

Seeking the 'unofficial Russian' in the 'Real Russia': sincerity in Soviet–British encounters in the Soviet Union, 1928–39

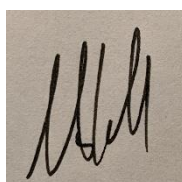
Submitted by Nicholas Hall to the University of Exeter as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Russian

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Abstract

This thesis explores an under-appreciated aspect of British engagement with the Soviet 1930s. Using British travel accounts, it considers how British travellers approached, understood and explored the Soviet Union in that decade. It does so via the concept of sincerity, as travellers sought truth in the Soviet Union. Travellers were aware of Soviet cultural diplomacy and intense ideological debate about the Soviet Union in Europe, and thus simultaneously sought to negotiate Soviet self-representation and present themselves as sincere observers of Soviet life to British audiences.

In the first three chapters it maps a discourse of travel. This discourse can be described as being constituted of a sense of discovery that travel would satisfy, dissent about competing visions and understandings of 'Russia', and doubt/the performance of doubt about a travellers' capacity to offer something new and insightful. The Soviet tour features as a nexus of concepts about sincerity and Soviet self-representation. Finally, travellers conceptualised the Soviet people in various ways, most notably of there being a divide between 'rulers and ruled', and the 'city and the countryside'.

Once this discourse is mapped, the thesis examines encounters between travellers and Soviets framed by three concepts: the 'usable self' of Soviet personhood, the problematic binary of 'public and private' in such a politicised society, and how travellers fit into a sense of 'us and them' in Soviet life. These chapters consider how travellers' expectations, and the general categories described here, are confirmed and confounded by the range of encounters, situations and relationships travellers and Soviets had with one another, and how sincerity was related in these encounters.

This thesis therefore makes several contributions: it considers sincerity as a fulcrum point for study of inter-cultural exchange, and explores its performance and reception in culture; it affirms the value of treating these travellers' texts as cultural objects in their own right, over the political aspects often studied previously; and it explores a range of Soviet reactions to, and understandings of, foreigners, via a great variety and number of encounters that have not yet been considered by the scholarship.

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A note on transliteration: This thesis follows the Library of Congress standard for transliteration of the Cyrillic alphabet. The transliteration used in original material is retained, otherwise the LoC system is applied.

Introduction

‘From the times of Queen Elizabeth it has been Englishmen who have written with the greatest intelligence and sympathy of Russia’ – Bernard Pares¹

‘I dropped orange peel into spittoon. Peasant picked it up & ate it. Later apple core’ – Gareth Jones²

“*Nekulturnii passagier!*” [...] he muttered furiously, pointing to the pile of orange skins I had deliberately put in the spittoon on the floor, rather than litter the carriage’ – Violet Conolly³

This thesis is an exploration of a discourse, and of encounters between individuals from radically different societies, systems of thought, politics, and moral economies. It studies the travel accounts of British travellers to the Soviet Union during pre-war Stalinism, and the multi-layered significance of encounters between travellers and Soviet individuals. It does so via the concept of sincerity. Investigation into foreign social conditions – seeing for oneself – has a long and influential history: Alexis de Tocqueville’s tour and study of the United States, published as *De la démocratie en Amérique* (1835–40) being perhaps the most famous modern progenitor. British travel accounts of the Soviet Union are a complex and specific descendent of such works. These accounts are one product of a cultural and political British fascination, part of a wider Western interest in all things Soviet pre-1939. Indeed, the inter-war period saw a significant number of British visitors to the Soviet Union, seeking to understand the nature of Soviet life and developments. When H. G. Wells published his account of a 1920 visit, *Russia in the Shadows*, such was the desire for a more ‘informed’ view of the new state, and his book was so widely read and debated, that to define its impact would be a ‘limitless task’ in the words of Angus Wrenn and Olga Sobolev.⁴ Fully describing the range and discursive complexity of British (let alone European or global) publications that appeared in the following two decades is too. This interest was riven by disagreements: being ‘informed’ about the Soviet world meant more than being in

¹ Bernard Pares, *Moscow admits a Critic* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1936), 22.

² Gareth Jones, Diary B1-15, March 1933. Gareth Vaughn Jones Papers, National Library of Wales. The appendix to this thesis contains brief biographical summaries of the travellers whose accounts are studied in detail.

³ Violet Conolly, *Soviet Tempo* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1937), 163. Jones was Welsh, Conolly Irish.

⁴ Olga Sobolev and Angus Wrenn, *From Orientalism to Cultural Capital* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2017), 103–105.

possession of mere knowledge – it meant deploying understandings of ideological biases and myriad prejudices to find truth, and to combat others' misunderstandings or deceit. Being informed could also entail the recognition and negotiation of an image projected by the Soviets themselves: cultural diplomacy.

Indeed, negotiating this projection was central to many travellers' attempts to become more informed about the Soviet world. Archibald Lyall, a British travel writer, wrote in a 1933 work, *Russian Roundabout*, of how he would have been 'rather more impressed' with the Soviet world if he had 'spoken to a single unofficial Russian who wasn't fed to the teeth with the whole business.'⁵ He was not alone in making this distinction between 'official' and 'unofficial' worlds. Gareth Jones, a Welsh journalist, referred to a 'real Russia' that was not that of the Soviet government. The Soviet world was seen to be a divided place, with a cultural front – an Iron Curtain, as per Patrick Wright – placed between foreigners and the 'real Russia'; placed there by a government seen as tyrannical or heroic, or something in between.⁶ Furthermore, the idea of there being an 'official' and an 'unofficial' Russia has a long history, one which will be considered throughout as it relates to these travellers: this is not only a history of a specific time and trend, but also of themes that were present in both British and Russian society long before even the revolutions of 1917.

This Iron Curtain and the discourse around it has received examination before, but there is much more to say. When exploring the statements of travellers, a lacuna in the historiography of foreign travel to the USSR became evident: the experiences of foreigners as they encountered Soviet individuals. This thesis looks at the sources produced by these travellers to ask what significance such encounters had for all concerned beyond the previous focus of the historiography, which has centred on the political conclusions of travellers, or the objectives and tactics of Soviet institutions that dealt with foreigners. It looks at foreigner and Soviet together and frames their encounters and relationships through a consideration of questions relating to sincerity – a concept that permeates this history on multiple meaningful levels, but which has not been deployed in this way before. Indeed, the investigation is of, broadly, two key issues of sincerity: the 'questioning sincerity' of a traveller as they explored Soviet life

⁵ Archibald Lyall, *Russian Roundabout* (London: Desmond Harmsworth, 1933), 141.

⁶ Patrick Wright, *Iron Curtain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 60–1.

(performance), and their questioning of other travellers' sincerity, and of Soviet sincerity (reception): the perceived honesty, the trustworthiness, of Soviet guides, Party members, workers, peasants – and the questioning of the sincerity of travellers by these Soviet people.

A contemporary anecdote illustrates the layers of sincerity bound up in the meeting of foreigner and Soviet. It comes from the writing of John Brown, a trade unionist from South Shields. Whilst aboard a boat to Leningrad in 1934, he listened to a speech Sidney Webb gave to their fellow passengers. The Fabian

related a story of Lady Astor's visit to Russia. Lady Astor asked a worker if he was happy. He said he was. She then said he could not be happy, as he could not denounce the Government. But the worker replied 'I don't wish to denounce the government!'⁷

Here are several challenges of sincerity, posed to each actor by another in the scene. First, there is Lady Astor as the foreigner, asking questions of the Soviet worker, hoping to discover something essential about Soviet life, exemplifying the ostensible objective of much of this travel. Then there is her doubting of the worker's reply, because of the ideologically charged context in which the interaction occurs: she expects the worker wishes to 'denounce the Government'. Then there is the worker's protest at being misread, at this questioning of his sincerity – he is his own agent, thank you very much. Then there is Webb relating the story to fellow tourists as a way of showing how jaundiced foreign readings of the Soviet Union could be (against the Soviet Union). Then there is Brown relating the whole episode to his readers as a way of showing how his fellow passengers considered their experiences and deployed such anecdotes in a (politically) meaningful way: if we are aware of ourselves, Webb was saying, we find the truth. Therein are many further questions and understandings that demand elucidation: hence this thesis.

The issues at hand are not the political conclusions reached by Astor, Webb or Brown. Rather, it is their activity and outlook as travellers, exploring a novel world, and the response and outlook of the workers themselves, being asked by the traveller

⁷ John Brown, *I Saw For Myself* (London: Selwyn & Blount, 1935), 180–1.

about their experiences, feelings, and beliefs. By interrogating the encounters such as those between Lady Astor and the Soviet worker, and their discursive framework, this thesis seeks to open up this history of travel and cross-cultural engagement in a new way. It asks questions that ultimately help us better understand this experience for travellers, but also to give a stronger idea as to what it meant for the Soviet individuals themselves. The thesis offers more complexity and granularity to the historiography of this period and place and establishes the travel accounts as still of relevance to scholarship today. At the same time the work considers the topic of foreign travellers in the USSR from a new position, one that has links to wider concepts of cross-cultural encounters. Given the ideas of truth and falsehood, and the revealing and concealing of information that permeate this history, sincerity is a useful frame for us looking back at something of real importance to contemporaries as they related these complex, only ever partially recoverable experiences. These themes remain resonant today, amidst contemporary concerns of 'post-truth' and the difficulty of identifying and relying on sincere information.

The tensions surrounding sincerity – doubt, deceit, truth-telling – were productive: they provoked questions, asked of each traveller and each Soviet individual. That is, when a traveller met a Soviet individual, it was likely that they already had ideas about what they thought this individual might say in response to questions and conversation. A traveller would need to gauge their interlocutor: was what they were saying sincere, or not? And concurrently, how would they themselves appear as sincere reporters to their readers? For the Soviet individual, judgements of sincerity can only be inferred, but it is clear there was a wide range of responses and behaviours relating to truth-telling when it came to engaging with foreigners. Properly exploring these questions requires the mapping of this discourse of travel in which British travellers experienced and wrote about Soviet life and people, and consideration of British framing and responses to encounters with Soviet people. It also requires taking existing historical understanding of Soviet identity and subjectivity and considering it via Soviet encounters with British travellers.

There are scores of travel accounts and hundreds of articles and other reports produced by foreign travellers during the long decade this thesis covers, but only a section are examined closely to keep this work to a manageable scope and to focus the cross-cultural study on Britain and the Soviet Union. The vast majority of the

authors examined are British, but some are by foreigners yet published in London – chiefly Violet Conolly (Irish), and to a lesser extent the Australian Edwin Brown, who travelled with a British companion. Furthermore, whilst the wider discourse is mapped, the particular focus is on those writers who questioned and sought, by turns, an ‘unofficial’, ‘real’ or ‘true’ ‘Russia’. The writers who did not pursue this are still considered to an extent to understand, via comparison and contrast, the travellers that worked in this way. ‘Unofficial’ travel happened frequently for travellers both friendly and hostile to the USSR, and those in-between, as Michael David-Fox notes:

Contacts with ordinary individuals and those outside the circle of handlers may have been discouraged, but they happened all the time. In 1927, ‘friends of the Soviet Union’ were reported to be wandering around the city without guides, visiting acquaintances in their homes, and shuttling around to ‘private parties, etc.’ Even visitors touring the Kremlin the same year were reportedly approached with whispered complaints in foreign languages.⁸

Yet these experiences have not been explored. They are many, and notions that suggest only anti-Soviet writers should be considered should be cast aside forthwith: the travellers who had these experiences cut across the spectrum of political loyalties in several ways. As Sheila Fitzpatrick writes, ‘it is noticeable how even the most sympathetic and receptive of visitors to the Soviet Union tended to stray off the beaten track.’⁹

The thesis is built on a close reading of these travel accounts, supported by a comparative survey of the accounts, and setting them in context via a wide range of secondary material and contemporary primary sources. Hannah Freed-Thall describes close reading as

a way of seeing that takes a wide variety of phenomena – from a poem to a fiddler crab – as lifeworlds to be read. Close reading, understood in this manner, is less a specific strategy than an ethical relation: it names a willingness to suspend what

⁸ Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 120.

⁹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, ‘Foreigners Observed: Moscow Visitors in the 1930s under the gaze of their Soviet guides’, *Russian History* 35:1–2 (Spring-Summer 2008), 215–34, at 234.

Roland Barthes calls the ‘will to possess’ (*‘le vouloir-saisir’*) in order to recognise the indeterminacy and variability of the world around us.¹⁰

In reading the accounts in this way, we can better understand how they help us see that ‘indeterminacy and variability’ found so often in history: we can explore the discourse and the experiences related alongside one another, treating them each with the necessary care and attention and not letting the former override our appreciation of the latter. As will be seen, the travellers often (implicitly) sought a ‘smallness’ (prefiguring Michael Young’s post-war focus on the same in sociology) in the midst of vast ‘bigness’ – the new Soviet world.¹¹ This thesis follows that direction in its own way, via close reading.

THE HISTORICAL AND HISTORIOGRAPHICAL SCENE

That foreigners visited the Soviet Union in such numbers (over 130,000 coming via Intourist alone, according to Igor Borisovich Orlov and Aleksei Dmitrivich Popov) in the inter-war period, and more significantly, why they did so, has been investigated extensively by historians, both in the West and in Russia.¹² The ebb and flow of British interest in the Soviet world has been mapped: a peak present in the late 1920s to the mid-1930s, and during the Second World War (albeit *sans* attendant travel), with notable declines in the late 1930s, and Cold War flashpoints such as the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. The rate and quantity of foreigners making visits to the Soviet Union follows this to a degree. Geopolitical shifts and cultural reconfigurations, orientated around the pivot from the anti-Axis wartime alliance to Cold War

¹⁰ Hannah Freed-Thall, ‘Thinking Small: Ecologies of Close Reading’, in David James (ed.) *Modernism and Close Reading* (Oxford: OUP, 2020), 228–241, at 228.

¹¹ Lise Butler, *Michael Young, Social Science, and the British Left* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 68–69; Daniel Immerwahr’s *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* notes how small-town America became ‘suddenly attractive’ to American intellectuals in the 1930s. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

¹² David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 1; Igor Borisovich Orlov & Aleksei Dmitrivich Popov, *Skvoz’ «zheleznyi zhanaves: See USSR! Inostrannye turisty i prizrak potemkinskix dereven* (Moscow: Izadetelski dom Vysshaya shkolii ekonomiki, 2018), 145. In 1930 British tourists made up 23% of Intourist’s ‘clients’, but by 1936 only 10% – 149.

belligerence, meant that a key period of Western travel fell between 1928 and 1939 and thus this period has been particularly well-examined.¹³

What the Soviet Union 'was' to foreigners is not easy to define neatly or concisely, but efforts have been made to describe how general views were formed. Martin Malia has described how 'Soviet Russia never came into stable focus under Western eyes', but this should not obscure the fact that for many individuals a(n often-narrow) focus was achieved.¹⁴ The advent of socialism on earth in 1917 was perceived as anything from another expression of Russia's 'Asiatic' despotic nature to an expression of a new kind of European modernity, a beacon of progress. In the newly 'leading' Soviet state various foreigners found myriad ideas or trends in which they might invest intellectual, political, or emotional energy.¹⁵ This appeal could be centred on issues as varied as social welfare, justice, economic planning, gender equality, radical art, the reshaping of man, the causes of international fraternity, world peace, disarmament, and world revolution. Similarly, negative perceptions, from fear of Soviet power – ideological, martial – to concern about the Soviet treatment of prisoners and political enemies, and the problems of Russian economic and civilizational 'backwardness' (a long-running theme in Western understandings of Russia), were also influential. Such perceptions, positive and negative, could survive the numerous contradictions discoverable in Soviet life, and attendant criticisms and praise directed at the Soviet Union.¹⁶

Developments in the outside world also significantly affected appreciation of the Soviet Union. The Great Depression and the rise of Fascism in Italy and Germany are the most significant examples of this, with the destabilisation of European society engendering a fervent and passionate interest in the Soviet alternative – apparently thriving as a progressive power amidst reaction and capitalist failings – evident amongst much of the European left in the 1930s. Interest in the Soviet Union was

¹³ That said, whilst the long decade between 1928 and 1939 is far shorter than the post-war years in which tourism also took place, it is important to note that between 1956 and 1990 Orlov and Popov give the total number of foreign tourists visiting the Soviet Union at 108 million. The 1930s are a speck in comparison: it is other factors that have engendered such interest in this travel, not least the contemporary European context. Orlov and Popov, *See USSR!*, 154–5.

¹⁴ Martin Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 292.

¹⁵ Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes*, 292.

¹⁶ David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 4.

bound to concerns with the political, social, economic and cultural problems of Europe of the period, and the USSR inhabited a very particular space here. Comparing the British appreciation of German and Soviet powers in the 1930s, Richard Overy notes how the negative perception of Fascist Germany contrasted to positive appreciations of Soviet promise. Germany, whose language and citizens were more familiar, whose refugees began to arrive in Britain, and whose political reinvention during Weimar had engendered more hopeful expectations than Tsarism ever had, contrasted with the framing of the new Soviet world as one of mysterious promise, alien experience, and as a source of potential ideas to regenerate British life.¹⁷

Indeed, ideas of Tsarism, already powerfully charged with positive and negative connotations were still strong. This was also true for 'Russia' as a concept – which, as with the Soviet Union in terms of Malia's comment of that world 'never coming into stable focus', has a long history of being both a curate's egg and a polarising 'mystery'.¹⁸ The 16th century trader Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations* includes extensive writing on Russia and the Russian people (or Muscovy – the habit of conflating a huge geography with a Moscow-centred polity began early). Russia was seen as a path for English commercial expansion. Hakluyt portrayed Russia as both 'cold and barbaric' and of tyrannical government, but also offering real opportunity for English interests. Indeed, many diplomatic reports to the English court around this time were of a similar mind – not least because 'civility' had become a measure of a society by this time.¹⁹ 'Russia' also acted as a lens to view English/'civilised' conditions and to consider the lessons of Russia's barbarism *vis à vis* improvement of the civil world, as in the case of Giles Fletcher's *Of the Russe Commonwealth*.²⁰ The interest in

¹⁷ Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilisation, 1919–1939* (London: Penguin, 2010), 283–8.

¹⁸ Eleonory Gilburd notes historical Russian perspectives on the West as similarly complex: 'The West has been a mirage, a temptation, a supranational location of the all-human and a savior. [...] images of the materialistic and philistine West, the West of the Antichrist, the West in crisis, have been similarly enduring.' *To See Paris and Die: The Soviet Lives of Western Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 2.

¹⁹ Felicity Stout, "'The Strange and wonderful Discoverie of Russia': Hakluyt and Censorship' in Daniel Cary & Claire Jowitt (eds.) *Richard Hakluyt and travel writing in early modern Europe* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 153–166, at 155–6. See also the works studied in Lloyd Berry & Robert Crummey, *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom: Russia in the Accounts of Sixteenth Century English Voyagers* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968); Anthony Cross (ed.), *A People Passing Rude: British Responses to Russian Culture* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2012).

²⁰ Stout, "'The Strange and wonderful Discoverie of Russia': Hakluyt and Censorship', 161.

Russia changed with British imperatives: during the latter-half of the 19th century, as British strategic interests and those of Russia clashed – over Turkey and Central Asia in particular, interest in Russia surged again. After the Crimean war of 1853–1856, it was Donald Mackenzie-Wallace who played a significant role in revealing the Russian ‘Other’ to Britain. Mackenzie-Wallace spent several years in Russia, before returning to Britain in 1875 and publishing works based on his experiences, including his two volume *Russia* (1877).²¹ He was joined by Maurice Baring and Stephen Graham in becoming influential in Britain on matters Russian.²² Baring, a journalist, published extensively between 1910 and 1914, bringing Russian matters to the British audience with passion and urgency.²³ Stephen Graham, particularly interested in Russian peasant religiosity, was also very active at this time, whilst a British fascination with Russian literature sprang up over the *fin de siècle*. In short, there was an established pattern in British cultural life when it came to Russia: a sense of exoticism, subtexts of civilisational superiority, an appetite for more information, and heartfelt commitment from a small number of Britons who found in Russia something they required. Furthermore, Russia was a British war ally from 1914 to 1917. Within these broad similarities Russia continued to exercise much thought and debate for Britons. 1917 only energised this and shaped the act of going to ‘Russia’: as Robert Byron noted, ‘[t]he tourist goes to Spain to see Spain, or to Italy to see Italy; but to Russia he goes to see Bolshevism.’²⁴

A diverse and contradictory information flow about Soviet matters came, via newspapers and books, speeches and pamphlets, to a British audience immersed in its own debates. British culture in the inter-war period broadly saw a debate between various forms of liberalism, socialism, and the more radical forms of collectivism developing in Europe. Julia Stapleton has identified a specifically English identity inter-war that ‘was also a national self-conception which was well tailored to meet the challenge of the supremely activist philosophies underlying totalitarianism’.²⁵ The

²¹ Douglas Morren, ‘Donald Mackenzie Wallace and British Russophilism, 1870–1919’, *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne Des Slavistes* 9:2 (1967), 170–83, at 172.

²² Sobolev & Wrenn, *From Orientalism to Cultural Capital*, 103.

²³ Sobolev & Wrenn, *From Orientalism to Cultural Capital*, 47–8.

²⁴ Robert Byron, *First Russia, Then Tibet* (London: Penguin, 1985), 61. Byron’s work was first published by Macmillan in 1933.

²⁵ Irish, Welsh and Scottish travellers are also included in this study, yet without wishing to be too cavalier with considerations of national subjectivities, the majority of these travellers were English.

