides to begin with an act of incredible generosity on a train to Baku, where a Russian gifts the narrator cigarettes, cognac, a book and a new film for his camera, which is reconfigured into the opening scene of a train journey to Tbilisi for *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks*. Alongside the drafts of this travelogue, Lehmann writes small pieces of prose that include characters who are found in *Evil Was Abroad*. Lehmann also relies on imagery first developed in his poetry. In 'Chapter Six', he writes of the remotest villages of the Caucasus and how 'A new spring is climbing to the mountain peaks, melting the barriers, like snow and ice', a clear reference to 'Waking from Snow'.[216] What the manuscripts reveal is the intertextual nature of the travelogue alongside poetry and prose, which is anything but a straightforward description of a factual, linear journey.

Lehmann opens *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks* aboard a train bound for Tbilisi.[217] Lehmann again finds particularly memorable the experience of travelling by train across the Soviet Union. In 'Waking from Snow', the train travelling at high speeds appears to carry the revolution into far flung places.[218] The narrator's external world, the surrounding countryside, reflects the revolution in terms of changes in seasons and colours. Train travel in *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks* serves a different function. This opening set piece gives the impression to the reader that they are starting a journey with the narrator. In cutting out his departure from London and residence in Moscow, Lehmann restructures his travels into a narrative chiefly concerned with Soviet Georgia and its people. The travelogue form also enables Lehmann to intersperse narrative with political and historical information. Rather than recording the entire train journey Lehmann provides in Chapter II a history of Tbilisi. Chapter III picks up the

[216] HRC, MS-02436, Poetry notebook, 1934-1936, container 17.1.
[217] Lehmann, *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks*, p. 1.
[218] Lehmann, 'Waking from Snow', p. 330.

narrative as the train approaches Tbilisi. At this moment, Lehmann records, like in 'Waking from Snow', how the winding shape of the railway provides different perspectives to view the 'Red Tiflis', revealing how the

> innumerable half-lit façades, pricked by window-lights, cut by the shadows of roofs and vaguely discernible trees and bushes, sort themselves out into the pattern of a town, filled with a concealed intimate life that quickens your curiosity and pleasure.[219]

Lehmann's description of the Georgian landscape makes use of the limited first-person perspective. The town conceals as much as it reveals. Nothing is clear to the traveller's gaze. Rather than the countryside obviously reflecting the revolution, there is an awareness that the urban environment reflects only the surface of Georgian life. This scene is also is very similar to his earlier untitled prose poem in which a narrator walks down side streets towards the 'heart' of the city.[220] This opening narrative of a train journey into Tbilisi heightens the 'curiosity and pleasure' within the reader, setting the expectation that Lehmann will detail this intimate life.

Lehmann's representation of the Georgian people in *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks* is his latest effort, this time in prose, to mine his individual experience for its universal significance. After the May Day celebrations, the narrator recalls how

> slowly an idea formed in my mind of the life of Soviet Georgian citizens, not merely the outer frame, the hours in the factor or office or school, the hours devoted to social work, the hours for sport and training, the hours for extra study or recreation in the evening, but also the inner picture.

[219] Lehmann, *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks*, pp. 12-26, 27.
[220] HRC, MS-02436, Poetry notebook, 1933-1934, container 16.7.

Lehmann's confidence in his understanding of the Georgian 'inner picture' continues the trend in his poetry of the public world being indistinguishable from the private. Without the perspective of Sikyr, Lehmann relies on the cult of Stalin as the unifying signifier. In Chapter Nine, Lehmann photographs a young Georgian boy and, based on his physical features, imagines him to be 'a reincarnation of Stalin in his youth', even labelling the photograph with the dictator's nickname 'Sosso'.[221] As with Fox dreaming of Lenin succeeding Genghis Khan, or Williams-Ellis finding value in the use of forced labour in the *White Sea Canal* (1935), Lehmann's failure is similarly rooted in deploying political narratives to fill in for the cultural gap that existed between him and the Georgian people.

Figure 16: John Lehmann, *The Face of the Boy Sosso*, from John Lehmann, *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks* (London: Cresset, 1937), pp. 120-121.

[221] Lehmann, *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks*, pp. 73, 128.