‘essence of a wide variety of interwar conceptions of Englishness was an association less with outward achievement than with a distinctively inward and private nation’, Stapleton writes

Whether in the realm of politics or commerce, the English nation was considered destined to make an ineradicable impression upon an apparently boundless world. After 1918, however, this image lost much of its appeal. Revulsion from war combined with a weariness of empire to force a retreat of the English imagination to more local, familiar, and domestic contexts. [...] This emphasised the marked introspectiveness, modesty, and quiet pleasure taken by the English in their home environments.²⁶

Elements of this are visible in the travellers’ accounts: there is a sense in some of a cultivated modesty and a preference for simpler, less ideological matters that contrasts with the Soviet world’s idealism. Richard Overy interprets this as a darker turn: he identified a civilisational concern with decline, decay, and catastrophe in inter-war Britain.²⁷ After the cataclysm of the First World War, the period was one of significant shifts in British culture. The 1920s saw the first Labour government and the fatal decline of the Liberals: the mainstream political battle was now between organised labour and the Conservative Party. Free Trade, previously for many an emblem of British civilisation – not simply an economic theory, but a driving cultural force – declined to the point of Britain deploying tariffs in the early 1930s and the dogma, faded from ‘historical memory’.²⁸ The inwards-turn saw an appeal to the resources and emotional connections of empire, embodied in Imperial Preference and the Commonwealth.²⁹

Yet the turn away from the wider world can be over-emphasised. Indeed, this should be read not as a rejection of said world, but the development of a different response to it. The argument between liberalism and collectivism constituted the heart of many

²⁶ Julia Stapleton ‘Political thought and national identity in Britain, 1850-1950’ in Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore, & Brian Young (eds.) *History, Religion, and Culture: British Intellectual History 1750–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 245–69, at 263–4.

²⁷ Overy, *Morbid Age*, 2–3.

²⁸ Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 18–19; 344; Richard Overy, *Morbid Age*, 57–8.

²⁹ Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2–3; 275–6.

matters in the inter-war period, and the outside world was significant to this debate. An often-liberal internationalism was cultivated as a response to the horrors of the First World War.³⁰ Travel and tourism were popular in the inter-war period: the first English-language newspaper in Spain, the *Majorca Sun*, was in circulation in the mid-1930s; domestic car ownership and railway journeys also increased, and by the late 1930s about one million trips were made to Europe by Britons, annually.³¹ Furthermore, political allegiance was often explicitly connected with international affairs:

By the mid-1930s, what put intellectuals in one camp or another was, above all, politics. This was most aggressively signalled by the commitment of many young artists, writers, poets – and scientists too – to Communism. The context was an apparent collapse of capitalism, or at least of prosperity throughout the capitalist world, in the early 1930s.³²

Indeed, mass communication saw other developments over the period: alongside the train and the motor car, newspapers saw consolidation too. Britons were more connected to more cities and regions of their country – and beyond – than ever before, both literally and figuratively: numerous newspapers (concentrating then in London) reached circulation figures of over a million during the 1930s.³³ In short: British people were generally more likely to read about matters domestic and foreign in a world that was, relatively speaking, shrinking. The culture of pessimism, Overy notes, flourished due to ‘mass communication.’³⁴ Indeed, the flow of information about the Soviet Union was part of this mass – and so too the avalanche of contradictions and argument about Soviet matters.

Representation of the Soviet Union was a major diplomatic, military, and economic concern for the Soviet leadership, despite shifting political imperatives (world revolution to ‘socialism in one country’, war communism to the New Economic Policy

³⁰ Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 263; Helen McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 2–3; 103.

³¹ John Walton, ‘British Tourism between Industrialization and Globalization’, in Berghoff, Korte and Schneider (eds.), *The Making of Modern Tourism: The Cultural History of the British Experience, 1600–2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 109–132, at 121; Leonard Lickorish and Victor T. C. Middleton, *British Tourism* (London: Routledge, 2007), 2–4.

³² Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900–2000* (London: Penguin, 2004), 171.

³³ Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, 113–14; 116.

³⁴ Overy, *The Morbid Age*, 5; 15.

to the Great Break). Despite persistent fears of foreign-driven counter-revolution and capitalist encirclement, the Soviet Union sought to engage foreigners, for work, expertise, currency and public support, and these twin influences regarding foreign contact – fear of foreign threats, the need for foreign engagement – underscored all Soviet cultural diplomacy. Frederick Barghoorn defined this as ‘an effort to project to all men an image of the Soviet way of life calculated to facilitate Soviet foreign policy objectives’.³⁵ By 1928 this cultural diplomacy was formalised as institutions engaging with foreigners – intelligentsia, worker delegations, those who were curious – for explicitly political purposes. However, the reality of cultural diplomacy encompassed more than Barghoorn’s definition. The reception of foreigners and the presenting of the Soviet Union to these guests went together with internal developments aimed at educating the Soviet people in the new world created by and around them.³⁶

The representations offered by visiting foreigners were complex, varied, and show traces of earlier understandings of ‘Russia’. Often these foreigners produced very positive appreciations of the Soviet Union. As Angela Kershaw writes, ‘*retour de l’URSS* narratives’ (after André Gide’s 1936 work of that name) often displayed a ‘rejection of “modern northern Europe”’ which was

achieved by a dual celebration of both the utopia promised by the new Soviet Russia and of the image of ‘traditional’ Russia on which the myth of the ‘Russian soul’ was based. This dual celebration is of course paradoxical, since it was precisely the ‘traditional’ Russia the Soviet regime sought to demolish.³⁷

Whilst many accounts did chime with the Soviet government’s own self-image and projection of its own novel values and (ostensible) imperatives, discrepancies between foreign understandings and Soviet projections could be about more than misreading strategic imperatives or specific trends. Ultimately, the Soviet Union’s very essence was disputed, its reshaping of Russian society – and its potential for reshaping the wider world – was questioned. Foreigners’ accounts of the Soviet world contributed,

³⁵ Frederick Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), v.

³⁶ David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 10; 17; 30; Ludmilla Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union*, (London: Routledge, 2007), 4–5.

³⁷ Angela Kershaw, ‘French and British Female Intellectuals and the Soviet Union: The Journey to the USSR, 1929–42’, *E-REA* 4.2, 2006, Article 7.

both implicitly and explicitly, to explanations of this essence, and in doing so spurred more questions about it, and thus inspiring the writing and consumption of more accounts. The complex interplay of influences on individual views of the Soviet Union did not, despite strident pro- and anti-Soviet voices in the discourse, force each observer into a polarised camp. Indeed, Paul Flowers has shown how perceptions of the Soviet Union in Britain were of far greater variety than merely gravitating towards extreme 'anti' or 'pro' poles:

there was a broad swathe of opinion between these two poles that praised various social and economic measures being implemented by the regime, and which saw the Soviet Union as at least a potentially beneficial factor in international affairs, whilst maintaining a firm opposition to its authoritarian political norms.³⁸

Nevertheless, travel to the Soviet Union was conducted – irrespective of interests and purposes – in a context of intense, politicised debate weighted down by certain polarised ideological positions; but by no means entirely dominated by either of these binary poles alone. The appeal of, and hostility towards, the Soviet Union was due to its myriad, multi-faceted challenges to various levels of Western society: for some this challenge was an existential threat, to others it was a beacon in a darkening time, to others a curiosity of remarkable scale.

The historiography of cultural diplomacy has primarily focused on Western public intellectuals and their Soviet hosts. These intellectuals acted as authoritative, insightful observers on a wide range of issues including the Soviet Union: European democracy, capitalism, and Western culture. The Soviet Union occupied a particular place and purpose for these intellectuals, alongside Germany. Again, the Soviet Union was more remote – culturally, religiously, geographically, politically, linguistically – than Germany. German democracy was being 'tested' – Overy describes it as being 'on probation', whereas few expected much of 'Russia'. This meant that British observers found the Soviet Union a more exotic, almost abstract place on which to project fears and hopes for, essentially, what was to come for Britain: could communism solve the

³⁸ Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, 171; Paul Flowers, *The New Civilisation: Understanding Stalin's Soviet Union 1929–1941* (London: Francis Boutle, 2012), 62

world crises of war and economic depression? Prominent intellectuals were engaged via the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS), established in 1925. VOKS sought to advertise the success of the Soviet Union abroad, and engaging foreign intellectuals was quickly seen as a viable way of doing this.³⁹ David Cate, in *The Fellow Travellers*, and Paul Hollander, in *Political Pilgrims*, focused on the ‘fellow-travellers’, especially prominent in the 1930s, who visited the Soviet Union as feted guests of VOKS.⁴⁰ Prophets of Soviet success such as George Bernard Shaw, Romain Rolland, Lion Feuchtwanger, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, have been studied alongside its critics and doubters, such as André Gide, who, via his *Retour de L’U.R.S.S* of 1936, ‘broke’ with the Soviet Union. The intellectual and moral quandaries the fellow travellers present have been well explored.

Recent scholarship has filled in many gaps as to how these visits functioned, and why, and provided a broader perspective on the range of visitors from the period.⁴¹ Ludmila Stern and Michael David-Fox have produced histories of the Soviet side of this interaction and have shown how foreign reaction was far from uniformly positive (or, indeed, uniformly negative). They have mapped the institutions created in the Soviet Union for handling different kinds of relationships with different kinds of foreigners, conducting agitprop abroad, and establishing friendship societies, such as the Society for Cultural Relations in London in 1924. Ludmila Stern has written on the International Association of Revolutionary Writers (MORP) and its successor body, the Foreign Commission of the Soviet Writer’s Union. These agencies dealt with literary figures, translating and publishing their works in the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, the Comintern, and the Trade Unions’ Commission on External Relations engaged with foreign labourers, abroad and within the USSR.⁴² These bodies have been rather less examined, however, than VOKS and Intourist (founded in 1929 and working alongside,

³⁹ David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 35–7; Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age*, 282–6.

⁴⁰ David Cate, *The Fellow Travellers: A Postscript to the Enlightenment* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1973); Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: travels of Western intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba, 1928-1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

⁴¹ As Stern notes, some foreign intellectuals simply lied about what they had seen. Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union*, 4.

⁴² David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 43–5. David-Fox also observes how the Comintern sought to appropriate VOK’s duties regarding foreign intellectuals, an impulse VOKS mostly managed to resist.

although not always without tension, VOKS), the two Soviet institutions this thesis is most concerned with.

The Russian historiography has explored these issues extensively too. Foreign intellectuals have been examined in works such as Galina Kulikova's *A New World, Old Eyes*. Kulikova explores the views of the Soviet Union of Dreiser, Wells, Shaw, Rolland and others – many of the same figures considered by Cauter and Hollander, although Kulikova also considers the 'forms and method of control' exercised on these intellectuals whilst in the Soviet Union.⁴³ The institutional history side of this field has also received attention. A couple of works from a 2016 special edition of *Service and Tourism: Current Challenges* bear mention here. Vladimir Novikov explores Intourist's 'acquisition' of foreign tourists and their agreements with foreign tour companies and their various products on offer to tourists. He notes how foreigners could use pre-determined tours, or instead opt for '*otkrytye tury*', open tours which meant the tourist could build their own itinerary from the plethora of sites and sights offered by Intourist.⁴⁴ Lidiya Berezovaya has set the appeal of Soviet tourism for foreigners into some context with the wider history of travel, noting the direct influence of Thomas Cook on Soviet planning for tourism (and indeed, even negotiations with Thomas Cook that ultimately failed but shows how foreign expertise and influence was embedded in this history from the very beginning). From this influence, and via this failure, came Intourist.⁴⁵ These smaller works are joined by a larger study by I B Orlov and A D Popov, Сквозь «железный занавес» [Skvoz "zheleznyĭ zhanaves"] – or, *Through the Iron Curtain*.

This 2018 study is the most relevant work from the Russian historiography. It encompasses both a detailed institutional and statistical history of Intourist, and more general aspects of travel to the Soviet Union from 1929 to 1990. It also explores the idea of cultural show (always across this vast period rather than just the 1930s) in some detail. Orlov and Popov note 'serious failures' in the 'techniques' of Soviet

⁴³ Galina Borisovna Kulikova, *Novyi mir, glazami starogo: Sovetskaia Rossiya 1920–1930-x godov glazami zapadnykh intellektual'nov* (Moscow: Institute of Russian History, 2013), 117.

⁴⁴ Vladimir Semenovich Novikov, 'Biznes pod kontrolem gosudarstva: inostrannyi turizm v SSSR 1930–1980-x godakh', in *Sovremennye problemy servisa i turizma* 10:4 (Moscow: 2016), 20–30, at 25.

⁴⁵ Lidia Grigorevna Berezovaya, '«Inturist»: u istokov inostrannogo turizma v SSSR', in *Sovremennye problemy servisa i turizma*, 10:4 (Moscow: 2016), 10–19, at 13.

hospitality in the 1930s, giving Gide's *Retour* as the key example. They also observe some foreigners' disgust at Intourist's apparent mission: to deceive, not reveal, and some foreigners taking matters into their own hands, such as in September 1936 a number of Americans hijacking a man in a car in Baku and demanding to be taken to his home, to see real living conditions.⁴⁶ Furthermore, they note how other foreigners travelled relatively freely, although such an opportunity was not formally 'provided' in the 1930s – and their examination swiftly moves to the greater freedoms afforded to travellers in the 1950s.⁴⁷ Indeed, this follows the pattern as seen in David-Fox, Fitzpatrick and elsewhere: the focus is consistently, and thoroughly, on the workings of the Soviet state and the interactions therein between tourist and guide, foreigner and Soviet, and on the reactions of prominent foreigners to the Soviet experience. Yet there is more to explore when the issue of cultural diplomacy is considered discursively, rather than institutionally, and what happened when things went 'wrong'. Orlov and Popov begin to do this, even, with a brief exploration of the 'shadow sides of foreign tourism', that is, tourism that might facilitate the transgressive, such as the illicit exchange of goods between foreigners and Soviet people – yet this part of the study is largely confined to the post-war period.⁴⁸ This 'shadow' side and the 'unofficial' world beyond these interactions of famed foreigner and cultural diplomacy require more attention. Nevertheless, the Russian historiography offers us significant data and insight into the world into which all travellers entered.

Indeed, the more recent Western research of Western-Soviet interactions in the Soviet Union (Stern, David-Fox, Patrick Wright's *Iron Curtain*) has considered a greater variety of visitors to the Soviet Union than the 'political pilgrim' histories (Caute, Hollander) achieved. This has built a vivid and complex picture of Soviet management of foreigners which earlier accounts were unable to provide due to a lack of available archival material (e.g., Sylvia Margulies' *The Pilgrimage to Russia*; Barghoorn's *The Soviet Cultural Offensive*).⁴⁹ This scholarship has joined with (and indeed influenced) the more recent Russian scholarship in enlarging the scope of investigation to include

⁴⁶ Orlov & Popov, See *USSR!*, 203–5; 233.

⁴⁷ Orlov & Popov, See *USSR!*, 277–8.

⁴⁸ Orlov & Popov, See *USSR!*, 423–6.

⁴⁹ Sylvia Margulies, *The Pilgrimage to Russia: The Soviet Union and the Treatment of Foreigners* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1968).

what Stern calls ‘rank-and-file’ intellectuals and many other tourists besides. Indeed, David-Fox identifies a ‘hard-currency campaign mode’ on the part of Intourist that significantly affected Soviet cultural diplomatic practice via its focus in extracting hard currency from foreigners (to support the first Five Year Plan). This was, in the 1929 words of the head of Intourist, N. Epshtein, to be conducted via “social tourism” – essentially, exploiting interest in Soviet culture for commercial ends.⁵⁰ These ‘rank and file’ visitors were thus targets for commercial gain, managed by intertwining this need for currency with foreigners’ interest in Soviet developments. Irrespective of Soviet cultural diplomacy’s intentions, the reportage of these travellers was the focus of domestic audiences eager for news of the Soviet Union – and it is these playwrights, civil servants, trade unionists, students, scientists, journalists, novelists, and low-ranking political party members that this thesis is primarily concerned with.⁵¹ Furthermore, thematic examinations have developed our understanding of what David-Fox terms the ‘competitive context’. David-Fox refers to a matrix of East-West inferiority-superiority, with Westerner and Soviet looking at one another through an understanding that their own cultural-political heritage and context was the more cultured – meaning competition underwrote their interactions; a continuation and expansion of Giles Fletcher’s concern with the idea of ‘civility’.⁵²

However, the traveller remains a largely amorphous figure in these works, other than specific cases being identified (e.g., prominent fellow travellers of value to VOKS) that offer infamous or useful examples that highlight problems for the Soviet cultural diplomatic apparatus. Other travellers have been examined in biographical studies.⁵³ This thesis follows the more recent trend of looking at the artefacts of their journeys as cultural objects recording varied experiences, conversations and impressions that are significant in themselves, even as the political subjectivity of their creator is, of course, pertinent. Brigitte Studer writes that ‘*le questionnement s’est déplacé depuis*

⁵⁰ David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 175–81.

⁵¹ Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union*, 242.

⁵² David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 19–20; Vera Tolz notes how since the Petrine reforms, the West ‘had become arguably the most important ingredient of modern Russian identity’. Vera Tolz, ‘The West’, in William Leatherbarrow & Derek Offord (eds.) *A History of Russian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 197–216, at 197.

⁵³ See for example the collection of traveller biographies in Sheila Fitzpatrick and Carolyn Rasmussen (eds.), *Political Tourists: Travellers from Australia to the Soviet Union in the 1920s–1940s* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2008).

lors vers les aspirations, les sensibilités et les croyances des voyageurs eux-mêmes’, and this work continues in the same vein: focusing on the ‘aspirations, sensibilities and beliefs’ of these travellers – but furthermore, what these reveal in and of themselves.⁵⁴ As Said writes of his approach in *Orientalism*, what is of concern here is ‘not [his emphasis] the correctness of the representation’ of an author, but their ‘style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances’.⁵⁵ Indeed, the corpus features hundreds of thousands of words of what Clifford Geertz, borrowing from Gilbert Ryle, termed the ‘thick description’ of anthropology. That is, travellers left us their interpretive ‘sorting out the structures of signification’ evident in Soviet life, even as their works were often framed as observational. This thesis mines these attempts to show the travellers’ own structures of signification, and the wider ‘webs of significance’ which Briton and Soviet alike were surrounded by.⁵⁶ In looking at travel to the Soviet Union more broadly than the historians of the fellow-travellers this thesis offers an opening in Soviet history through which the relationships between West and East, foreigner and Soviet individual, can be considered in a new light.

70–80,000 foreign workers, specialists and political exiles (most of them ‘skilled workers’) lived and worked in the USSR between the two world wars.⁵⁷ Their interaction with Soviet people presents an interesting view of Soviet-worker relations: their experiences put them in direct contact with Soviet working conditions and material culture.⁵⁸ There have been studies of these workers, and numerous accounts have been left, most notably those of the Americans John Scott and Zara Witkin. Scholarship has considered both specific incidents, such as the Metro-Vickers trial of 1933, and longer-term trends, such as those explored in Julia Mickenberg’s *American Girls in Red Russia*. This work looks at travellers and residents such as Anna Louise Strong and Ruth Epperson Kennell, contributing to the necessary expansion of the types of figures considered in this history, and shining a light on the complexity of

⁵⁴ Brigitte Studer, ‘Le voyage en U.R.S.S et son ‘retour’’, *Le Mouvement social* 205 (Winter 2003), 3–8, at 6.

⁵⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1995), 20.

⁵⁶ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5–9.

⁵⁷ Andrea Graziosi, ‘Foreign Workers in Soviet Russia, 1920–40: Their Experience and Their Legacy’, *International Labor and Working-Class History* no 33 (Spring 1988), 38–59, at 38–9.

⁵⁸ Graziosi, ‘Foreign Workers in Soviet Russia’, 43.

these interactions to some extent.⁵⁹ Andrea Graziosi summarises the relationship between foreign and Soviet worker as troubled. Foreign workers' privileges as against Russian suffering made relationships difficult. Some of the foreign workers despised Russian conditions, whilst those foreigners enthusiastic about building socialism were initially more amenable to Soviet norms. Foreign workers could be identified as allies of the government: 'All foreigners, moreover, were identified with the industrialisation drive, thus becoming the target of Russian workers' resentment, which during the purges exploded against the industrial cadres with an intensity that left our witnesses speechless.' From 1934 government-inspired nationalist rhetoric further worsened this scene. Graziosi continues: 'Only later, after privileges were removed, were foreign and Russian workers brought together by their common conditions. Foreign workers then had to learn how to make ends meet; while in prison cells, foreigners and Russians alike discussed their shared fate.'⁶⁰ Indeed, foreign workers suffered during purges: over 10,000 were arrested during the Great Terror, and these foreigners played an important role in Western understanding of the development of Soviet power.⁶¹ Whilst of clear relevance, the scope of this study has to set aside foreign workers for now. The context of foreign workers is significantly different to that of foreign travellers: the duration of stay; a different relationship to cultural diplomacy. However, work to expand our understanding of this history is surely necessary, particularly when explored in a similar manner to this thesis.

SINCERITY AND AUTHENTICITY

Whilst authenticity is also relevant to this thesis, and will be explored throughout, it is sincerity that is the focus here. From Barghoorn to David-Fox, the significance of performance and truth-telling has drawn historians' attention, and this is true for the travellers' themselves, especially if considered as Studer and Kershaw suggest. Yet sincerity is not the term these scholars or travellers used extensively. The concept needs to be established firmly here.

⁵⁹ Gordon Morrell, *Britain Confronts the Stalin Revolution: Anglo-Soviet Relations and the Metro-Vickers Crisis* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1995); Julia Mickenberg, *American Girls in Red Russia: Chasing the Soviet Dream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

⁶⁰ Graziosi, 'Foreign workers in Soviet Russia', 45

⁶¹ Graziosi, 'Foreign workers in Soviet Russia,' 48–50.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines sincerity as an attribute of a person's character that signifies a 'freedom from dissimulation or duplicity' and thus the possession of 'honesty, straightforwardness'. This requires more unpacking to show how useful this concept is to the study. The 'semantic cluster' around sincerity by which we consider how people are sincere, or not, and why – 'performativity, irony, subjectivity, the self', and I would stress, the implicit concern with 'truth' – is important.⁶² Lionel Trilling's Harvard lectures on this subject were published as *Sincerity and Authenticity* in 1972. Trilling suggested a shift in Western culture had occurred in the 18th and 19th centuries. Sincerity, Trilling wrote, had 'arisen to vex men's minds in the epoch that saw the sudden efflorescence of the theatre', with Shakespeare's 'all the world's a stage' evoking this new mode.⁶³ Ellen Rutten, in a study of the contemporary 'New Sincerity' in Russian literature argues similarly, writing that 'in early modern culture' (when the term entered French, before its arrival in English in the first third of the 1600s) 'the birth of the term sincerity coincided with that "of the idea of society"'.⁶⁴ Society demanded of its participants a life lived in accordance with public values:

'the most efficacious way of satisfying this demand is to see to it that we really are sincere, that we actually are what we want our community to know we are. In short, we play the role of being ourselves, we sincerely act the part of the sincere person'⁶⁵

Trilling then argues that we are judged by society as to whether we are authentic, and this term is 'the dark source of art', by virtue of it embracing a range of human 'being', from qualities similar to those associated with sincerity – honesty, truthfulness – to others, such as 'disorder, violence, unreason'.⁶⁶ Whilst Trilling's work does not offer a cast-iron definition of the two that clearly demarcates them from one another in every way (if such a thing is possible), he does suggest they are different in terms of their audience.

I use these terms as follows: sincerity is that which faces society, seeking some kind of sanction (a performance of sincerity), whilst authenticity is inwards facing, that

⁶² Ellen Rutten, *Sincerity after Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 35.

⁶³ Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 10.

⁶⁴ Rutten, *Sincerity after Communism*, 40.

⁶⁵ Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, 10–11.

⁶⁶ Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, 11.

which sanctions itself by virtue of its innate qualities. This is that which ‘is’ (thought to be) true, beyond or behind a performance, and thus is disguised, or which underlies a performance, and is thus exemplified – someone ‘sincerely’ expressing themselves can be considered as also being authentic.⁶⁷ There are further overlaps: Rutten quotes John Martin to show how in Renaissance culture people could chose to follow ‘the conventions of society or court life’, or opt for an “inner” “ideal of sincerity”, which echoes Trilling’s authenticity; Calvinism blended ‘the civic act of political opposition’ with the ‘sincere ideal’ – the public expression of personal views.⁶⁸ This ‘inner’ ideal is familiar to us today as authenticity. From the romanticism of the authentic artist being a commonplace of popular culture, to the significance vested in the authenticity of a people or group being a fundamental ingredient of the complex and bitter cultural histories of Orientalism and colonialism (e.g., ideas of the ‘noble savage’) and certain forms of authoritarianism (e.g., the *Volk*), the power of the authentic is readily apparent to us. Thus, the concept of authenticity is relevant for this thesis: the travellers produced personal accounts of foreign lands, immersed in the hunt for the ‘real Russia’.

Authenticity as it relates to travel is the subject of its own wide scholarship. Jillian Rickly and Elizabeth Vidon note that the question of whether authenticity mattered to tourists ‘was among the first questions disputed’ at the genesis of tourism studies. In sum, said studies have offered ‘symbolic authenticity’ to help us understand what a tourist ‘wants’ from their experiences of the Other: how authenticity can be a ‘judgement [...] emergent [...] contextual and [...] pluralistic’ (and, indeed, about a whole lot more that isn’t strictly relevant here).⁶⁹ That is, what is authentic is based often on the expected symbols of the Other (i.e., stereotypical images and understandings), even as observers can offer contradictory readings of the authentic.

There are further layers to this. Umberto Eco describes the concept of ‘postmodern authenticity’ – that is, the appeal of places that are explicitly inauthentic, determinedly

⁶⁷ Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, 11.

⁶⁸ Rutten, *Sincerity after Communism*, 40.

⁶⁹ Jillian Rickly & Elizabeth Vidon, ‘From Pseudo-Events to Authentic Experiences’, in Jillian Rickly & Elizabeth Vidon, *Authenticity & Tourism* (Bradford: Emerald Publishing, 2018), 1–12, at 1 & 3–4.

selling fantasy, giving Disneyland as an example.⁷⁰ Here enters a curious historical parallel: the ‘Potemkin Village’ of Soviet showcase sites (that is, the infamous story of Prince Grigorii Potemkin’s false villages for the benefit of Empress Catherine’s tour of ‘Novorossiia’ and Crimea: ‘Potemkin villages’ being deceptive facades constructed for the benefit of an outsider, designed to convey a falsely positive view) and the theme park. What is crucial here is not, generally, any such appetite for the knowingly inauthentic in a postmodern sense, but rather the ready identification by some travellers that these sites were inauthentic, and an expression of an insincere Soviet Union (as we shall see). Charles Lindholm observes how in most tourist environments, the staging of authenticity is self-sabotaging – the tourist seeks a ‘more real’, un-staged experience.⁷¹ Even those who admired the showcase sites did so not in a knowingly ironic way: they admired them because they were seen to be impressive and, to varying extents, representative of Soviet achievement. The idea of the authentic features in the background of these travellers’ explorations of Soviet life, but the central presence of Soviet cultural diplomacy meant that sensitivity about sincerity was more pressing: if the authentic Soviet world was the destination, a proper understanding of Soviet sincerity was the ticket there. Furthermore, travellers were not seeking experience of the authentic cuisine, architecture, rituals and sounds of Soviet (or Russian) life (writers like Ethel Mannin and Robert Byron – the latter’s fascination with Russian architecture filling much of his account – aside). They were seeking ‘truth’, a fundamentally political – even moral – understanding of what the USSR was: its Five-Year Plans, its cultural instruments, its disciplinary power, its ideology, and what people there felt about it. It is this understanding of truth – of a Briton finding out the nature of the Soviet Union – that this thesis works with. As will be seen, this relates to both empirical and romantic conceptions of which truths are worthier than others, and inherent in all such discussion is cultural contingency.

Subaltern studies bear mention here as they are a nexus of sincerity meeting authenticity – although the differences between the Soviet situation and that of those

⁷⁰ Umberto Eco, ‘Travels in Hyperreality’ in *Faith in Fakes: Travel in Hyperreality*, trans. by William Weaver (London: Vintage, 1998), 1–58, at 43–44.

⁷¹ Charles Lindholm, *Culture and Authenticity* (Oxford: Blackwells, 2008), 43. Lindholm observes that ‘tourists are not paying to be reminded that history is unstable and contingent.’ (47) I would venture that the travellers were bolder than this: they were trying to understand what was commonly agreed as ‘history in the making’.

traditionally considered subaltern are crucial. James Scott's *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, whilst not making sincerity and authenticity explicitly central to its argument, explores the idea of 'hidden transcripts' that take place 'offstage' (in 'private'), away from 'the official transcript of power relations' on stage (i.e., in view of society).⁷² Scott's focus on the lowest of all groups – slaves, serfs – and his interest in the 'interaction between subordinates and those who dominate' might encourage a drift towards a more totalitarian reading of Soviet society than this thesis wishes to offer. It is important to note that encounters 'offstage' (thus in the realm of the 'unofficial') should not necessarily be read as an encounter with the authentic and encounters with the 'official' Soviet world should not be read as necessarily inauthentic. The traveller was a figure of power in their own way, and individuals could support aspects of the regime. What this thesis does not seek to do is replicate the idea, powerful at the time amongst some travellers, that Soviet cultural and political power was so widespread, so deep, so efficacious, that all encounters 'offstage' were necessarily rare, and were necessarily encounters with resentment, resistance, and doubt.⁷³

Scott's idea of 'hidden transcripts' is however useful because all power relations breed performative acts that necessarily relate to sincerity. Such acts were witnessed by travellers. These acts include deference, avoidance, silence, selective use of words and subjects of discussion, over-emphasised compliance and so on. In a way, historians are like the travellers: there is only so much we can discern about a Soviet person's outlook from such a mental and temporal distance, but by using traveller's accounts (which at the least briefly close these distances between us and the Soviet) as a cue, we can access records of pronouncements that were at the very least informed by – if not exclusively shaped by – power structures in Soviet society. Yet even when we have the idea of 'hidden transcripts' however, we are still plagued by a further questioning of historical source: here there could be lies and half-truths. Furthermore, there is the danger of 'hidden transcripts' displacing, rather than revealing, Soviet experience.

⁷² James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), xi.

⁷³ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 2.

Luise White, a historian of (often colonial) Central and Eastern Africa, wrote 'Telling More: Lies, Secrets, and History' in 2000. As a historian who often uses oral sources, she is strongly concerned with rumour and deception, willing or otherwise. White argues that 'secrets and lies are not forms of withholding information but forms by which information is valorized'.⁷⁴ That is, secrets and lies reveal information and the hierarchy of meaning a subject is concerned with. This thesis has no oral sources, and in terms of subaltern subjects, only has the travellers' accounts recording of their words. Furthermore, interpretation can cloud the truth. That is, in seeking the truth, just as the travellers did, one must recognise the limits of the self and the material being considered, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argued in her 1988 article, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'. Spivak argued that the very act of investigating subaltern people can reproduce an interpretive violence, whereby the scholar imposes a mode of speaking, rather than allowing the subject to speak for themselves.⁷⁵ These travellers sought to explain to their own, and their readers', satisfaction (and prejudices). It is also evident that some travellers themselves did, if not lie as such, then employ devices that were in some way fictional, such as creating composites to stand in for real people: Herbert Marchant does this, as will be seen, and the possibility of lying outright is noted by Elizabeth Delafield. Ultimately the historian is, too, working within the same limits as the traveller, but at one remove: assessing the sincerity of the traveller, noting where their tricks and methods suggest a distortion of some kind, and considering the trustworthiness of the source.

Soviet individuals were not subaltern in the sense that historiography has explored, and nor are these travel accounts the only sources we have available to read their views. Nevertheless, the similarity of the attempt to 'recover' their words and stories is close enough to give us pause. The dichotomies that ideas of 'hidden transcripts' and lying evoke, and the idea of performance, and the questions they provoke in the scholar about their own craft and intention, are directly relevant. Even more relevant, however, is awareness of how the discourse of travel itself was built in no small way on such expectations, and on such displacement. In summary: the historian has to

⁷⁴ Luise White, 'Telling More: Lies, Secrets, and History' in *History and Theory, Theme Issue 39* (December 2000), 11–22, at 11.

⁷⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in C Nelson and L Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988) 271–313, at 273.

account for the travellers' displacement of Soviet subjects (that is, to identify how their expectations and preconceptions were not the same as the reality they explored), and yet utilise texts filled with their particular language and concepts to help uncover new aspects on Soviet mentalities and culture, without falling into the same trap of displacing what is present with what the historian expects to see. This is a complex intertwining of story and reality, of discursive frameworks and the recorded experiences that complicate and confound these frameworks.

It is therefore sincerity that is at the forefront of the study. This is because of the challenges provoked by the encounter between actors, and the public nature of many of the travellers' sources. Thus, it is the performance/reception of sincerity which is the focus of this work.⁷⁶ The travellers' sincerity, as expressed in travel accounts, related to discovering and reporting in a particularly politicised environment. On the one hand, travellers described their abilities and capacity as an observer of an unfamiliar and distant world, established their objectives and their methods of investigation to discover truth/s, and critiqued a Soviet world that presented a challenge to travellers in the form of cultural diplomacy and visible political and cultural repression. On the other hand, the Soviet state and its people present a different set of challenges for examination. Soviet cultural diplomacy was directed not only at a foreign audience normally far removed from Soviet life, but at a whole society, which the state sought to reshape. The Soviet individual was thus immersed in a daily performance of sincerity in relation to this state that was changing so many aspects of human life and which had immense capacity for violence.

Whilst the scope of this work cannot provide a truly bipolar study of foreigner-Soviet engagement (though this thesis is a significant part of the necessary groundwork for any such study), it is necessary to establish a considered framework through which

⁷⁶ Trilling also relates a complicating factor of sincerity, one that is noted here only to limit the theoretical adventure. He quotes Oscar Wilde: 'all bad poetry springs from genuine feeling' (Oscar Wilde 'The Critic as Artist', in *Intentions* (London: Methuen & Co., 1921), 95–217, at 201). By this, Trilling argues, Wilde was saying that the public expression of experience does not necessarily yield truth: "Man is least himself," Wilde said, "when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask and he will tell you the truth." ('The Critic as Artist', 185) Nietzsche agreed: 'every profound spirit needs a mask.' (*Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. by Helen Zimmern (New York: The Modern Library, 1917), 46). This deeper layer of meaning – that of the apparently sincere person necessarily being insincere when they are exposed to society – is familiar and ever-dizzying, but it is not the subject here. Whatever artistic and moral imperatives and preoccupations the travellers had, the question here is how sincerity (and authenticity) relate to an understanding and experience of the Soviet world, and the reporting of that world to unknown readers.

the Soviet individual can be examined as part of this history. When a 'Soviet' person is referred to here, it simply means one who lived in the Soviet Union, being Russian, Ukrainian, Kazakh or another nationality encompassed by the Union, even as the focus of the travellers, and this thesis, was often on the dominant conceptualisation/s of 'Russia'. To understand their views of foreigners, we need first to consider a Soviet individual's sense of their place in society. Then we can consider how that might have impacted their sincerity when meeting with foreigners. Ellen Rutten argues that *iskrennost'*, which in English would translate as 'sincerity', is the more dominant concept in Russian culture (over *podlinnost'*, the closest to 'authenticity', which, furthermore, is used more about objects than subjects), because it assumes more meaning than the English equivalent. This includes, in the 19th century, being located in and of the Russian people, as opposed to the elites. This is linked to the tension between Slavophiles in Russia and their repeatedly defining sincere Russian culture as against/alongside insincere Western cultural influences, and the Westernisers who argued otherwise. Combined, these ideas became clichés, but remained 'immensely powerful' in Russian discourse, Rutten notes.⁷⁷ Sincerity was located in Russia by those outside its borders, too. Olga Sobolev and Angus Wrenn note that John Galsworthy, in writing of his appreciation of Russian fiction throughout the 1910s and early 1920s, approved of a 'fearless sincerity' on the part of Russian novelists, for their adherence to truth-telling.⁷⁸ Within the Soviet Union, questions of sincerity, of the individual as they present themselves to society (and ultimately thus to power), come to the fore, after the collapse of people and elite into one ostensibly Bolshevik whole, wherefrom the immorality of Tsarism had been expelled – but where repression and suspicion remained.⁷⁹ The historiography of early Stalinism has explored questions of Soviet identity, of deception, of subjectivity, extensively, and the problem of sincerity runs through these studies, if not always explicitly. These issues will be addressed more fully in the second part of this thesis.

⁷⁷ Rutten, *The New Sincerity*, 46–7; 51–3.

⁷⁸ Sobolev & Wrenn, *From Orientalism to Cultural Capital*, 69. The influence of *Russian* culture and ideas about *Russian* people pre-revolution was fundamental to contemporary understandings of *Soviet* culture and ideas about *Soviet* people post-revolution.

⁷⁹ Rutten, *The New Sincerity*, 65.

THE SOURCES: GENRE, AGENCY, DISCOURSE

The sources in use here are not those of the Soviet individual. Therefore, this is a work of inference and contextualisation via secondary material, filtering the Anglophone primary sources carefully, to engage with the valuable material British travellers recorded. It entails being constantly aware of the traveller's perspective and selectivity and bringing in the wealth of historiography on the Soviet individual during early Stalinism to glean what we may from such material. We do not have access to the 'before/after' experiences of Soviet individuals having engaged with foreigners. However, we do have sight of their reactions to each other when in the presence of foreigners, and we do have, despite the numerous filters applied by travellers, sight of varying responses and differing levels of engagement with foreigners that bears – and deserves – some closer scrutiny.

Understanding the travel-writing genre is important for assessing how travellers represented their activity in the USSR. Such travel is a 'culturally significant event', not just 'mere movement'.⁸⁰ Genres are constituted of commonly accepted rules and values. In the present case, these rules relate to truth-telling alongside tensions between multiple subjectivities. This thesis considers travel-writing broadly. Many of the primary sources used for this work are published travel accounts or reportage, published by the score during the late 1920s and into the 1930s, primarily in London. Keith Williams has argued that documentary, the 'characteristic and international' practice of 1930s writing about social and political issues, 'underwent its own peculiar crisis of transition from modernity to incipient postmodernism during the period.' Williams explores how the medium of reportage 'tried to absorb modernism's lessons for politically accountable ends', following John Reed's *Ten Days that Shook the World* in mixing 'I-witness reporting and intertextual documentary', problematising 'the conventional boundary between literature and history.'⁸¹ As Williams himself notes, however, by no means all writers were concerned with such aesthetic or intellectual questions, and this is true for the majority of the sources considered in this thesis. This

⁸⁰ Jaś Elsner and Joan-Pau Rubiés 'Introduction' in *ibid.* (eds.) *Voyages and Visions: Toward a Cultural History of Travel*, 1–56, at 7.

⁸¹ Keith Williams, 'Post/Modern Documentary: Orwell, Agee and the New Reportage', in Keith Williams & Steven Matthews (eds.) *Rewriting the Thirties: Modernism and After* (London: Routledge, 1997), 163–181, at 164.

lack of engagement can be over-emphasised: the term ‘naively empirical’, which Angela Kershaw applies to some travellers can elide the way many showed an awareness of their limitations and doubt – from arguably insincere expressions of uncertainty to apparently genuine misgivings – regarding the scope of their task is frequently visible.⁸² In a sense, many of these accounts follow in the tradition of certain British rural investigations of the Edwardian period: rather than prioritising sociological methodology, the works are predicated on personal observation and engagement.⁸³ However, it is also true that many of these writers mixed personal narrative and knowingly limited experiences with statistics, reports and other historical data sourced from Soviet and other contacts or publications. Above all, there was an underlying assumption of the inherent validity and significance of experiences arising from personal engagement with the Soviet world.

Reportage is particularly relevant where, to quote Angela Kershaw, it ‘stressed [...] the militant potential and situated perspective of the eyewitness report.’⁸⁴ Patrick Wright relates Hans Magnus Enzensberger’s observation that in this period information was otherwise hard to come by, and so ‘the anachronistic system of the traveller’s eye-witness account’ gained currency, although this paucity of information, described by John Maynard Keynes as creating a ‘fog’ in 1925, was dispelled by the end of the decade: journalists, primarily American, reported from Moscow, and travellers undertook the trek eastwards in greater numbers.⁸⁵ These ‘wanderers’ who went to the Soviet Union, Wright argues, saw themselves as ““detectives” seeking out the “truth” about a wildly misrepresented new world,’ and the representations to be challenged could be both wildly positive or negative, or rather more nuanced.⁸⁶ In short, they were mediators of the Soviet world for British audiences. In the particular context of the Soviet Union, the contemporary idea that the truth was seen to be something awaiting discovery was strong: this impetus is at the heart of so many of these accounts. Indeed, the wider context in Britain, Richard Overy notes, presented

⁸² Kershaw, ‘French and British Female Intellectuals and the Soviet Union: The Journey to the USSR, 1929–42’.

⁸³ Mark Freeman, *Social Investigation in Rural England, 1870–1914* (Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society & Boydell Press, 2003), 133–4.

⁸⁴ Kershaw, ‘French and British Female Intellectuals and the Soviet Union: The Journey to the USSR, 1929–42’.

⁸⁵ John Maynard Keynes, *A Short View of Russia* (London: Hogarth, 1925), 11.

⁸⁶ Wright, *Iron Curtain*, 228.

'the new Russia [...] as a curiosity which needed exploring' with the BBC planning radio programmes with titles like 'A day in the city' and 'A day on the farm' to explain the Soviet world.⁸⁷ The Soviet world was remote, strange, and in need of explanation. That is certainly evident in numerous sources this thesis will consider: travel writing was implicitly meant to be effective in some way, although we shall see how this varied from writer to writer. The performance of sincerity was crucial in making these travel accounts effective, be that as an evocative account of foreign experience, and/or as a moral lesson, and/or as a defence of one kind of civilisation or another.

As Carl Thompson notes, all 'travel experience is [...] crafted into travel text.'⁸⁸ Travel accounts are necessarily constructed out of notes, fragmentary experiences, and memories, and can even be rendered: that is, they are a reconstruction of experience as a new creation. This thesis works on the understanding that 'any form of travel text is a constructed, crafted artefact', and as such, are artefacts 'of a certain cultural praxis'.⁸⁹ This can apply to other genres, too. Newspaper articles feature in this thesis, albeit fewer in number and range than the travel accounts for two simple reasons: one, because a full survey of articles from the period would be too great a task for this project and two, because the specific focus of this thesis is on travel, not residency. Many articles published in Britain on the USSR were either from remote observers of Soviet affairs, or from resident journalists, workers or others. Other tensions are seen via examining unpublished and published sources alongside one another. This can be the locus of differences between the sincere and the authentic, not least in a political context as heated as foreign debate about the Soviet Union – exemplified by the differences between George Bernard Shaw's positive public words about the Show Trials, and his more negative private pronouncements on the same.⁹⁰

The significance of 'imagined geographies', used by Edward Said in his exploration of Orientalism, is great for this study. Said wrote, following Gaston Bachelard, that the 'poetics of space' are more important than the physical realities of a space when one considers and assesses the significance of any particular place, at least in terms of

⁸⁷ Overy, *The Morbid Age*, 283.

⁸⁸ Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing* (London: Routledge, 2011), 27–8.

⁸⁹ Sobolev & Wrenn, *From Orientalism to Cultural Capital*, 19.