Lehmann concludes *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks* with an imperial dream sequence titled 'Prometheus'. In this case, the dream is a retelling of the Georgian epic that is inspired by Soviet discussions on the encouragement of national cultures, as well as *Shelley's Prometheus Unbound*. The narrator recalls a dream he had one November afternoon, after falling asleep on a Soviet steamer sailing across the Black Sea. As his eyes begin to close, the environment intentionally echoes the Prometheus myth. The sun 'began to glow red' as if the stolen fire descended to earth. A seaplane, a modern interpretation of the eagle, circles overhead. The narrator's body, sprawled naked on a deckchair, resembles Prometheus chained to the rock. The peaks of the Caucasus, Prometheus' prison, stand ahead of him. The real world blurs with the classical. As the narrator dozes, his companions disappear on their deck chairs, replaced by 'Prometheus himself' lying next to him.[222] This dream sequence serves multiple ends. The dream is about the personification of Georgia freeing himself from his chains. There is also a doubling between the narrator and Prometheus. After discussing the narrator's findings, Prometheus converts to the Soviet cause, which reflexively validates the travelogue. The narrator travelling back home in some sense is taking Prometheus' fire, the knowledge of the Soviet Union, back to Britain. Once more, a British writer rewrites a national myth, and a national hero, to justify the Soviet Union.

Lehmann continued to consider the generic boundaries between poetry and prose into the nineteen-forties. His later discussions on the subject revolve around modernist literature's achievements, rather than as a means to encourage a worldwide communist revolution. In concluding his BBC radio series 'New Soundings' in August 1947, Lehmann chose to reflect on Cyril Connolly's suggestion, put forth in the series' opening broadcast, that prose would soon overtake poetry. Disregarding Connolly's death knell for poetry, Lehmann now believed 'that all prose-poetry

[222] Lehmann, *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks*, p. 243.

tends towards the state of verso-poetry, and becomes more potent in the world of the imagination the nearer it approaches the stricter forms: and that this will always be so'. Lehmann defines prose-poetry in this talk as 'that kind of prose which appeals to the imagination before it appeals to the reason, which awakens the slumbering powers of the intuitive mind, and signifies far more than the surface statement'.[223] In justifying his position that poetry constantly evolves, Lehmann proceeded to analyse Virginia Woolf's literary development throughout the interwar years, finding moments in *To The Lighthouse* (1927) and *The Waves* (1931) that he concluded were the most striking case studies of prose poetry.[224] In focussing on a prose writer, Lehmann hopes to persuade the listener 'that there is a frontier between poetry that is in verse and poetry that is in prose, and even if it is not mapped one comes across the frontier-posts when one travels far enough'. He concludes that Woolf and James Joyce's innovations 'will lead to new experiments, a new vitality and range of prose for a long while to come'.[225] Back in the early nineteen-thirties, it was Woolf's prose and Isherwood's encouragement, that motivated Lehmann to experiment in developing a new poetics. Moving into the post-war period, however, Lehmann now concludes that Joyce's and Woolf's literary writings represent the latest advancement in this form. This broadcast can be seen as one of the first instances when Lehmann retreats to a familiar modernism. Perceiving himself to have failed advancing the direction of poetry in the previous decade, Lehmann now saw modernist prose poetry as the future.

[223] HRC, MS-02436, Broadcast: C-D, container 4.6.
[224] Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Hogarth Press, 1927); Virginia Woold, *The Waves* (London: Hogarth Press, 1931).
[225] HRC, MS-02436, Broadcast: C-D, container 4.6. Underline in the original.

Lehmann required travel writing in order to develop his experimental left-wing poetry in the nineteen-thirties. He hoped to transform his and Sikyr's experiences of Soviet Ukraine and Georgia into a new modern poetry for a mass audience. His unpublished travel journals of this visit prioritise experiences defined as 'Soviet moments' that he thought signalled towards this new poetic direction. With this as his starting point, Lehmann synthesised this raw material of private images, feelings and sensations into a public poetry that reflected a wider class struggle. What remains valuable for today when considering are the radical possibilities of this poetic process. Lehmann is genuine in his desire for Sikyr's economic and personal liberation. His descriptions of Sikyr in the private journals are particularly arresting. He takes seriously Sikyr's impressions of the Soviet Union. Despite this, there are several limitations in Lehmann's desire to base his poetry in an authentic working-class experience. Lehmann never relinquishes poetic control. Sikyr only contributes content for Lehmann's experimentation in form. The radical possibilities are also curtailed by Lehmann's pro-Soviet commitment, which is terminal in leading the poet to abstract his personal relationship with Sikyr into political propaganda that seeks to be representative of the working class movement.

Conclusion

After the Second World War, travel to the Soviet Union irrevocably changed. The first postwar delegation of British writers to the Soviet Union was organised in 1952. In February of that year, the Authors' World Peace Appeal (AWPA) organised a writers' delegation to Moscow with the aim of 'easing the present tension in national affairs' between the West and the Soviet Union. Henry Stead finds that after the AWPA's founding in 1951, 'it was quickly populated by known Soviet sympathisers and widely considered a front organisation and part of the Soviet cultural offensive'.[1] The AWPA had received the invitation to visit from the Chairman of the Union of Soviet Writers and president of the Soviet peace committee, Nikolai Tikhonov.[2] The head of the AWPA committee, Naomi Mitchison, accepted the invitation and proceeded to organise a delegation of ten British writers who would depart as soon as mid-April.[3] In her invitation to writers, she emphasises how the delegation would be of a 'strictly professional, non-party political, nature'. In her view, this visit represented 'one of the most effective steps we can take towards realising the aims of the Peace Appeal'. The committee hoped that the delegation would take the form of 'a representative group of British authors'. However, the invitation failed to generate much enthusiasm. The AWPA's joint secretary, John St John, complained to Mitchison that the 'last meeting was rather a tedious and depressing one as so few turned up and there were so many difficulties'. Mitchison expected to receive enough acceptances to her invitation to be able to create a twenty-person list of 'top ranking' writers. The provisional delegates included A. E. Coppard, Arnold Kettle, James Kirkup, Doris Lessing,

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[1] Henry Stead, 'From Argyll with Love: Naomi Mitchison and the Soviet Union', in *Naomi Mitchison: A Writer in Time*, ed. by James Purdon (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), pp. 99.
[2] Manchester, Labour History Archive and Study Centre (People's History Museum), CP, Miscellaneous non-party organisations, CP/ORG/MISC/3/9.
[3] On Mitchison's work for the AWPA and visit to the Soviet Union in 1952, see Stead, 'From Argyll with Love', pp. 98-103.

Richard Mason, Enid Starkie and Douglas Young. Mitchison felt exasperated because she did not admire two of the writers on this list and struggled to persuade other candidates. Eventually, Starkie dropped out because she refused to sign the peace declaration. Attempts to contact Dylan Thomas went unanswered. Siegfried Sassoon rejected the invitation because he had never flown.[4] The Soviet Union no longer had the wide appeal that it had over the interwar period.

This thesis provides a nuanced understanding of three writers who had leading roles in the development of left-wing literature in the interwar period. It argues that the existing literature on Ralph Fox, Amabel Williams-Ellis and John Lehmann is unsatisfactory. A reader of this literature would only come to know Fox as the author of *The Novel and the People*, Williams-Ellis as the organiser of literary competitions in *Left Review*, and John Lehmann as a poet of the early nineteen-thirties and publisher of *New Writing*. This thesis foregrounds how each writer was occupied with developing their own distinct literary project. Taken together chronologically, these literary projects encompassed the adventure novel, historical fiction, satire, prose poetry, the revolutionary song, Marxist literary theory and the socialist realist novel.

Providing this comprehensive account of Fox, Williams-Ellis and Lehmann also necessitates a re-evaluation of how these literary projects related to the Soviet Union. This is an aspect of these writers' literary and political lives which is often misunderstood. As has been argued in each chapter, Fox is typically understood as an orthodox communist; Williams-Ellis is framed as not understanding the Soviet Writers' Congress; Lehmann's move away from radical politics led to a neglect in his poetry in the middle of the nineteen-thirties. This thesis complicates these presumptions that exist in secondary literature. Fox's *People of the Steppes*

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[4] Labour History Archive and Study Centre, CP, Miscellaneous non-party organisations, CP/ORG/MISC/3/9. For an overview of Doris Lessing's involvement in the AWPA Delegation, see Henry Stead, ''Comrade Doris': Lessing's Correspondence with the Foreign Commission of the Board of Soviet Writers in the 1950s', *The Critical Quarterly*, 63.1 (2021), 35-47 (pp. 39-42).

and *Storming Heaven* create a singular vision of Soviet Central Asia that at times departs from Soviet orthodoxy. Williams-Ellis' understanding of the Soviet Writers' Congress is rooted in her experiments in left-wing fiction in the early nineteen-thirties. Lehmann's poetry on the Soviet Union attempts to transform his working-class lover's response into poetry.

It is clear that these three sympathetic travellers to the Soviet Union had vastly different motivations and literary projects. This diversity is a result of each writer finding inspiration in the Soviet periphery. Fox sought adventure in Central Asia. Williams-Ellis studied Soviet industrialisation in the Donbas. Lehmann holidayed with Sikyr in Crimea and Georgia. These different types of journey resulted in different kinds of travel writing that contained aesthetic judgements which took their literary writings into strange places. Fox's travel writing provided him with a way of looking at a foreign culture which he built into a comprehensive anti-capitalist worldview. Williams-Ellis was fascinated by the Soviet relationship between the writer and reader that culminated in her praise of the Soviet trials. Lehmann transferred his intimacy with Sikyr onto a grand scale of world revolution. In each case, political apologism functioned as a blockage that closed off the more radical possibilities of their thinking. It is not therefore not accurate to characterise these writers as being simply deceived by the Soviet regime. Rather, they were more active participants in the creation of a Soviet culture.