⁹⁰ Olga Sobolev & Angus Wrenn, *The Only Hope of the World: George Bernard Shaw and Russia* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), 166.

human imagination, and thus culture. That is to say: 'the objective space' is 'far less important than what it is poetically endowed with'. Ideas of Russia, of the Soviet Union, had both significant meaning for travellers before they ever travelled, and continued to do so whilst travelling, even as empirical experiences added to their store of knowledge, and interacted with the imagination in myriad subtle ways. This applied to groups of people too: 'the party', 'the peasants', 'the workers', 'the police' and others all played significant discursive roles for travellers, as shall be explored. 'Imaginative geographical and historical knowledge' are essential concepts for this study of British travellers in the Soviet Union.⁹¹ Thus, one challenge of sincerity, recognised by travellers when they referred to the scale of the task of 'explaining' the Soviet Union, was the conceptual apparatus with which they approached it. Nobody could divest themselves of these preconceptions and prejudices, but that's not to say this left all travellers trapped by these constraints in the same ways.

Indeed, these questions of frameworks and agency in and of themselves must also be (briefly) considered when discourse is mentioned. Mark Bevir writes of the significance of 'traditions and agency' and critiques Michel Foucault, arguing the latter's theories only allow for deviation and difference by 'attenuation' of epistemic frameworks. Foucault writes, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*:

[T]he diagnosis [of our archive – that is, our discourse] does not establish the fact of our identity by the play of distinctions. It establishes that we are difference, that our reason is the difference of discourses, our history the difference of times, our selves the difference of masks. That difference, far from being the forgotten and recovered origin, is this dispersion that we are and make.⁹²

This recognition of our most contingent context, Foucault suggests, reveals the nature of difference which (at least) implies possibilities for change: the centre cannot hold, because there is no centre. The 'temporal identity in which we are pleased to look at ourselves' is dissipated, and so too are 'transcendental teleologies'.⁹³ Bevir thinks (broadly) this is nevertheless too limiting: this statement still implies that what

⁹¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 54–5.

⁹² Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. by Sheridan Smith, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 131.

⁹³ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 130–1.

constitutes 'our selves' is determined by structure over agency in the final analysis, even as 'we' can analyse the archive and by doing so recognise its, and our, contingency. Conversely, Bevir argues that the episteme is senseless to us as an object of study as it is limitless, and that a rejection of paradigms, traditions and norms is not thus 'merely' an attenuation of the episteme.⁹⁴ Bevir instead advocates for a combination of structuralism and individualism, but without the Foucauldian emphasis on the former ultimately superseding the latter. Agency, for Bevir, produces 'dilemmas' that (dialectically) form new beliefs:

People reach the webs of belief they do against the background of traditions, but they are agents who can extend, modify, and even reject the traditions that provided the background to their initial webs of belief.⁹⁵

Whilst I freely use 'discourse' in this thesis, Bevir has appeal in his emphasis on agency. Discourse here encompasses both specific instances of verbal/non-verbal interaction between traveller and Soviet and the influences that framed these interactions – political structures, cultural practices, conflicting ideologies, and so on – as recorded in written texts. Bevir would term this a web of beliefs, founded on numerous traditions. However, I nevertheless use the term discourse for the fundamental linguistic meaning it has, which is essential in a close study of texts, for the significance of Foucault's emphasis on contingency – and the word is pithier. Yet I also follow Bevir in valorising agency, as if we consider each traveller as an agent, we can walk with them into the Soviet world and discover with them that their traditions and beliefs – their archive – were to be challenged by those of a very different world (even as the records of these challenges are only from one of these worlds, and a true dialectic is often absent). The key here is the dynamism caused by the interaction of structure and agency – at all times, whether we accept the episteme or not, this interaction is the philosophical focus of this thesis.

STRUCTURE

⁹⁴ Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 197–8; 211.

⁹⁵ Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, 198–9; 262–4.

The structure of the thesis follows the travellers' journeys with preamble, departure, immersion in the experience and reflection at journey's end. This helps us explore both the discourse and the historical reality that this discourse was supposed to illuminate, revealing the disjunction between the two.

The focus is primarily on accounts produced in the 1930s. That said, some travel from the 1920s is relevant (particularly Malcolm Burr's *In Bolshevik Siberia*, published in the 1930s), and so too Noel Barber's account of a 1939 trip from Dairen (now Dalian, China) to Moscow via railway, which was only published in 1942. It is punctuated with experiences facilitated by a soldier, 'Alexandrov', who it seems became Barber's (and his wife's) guide for the duration:

[W]e became great friends, and he was always in and out, and always being questioned, and though he would tell us little about the training of Soviet officers (I can't say I blame him), he was as generous as he could be with his information. [...] I didn't suspect Alexandrov of propaganda – he was one man in Russia who never tried consciously to pump anything into me, though now and again, as I say, he came out some obvious dope that he had lapped up somewhere.⁹⁶

Barber's account is strongly focused on the martial and appears as a striking contrast to the works earlier in the decade. It emphasises the bonds between Britain and the USSR, and the martial prowess of the latter. It engenders a sense of camaraderie with the 'Russians'. Playing chess with Alexandrov, Barber noted:

It was astonishing how sympathy between our two nations oozed through those small pieces on the black and white checked board as the train rumbled on. I could feel something – I don't quite know what – that linked us together. There was a simplicity about them that had some semblance to the finer points in the British character – the right British character, of course.⁹⁷

This is included here to give a sense of the significant change in works caused by the joining of Britain and the Soviet Union as war-time allies (and the fact that war disrupted all travel) – a pair of Germans aboard the train are referred to as rather

⁹⁶ Noel Barber, *Transiberian* (London: Harrap, 1942), 50–2.

⁹⁷ Barber, *Transiberian*, 59.

cynical and bitter about the Soviet Union. The accounts considered here were written and published in a more divided atmosphere than that of the Second World War.

It is those travellers that privileged understanding of the 'unofficial' whilst negotiating the 'official' that this thesis focuses on. These terms are overly-simple: they represent contemporary British conceptions of public and private, government and people, and were applied by travellers to a system developing a radically different socio-political praxis. The official Soviet world as experienced by foreigners is a vast topic and so is dealt with throughout this thesis as it pertained to specific travellers and their experiences with Soviet individuals. The manifestations of this world are varied, including people, such as Commissars and other government officials, Party and Komsomol members and the police, and Intourist and VOKS guides, to events, like rallies and marches, performances, and debates, locations like farms, prisons, factories, and objects of mass communication such as wall posters, newspapers, statistical reports, propaganda broadcasts. These people, places, and objects took on a collective role in the discourse as being representative of, or embodying, the regime and its goals. Aspects of this official scene that were sometimes inaccessible to some foreigners (e.g., meetings with Commissars; being able to read a school textbook) as compared to the signs of Soviet civilisation seen via a tour with a guide (and the tour-structure itself as a sign of the official), are still significant for they had influence even when not directly experienced. How the unofficial Soviet world was constructed by travellers is another significant part of this thesis: the population interacted with Soviet policy and practice, by definition, in almost every aspect of life, as the historiography on Soviet identity, sociability and selfhood has explored. The foreigner and Soviet interacted in official and unofficial spaces alike. Examining the official further establishes the discursive location, in relief, of the unofficial, and leads to how this unofficial Soviet world was sought. Simultaneously it reinforces our understanding of the particular nature of early Soviet society, and how clear lines between official and unofficial are hard to find.

At the heart of both this discourse and the experiences of the travellers is the encounter between foreigner and the Soviet individual. Such an encounter was the apex of many travellers' ambitions in visiting the Soviet Union, and conversely an under-examined moment in the historiography. To reach the encounter between foreigner and Soviet, a better understanding of how travellers travelled, and why, and

how they negotiated the challenges of sincerity that are put before travellers in such a context, is needed. There are also several cultural currents that are seen from new perspectives when considering British and Soviet cultural history as part of one study. The idea of an official and unofficial Soviet world was part of a longer lineage into which travellers were placing themselves. The idea of such divides, such as those between *Rus'* (the people) and *Rossiiia* (the state); between 'The Third Rome' of the Orthodox Church and the 'Holy Russia' of the Old Believers; between St Petersburg and Moscow; between the palaces of the Tsars and the villages of the peasants, has a long standing in Russian history.⁹⁸ Travellers, when they posited official and unofficial worlds, were echoing these divisions, but framed from a British perspective. Indeed, this travel was a small part of the centuries-long currents of East-West engagement that played no small role in shaping much in Russia and the Soviet Union. The encounters between Soviet and Briton were part of a longer tradition of engagement with the Anglo-Saxon or Slav Other, and this thesis bridges gaps between politics and literature, between British and Soviet culture, between the history of fellow travellers and Soviet state institutions, and the history of travel.

In summary: the first chapter is concerned with the discursive preparations and preamble for travel – the reasons for travel, the perceived challenges of such travel, the methodology (or lack thereof) of investigation. The second chapter considers the Soviet tour and various foreign reactions to it, as a way of exploring its power in reality and in discourse. The third chapter explores more closely the way travellers framed who they were seeking, and why, and where they might be found. The fourth and fifth chapters examine at length the encounters with Soviet individuals, to see how contact impacted on travellers' assessments and understandings, and to explore a range of Soviet reactions to foreign presence.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY: TRAVELLERS, TOURISTS, AND THEIR WORKS

Paul Fussell spends a significant amount of time exploring the 'atmosphere of travel' and the status and characteristics of 'travellers' and 'tourists' in his 1980 work, *Abroad*:

⁹⁸ Michael Cherniavksy, *Tsar & People: Studies in Russian Myths* (New York: Random House, 1969), 116–20.

British Literary Travelling Between the Wars, and his is an insightful and liberating standard by which to consider terminology. This introduction has already made extensive use of the word ‘traveller’ to describe the foreigners in the Soviet Union. Fussell defines a traveller as someone who seeks ‘that which has been discovered by the mind working in history’, whilst the tourist seeks ‘that which has been discovered by entrepreneurship and prepared for him by the arts of mass publicity’. Beyond these, the explorer is one who ‘seeks the undiscovered’.⁹⁹ Anyone with a passing knowledge of travel to the Soviet Union can see the problem these broad definitions present. Many who went to the Soviet Union went on tour (‘state-entrepreneurial’, but also very much an attempt to show ‘the mind working in history’), but this did not preclude seeking the ideological, cultural, spiritual and historical significance of the Soviet world, even if this could be embodied in sites and conversations born of cultural diplomacy.

Furthermore, the symbolism of exploration was significant for some travellers, even if what they were exploring was not an (relatively speaking) unknown country, but a novel system already examined by scores of their fellows. Thus ‘traveller’ is used over ‘tourist’. It is no doubt true that some probably did fit Fussell’s extended definition of ‘tourist’ as one who moved toward ‘the security of pure cliché’ (most obviously in assessments of Soviet life) and displayed their willing acquiescence to the tourist mode by, for example, not speaking Russian with the locals.¹⁰⁰ It is also true that some did choose a packaged tour over an independent adventure – justifying it in terms of cost and convenience, even. However, focusing on these markers of ‘tourism’ privileges a generalised understanding of a ‘tour’ over the nuances of the historical scene in which the tour and its political nature was both recognised as being *problematic* by many, and was also but one cultural, discursive and logistical influence shaping foreign experiences of Soviet life. The focus of this thesis is people who are described as travellers – and this group is itself diverse.

The works are described as ‘travel accounts’, which includes diaries, letters, and books. Fussell settles on ‘travel books’, distinguishing these from ‘guide books’, and rejecting ‘travelogues’ or ‘travel logs’.¹⁰¹ ‘Travel accounts’ encompasses both the

⁹⁹ Paul Fussell, *Abroad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 39.

¹⁰⁰ Paul Fussell, *Abroad*, 39–42.

¹⁰¹ Paul Fussell, *Abroad*, 202.

possibility of relating empirical and romantic experience, but also suggest the role of travel literature of the period in the weighing of experience and moral assessments to judge the Soviet Union's import and ethical nature. An 'account' is a 'report or description of experience', which implies a subjectivity not only of experience, but of an assessment conscious of its audience, and thus is necessarily linked ('she gave her account') to ideas of harmony and conflict between multiple narratives, of making a case. Concomitant with this, however, is the recognition that whilst a traveller might think they were giving their Soviet interlocutors a space to provide an account of their own, what the Soviet person thought and said and did was not necessarily intended to be an account in this sense. Evasions and elisions and basic misunderstandings have as much a part to play in this story as do considered reflections. As we look at 'travel accounts', they are very much *travellers'* accounts, assemblages of imagination, perception and experience that open windows on a world beyond substantial comprehension by most – yet when treated as cultural objects in their own right, they are illuminating.

Part I – The Discourse of Travel

Chapter I

Discovery, Dissent – Doubt?

‘They wanted to know what it was like “over there”. They said that people came back with such conflicting reports’ – Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton¹

‘One modest virtue at least this work claims, none too common in modern books of travel. It is all true’ – Malcolm Burr²

Almost all travellers who wrote of their experiences in the Soviet Union relied upon an idea of sincerity: they positioned themselves as honest truth-seekers, determined to offer a sincere account of the Soviet world. The Soviet Union was far away, and strange, from British audiences: this gave travellers a powerful role as mediators. This relatively simple appeal to sincerity and an underlying assumption of authority (to varying degrees) did not preclude travellers consciously recognising/ignoring (and unconsciously/uncritically missing) obstacles: self-doubt, the geographical/temporal limits of experience, linguistic deficiencies, cultural and political ignorance and essentialism – let alone the complexities provoked by artistic irony or political sympathies, the latter long standing in the historiography as the most relevant factor for a traveller’s conclusions.

Angela Kershaw provides a broad analysis of the general discursive structure of the travel account:

In works of *reportage* on the USSR, a first-person narrator discusses the political and social changes brought about by the regime in terms of her personal experience. The texts are chronological, based on notes taken at the time, sometimes partly written during the visit or the journey home, and often amplified later by references to works of history, political analysis or to other works of reportage. They begin with an account of the journey and mention any specific textual preparation or awareness of Russia on the part of the author. They display a determination to see if ‘what everyone is saying about Russia’ is true, and an

¹ Charles Frederick Andrew Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, *Russian Closeup* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932), 166.

² Malcolm Burr, *In Bolshevik Siberia* (London: H F B Witherby, 1931), 5.

awareness that a great deal is indeed being said. There is some explanation of why the author chose to go, and of her political commitments, or absence thereof. They then recount the arrival, things seen and done, and people met; this is punctuated with personal reflections on ‘the system’, which is often compared to the situation in the home country and is located in the wider context of European politics. The account of the return journey tends to be amplified by a reflection on whether or not the author is glad to leave, and there is usually a conclusion summing up the author’s impressions of Russia. Authors of such narratives followed broadly the same itinerary, defined by Intourist or VOKS – Leningrad, Moscow and surrounding areas, and also sometimes the Ukraine, including Kiev and the Dnieper dam.³

This is true for many accounts, but it is also lacking. Focusing on these structural similarities does not illuminate differences between, and nuances within, these texts, nor does it account for different approaches taken by travellers – conceptual, methodological, and geographical. This chapter takes the opportunity to explore these differences and nuances.

There are strong British domestic antecedents for investigations built on travel. These do not form, I believe, a determining influence on travel accounts of the USSR, but they are relevant to the general cultural hinterland for travellers abroad in the inter-war period. ‘Slumming’ and other ‘investigations’ of London slums was a noted phenomenon of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Seth Koven has identified a range of motivating factors for Britons desiring experience of the lives of the metropolitan poor: charity, voyeurism, titillation, sexual liberation, ‘attraction to repulsion.’⁴ Some spent time in the slums for enjoyment, others for high-minded charity. The most relevant factor here was how one group of people could seek to explore the lives of another group, considered alien, and do so in ways that required a performance of sincerity, to assure others of pure motives, and in turn the questioning of their sincerity by others. Thomas John (Dr) Barnado, for instance, was investigated for the alleged ‘staging’ of photographs of ‘his ragged children’, the

³ Kershaw, ‘French and British Female Intellectuals and the Soviet Union’.

⁴ Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 4.

accusation being that he was producing inauthentic images as part of an insincere attempt to gain donations for his philanthropic work.⁵ In a study of the divides that saw a gulf of understanding between social groups in the British capital, Gareth Stedman Jones notes that ‘we more often than not hear their [the working-class] voices through texts produced by the well-to-do.’⁶ Rural investigations were also common: Mark Freeman has explored the ‘social investigation’ of rural England in the 40 years leading up to the First World War: nascent sociology being undertaken in investigating rural culture, economy, and social ills.⁷

Investigations abroad also took place. Frank Trentmann describes ‘tariff trippers’, politicians and others (often funded by the Conservative party) taking visits, just before the First World War, to Germany. The German government employed various protectionist instruments, including tariffs, and the condition of German moral and economic wellbeing was a topic of debate in Britain, at least in terms of how Germany’s protectionism could be made to support domestic arguments for Free Trade or tariff reform. Free Traders also visited – Ramsay MacDonald visited Germany in 1910 and later reported on the “‘true conditions’” of the German worker. ‘Trippers’ became desirable speakers at functions back in Britain: their eye-witness accounts were in demand.⁸ Important here also were perceived cultural differences: a foreign state was both a place to gather information for use at home, and a place to compare Britain to: Germans eating horseflesh, for instance, was used by Free Traders as an indication of substantial differences to Britain. ‘Why would a Briton want such a thing?’ the Free Traders scornfully asked.⁹

These phenomena all continued in some form in the 1930s, about matters foreign and domestic. Travel to the Soviet Union, and debate about that state, occurred in the same decade Rebecca West undertook her travel in the Balkans that formed the basis of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*; that Orwell published *Road to Wigan Pier* and *Down and Out in Paris and London*, continuing the ‘slumming’ tradition. In 1933 the American

⁵ Koven, *Slumming*, 90–1.

⁶ Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (London: Verso, 2013), 12.

⁷ Freeman, *Social Investigation in Rural England*, 2–3; 11.

⁸ Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation*, 96–8; 116.

⁹ Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation*, 100.

Edward Wight published in London *The Unemployed Man*, a close study, born of immersive experience, of the everyday experience of the English working-class unemployed. Beatrice Webb visited Bacup, north of Rochdale, ‘to see for herself, not the people of the abyss, but the ordinary, “normal” British manual worker’.¹⁰ This scene and that of travel to the Soviet Union even overlap directly. For example, the journalist Ada Chesterton infamously spent time on the London streets in 1925. From this experience she wrote *In Darkest London* (1926), and articles for the Daily Express on her explorations of poverty in the north of England in the later part of the 1920s and into the early 1930s. This mix of professionalising social investigation, amateur curiosity, picaresque adventure, a search for truth and persistent questions of sincerity and authenticity – all are mixed together in travel to the Soviet Union.

Some more detailed mapping of British investigation of the Soviet Union in the inter-war period has already been undertaken. Patrick Wright’s exploration of the history of the ‘Iron Curtain’ metaphor, before its most famous expression by Winston Churchill at Fulton, Missouri in 1946, tells us that the ‘Iron Curtain’ of the inter-war period was a “psychological” phenomenon’ as much as a matter of borders, a ‘barrage of contrary propagandas in which, thanks to the cancellation of more reliable information, fact, fantasy, and ideological allegation had become extravagantly confused.’¹¹ Thus, Wright surveys certain journeys made to the USSR by Britons, in particular those of a series of delegations of left-wing politicians and intellectuals, between 1917 and the Second World War, and focuses his examination on the contested, complicated and confusing narratives that confronted people when they discussed the Soviet Union. Wright also made a brief study of Charles Roden Buxton’s visits to the USSR made in 1922 and 1927. Buxton sought rapprochement between Britain and the Soviet Union by finding and emphasising interaction between British visitor and Soviet individual. However, in both David-Fox and others’ work on Soviet institutional engagement with foreigners, and in much of Wright’s study, the focus on foreigners is primarily on the broad conclusions generated by travel to the Soviet Union (often orientated around vigorous pro- and anti-Soviet biases). Ultimately, Wright’s labelling of some travellers

¹⁰ Kevin Morgan, *The Webbs and Soviet Communism* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2006), 70–1.

¹¹ Wright, *Iron Curtain*, 191.

as ‘detectives’, and of travellers positioning themselves ‘against’ cultural diplomacy and its foils is insightful but has been left under-explored.

It is the clash between Soviet reality (with its custodians, the Soviet authorities, looming in the background), and a visitor’s preconceptions and intention, that Wright’s work helps illuminate. He sets out a scene in which foreign visitors had difficulty correlating scattered and superficial experiences into a useful, defensibly-informed conclusion, and thus ultimately relied on their own preconceptions and ideological loyalties.¹² He notes contemporary contempt or advice regarding this phenomenon: Friedrich Adler’s contempt for ‘the whole idea of ‘studious travel’, Walter Benjamin imploring visitors to attempt to not see things by ‘observing events as outsiders’, but rather to ‘take a position while you are in the midst’ of Soviet life, and the combined efforts of Boris Souvarine, Panaït Istrati and Victor Serge, published in 1929 as a series collectively titled *Vers L’autre flamme*, to expose Soviet duplicity towards both their own population and foreigners, and recommending to foreigners the steps necessary to understanding Soviet life.¹³ Istrati, writing in the third volume, *La Russie Nue* (translated into English in 1931 as *Russia Unveiled*) noted:

A visit to Soviet Russia is not necessarily a revelation in itself; everything depends on the conditions under which the tour is carried out and on the intellectual and moral worth of the traveller himself.¹⁴

Wright suggests that whilst this work, and this advice, proved rather unsuccessful in effecting change, they and other authors contributed to the fact that by the 1930s the ‘charge of Potemkinism’ was acknowledged even by those friendly to the Soviet Union – and, as David-Fox has shown, this acknowledgement was matched by VOKS and Intourist recognising the necessity to pre-empt suspicions of deceit, changing their tactics regarding the marshalling of foreign visitors to better assure their charges that what they were seeing was indeed ‘real’ (and to maintain a pre-eminent position in the cultural competition).¹⁵

¹² Wright, *Iron Curtain*, 235–7.

¹³ Wright, 252–3; 235–6; 262–79.