This thesis argues that British travel writing to the Soviet Union contributed to the 'development' of left-wing literature. Fox's and Williams-Ellis' literary activities and political commitments in the nineteen-twenties continued into the nineteen-thirties, which revolved around the Soviet Union, expands and complicates our understanding of the decade's literature. Fox's communist commitment reflects his attraction to male heroes in Central Asia and Russia that evolved into his theory of the communist hero. His use of the adventure novel genre in *Storming Heaven* reveals a willingness to use popular forms in order to effectively propagandise the communist cause. *Storming Heaven* and *This Was Their You* also possess an

anti-capitalist world vision that he first worked out a decade earlier in *People of the Steppes*. Williams-Ellis' dissatisfaction with *The Spectator*'s conservative editorial policy, the influence of her brother John Strachey, and her visits to mining communities in South Wales and the Donbas led to her leftward shift in politics. Her experiments in propaganda writing combine traditional and experimental styles; a modernist subjectivity of revolution in *Volcano*, defamiliarization in *To The Truth*, a new relationship between author and reader in her *Left Review* literary competitions. Even Lehmann's communist poetics attempts to extend and deepen the modernist project, rather than to break away from it entirely, by transforming his relationship with Sikyr and their combined experiences of the Soviet Union into revolutionary poetry.

This thesis does not offer the fullest possible account of British travel writing and the development of left-wing literature in the nineteen-thirties. It instead lays the groundwork for future investigations into this connection between travel writing and left-wing literature. This thesis focusses on the major figures with the most materials. Future work could widen the evidence base by considering other writers, literary genres and geographies.

This thesis, then, establishes how travel to, and travel writing on, the Soviet Union functioned as an integral imaginative resource for these three writers. It contends that their travels and travel writing encouraged the development of new forms of politically committed literature. Each of these writers gained something from travel writing. Fox's *People of the Steppes* produces a personal myth about his self-realisation as a communist hero, alongside a public myth of Central Asia as the heart of the Soviet revolution. Travelling between South Wales and Moscow led Williams-Ellis to experiment with different literary forms with which to teach the British worker about the Soviet Union. Lehmann kept travel journals of his visits because he sensed a record of experiences would prove useful for his future work.

Ultimately, in treating travel writing seriously as a literary category, it becomes possible to gain greater insights into a writer's literary project. Existing accounts of Fox, Williams-Ellis and Lehmann overlook the aesthetic and political concerns outlined in their travel writing, and fail to consider the relations between travel writing and other literary forms, resulting in incomplete interpretations. This thesis recovers how these writers relied on travel writing not only as a factual record, but also crucially as an initial literary text that could be transplanted, adapted and developed into different literary forms. Travel writing provided Fox with an imaginative vision of Central Asia with which he repeatedly returned. Williams-Ellis gained an insight into the historical movement of the revolution, as well as an idealised relationship between the writer and reader. Lehmann attempts to negotiate between his private and public worlds through his unpublished travel writing which focusses on his private love for Sikyr, and his published poetry that imbues this feeling into a hidden queer communism. Without this careful intertextual approach, the sense of these writers having an overriding literary project disappears, leaving behind a disparate collection of texts. The process of tracing these continuities, rewrites and adaptations of travel writing, then, is an essential critical framework with which to trace a writer's developing literary style and political commitment.

This critical framework also contributes to our understanding of the generic fluidity that exists between travel writing and other, seemingly more imaginative, literary forms. Travel writing was particularly useful for these writer for its adaptability. Much of the travel writing cited in this thesis contained sophisticated character development, narrative voice and structure that could be developed and refined across different literary forms. These features often functioned as projections onto the external environment. The best examples of this projection are Fox's and Lehmann's preposterous dream sequences at the conclusions of their travelogues. In the more indeterminate travel writing, such as Lehmann's travel journals, it was possible to combine and expand impressions into a comprehensive vision of the Soviet world. In either

instance, these writers attempted something more than objectively recording their journeys. The act of transforming this travel writing into literature was often a political one. Untethered by their experiences during their travels, these writers utilised different kinds of fiction in order to most effectively persuade their readers to take particular pro-Soviet political positions.

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