¹⁴ Panaït Istrati, *Russia Unveiled*, trans. by R. J. S. Curtis (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931), 19.

¹⁵ David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 140–1.

In 1930, Joseph Douillet's ('Belgian Consul in Russia' from 1891) work *Moscow Unmasked: A Record of Nine Years' Work and Observation in Soviet Russia* was published in London. In this fiery text, Douillet stridently attacked the way Soviet Russia was 'being "shown" and only that which beforehand had been prepared, cleaned and tidied for the inspection of the foreign visitor' was visited by a tourist.¹⁶ The "'cultural myth" of Potemkin villages' was resurrected.¹⁷ The historical resonance of Potemkin's supposed deceit is far-reaching: David-Fox shows the representation of 'Russia' has long been contested by foreigner and Russian, with a focus on tours of the Russian interior. The travelogue of Astolphe-Louis Leonard, Marquis de Custine, *La Russie en 1839*, depicted Russia as a 'theatre', where Russians pretended to be civilised, hiding their barbarous essence. The Baron August von Haxthausen was commissioned by the Russian government to write another account of Russia in response. He did so, after travelling with an appointed interpreter/minder, producing a glowing account of Russian life that was in direct opposition to de Custine's.¹⁸ As both Wright and David-Fox show, visitors were alert to the possibility of 'cultural show' (*kul'tpokaz*), aware of the possibility they could be shown 'unrepresentative, propagandistic models'.¹⁹ The discourse of travel was thus fraught with questions of sincerity.

The scholarship has not, however, explored at length what happened when, to put it from a Soviet institutional perspective, things went 'wrong'. For, if as David-Fox, Wright and Fitzpatrick and others show, VOKS and Intourist and the Soviet secret police (for they were involved, as Stern notes, although more work needs to be done here too) all recognised that foreigners ignored, strayed from, or even evaded the cultural diplomatic apparatus of tour and guide, interviews and itineraries, what does that mean for these foreigners' subsequent reports on the Soviet Union and their reception, and what does it mean for the Soviet handlers – and, ultimately, the Soviet

¹⁶ Joseph Douillet, *Moscow Unmasked: A Record of Nine Years' Work and Observation in Soviet Russia* (London: The Pilot Press, 1930), xii.

¹⁷ David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 20.

¹⁸ David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 21. Francesca Wilson notes how de Custine 'was already prejudiced against Russia' before his arrival. Haxthausen, in contrast, was 'naïve in his enthusiasm for the primitive, [and] contributed richly to the myth of the "Russian soul"'. Francesca Wilson, *Muscovy: Russia Through Foreign Eyes 1553–1900* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1970), 218; 243.

¹⁹ David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 99; Wright, *Iron Curtain*, 142–3.

individuals these foreigners encountered?²⁰ Gareth Jones's exploration of the Ukrainian countryside to find famine near Kharkiv, March 1933, remains one of the only such incidents that has been examined, and thus has been explored in isolation.²¹ Whilst most other cases of 'tramping', as Jones termed it, were perhaps of less obviously dramatic consequence, they should nevertheless be explored and considered and set in context with one another, for they reveal much about the discourse of travel, and Soviet discourse regarding foreigners.

Furthermore, travellers fulfilled a role for domestic audiences. In 1932, Bernard Pares discussed a range of 'English Books on Soviet Russia' in *The Slavonic and East European Review*.²² In his article Pares described the difficulty of gaining 'trustworthy information' about the Soviet Union. His review considered in books primarily written by travellers, not experts, and spent most of its time discussing the works of two Americans: Ethan Colton's *The XYZ of Communism*, and Maurice Hindus' (born in Belarus, migrated to the USA pre-1914) series of books, most notably *Red Bread* (1931). Pares himself was one of the noted British experts on Russian matters pre-1939. Pares liked both Colton and Hindus for their giving a 'fuller, clearer, and better picture of the whole subject'.²³ He discussed them at length in this review. Neither is noted as a professional, i.e., an economist, an agronomist, a historian, a scientist. Professionals did visit the Soviet Union and reported on matters with expert knowledge to hand. Yet they were not experts on the Soviet in and of itself. Colton and Hindus were, Pares was saying, because of their experience in the Soviet Union: they were the people who had been there and seen it, and knew 'Russia' well-enough to know its complexities. Hindus was particularly praised for his numerous conversations and engagement with Soviet people; Pares himself based much of his work on Russia on

²⁰ David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 120–1; Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'Foreigners Observed', 220; Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union*, 120.

²¹ See works such as Teresa Cherfas, 'Reporting Stalin's Famine: Jones and Muggeridge: A Case Study in Forgetting and Rediscovery', *Kritika* 14:4 (Autumn 2013), 775–804; Ray Gamache, *Gareth Jones: Eyewitness to the Holodomor* (Cardiff: Welsh Academic Press, 2013); Nicholas Hall, 'Gareth Jones, the Soviet peasantry, and the "Real Russia"', *Russian Journal of Communication* 8:3 (2016), 242–55.

²² Bernard Pares, 'English Books on Soviet Russia', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 10:30 (April 1932), 525–546. 'English' here means Anglophone.

²³ Pares, 'English Books on Soviet Russia', 530.

his own travels there (alongside his contacts with Russian politicians and academics).²⁴

This role largely occupied by, broadly speaking, curious amateurs is important. The fact that *Country Life* and *International Affairs* alike could review a travel text not by a recognized scholar of Russian (let alone Soviet) matters, but by the travel writer Norah Rowan-Hamilton, is indicative of the role the amateur played. It is doubtful Pares would have considered Rowan-Hamilton on the level of Colton or Hindus, but that her work was published is indicative of the contemporary effort to understand the Soviet Union (and profit from curiosity about it). It was the direct experience these writers had that gave them at least some measure of credence. Alongside the diplomatic staff at British outposts in the Soviet Union, and the resident Anglophone journalists in Moscow, travellers were a key source of information about the Soviet Union.

Expertise was developing. Pares himself was at the forefront of advocacy for the study of Russian and Slavic affairs in Britain.²⁵ Indeed, Rebecca Beasley notes how ‘at the turn of the century the study of Russian was becoming professionalised’.²⁶ During the interwar period émigrés played an increasingly important role. (Prince) Dimitrii (Petrovich) Svyatopolk–Mirskii, better known as D. S. Mirskii, was engaged in instructing those who were willing to learn about the Russian world, and Isaiah Berlin began to develop his investigations of Russian radical thought (especially that of Aleksander Herzen). That said, the actual numbers of people engaged in formal study of the Russian language or Russian subjects more generally, was very small pre-Second World War: Beasley notes only ‘an average of less than one student a year’ was taking Russian at Oxford in the inter-war period, whilst SSEES awarded only ten first degrees between 1920 and 1939.²⁷ There was wider appetite for Russian and Soviet news and information, as evidenced by the works considered in this thesis, but

²⁴ Rebecca Beasley, *Russomania* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 324.

²⁵ Pares founded a department in Russian at Liverpool in 1907 and also began what eventually became the *Slavonic and East European Review*; in 1917 he was made Professor of Russian the School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies at the University of London, and in 1932 Director (when it was newly independent of King’s College): Dorothy Galton, ‘Sir Bernard Pares and Slavonic Studies in London University, 1919–1939’, *Slavonic and East European Review*, 46:107 (October 1968), 481–91, at 489.

²⁶ Beasley, *Russomania*, 319–20. The Leathes Report of 1918 advocated the expansion of Russian teaching provision in Britain – Beasley, *Russomania*, 329.

²⁷ Beasley, *Russomania*, 337.

the scale and substance of the British response to Russia as an intellectual subject in its own right, to teach Russian matters at universities, within the civil service, and so on, was still relatively limited. James Muckle notes that even with the great interest in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, Russian studies faced a ‘quiet time’.²⁸ Violet Conolly was unique amongst the travellers considered here, in that her travel to the Soviet Union was related to her (nascent) profession as, in effect, a Sovietologist. Yet given the relative paucity of people like Conolly, travellers still fulfilled a function in teaching Britain about the Other. The travellers were, at the very least, looked to for insight: they were not *a priori* discounted for lacking expertise.

Another relevant trend here is the professionalization of the social sciences: particularly anthropology and sociology. Both were developing significantly in the inter-war period. Anthropology found greater contemporary interest in the inter-war period, as cultural relativism rose to challenge longer-standing assumptions of civilizational hierarchies.²⁹ The American anthropologist Margaret Mead’s most famous works, *Coming of Age in Samoa* and *Growing up in New Guinea* appeared in 1928 and 1930 respectively; the First World War gave some Western minds pause, and the appeal of other cultures was part of the search for alternative ways of living. Domestically, the development of the social sciences and the investigation of everyday life were gathering pace in British intellectual and political circles pre-Second World War. James Hinton describes, for example, Mass Observation thus:

Formed in 1937 from the cross currents of 1930s radicalism, Mass-Observation (MO) set out to document popular life and belief in ways that would contribute to the democratization of sociological knowledge: ‘an anthropology of ourselves’.³⁰

Yet the travellers were far from professional social observers and were not even like the volunteers MO relied upon for much of its survey and investigative work. When it comes to both expertise about Russia and the Soviet Union, and anthropological/sociological investigative tools, the travellers were amateurs. Nevertheless, their works were published, they were read, and many were reviewed

²⁸ James Muckle, *The Russian Language in Britain* (Ilkeston: Bramcote Press, 2008), 100.

²⁹ Peter Mandler, *Return from the Natives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), xi; 11–14.

³⁰ James Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass Observation and the Making of the Modern Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 2.

by a wide range of journals: they filled a gap. Post-war, as with Russian and Soviet studies, this situation changed considerably.³¹

DISCOVERY, DISSENT – DOUBT?

The chapter focuses on three key ideas within the discourse of travel, all relating in some way to sincerity. The first is that travel was an act of discovery, the second that the truth of the Soviet Union was contested between foreigners, and between foreigner and Soviet, as the scholarship has identified, but has not interrogated in sufficient detail as it pertains to the framing and conduct of travel to the USSR. The third is the idea of doubt, necessarily linked to dissent, but also underpinning/undermining the idea of discovery. The first idea, which Patrick Wright suggests with the identification of ‘detectives’, can be interrogated as a starting point for an examination of the discourse of travel. Given the range of views and experiences in the travel literature of the period, dividing the accounts into groups that are neatly mutually exclusive of one another is an impossible task. The desire for discovery can at the least provide a starting point for our plunge into the discourse of travel to the Soviet Union, a way of understanding what most travellers framed as the essential purpose of their journey. The significance of discovery is not unobvious – but nor should it be taken for granted. Through comparing travellers’ statements of intent and objectives, the sincerity of travellers becomes more clearly contingent on shared attitudes and understandings, and also show how travellers’ accounts were subtly divergent. It also shows how closely these issues of discovery and contested truths were intertwined, and by establishing this it is possible to juxtapose how accounts show, explicitly and implicitly, different readings of the utility and sense of travel. So, to start, we shall look at discovery, dissent, and doubt as presented by travellers in their accounts, before exploring the tensions between these themes in more detail.

The importance of travel to discover things was obvious to many travellers. Gareth Jones was forthright: ‘few observers of Soviet Russia’, he wrote in 1930, ‘are worthy of credence’ without immersion in Soviet reality.³² Walter Citrine’s words, of his desire

³¹ Lise Butler, *Michael Young, Social Science, and the British Left*, 54.

³² Gareth Jones, ‘Rulers and Ruled’, *The Times*, 13 October 1930, 13f.

to see 'how things were' in the Soviet Union, was a more common sentiment – evidence of the same curiosity, but with a less strident tone.³³ Edwin Taylor Brown wrote that when he and his companion Augustus discussed travelling, the latter said it would be a chance to 'see Things as they Really Are.'³⁴ John and Leonora Davies wrote simply that 'we decided to see for ourselves what the Russians were like, what they aimed at, and how they carried out their Plans.'³⁵ Violet Conolly stated in the preface to her *Soviet Tempo* that 'I had to go back to get my bearings, [...] to test my prejudice against reality.'³⁶ Archibald Lyall wrote how 'so many utterly contradictory reports came out of Russia'; he 'wanted to go and see for myself what it was like'.³⁷ Henry Roy Pratt Boorman wrote 'so much has been said and written, both in favour and against Russia of late that I determined to see for myself.'³⁸ Visiting would give credence to an author's views; discovery was a beguiling idea. This was encouraged by Soviet advertising. A 1937 English-language Intourist brochure opened with the wry statement: 'We Know That You Are Interested'.³⁹ The sense that visiting the Soviet Union could lead to discovery even included the possibility of revelation. Archibald Lyall wrote of an acquaintance who had experienced a conversion when in the Soviet Union. This man had been 'drifting, frustrated, melancholy, who had been to Russia and got converted. He had come back with a purpose in life, happy, busy, going out nearly every evening to speak at Communist meetings.'⁴⁰ Michael David-Fox writes that for prominent intellectuals visiting the Soviet Union, 'time spent inside the country was a crucial experience in the lives of key figures, and the actions of travellers and hosts alike could dramatically affect the results.'⁴¹ Travel was essential to these writers as a way of achieving understanding – but what kind of understanding was another matter. This desire for discovery, this way of orientating experience, crosses multiple lines in the corpus, independent of an author's political loyalties, cultural interests, date, duration, and location of visit, and so on, although the sincerity of their purpose was not always as unproblematic as presented. What was thought to be discoverable,

³³ Walter Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia* (London: Routledge, 1936), vii.

³⁴ Edwin Taylor Brown, *This Russian Business*, 7.

³⁵ Leonora & John Henry Davies, *A Trip to Soviet Russia* (London: Strangeways & Sons, 1933), 7.

³⁶ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, viii.

³⁷ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 2.

³⁸ Henry Roy Pratt Boorman, *So This Is Russia* (Maidstone: Kent Messenger, 1936), 10.

³⁹ Anonymous, *USSR: Soviet Travel Handbook for 1937*. Helen Muspratt private archive.

⁴⁰ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 1.

⁴¹ David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 3.

and how this discovery was to be made, and where, and why, is the significant data that locates a traveller in the discourse, and thus forms a significant part of this thesis.

The idea of a contested truth was fundamental for a traveller's attempt at sincere reporting and assessment of Soviet life, for it shaped their ideas about discovery, about how best to sincerely represent a truth, and where and who and what that truth was. Dissent orientated around which story of the Soviet Union was true, or most accurate, and revolved around two sources of stories: the Soviet state's cultural diplomacy, and the reports of travellers themselves. A necessary divergence between these was accepted by many travellers: it was not the case that only a select few travellers recognised the possibility of a different Soviet world to that shown by cultural diplomacy, and neither was it the case that such reflection was followed by uniform action and conclusions.

The Soviets published material on the activities of VOKS in English: they were not shy about their cultural diplomatic organisations, and sought via sincerity to head off accusations of deceit: the Soviet state explained its work to foreigners via small publications like the 1930 pamphlet, *Facts and Figures*, and journals like *The Moscow News* and *USSR in Construction*, both Anglophone, which were launched in 1930 and 1931 respectively.⁴² *Facts and Figures* detailed the organisation's purpose as channelling the 'peculiar force' that the 'attention of all mankind' has put on the Soviet experiment, whilst helping the Soviet state learn of foreign science and engineering.⁴³ It then described the facilitation by VOKS of scholarly, photographic and book exchanges, exhibitions and the publication of the VOKS magazine, and the co-operative work enjoyed with numerous foreign friendship societies.⁴⁴ There are only a few pages of the pamphlet dedicated to the hosting and guiding of foreigners. Yet the Soviet focus on these foreigners was significant. Intourist also offered guidebooks for travellers as part of 'providing service', such as the 700-plus pages of the *Pocket Guide to the Soviet Union*, replete with numerous fold-out maps and the admission that

⁴² Anonymous, *VOKS: The Soviet Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries – Facts and Figures* (Moscow: VOKS, 1930), 3.

⁴³ *Facts and Figures*, 3.

⁴⁴ *Facts and Figures*, 7-28; 36-58.

the publishers are only too keenly aware that many of the figures will be out of date before the book is off the press, but this only emphasises again the remarkable transformation taking place in the Soviet Union.⁴⁵

This dense tome also clearly stated the purpose and meaning of the Soviet state, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and other fundamentals of the Soviet project. It also mixed the life story of Lenin and the pronouncements of Stalin with lists of hotels, scientific institutions and theatres; descriptions of many locations with a weight of demographic statistics; explanations about different organs of the state with information on the numbers of radios in use across the Union. The descriptions of cities and regions are extensive but make only a very general reference to the visitor's perspective: the guidebook is more of an encyclopaedia than an instrument for the navigation of Soviet life. Indeed, other than a score or so pages describing visa requirements, booking offices, tours and itineraries and customs rules, the guide does not (unsurprisingly) discuss travel as an act, but rather represents the Soviet Union as open to foreign eyes by the absence of any statement of there being areas off-limits. It also does not describe Soviet life east of the Urals beyond naming frontier posts and the railways across Siberia. When combined with the VOKS document from two years earlier, a clear picture of the appeal Soviets made to foreigners is seen: here we are, this is what we are doing, please join us to see for yourselves.

As noted, awareness of Soviet cultural diplomacy was common in Britain. Angela Kershaw writes the following of Ethel Mannin's work, *South to Samarkand*:

Ethel Mannin was repeatedly asked on her return whether 'it was true that You Only Saw What They Wanted You To See' [...]. The capital letters indicate that the 'techniques of hospitality' had become cliché by the mid-1930s.⁴⁶

John Brown wrote that: 'people told me that I should be unable to see anything on my own – that I should be shepherded everywhere by guides, and refused admission to any factory or settlement that was not a "show place".⁴⁷ John Gilbert Lockhart wrote similarly, of 'the trite warning addressed to the prospective traveller by his friends: "Of

⁴⁵ *Pocket Guide to the Soviet Union*, ed. by L. Blok, (Moscow: Vneshtorgizdat, 1932), v.

⁴⁶ Kershaw, 'French and British Female Intellectuals and the Soviet Union'.

⁴⁷ John Brown, *I Saw For Myself*, 172.

course they will only show you what they want you to see”⁴⁸ Bernard Pares states he was not followed during his ‘casual’ walks around Moscow, but that ‘some of my friends have refused to believe that I was not’.⁴⁹ In 1934, Harold Bellman reflected on the words of a ‘Soviet official’ who promised Bellman and his fellow travellers assistance and the freedom to travel: ‘Whether we shall be free in this land of the free remains to be seen: so far, we have heard nothing but restrictions, prohibitions and warnings’.⁵⁰ Such ideas impelled some to go, not because they wished to give an account of this restrictive world, but so they could find another story, one that was less negative. Hubert Griffith wrote how his friends warned too that not only was he ‘was taking my life in my hands’ and would see “only what the authorities wanted me to see,”, but dismissed this as nonsense.⁵¹ The idea of ‘seeing what is meant to be seen’ was central to many travellers for whom travel became more than an itinerary, more than a narrative of movement, more than a way of experiencing difference. It became a subject to be discussed in and of itself, a politicised field in which a foreigner consciously acted, choosing a specific mode that suited their intentions, whilst accounting for the intentions of their Soviet hosts as they were perceived to be. This was not necessarily a binary issue, of negative/positive experiences or anti/pro-Soviet conclusions respectively.

Dissent also reared its head when travellers engaged with others’ accounts, as is shown by the varied mentions of reports and numerous visits to the USSR in the quotations above. Demands for ‘impartiality’, for ‘balance’ and the like were made of foreign observers from the very start of foreign engagement with the Soviet Union, even as the news that these travellers consumed was not always concerned with ‘unadorned facts’, so much as ‘interpretation.’⁵² The problem of ‘impartiality’ was central to foreigner’s performance of sincerity, such was the ideological tinge to the debate. Indeed, from the very first British reports of the Soviet world, such as the British

⁴⁸ John Gilbert Lockhart, *Babel Visited: A Churchman in Soviet Russia* (London: Centenary Press, 1933), 23–4. There are numerous such statements in the corpus, e.g. “You will only see what they choose to show you”, Norah Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1930), 12.

⁴⁹ Pares, *Moscow admits a Critic*, 30.

⁵⁰ Harold Bellman, *Baltic Backgrounds* (Privately published, 1934), 38.

⁵¹ Hubert Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia* (London: John Lane and Bodley Head, 1932), 7–8.

⁵² David Engerman, *Modernisation from the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development* (London: Harvard University Press, 2003), 206–7.

Labour Delegation of 1920, were praised (or damned) in light of their perceived impartiality, or lack thereof. For example, that delegation's report was praised by William and Zelda Coates as being a 'balanced and explanatory account of the state of affairs in Soviet Russia' which 'acted as an important corrective to the one-sided distortions [...] in Conservative newspapers.'⁵³ William Coates also wrote pamphlets with evocative titles like *Anti-Soviet Lies Nailed* (and a sequel, prefixed 'More') attacking 'the constant stream of misrepresentations and distortions in our Tory Press' about the Soviet Union – although Coates based his rebuttals on news and statistics in the Soviet press.⁵⁴ Deeply negative anti-Soviet stories did indeed circulate, including fabrications like those of Frank Easton Woodhead in 1930, who claimed to have seen a Moscow riot by Red Army soldiers in which a thousand people were said to have died.⁵⁵ Other stories, rooted in experience and observation, were however critiqued on the basis of their political position: as Paul Flewers notes, critical writers could be attacked by virtue of their doubted 'motives', and so 'any assessments would be written off as a product of his or her bad faith and prejudices.'⁵⁶ Thus, while Peter Fleming, who reflected on his re-telling of an experience of a brawl with a Japanese soldier in occupied China 'I have – I don't know why, for nobody expects a traveller to tell the truth – some scruples in the matter of veracity', such scruples were considered a matter of fundamental importance when travelling in the Soviet Union.⁵⁷ The context of travel to the Soviet Union heightened the travellers' concerns with recording and accounting for what they saw. Fleming's assertion that 'nobody expects a traveller to tell the truth' was not shared by many of his contemporaries who made their 'truth-telling' explicitly central to their works. Whereas wider travel culture is a broad, tangled

⁵³ William Coates & Zelda Coates, *A History of Anglo-Soviet Relations* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1943), 29–30.

⁵⁴ William Coates, *Anti-Soviet Lies Nailed* (May 1930) and (with George Lansbury MP) *More Anti-Soviet Lies Nailed* (August 1933), both published by the Anglo-Russian Parliamentary Committee; *More Anti-Soviet Lies Nailed*, 9.

⁵⁵ Wright, *Iron Curtain*, 308; Anonymous, 'Briton Says He Saw Troops Revolt in Moscow, Tells of OGPU "Butchery" and Arrest of Rykoff', *New York Times*, 28 November 1930, 1; Anonymous, 'Mutinies in the Red Army', *Daily Telegraph*, 28 November 1930, 11g.

⁵⁶ Paul Flewers, *The New Civilisation?*, 68.

⁵⁷ Peter Fleming, *One's Company: A Journey to China* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934), 121–2. Fleming goes on to write 'You would have thought [...] that there ought to be some compensation, that life should offer to one who reports it with such pious and boring fidelity an occasional good conduct prize in the shape of an authentically Strong Situation, a ready-to-wear adventure off the peg. But life apparently thinks otherwise. Colourless experience continues to be delivered in plain vans.' This kind of reflection on the tension between romantic and empirical experience, and its reporting – and the irony about travel writing as a form – is conspicuously absent from many travel accounts.

phenomenon that concerns multiple countries, contexts and characters, this travel to the Soviet Union is very specifically located in more than a merely geographical or temporal sense – its attendant cultural values are more fixed: a particular performance of veracity mattered in a particular way to a traveller there. However, travellers were not equally concerned with the same types or qualities of truth.

The diverse debate in Britain about Soviet developments was a key driving force of interest in travel to the Soviet Union. Indeed, such was the volume and size of this debate that it threatened to silence some. Harold Bellman wrote:

There is an overflowing peck of good reasons for keeping a stilled tongue and a locked typewriter, or even for poisoning a pen irresolutely above the blank folios of a personal journal on the subject of the Russian experiment. For one thing, so many observers have produced their reams on 'What I Saw in Russia,' that the temptation to issue an irreverent document entitled 'What I Didn't See in Russia,' is almost irresistible. [...] When the ordinary interested individual, finding himself no nearer to a reliable estimate of what he could see in Russia, looks up his passport, makes a private audit of his resources, and takes to the Baltic passage, does he step clear of controversial uncertainties once he sets foot into the Socialist Republic? Not a bit of it. If anything, the enigma becomes greater than before. Russia is still Russia. Let him wander and comment at will upon Milan, Cairo, Johannesburg, Salzburg, Jerusalem and Chicago, and he may return with any story he pleases. But immediately he mentions bread queues in Moscow a fellow passenger will counter him with accounts of communal kitchens.⁵⁸

Boorman offered his own remedy to this epistemological conundrum: 'I refused to read books on Russia before I came out here, because I did not wish to be influenced by authors who had.'⁵⁹ Kingsley Martin referred to a fatigue resulting from too many travel accounts:

I tell you, no one wants to read any more about Russia. The entire British intelligentsia has been to Russia this summer. Most of it has asked me to print its articles. I have refused the lot. Must I accept my own?

⁵⁸ Bellman, *Baltic Backgrounds*, 84–5.

⁵⁹ Boorman, *So This is Russia*, 9.

The fact we can read these words in a published book suggests Martin's scepticism was not insurmountable: 'I'm merely publishing an irresponsible diary – just a lot of questions, and no answers'.⁶⁰ The debate about the Soviet Union might have been tiresome to some, but it was well sustained by travel accounts. Indeed, a motivation for travellers was a demand for answers on the part of their British audience. Walter Citrine, and John and Leonora Davies, gave numerous lectures on their travels, and could relate being encouraged from 'several quarters', despite 'hesitation', to publish their experiences as books.⁶¹ Boorman wrote of being asked 'repeatedly' to collate his articles into a book.⁶² Some thought edification would follow discovery: John Hoyland wrote in his glowing account of Soviet life, *The New Russia*, about 'the abysmal ignorance of our people regarding Russia' and he sought to publish an account of his visit as a corrective.⁶³ Hubert Griffith took this further. Denying he would have any ability to "“tell the whole truth about Russia”" (a 'pretentious' claim), he nevertheless sought to report on the Soviet Union to persuade others to 'see for themselves rather than to sit at home and read libels'.⁶⁴ Cicely Hamilton wrote of a friend "like other of her countrymen, [...] curious to hear my impressions' of the USSR, and the 'emotional and therefore [...] unreasoning public' that would devour accounts by observers, judging them in light of 'prejudice or sentiment", and so she resolved to be cautious with her own prejudices when assessing Soviet life, to give at least as honest an account as she could.⁶⁵ The point is that the debate influenced all, positively or negatively: Elizabeth Delafield noted that there was no '*juste milieu* where the Soviet is concerned'.⁶⁶ That said, the deluge of accounts was not necessarily seen to be particularly convincing or effective in and of themselves: Peter Fleming noted that 'in England authorities on Russia are about as numerous as authorities on Mars'.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Kinglsey Martin & David Low, *Low's Russian Sketchbook* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1932), 9. Martin wrote the text, which Low illustrated.

⁶¹ Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, x; John Henry Davies & Leonora Davies, *A Trip to Soviet Russia* (London: Strangeways & Sons, 1933), 13.

⁶² Pratt Boorman, *So This is Russia*, 3.

⁶³ John Hoyland, *The New Russia: A Quaker Visitor's Impressions* (London: H. R. Allenson, 1933), 1–2.

⁶⁴ Griffith wrote this phrase in quotation marks, despite not quoting anybody and referring only to himself. This suggests that 'the truth about Russia' was a concept alive in the discourse, a phrase of contemporary public significance, and thus deployable as an unattributed quotation; Hubert Griffiths, *Seeing Soviet Russia*, vii.

⁶⁵ Cicely Hamilton, *Modern Russia as Seen by an Englishwoman* (London: J. M. Dent, 1934), v.

⁶⁶ Elizabeth Delafield, *Straw without Bricks: I Visit Soviet Russia* (London: Macmillan, 1937), 241.

⁶⁷ Fleming, *One's Company*, 30.

Dissent inspired a desire for discovery, even as it could also smother any chance of making a discovery: a traveller had to be careful to recognise the dangers of received prejudice. Ethel Mannin summarised the effect this had on how travellers could prepare themselves in her book *South to Samarkand*, writing of her journey out to Leningrad:

I had dreaded this ship. I had feared that its passengers might consist of the friends of the more tiresome breed of Communist – such as abound in Bloomsbury, Greenwich Village, Montparnasse – and the more earnest kind of tourist who would take one aside and ask what did one Really Think of Russia.⁶⁸

A traveller was confronted by nagging questions of what precisely they were seeing and asking themselves how best to explain it – and also wondering why anyone should listen to them about ‘Russia’ at all.

Indeed, doubt was a key factor in these works. Doubt underpins discovery and dissent and can be just as meaningful by its absence as its presence. Travellers recognised ignorance, self-doubt and their own limitations. Archibald Lyall wrote ‘to be sure, I had no very solid hope of being able to find out the truth in a month’s conducted tour’, whilst Violet Conolly doubted her capacity to overcome her prejudices: ‘I do not pretend to have gone to Russia with an open or empty mind, which is more or less the same thing. How could I?’⁶⁹ This was accentuated by her dislike and distrust of some of the passengers on her boat to the Soviet Union: ‘I was always uncomfortable with the English comrades on board. None of them had been in Russia before, and yet they fixed you with a glassy and uncomprehending eye if you attempted any criticism of the USSR. It just wasn’t done in that society.’⁷⁰ Such an example seems to have reinforced her understanding of her inability to do away with prejudices, and in fact, probably entrenched them: she noted that at a parade on Red Square, her commentary about the ‘vast potential destruction’ embodied in the military show was received very poorly by Britons who argued for the Soviet’s need of ‘defence’.⁷¹ Some took this self-doubt a step further: Elizabeth Delafield wrote that her book, *Straw without Bricks*, was ‘not

⁶⁸ Ethel Mannin, *South to Samarkand* (London: Jarrolds, 1936), 27.

⁶⁹ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 2; Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, xii

⁷⁰ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 12.

⁷¹ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 22–3.

a book about the USSR. It is more a book about myself when travelling in Russia', in which, being 'incapable of assimilating' facts and figures 'intelligently', she was more concerned with her impressions and experiences than statistics.⁷² Such self-deprecation is indicative of the prominence and weight of facts and figures in the discourse more than the lack of ability to comprehend them, but her performance is one of submission before a vastly complex problem. Robert Byron melded these three themes together to describe a state of being one must assume when in Russia: 'the ideas of Russia are preached, and act, as a challenge to those in the West', so 'in Russia one must think, argue, and defend'. This contrasts to the other destination featured in his work, Tibet, where ideas offer no challenge but 'maintain, simply, a passive resistance towards those of the West'.⁷³ The scale of this challenge, in geography and complexity and historical import was recognised as being a significant barrier to discovery. Edwin Taylor Brown wondered, as did others, if anything was truly discoverable without staying for 'at least six months'.⁷⁴ Violet Conolly wrote how she talked to herself about her own limitations: "Go back and see for yourself," pounded my brain. "What is one pair of eyes, one short visit, for that quest," countered the more level-headed part of me.⁷⁵

Travellers resorted to different approaches and attitudes to overcome such thought: doubts co-existed with the fact of a published account about the Soviet world, which could contain strong – if not necessarily radical – opinion. What is seen via this theme is how travellers could consider themselves able to provide some insight, if not necessarily revelation, to their readers, despite doubts about their ability, prejudice or their standing in the debate, explicit or otherwise. Recognition of the vastness of the question, 'what is the Soviet Union?' did not preclude an attempt at an answer. This crossed ideological lines: willing admission of prejudice and limited experience is found from all different kinds of travellers. This tension, between confidence and doubt is useful when considering various aspects of a traveller's self-representation, particularly as it relates to methodology, and the significance given to certain skills a traveller might possess. Edwin Taylor Brown concluded he did not 'feel that any of my

⁷² Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, vii.

⁷³ Byron, *First Russia, Then Tibet*, 11.

⁷⁴ Edwin Taylor Brown, *This Russian Business* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1933), 7.

⁷⁵ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, vii.

deeper doubts have been solved, or that I found in Leningrad or Moscow the key to any of the riddles which oppress my mind'.⁷⁶ Gareth Jones, on the other hand, described himself as having located the 'real Russia'. Yet both published their works all the same: the appetite for news and views and the relative absence of professional observers gave them the space to do so.

Discovery, dissent and doubt are necessarily closely bound, for all related to the finding and telling of truth and dealing with others' truths, be they as diverse as the statistics of industrial production to the revelatory truth of Marxism, and it is precisely how these themes collide (or do not) in a traveller's account that is significant. To begin the examination of the relationship between these key ideas within the discourse, some broad dichotomies can be deployed. They are not supposed to be definitive, exhaustive, or mutually exclusive – indeed, these ideas of discovery, dissent and doubt are coded in subtly varying, overlapping ways. However, the dichotomies can swiftly offer insight into how these ideas of discovery and contested representations interacted with doubt and confidence, giving us a platform from which to venture further into the Soviet interior. These dichotomies are as follows:

- Soviet power and material conditions as a danger/as a myth;
- travel as essential to understanding/travel as prejudicial to understanding;
- pro-Soviet and anti-Soviet views and the idea of travel;
- methodologies for discovery: empiricism and immersion;
- the significance of Russian as a skill for travellers: vital or disposable.

THE DANGERS OF SOVIET POWER AND MATERIAL CONDITIONS

First, therefore, comes traveller attitudes to perhaps the most significant element of the Soviet order that they encountered, such was its presence in the discourse: the fact of Soviet control and fears about Soviet conditions. This section looks at the expectations regarding Soviet control and how attitudes diverged pre- and post-arrival. As has already been suggested, the likelihood of achieving discovery was understood to be contingent on a range of factors, most often the successful negotiation of encounters with the Soviet state, but also material comfort, even survival, in a

⁷⁶ Edwin Taylor Brown, *This Russian Business*, 7.

disordered world. A crucial discursive influence the State had was the specific set of meanings foreigners associated with the Soviet apparatus of control, and the doubt and dissent that these inspired in foreigners. It should be noted that the reality of such control varied over the decade. However, the idea of Soviet control being ferocious and far-reaching was well-established long before then and was referred to by travellers of many different attitudes. How travellers reacted reveals something of their position. There is a noticeable decline in the numbers of travel accounts from 1937, suggesting that fewer people made the journey during the Terror, but the idea of terror, of state tyranny, was ever-present in the discourse throughout the period.

From the first, when travellers made visa applications, they were confronted by the probing gaze of the Soviet state: Una Pope-Hennessy wrote of how it was obligatory to ‘fill up a form that includes a demand to know the traveller’s motive for wishing to make the journey’.⁷⁷ This mattered: John Grierson waited weeks to hear of a rejected visa, and, like Gareth Jones (who utilised his connections to David Lloyd George), Grierson eventually used personal connections (ultimately writing to George Bernard Shaw) for help in gaining a visa. Norah Rowan-Hamilton wrote of applying for her visa in the “sanctum” of a visa office (probably in London), of filling out the ‘long sheets’ of the application, and of the fact of ‘still no visa!’ until sometime later.⁷⁸ Ada Chesterton travelled to Poland before she received her Soviet visa, and even then, she had to apply for further permissions once inside the Soviet Union.⁷⁹ Violet Conolly reported being refused a ‘consular visa’ upon her return to the USSR in the mid-1930s, a matter of concern for her: she sought such a visa ‘so that I might at least live as I pleased in Russia, with Russians whenever possible, and move about freely’.⁸⁰ Herbert Marchant wrote that his visa, also granted in the mid-1930s, would enable him to ‘go everywhere they would let me go, see everything they would let me see’ – but all the same he would ‘delve, get a worm’s eye view of things’.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Una Pope-Hennessy, *The Closed City: Impressions of a Visit to Leningrad* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1938), 17; John Grierson, *Through Russia by Air* (London: G T Foulis, 1934), 3.

⁷⁸ Norah Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 12–13.

⁷⁹ Ada Chesterton, *My Russian Venture* (London: George Harrap, 1931), 65.

⁸⁰ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, viii.

⁸¹ Herbert Marchant, *Scratch a Russian* (London: Lindsay Drummond, 1937), 11–12.

Furthermore, fear of Soviet conditions was prominent in the corpus. Where this is mentioned, it is usually to express how friends, family and others warned the traveller of the problems of visiting, either regarding material conditions, or regarding how limited a visitor would be. Ada Chesterton wrote of how ‘warnings and prophecies rained on me over the telephone, arrived in sheaves through the post.’ Her ‘friends and relatives’ warned of robbery, imprisonment, that ‘you will never come back alive!’.⁸² Norah Rowan Hamilton related ‘surprised and horrified friends’ who ‘tried to shake my resolution’ about visiting.⁸³ Herbert Marchant reported on warnings – and the confusion of contradictory ideas about the USSR – as given to him *en route* to Archangelsk:

‘You’ll get bed-bugs,’ said the bosun.

‘You’ll get caviar,’ said the captain.

‘You’ll get shot,’ said both.’

I alone on board seemed to have no very definite ideas about it all.⁸⁴

Boorman told of a friend who claimed “I would not visit Russia for £2,000” and who then added ‘I hope you will come back alive!’.⁸⁵ Owen Tweedy, aboard a boat to Leningrad met a man ‘who was of a party from some town in Yorkshire.’ This man told Tweedy a story:

Just before he had left, a friend, with a face as long as your arm, had come to his house to try and dissuade him from at any rate Moscow. He had produced a letter from a recent visitor, who described the prospect with ruddy emphasis and in such detail that it sounded straight from the horse’s mouth. The *motif* was that Moscow was a place to be visited at one’s peril. There would be no edible food; to drink water was to invite early death from typhus; the last batch of tourists had suffered chronically from laryngitis, tonsillitis, typhoid and dysentery. My deck friend could not help being impressed. It all sounded so authentic.

⁸² Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 10.

⁸³ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 12.

⁸⁴ Marchant, *Scratch a Russian*, 9.

⁸⁵ Boorman, *So This is Russia*, 5.

Tweedy himself noted that he had ‘no confirmation’ of such ‘apprehensions’.⁸⁶ If these expectations above were widespread, and of variable significance, the traveller’s meeting with the reality of Soviet life was often the moment these expectations were shown to be, at the least, divergent. Furthermore, it is possible that such warnings of danger were included to give the traveller an aura of daring, at least beyond the lack of courage evinced by ‘friends’ left at home. Whilst the discipline of the visa process and the tour was widely experienced, fears of personal danger and incredible hardship did not always translate into experience of such things.

The point here is that subsequent experiences of these travellers show not that Soviet state control did not exist, nor that conditions were not often poor, but that very few of these travellers experienced anything like the horrors predicted by fearful friends and relatives. Indeed, Henry Devenish Harben noted upon arrival at ‘Niegoroloye’ [Negoroloe] – where Ada Chesterton had felt ‘little shivers of apprehension’ running up her spine – that his

first hour in Russia dispelled many fears and false impressions.⁸⁷ One had read, for instance, that no one was allowed to shave, and I had half expected to be received by a body of bearded ruffians, a sort of Savage *Oberammergau!* Neither here nor at Minsk nor all this evening have I seen as yet one beard.⁸⁸

Edwin Taylor Brown was fined one rouble by a militiaman in Leningrad for walking on the road. The scene is presented as a confused, almost genial, meeting of two people who couldn’t communicate beyond gesture and a couple of words – not the meeting of an instrument of terror and its helpless victim.⁸⁹ Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton wrote ‘there has been much exaggeration about the search that is made at the customs-house.’⁹⁰ The Soviet border possessed the ‘malign’ and ‘mortal’ ‘import’ that frontiers assume, arguably novel in the inter-war period for many Britons, as a result of the introduction of passports across Europe and the re-division of the continent in

⁸⁶ Owen Tweedy, *Russia at Random* (London: Jarrolds, 1931), 8.

⁸⁷ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 39. Chesterton described herself considering ‘sneaking’ into the USSR as she awaited permission from Moscow whilst in Poland. She in fact entered by one of the main rail arteries between Moscow and central Europe.

⁸⁸ Henry Devenish Harben, *Diary written during a visit to Russia in September and October 1930* (Privately published, 1930), 15.

⁸⁹ Edwin Taylor Brown, *This Russian Business*, 30–1.

⁹⁰ Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, *Russian Closeup*, 13

the post-war treaties.⁹¹ Indeed, Norah Rowan-Hamilton wrote that the frontier was described by her fellows thus: ‘You “go in,” as into an underground fortress. You “go out” into light and air and freedom.’⁹² As inconsequential and flippant as stories of being forbidden from shaving might be, Harben’s experience is both evocative of that general cultural anxiety about such frontiers (and ‘Russia’), and also of how swiftly expectations could be confounded – at least in terms of dangers faced by the traveller themselves.

For many travellers these ideas of danger changed *in-situ*. Hearsay and news amongst travellers about the dangers the Soviet population faced replaced the anxiety for the sake of the traveller themselves. The apparatus of Soviet control is seen as at a remove, a remote presence to be cautiously observed where possible, rather than feared as a direct threat. This presence was made foggy and indistinct in part by the retreat of the anxiety of approach and arrival. Travellers, despite not usually experiencing control other than that exercised by Intourist, focused on censorship and control exercised through state organs like the infamous ‘Ogpus’, as numerous travellers somewhat jovially called the OGPU (often using the same name for the NKVD) and how this might impact on the traveller. Delafield wrote of discussions in Leningrad amongst tourists about censorship of, and eavesdropping, on foreigners by the police.⁹³ Lockhart wrote of the OGPU that ‘I cannot complain that they ever troubled me, but the feelings of the visitor to Russia are continually harrowed by tales of their doings,’ and furthermore, that ‘I have heard it stated that most of the staff in the hotels and the guides supplied by Intourist are either GPU or in close liaison.’⁹⁴ Violet Conolly wrote of how in Moscow ‘on all sides there were unpleasant stories of the high-handed behaviour of the secret police.’⁹⁵ Archibald Lyall, also in Moscow, this

⁹¹ Paul Fussell, *Abroad*, 24; 33. Fussell also suggests that Britons are ‘singularly sensitive’ to land borders, possessing none other than the line between the Republic and Northern Ireland, 33–4. Whilst land-borders arguably do not hold the same qualitative historical meaning for most Britons as for their neighbours, it surely must be recognised that the different ‘sensitivities’ of individuals of France, the Low Countries, Germany, ex-Austro-Hungarian, ex-Ottoman and ex-Russian territories are important: the treaties signed in the aftermath of the First World War ensured territorial lines were matters of persistently intense emotional resonance for nations and peoples – including the new Soviet state with its fear of encirclement.

⁹² Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 16.

⁹³ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 74–5.

⁹⁴ Lockhart, *Babel Visited*, 38.

⁹⁵ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 29.

time in a hotel, related ‘some romantic’ amongst the tourists saying “‘I wonder whether we’re being watched by the Ogpu [*sic*] all the time,’” to which the answer another tourist gave was:

‘I expect so. Look at those two fellows with the spectacles on the other side of the table. They’re as Og-looking a pair of Pu’s as you could wish to see.’⁹⁶

Boorman, rather less jovially, related a story of the ‘Ogpu’, which by turns banned and then allowed the playing of an organ in a church in Leningrad. This unreliable, capricious aspect of Soviet life needed extra verification, so Boorman offers it to the reader:

I pass this story on as it was told to me. Its authenticity depends entirely on the word of my informant, and, as he holds a prominent position in Leningrad, I have no reason to believe it is incorrect.⁹⁷

Lockhart wrote how ‘much of the terror inspired by this ill-famed body proceeds from the fact that no one quite knows who does or does not belong to it.’⁹⁸ The ‘Ogpus’ were also sometimes linked by travellers to the apparatus of cultural diplomacy. Una Pope-Hennessy’s account of Leningrad from 1937, *The Closed City*, opens with a statement including the following:

it is unlikely that travellers will be allowed to inspect the city or its sights save under the brisk and formal chaperonage of Intourist guides.⁹⁹

Certainly, her view was influenced by the fact that, in early 1938 the British consulate in Leningrad was closed.¹⁰⁰ More destructively for Pope-Hennessy, Lady Muriel Paget’s mission in the city, the ‘British Subjects in Russia Relief Association’ was also closed that year, and Lady Paget died in June.¹⁰¹ Even so, Pope-Hennessy toured

⁹⁶ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 33.

⁹⁷ Boorman, *So This is Russia*, 34.

⁹⁸ Lockhart, *Babel Visited*, 39.

⁹⁹ Una Pope-Hennessy, *The Closed City*, 7.

¹⁰⁰ Wilfrid Blunt, *Lady Muriel* (London: Methuen, 1962), 285; ‘British Consulate in Leningrad’, *The Times*, 18 February 1938, 13a.

¹⁰¹ Blunt, *Lady Muriel*, 244; 287–8. Paget was a doyen for Britons in the USSR. She was visited by Peter Fleming and Robert Byron, among others, when they travelled there. Blunt’s panegyric biography also notes Paget’s apartment in Leningrad was unique in the Soviet Union for being able to hold an ‘international party’. As will be seen, this overlooks a range of encounters between foreigner and Soviet across the Union. Blunt, *Lady Muriel*, 255.

with a guide (prior to these developments) to such an extent that it appears no other option was conceivable to her.¹⁰² In such a book, Soviet control was seen to be ever-present.

Yet other examples show how the discussion could be orientated not around the presence of repression, but its absence. Ada Chesterton, talking about ‘Ogpu’, wrote ‘[s]ince leaving Stolpce nothing had happened according to prophecy or supposition. [...] We had seen what we wished, gone where we wanted, and neither commissars nor Ogpu had stood in our way.’¹⁰³ She also related more generally how feelings changed once in the country: ‘appearances are grim and gaunt and terrifying at a distance, but under the surface you find unexpected reassurance and assuagement’.¹⁰⁴ Some even expressed disappointment at this absence. Edwin Taylor Brown relates the following said by a tourist (‘more or less’) in Moscow:

‘I’m disappointed about the Ogpu,’ said the School Teacher. ‘What *is* the Ogpu?’ asked a flippant young man. With a gesture expressive of patient suffering, the School Teacher appealed simultaneously to Augustus and to the listening heavens. ‘What *are* you going to do with a man who doesn’t know about the Ogpu? Don’t you ever read the London newspapers?’ ‘What I read,’ replied the Flippant Young Man, ‘is between myself and my Maker’.

Brown related that the ‘School Teacher’ was told what ‘the Ogpu’ was:

‘That’s what I’m complaining about,’ said the School Teacher. ‘I was assured that every foreigner in Russia was dogged by an agent of the Ogpu where ever he went. I was quite thrilled. It seemed so dangerous and romantic. It’s one of the things that induced me to come. And I’ve never once laid eyes on anybody that even looked like an Ogpu agent!’

The ‘Flippant Young Man’ then assured the School Teacher that the ‘Ogpu agents’ were likely in disguise.¹⁰⁵ Brown’s friend, Augustus, retorted with an attitude similar to

¹⁰² Una Pope-Hennessy, *The Closed City*, 248.

¹⁰³ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 101.

¹⁰⁴ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 56.

¹⁰⁵ Edwin Taylor Brown, *This Russian Business*, 195.

those above: “It’s well known that all foreigners are more or less under surveillance”.¹⁰⁶ Archibald Foreman wrote how whilst the

Russian-speaking tourist is an object of suspicion and is closely watched’ he and his party ‘were permitted to go where they wished without restriction; they were kindly received everywhere, and the various experts, guides and officials with whom they came into contact were, with few exceptions, not only anxious to give them any information they required, but admitted and discussed the shortcomings of their vast social upheaval with a candour and frankness that was amazing.¹⁰⁷

Hubert Griffith wrote of one of numerous ‘illusions’ being dispelled by visiting, that of the ‘rigidity of Police surveillance and censorship.’¹⁰⁸ He wrote how travellers were not always registered promptly, or correctly, at hotels, and argues that this cast great doubt on the police’s ability to control foreigners in the country. John Grierson’s experience echoed this:

Here I must explain that it is a mistaken idea that the foreigner in Russia is under constant supervision and guidance. On the contrary, apart from the aviation, I found myself free to go where I would, unescorted.¹⁰⁹

Police activity could even be defended: Lars Moën euphemistically described the GPU’s activity regarding preventing foreigners from travelling at will as necessary ‘to avoid international complications.’¹¹⁰ What is clear is that neither narrative of ‘travelling at will’ or ‘limits on my freedom’ were full-enough descriptions of the myriad experiences travellers had. Robert Byron threw all the cards in the air in describing ‘a favourite amusement’, which was to ‘enunciate the fatal syllables [‘Gay-payoooh’] in public places, in order to watch the tremor of surprise and apprehension elicited from everyone within hearing.’¹¹¹ There was a divergence of feeling about the possibility for discovery: the significance of cultural diplomacy (guides, itineraries) and Soviet state control (visas, police) varied for each traveller. Sometimes fears were dispelled, other times they were confirmed. Sometimes they were thought to preclude any chance of

¹⁰⁶ Edwin Taylor Brown, *This Russian Business*, 196.

¹⁰⁷ Archibald Forman, *From Baltic to Black Seas* (London: Sampson Low, 1932), vi.

¹⁰⁸ Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia*, 168.

¹⁰⁹ Grierson, *Through Russia by Air*, 57.

¹¹⁰ Lars Moën, *Are you Going to Russia?* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1934), 218.

¹¹¹ Byron, *First Russia, Then Tibet*, 46.

real discovery (Pope-Hennessy), other times they were even seen as beneficial to it (Griffith, Moën). Either way, the point is that they were significant constants in the discourse, even before travel commenced.

THE UTILITY OF TRAVEL

Indeed, given the prominence of fearful rumours, and also the emphasis writers like Griffith placed on rejecting their validity *a priori*, it is important to note that travel to 'Russia' was not necessarily assumed, both explicitly and implicitly, to be necessary for discovering the truth about the Soviet Union. This is suggestive of the political atmosphere within which assessments of the Soviet Union were made. Two examples of different attitudes to travel and its utility are relevant here, for one shows us how travel could be considered actively dangerous to discovery, whilst another shows how travel could be a mere confirmation of that which had already been 'discovered' before travel commenced.

The publisher Ernest Benn did not make the trip to the Soviet Union at all, but he still wrote *About Russia*, a text dedicated to explaining what the Soviet Union was. In his introduction to the work, he wrote 'I have never been to Russia, and I shall never go to Russia as long as the Soviet regime, with its present ideas, is in force':

If I go to Russia I must be prepared at every turn to dispense with things which I regard as essential to my intellectual comfort, and without which I am completely unable to do justice to a mission of enquiry. I should require, for instance, the opportunity to talk to artists, writers, scientists, professors, and the sort of people that one would expect to meet in any properly constituted society.¹¹²

Benn thus sought to explain without exploring: in contrast to those who travelled because of the 'present ideas' of the Soviet Union, he did not go because of those same ideas. The Soviets, he argued, would not let him be at liberty to inquire, and since discovery by travel was not possible – indeed, travel was prejudicial to discovery, placing the traveller at the mercy of deceitful hosts – travel lost its function and allure.

¹¹² Ernest John Pickstone Benn, *About Russia* (London: Ernest Benn, 1930), 7 & 10.

He was not alone in this explanation of his aversion to contact with the Soviet world. As Patrick Wright has noted, certain newspapers kept their 'Russia correspondents' elsewhere. For instance, Donald Day of the *Chicago Tribune* was based not in Moscow, but in Riga, to maintain a freedom that was thought otherwise compromised by reliance on Soviet hosts. This geographical distance was read by others as a prejudicial critical distance that *a priori* made nonsense of any claim to a fair understanding of Soviet events, as the US correspondent Louis Fischer decried whilst demolishing claims about Soviet brutality as related by foreigners making quick visits to Moscow.¹¹³ Nevertheless, the power balance of interactions between foreigner and Soviet authorities were, to some, so obviously skewed in the Soviet's favour that it was possible to argue that writing on the USSR was valuable because of a lack of local experience – really, this meant an absence of contact with Soviet cultural diplomacy (and in the case of Moscow-based journalists, the censors of the NKID's [People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs] Foreign Press office). Benn placed himself as an observer-from-afar, and as such capable of a worthy contribution, and his argument cast doubt on accounts of the Soviet Union that were founded on travel there.

Benn, a classical liberal who pursued an 'Individualist' credo, was fundamentally opposed to the Soviet Union's nature, which, when combined with his recognition of Soviet manipulation and deceit, explains his aversion to visiting it.¹¹⁴ A significantly different example of writing without travel is that of Osbert Crawford, who admired the Soviet Union. Crawford did visit the Soviet Union, in 1932, and he did produce an account, albeit unpublished, called *A Tour of Bolshevy*. However, whilst most of this account was based on experience within the USSR, several pages were not: they were written before he left. He was so predisposed to admiring the Soviet Union that, in the words of his biographer, he 'knew before he went to Russia what he would find.'¹¹⁵ Crawford's excited, yearning belief in communist progress, in the scientific perfectibility of human society, encouraged him to both project these values on to the Soviet land

¹¹³ Wright, *Iron Curtain*, 308–9. Louis Fischer referred to a 'smoke-screen of falsehoods' created by journalists, based outside Russia, writing with an anti-Bolshevik attitude. For Fischer the rationale for other journalists maintaining a sanitary distance was predicated on, and compounded by, ideological bias against the Soviet Union. See Fischer, 'Lies About Russia', *New Republic*, 10 June 1931, 94–6, and 'Lies About Russia: II' *New Republic*, 8 July 1931, 199–202.

¹¹⁴ Deryck Abel, *Ernest Benn: Counsel for Liberty* (London: Ernest Benn, 1960), 54; 76–7.

¹¹⁵ Kitty Hauser, *Bloody Old Britain* (London: Granta, 2008), 130.

before he had even been there, and then when there, to find these in abundance. Walter Benjamin wrote that whilst, indeed, immersion in ‘Russia’ was necessary, so too was taking a position before one visited: ‘In Russia, above all, you can only see if you have already decided.’ Benjamin, as Patrick Wright notes, was troubled by the fundamental task of deciding how reality and truth converged: he asked which reality, the Western or the Soviet, was to become ‘truth’ – that is, which system had captured history’s logic most accurately.¹¹⁶

Contemporaries were aware of other pre-trip projections such as Crawford’s, but without the philosophical questioning: Archibald Lyall observed, whilst on the boat to Leningrad, that ‘one eminent Socialist journalist had even written a glowing article before departure called “What I Expect to See in Russia”’ which Lyall found innately ridiculous.¹¹⁷ Lyall would have agreed with the playwright Hubert Griffith, at least regarding the significance of travel, when Griffith wrote that ‘what one knows before one goes to Russia is not worth knowing. In Russia one learns a new truth a minute’.¹¹⁸ The examples of Benn and Crawford are not as widely replicated as those of the writers who did consider travel a potentially enlightening exercise, but they at least establish that contemporaries did not necessarily agree as to how best to understand the Soviet Union: for some, travel was actually a hindrance to achieving any real understanding, whilst for others, travel was a rubber-stamp exercise, to affirm what was somehow already ‘known’ – and this could even be expressed openly, as by the ‘eminent Socialist journalist’ Lyall referred to.

In short: discovery was not always considered contingent on travel. Nevertheless, in the case of Crawford, travel clearly retained a performative value, being an affirmation of authority when discussing the Soviet Union. This authoritative aspect of travel could generate cultural capital of sorts of equal or even greater significance than any discovery it could enable. For instance, the British Society for Cultural Relations with the Soviet Union held an annual ‘We-have-been-to-Russia’ dinner, attended by scores of people: the fact of travel was made conspicuous, and was celebrated. No doubt it was a useful event to discuss Soviet affairs and people’s experiences of it but

¹¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, ‘Moscow’, in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, translated by Edmund Jephcott & Kingsley Shorter (London: New Left Books, 1979), 177–208, at 177; Patrick Wright, *Iron Curtain*, 235.

¹¹⁷ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 15.

¹¹⁸ Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia*, 177.

given the cachet the USSR had in such circles, the ‘showcase’ element of such a dinner is not far from view.¹¹⁹ Even without this performative aspect, travel was not the only way to understand ‘Russia’, and even if it was, its value was potentially secondary to, or at best on a level-footing with, knowledge already divined outside Soviet borders. Politics cast its shadows across both these ways of seeing the utility of travel to the Soviet Union: either, as shall be seen more closely below, the Soviet Union was not interested in presenting any truth, and would hamper any search for such a truth, or the truth of the Soviet Union was self-evident from a thousand miles away. Political allegiance certainly does have an influence here, with Crawford a fellow-traveller (close to, but never a member of, the Communist Party of Great Britain), Benn a staunch classical liberal, but such sympathies cannot explain all differences and similarities between travellers’ accounts.¹²⁰

A MATTER OF POLITICAL PERSUASION?

Of all the factors that constituted a foreigner’s mental picture of the Soviet Union, the most discussed has been their political worldview, their ideological sympathies, and the roles these had in their preconceptions – as is sensible, if one recalls examples such as Crawford’s. This is not to say that all visitors had as their goal the illumination of specific political ideas (equality, collectivism, etc.) and their application, but that political loyalties are rightly considered significant when discussing how and why travellers represented the Soviet Union as they did, particularly given infamous views on the part of prominent fellow travellers. Ethel Mannin prescribed neutrality itself as a way to discover:

The only person who can give anything approximating to a ‘true’ picture of modern Russia is someone who doesn’t give a dam” politically, one way or another.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Emily Lygo, ‘Promoting Soviet Culture in Britain: The History of the Society for Cultural Relations between The Peoples of the British Commonwealth and the USSR 1924–1945’, *The Modern Language Review*, 108:2 (April 2013), 571–96, at 588.

¹²⁰ Hauser, *Bloody Old Britain*, 171.

¹²¹ Mannin, *South to Samarkand*, 17–18.

However, there is more to consider regarding the general position of travellers on the Left–Right political spectrum affected how they framed and narrated their travel to the Soviet Union. For some travel was a political act in and of itself because it was conducted consciously in engagement with Soviet cultural diplomacy, and thus how travel was discussed was significant for their overall depiction of the Soviet Union. For others, interaction with Soviet cultural diplomacy was less significant: their narration of travel did not place the political significance of travel at the centre of their representation of the Soviet Union. The point here is that narratives of travel that did reflect extensively on contested representations were not uniquely produced by either pro-Soviet or anti-Soviet writers.

This is best illuminated via contrasting two groups of writers: one made up of writers broadly sympathetic to the Soviet Union, the other made up of authors much more hostile. Leonora and John Henry Davies, both active within the Labour party in Wales, visited the Soviet Union in late summer, 1932. Their account, *A Trip to Soviet Russia*, describes an Intourist-arranged tour following a standard itinerary, taking in Leningrad, Moscow, and eastern Ukraine. Leonora and John Henry were suitably impressed by what they saw in the Soviet Union, and judged it had ‘made tremendous strides’ in ‘the greatest experiment ever attempted by man in changing their environment.’¹²² Discovery was key: they sought to see ‘what the Russians were like, what they aimed at, and how they carried out their plans’, but they do not interrogate the nature of travel to the USSR.¹²³ Indeed, their travel is only considered when things went awry in material terms: an interpreter being late for a rendezvous, or their horrified realisation that they had to share a train compartment with strangers. Only once did they mention the issue of representation when travelling: ‘some people think that we were shown the best only. The worst was also shown as a contrast to the modern improvements.’¹²⁴ They wrote to ‘express our thanks to the “Intourist” [...] whose arrangements were elastic to meet our varied requirements.’¹²⁵ The ostensible elasticity of the

¹²² Davies & Davies, *A Trip to Soviet Russia* (London: Strangeways & Sons, 1933), 139; 7.

¹²³ Davies & Davies, *A Trip to Soviet Russia*, 7.

¹²⁴ Davies & Davies, *A Trip to Soviet Russia*, 19; 59–60; 68.

¹²⁵ Davies & Davies, *A Trip to Soviet Russia*, 8. Notably, John Henry Davies, a geologist, was given extended audiences with numerous Soviet geologists in Moscow.

arrangements, and the ramifications of such elasticity in the functioning of their being 'shown' the Soviet Union were not commented upon.

In contrast, in 1932 the playwright Hubert Griffith published *Seeing Soviet Russia*, which was based on his 1931–2 tour through western Russia, Nizhnii Novgorod, Kineshma, and eastern Ukraine. Griffith opened his work stating that he could not tell the "whole truth about Russia" because of its size and scope, but that his trip was conducted as a way of discovering a truth of sorts and, most important to us here, that he was travelling in effect to disprove that supposed Soviet manipulation of travellers was prejudicial for any conscientious and open-minded foreigner's investigation.¹²⁶ He, like the Davies, concluded that the Soviet Union was, despite some superficial deficiencies, a remarkable place which had 'now at last got something to show worth seeing', as opposed to Tsarist Russia's dire record.¹²⁷ Unlike the Davies, he deliberately discussed in detail how he travelled, to respond to critics of the Soviet Union: his account of travel is built through his considering the nature of his travel, of his engagement with Soviet cultural diplomacy. Griffith writes of travel as a political act, to show, *pace* Ernest Benn, that such contact with cultural diplomacy was not prejudicial – that the Soviet state was not a criminal defendant, whose words are given 'little importance' in any trial of the evidence, as Benn put it.¹²⁸ Griffith wrote positively of the tours and guides he engaged with, and furthermore, explicitly stated his position as a rational, intelligent agent who could understand and negotiate Soviet intentions in representing their country without resorting to the calumny he discerned in so many critics. For him the cultural diplomatic apparatus was in fact a boon, not a hindrance, to a foreigner.

These works represent favourable outlooks on the Soviet Union. The First World War correspondent and once Conservative MP Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett's 1929 account, *The Riddle of Russia* did not, and neither did the newspaper articles (running 1930–5) of Gareth Jones. However, the divide between these two authors regarding their discussion of travel is like that between the Davies and Griffith. Ashmead-Bartlett,

¹²⁶ Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia* (London: John Lane and Bodley Head, 1932), 8–10. I use the name Nizhnii Novgorod or Gorkii depending on the travellers' usage: the city was renamed Gorkii in 1932, but some travellers continued to use the name Nizhnii Novgorod after this point.

¹²⁷ Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia*, 46–7.

¹²⁸ Benn, *About Russia*, 18.

visiting Moscow (and a short trip to Leningrad) in late 1928 and early 1929, describes travel as the Davies did: more in terms of incident, quirks, and annoyances than as a subject. He despised his time in Moscow, describing his being isolated – ‘I felt I had not got a friend in the world’ – and of being caught by the melancholy ‘Moscow atmosphere’, but his account is concerned with describing general Soviet issues, derived from conversations with Soviet officials and fellow foreigners and the reading of reports.¹²⁹ The apparatus of Soviet cultural diplomacy and the subtleties of experience on tour or off mean little to his understanding of the Soviet world, because it was subsumed into a world of ‘tyrannical’ rule, with the secret police holding the Russians in ‘steel chains’.¹³⁰ Cultural diplomacy had no relevance in a world of obvious terror. So, whilst travel was ostensibly a useful exercise to discover how awful the Soviet Union really was, contested representations meant little to Ashmead-Bartlett, in the sense that there was nothing to colour or temper his views of Moscow and Leningrad for the better: there was no contest to be had. Despite similarly negative appraisals of the Soviet Union, Gareth Jones predicated his entire investigation into the Soviet Union on the narration of his travel, of travel itself being a subject worth describing, and its relevance to his authority on Soviet matters. As opposed to Griffith, Jones wrote that most tourists were ‘being shown by competent and charming guides [only] the facade of Soviet Russia’, but he shared with Griffith a concern for the idea of contested truth: travel was not *a priori* a path to enlightenment – it had to be conducted in a certain way.¹³¹

Thus, political loyalties, or at the least, reactions to the Soviet Union, are not necessarily indicative of how a traveller considered their travel. For the Davies and Ashmead-Bartlett, travel was an almost incidental fact, a narration of mere movement, and there was no real contest in terms of representations: they saw unvarnished good and unvarnished ugliness respectively. They sought to discover truth, but they did not see truth as being contested – it was already on show, it did not need to be uncovered, and could not be debated. For Griffith and Jones, however, the recognition of travel as a significant act in its own right was an essential component of how they would

¹²⁹ Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, *The Riddle of Russia* (London: Cassell, 1929), 30–1.

¹³⁰ Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, *The Riddle of Russia*, 230; 258.

¹³¹ Jones, ‘Rulers and Ruled’, *The Times*, 13 October 1930, 13f.

represent the Soviet Union to their readers, irrespective of whether their conclusions were optimistically positive or savagely critical. What they questioned was Soviet sincerity as it encountered foreigners, and the sincerity of their own *reportage* was contingent on this questioning. It gave each of them both a justification for their own investigations, and a stronger basis on which to say that they had discovered a truth about the Soviet Union, because they had recognised and written about – and (so they implied) been a match for – the challenges of sincerity.

What these varied accounts reveal is how some travellers sought to present themselves as suitably placed to provide insight into Soviet life in the face of – and because of – contested truths. Travellers sought to assure their readers of their ability by explaining how they approached the idea and reality of the Soviet Union. As we have seen, this could include justifying travel as a particular act conducted in a certain way, and even include a performance of self-reflection that meant the traveller related their self-doubts about the enterprise. It could also include relating their expertise and their methodologies. If sincere relation of Soviet conditions was the task, the particular approaches and attitudes adopted to achieving and processing and then representing discoveries are important, as was the confidence with which they were transmitted. Explaining these approaches, or even particular methods, to their audience could help give a traveller an appearance of thoughtful, reflective engagement with their chosen task. How these writers reconciled these expectations and doubts with their published account varied, and is considered on an ongoing basis, but in general they did so, and this is down in no small part to an assumption that even before they had boarded a boat to Leningrad or a train to Moscow, they as traveller – despite their self-identified weaknesses – would be able to offer some insight, even possibly with a sharper pen and a clearer mind than some others before them. Doubt was present in these accounts, but it never overpowered a traveller to the point that they offered no analysis or conclusions of any kind. What follows, therefore, is a look at these approaches, and an examination of how doubts varied between different travellers.

METHODOLOGIES

How a traveller explored the Soviet Union – empirically; conceptually; romantically – is also important, and this section explores these methods. There were very few, if

any, travellers who worried about the fundamental issue confronted by American writer James Agee's 'New Reportage': that language itself could not adequately describe lived experience, let alone a brave new world.¹³² Rather, in the words of Robert Byron, many travellers sought experience on a literal, sensorial basis. Byron argued that, in the view of the 'specialist', 'real knowledge [...] is contained, as it were, in cells' which only the specialist can access.¹³³ Byron suggested the traveller

is a slave to his senses; his grasp of a fact can only be complete when reinforced by sensory evidence; he can know the world, in fact, only when he sees, hears, and smells it. Hence that craving for personal reconnaissance which can only be lulled by acquaintance with the broad compartments of race, politics, and geography that comprise our earth. From the specialist's point of view such acquaintance must always be superficial. The traveller can only reply that at least he desires to know more and more about more and more.¹³⁴

Byron's defence of travel is a starting point for many travellers, but again, usually implicitly. Sensorial experience is the foundation, and could be articulated: all travellers accepted this, even if they usually lacked the verve of Byron. The Polish writer Antoni Słonimski wrote in his 1932 *Moja podróż do Rosji* [*My Journey to Russia*]:

A feature of Anglo-Saxons – a feature anyway so very human – is trustfulness. An Englishman or an American trusts, whether they tell him about social advancements, or about feeding children, or if they give him figures. An Anglo-Saxon takes out his notebook, says *Well*, and writes down what he has been dictated. Russia has been visited by people who know how to look.¹³⁵

¹³² Williams, 'Post/Modern Documentary', 174. The 1933 work *EIMI* by the American poet E. E. Cummings is perhaps the closest example of artistic engagement with the question of language vis the Soviet Union. *EIMI: The Journal of a Trip to Russia*, 2nd ed. (New York: William Sloan Associates, 1949).

¹³³ Byron, *First Russia, then Tibet*, 10.

¹³⁴ Byron, *First Russia, then Tibet*, 10.

¹³⁵ Antoni Słonimski, *My Journey to Russia*, (Warszawa: Literackie Towarzystwo Wydawnicze, 1997), 26–7, as translated by Grzegorz Moroz in 'Fellow travellers and Soviet Russia's guides in 1930s travel books by Antoni Słonimski, Robert Byron and Walter Citrine', *Studies in Travel Writing*, 24:1 (January 2020), 88–101, at 91. In contrast, the Red Army officer Alexandrov complains to Noel Barber in 1939: "The trouble with you foreigners," said Alexandrov, quite without malice, "is that you're never content with what you see. You can see for yourself great factories, wonderful farms, a good army – look at the money our soldiers have to spend – and yet you're always asking questions. Isn't the picture enough proof?". Noel Barber, *Transiberian*, 158–9.

Słonimski demanded a 'heroic' attitude to overcome this brutish empiricism. To this empirical basis, some brought expertise. Some travelled as the specialists to see specific industries/structures and assess their quality and character (e.g., Walter Citrine's interest in labour relations and working conditions). Others sought a more imaginative approach, perhaps to avoid unthinking reliance on such empiricism that could lead to misguided analysis that Słonimski criticised. Yet it is via dozens of configurations of empirical experience, pre-existing knowledge and emotional attitude that travellers produced their accounts.

Broadly, empiricism was employed to describe the significant issues and data of Soviet life, but also to give credence to a traveller's account: if doubt threatened the venture, methodology fought back. Indeed, Crichton offered his empiricism as a corrective to dogma:

those who look merely for sensation or for the confirmation of any strong prejudices, are advised to turn elsewhere. This book has nothing to offer them. It is not intended to support either one side or the other in the great controversy, but has been written in the firm belief that misunderstandings between nations can only be avoided if greater contacts are established.¹³⁶

Henry Devenish Harben opened his account with a direct appeal to his empirical methodology, as per Byron: 'In the following paper I have put down only what I have seen with my own eyes; or what has been told me by foreigners who have resided for many years past in Russia, and whom I deem worthy of credence; or what I have learned from published official sources.'¹³⁷ Walter Citrine recorded statistics and tables of data in his diaries, and predicated his visit on being able to record in writing what he found:

the extraordinary divergences in descriptions of actual conditions made me resolve that such impressions as I formed would be securely founded upon accurately recorded facts.

There is a scientific tone to Citrine's work wherein the meticulous recording of data, the totting up of statistics and discussion of contradictions and lacunae in knowledge

¹³⁶ Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, *Russian Closeup*, 3.

¹³⁷ Harben, *Diary*, 9.

would produce an informative picture of the complex Soviet reality – despite some doubt about the validity of Soviet statistics (e.g., Citrine’s ironic exclamation of ‘this was news to me!’ when told by the captain of his boat to Leningrad that ‘Russia’ was now the fifth largest maritime nation, in terms of merchant tonnage; a footnote relates ‘Statistics show Russia’s merchant fleet as fourteenth amongst the nations’; this is alongside numerous tables in the book).¹³⁸ Similar to Harben, Citrine related that one of his notebooks was ‘always in my pocket’, and ‘on the evening of each day I devoted a considerable time to writing down [...] an extensive description of the proceedings of that day taken from the notes’ he had made.¹³⁹ John Henry Richardson’s papers show a concern with offering clear, discrete facts, as though the Soviet Union were a study: he visited six types of industry – clothing, agricultural tools, hydro power, and so on – and related the general conditions and labour arrangements for each.¹⁴⁰ Whilst Gareth Jones’s technique was described less mechanically than Harben’s or Citrine’s, he explicitly predicated his reporting on his method nevertheless. He made a continued point of describing who he was with, and how he travelled and, more particularly, how he investigated.

In estimating the importance of the opinion expressed by Russians the character and position of the speakers should be taken into consideration on the presumption that a miner escaping from the Donetz Basin, where there has been a serious breakdown in food supplies, is far more likely to exaggerate the gravity of the situation than a well-paid specialist working in the electrical industry, which is making great progress. The following estimate of the state of affairs in Russia has been made on these methods during a recent visit to the Soviet Union, and the conversations quoted in the

¹³⁸ Citrine, *I Search For Truth*, 16. The Labour Party over the inter-war period generally followed a ‘programmatic’ line: that is, a costed and rationalised plan for effecting social change in government, wherein statistics were integral: hence interest in the Soviet world, and perhaps a way to explore it too. David Thackery and Richard Toye, *Age of Promises: Electoral Pledges in Twentieth Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 3; 86–7.

¹³⁹ Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, ix. These notes formed the text for the book, which are nearly identical to the published work, albeit with certain key differences that will be explored below.

¹⁴⁰ John Henry Richardson, *Impressions of Soviet Russia* (Privately published, 1933). University of Leeds MS800/13, 6–24.

following articles were written down at the earliest possible moment after the Russian had left the writer's presence.¹⁴¹

Experience was appealed to by many travellers, and quite possibly as a literary device as much as an epistemological tool. Citrine, Harben and Jones alike were convinced of the necessity to see, record and report as accurately and honestly as they could. This had the concomitant intention of increasing their sincerity to the reader, of offering a more trustworthy account. It could also combat doubt, and appeal to a reader's generosity: Bryon's comment that 'the traveller can only reply [to the specialist, demanding expert insight] that at least he desires to know more and more about more and more' simultaneously acknowledges the travellers' limitations and, I venture, appeals to a sensibility that valued honesty and a certain measure of humility – sincerity.

Furthermore, reference material was of great use to many travellers. To those who could read Russian, the Soviet press was available – Gareth Jones frequently read the Soviet press, as it gave context to his observations – and some of this information was translated into English, either by translators, or as part of literature relating to certain places, people and histories that foreigners encountered. Paul Flowers notes that this information in newspapers could suffice to generate a negative appreciation of the Soviet Union, but that given this was all information from the Soviet government itself, there were limits to the analyses made possible by it.¹⁴² Indeed, this could be rhetorically useful: Kingsley Martin sardonically noted that a fellow tourist, visiting the Ford *autostroy* at Nizhnii Novgorod, carried an article from *The Times*, written by its Riga correspondent. The article detailed the plant's 'colossal failure', and the tourist 'would not be disappointed': the plant was in a bad state. However, Martin commented 'how should [the report] not be [true]? It was all taken from the director's own report published and broadcast in Russia.'¹⁴³ The failure of the plant lost its rhetorical power for the critic because it was recognised as a failure by the Soviets; conversely it gained such power for the defender of the Soviet Union via the same means.

¹⁴¹ Jones, 'Rulers and Ruled', *The Times*, 13 October 1930, 13f.

¹⁴² Paul Flowers, *The New Civilisation?* 68–9.

¹⁴³ Martin, *Low's Russian Sketchbook*, 81.

For those who did not read Russian, other reference material was useful, particularly when it was not Soviet. Hubert Griffith used a British source to credit the Soviets and discredit British ‘libel’: in *Seeing Soviet Russia* he repeatedly refers to positive statistical developments (e.g., about the decline in infant mortality in the 1920s) about the USSR from *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and also used it to relate the well-recorded iniquities of Tsarism to his readers, daring critics to contradict their own civilisation’s record of historical development. This was rather less integral to travel (such sources could of course be used whether the observer was to travel or not), but given Griffith’s purpose, such references were central, reinforcing his authority as a fair observer of the Soviet Union by providing ‘British’ facts.¹⁴⁴ Archibald Lyall carried a ‘pre-War Baedeker’ and used it to contrast 1932 Leningrad with pre-1917 Petrograd: he noted ‘how little Russia had changed in many ways’.¹⁴⁵ For Lyall, making only one visit to the USSR, reference material like a Baedeker was the only easily-accessible way to compare past and present conditions, which, according to the guides, was often the key to understanding why present conditions were perhaps less than excellent.¹⁴⁶ Henry Devenish Harben was similar, comparing his ‘Tsarist’ Baedeker with a Soviet equivalent to compare and contrast conditions (for that is what he considered he was comparing, not foreigner representations against Soviet representations).¹⁴⁷ Personal prior experience also helped: Violet Conolly, Gareth Jones and Walter Citrine all used their prior experience as a reference, the latter writing that he re-examined his diary of a visit in 1925 whilst also reading up on the most recent Soviet decrees and the ‘mass of day-to-day information’ kept by the Trades Union Congress.¹⁴⁸

Other writers, usually compensating for a lack of linguistic ability, focused on thematic issues, discussed at a remove from Soviet life, but peppered with anecdotes to support a point. Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett’s *The Riddle of Russia* focused on reports, general assessments, and dealing with matters on an ‘issues’ basis – that is, looking

¹⁴⁴ Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia*, 38.

¹⁴⁵ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 24.

¹⁴⁶ David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 54.

¹⁴⁷ Harben, *Diary*, 11; 15.

¹⁴⁸ Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, ix. Citrine was travelling as a representative of the British Trades Union Congress, and he sought information of interest to the TUC, such as ‘Annual Reports’ of the Leningrad Trade Council, and its ‘Balance Sheets’, ‘Social Insurance payments’, and so forth. *Russian Diary*, LSE Special Collections, CITRINE 1/19, fol. 93.

at 'religion', 'culture', 'economics' by turn.¹⁴⁹ He gauged the Soviet Union via discussions with other foreigners, reading reports, and making general assessments based on observing crowds and engaging, sporadically, with Muscovites themselves. Edwin Taylor Brown did similarly: his work, *This Russian Business*, is divided into chapters on Moscow, on the first five-year plan, on Soviet attitudes to religion, on terror and political control, and others: it is not a travel account so much as an analysis of Soviet policy inspired and informed by a visit to the country.

Such thematic, quasi-scientific, approaches worried some travellers. John Gilbert Lockhart wrote specifically on the problem of particular methodology as he thought it afflicted his contemporaries such as Ashmead-Ellis and Brown (in their focus on 'the strands of this new society'), but also, Citrine, Jones, and others (in their focus on 'a material standpoint'). In particular, Lockhart sought to avoid the 'danger of being overborne by the economist', of the 'private balance-sheet' that 'makes no allowance for the capital and human energy squandered in ill-starred experiments'¹⁵⁰:

It is exceedingly difficult to separate the strands of this new society. Politics, economics, religion, and social life are so intimately connected that it is almost impossible to isolate one of the four to the exclusion of the others. But an even greater difficulty baffles the attempts of those who try to observe Russia in sections. Nearly everyone who has recorded his impressions of Russia has approached the task from a material standpoint, and has drawn his conclusions from what he has *seen*. [...] In no country I have visited is it harder to arrive at the truth, because both within and without it everyone is anxious to inoculate the enquirer with a point of view. The visitor therefore very soon begins to distrust what he is told; he often ends with an almost equal distrust of what he is shown.¹⁵¹

In place of such material concerns, and confronted with such an epistemological problem, Lockhart proposed looking as a 'churchman' for the 'spiritual' aspects of Soviet life, an undertaking which was not entirely successful.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Ashmead-Bartlett, *The Riddle of Russia*.

¹⁵⁰ Lockhart, *Babel Visited*, 122.

¹⁵¹ Lockhart, *Babel Visited*, 12–13.

¹⁵² Lockhart, *Babel Visited*, 15–16.

Similarly, Elizabeth Delafield commented on how, in effect, the absence of broader insight born of expertise meant traveller conversations were ‘singular and detached’, as they passed ‘fragments’ between one another: ‘Have you been to see any of the Workers’ Dwellings here?’; ‘they [‘tourists’] ask one another how they have been getting on, and if they met the French astronomer, and the English journalist’ and so on.¹⁵³ Archibald Lyall noted that ultimately what was most significant in terms of shaping the conclusions travellers reached was their ‘temperament’ – here is both the oft-studied political position of an observer as evidenced in their conclusions, but also their attitude to the task of discovery.¹⁵⁴ For writers like Lyall and Delafield, the challenge of trying to understand Soviet matters appears to have had no obvious end: stories and discussions abounded, with conflicting information confusing an individual, who, when they sought recourse to attentive fact-collecting, still might not find themselves convinced of anything definite.

Others approaches gave more satisfaction for some travellers. Violet Conolly described wanting to find the ‘stress and current’ of Russian life, meaning conversations and impressions that would give her understanding of an essential Russian reality. Her lack of meticulous description about the specifics of her travel and its logistics contrasts with her recording extensive, numerous conversations with Russians and other Soviet individuals about a wide range of topics. She mentioned keeping a notebook and diary, and certainly noted discussion about significant contemporary political and economic issues, but the focus of her account is on the flow of conversation and observation – she does not explain her methods of recording regularly: they are largely implied via the different weightings evident in her work, with a focus on conversation. This impressionistic approach is mirrored by necessity in accounts from travellers like Ashmead-Bartlett (when he does discuss ‘life in Moscow’, or the ‘manners’ of the Soviets), or the Davies: these travellers lacked Russian, and thus these accounts, bitterly cynical or blandly idealistic respectively, rely on impression and the reporting of translated facts: the ‘masses’ remain out of reach, subject only to the projections and theoretical assumptions, not the experience-based understanding, of the authors. Ada Chesterton was similarly inclined, writing that the

¹⁵³ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 120–1 & 159.

¹⁵⁴ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 143.

‘only way’ to see ‘true conditions’ was to ‘find out for myself how [Russia’s] people exist, to try by actual contact to discover their hopes and their hardships, the angle from which the Russian peasant, with his immeasurable potentialities, views the world.’¹⁵⁵ Chesterton’s account, *My Russian Venture*, is suffused with a romanticism both heady and misleading, and it is a world away from the drier empiricism of Citrine. Neither Chesterton nor Conolly spent much time describing the ‘where’ and ‘how’ of travel, focusing rather on description of a series of experiences. There was a middle ground, too: Archibald Lyall was far more explicit about the ‘how’ and ‘when’ of his travel, but beyond this he too writes mostly about the impression of the moment. He frequently quotes fellow tourists having a discussion, but via fragments: vignettes and phrases, rather than a transcription; isolated sentences on the page, shorn of any attribution, placing, time or mood: “I am afraid my political complexion has changed from pink to blue in a month – like a piece of litmus paper”, said one anonymous tourist.¹⁵⁶

This immersive approach was followed by others. Elizabeth Delafield, spending time on a farm in southern Russia, gave an indication of her approach by relating her planning for the trip there:

I may say here that I had purposely brought no extra provisions of any kind with me, since one of the objects of the expedition was to live as far as possible the same kind of life as did the workers – and I was quite surprised and pleased to find that I remained just as strong and well as ever on a diet that, to me, seemed both restricted and unpalatable.¹⁵⁷

John Brown also sought an experience ‘as far as possible’ close to the workers of the USSR (and Nazi Germany), adding in a pointed comment about how this permitted a better understanding of matters:

In both countries I tried to get as close to the lives of real workers as possible. Those writers on “foreign affairs” who take first-class pleasure jaunts through expensive hotels, with much luggage, and who spend more time typing in their

¹⁵⁵ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 9.

¹⁵⁶ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 192.

¹⁵⁷ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 24.

rooms than outside studying conditions, are as guilty of defrauding the public as those who think that by colouring their experiences they will discredit their political opponents.¹⁵⁸

Both Delafield and Brown offer this, rather than empirical notes or an explicit methodology, as their approach: endeavouring to find a sympathetic, intimate engagement with everyday life.

Delafield not only sought immersion, but also played with the role of the foreign specialist in her writing. As she reflected on her own status, she asked herself ‘Can I tell them that an eminent American publisher has sent me to the Soviet because nobody has as yet tried to be funny about it? All along, I have said, weakly, that I am a journalist.’¹⁵⁹ On a tour of factory, being uninterested in the workings, unlike the ‘products’ of ‘Organisations’ besides her, she was asked if she had a question about the factory: ‘I see that I shall have to evolve something. What in the name of fortune can I ask that will sound reasonably intelligent?’. She considered this, and then

At last I enquire *exactly* what the proportion of women workers is – implying that only the most absolute accuracy on this point will satisfy me – and the guide translates the question and the answer, and honour is appeased. To do the thing perfectly, I ought to write down the figures in a note-book – but I don’t.¹⁶⁰

In the spirit of this effort, she also decided to investigate whether Soviet people kept pets: she determined that this would be her specialism, and thus she could ‘trail meekly in the wake of people who have been sent to Russia by Associations, Organisations, Societies and so on.’¹⁶¹ Her endeavours, however, were not particularly successful. She spots few animals, let alone pets, and notes living space shortages might be to blame. She readily admitted defeat, one suspecting her ‘I shall never know’ whether it was the topic or herself that was at fault for her lack of success was more rhetorical than substantive: it does not seem likely Delafield truly wished for such ‘expertise’.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ John Brown, *I Saw for Myself*, 7. Brown echoed writers like Christopher Holdenby, who just before the First World War sought to work regularly with English rural labourers to overcome the “challenge of silence” – born of awareness of class divides between observer and subjects – that had prevented free talk with the labourers previously: see Freeman, *Social Investigation in Rural England*, 136.

¹⁵⁹ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 204.

¹⁶⁰ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 216–17.

¹⁶¹ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 204.

¹⁶² Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 209.

Rather, she settled on an attitude she described as being similar to that of Frances Trollope upon her move to America.¹⁶³ Trollope wrote *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832), which observed the discrepancies between American rhetoric about liberty and equality and the lived reality of American life. Delafield embraced the figure of a writer overcoming adversity, and with no knowledge of the country she was visiting, but who managed to espy some essential truths about that alien place.

The differences between travellers also help reveal how doubts could vary in tone and meaning. Elizabeth Delafield's temporary companion, known as the 'Savoyard', and Edwin Taylor Brown's friend Augustus, provided each writer with a contrasting approach and attitude to themselves that provoked reflection about their own travel and ways of seeing. Both the Savoyard and Augustus displayed far greater scepticism, even cynicism, than either Delafield or Brown. Delafield's doubts about her capacity to understand the Soviet world were matched, ostensibly, by Brown, as has been seen above. The contrast between themselves and their travelling partner were significant for both. Brown repeatedly deferred to Augustus's views in his work, *This Russian Business*, describing Augustus as 'logical', but also dogmatic:

the statement that there must be a catch in it [whichever fact of Soviet life was being discussed] somewhere was a fixed principle with Augustus where Russia was concerned, almost an article of faith. He spent a good deal of his time in Russia trying to find out where the catch was, and to that end, or mostly to that end, he carried on many conversations with a motley assortment of informants. [...] I have heard him explain this [a lack of 'adequate admissions' from Russians] by the fact that of course none of these people were *allowed* to tell the truth about things.¹⁶⁴

Brown struggled to debate with Augustus. At one point, they met an American en-route to Nizhnii Novgorod. Augustus dismissed a letter from Nizhnii, sent to the American by a friend encouraging him to visit, as he contested it was likely to be censored at source. Brown thought this was rather unfair: 'As I have never been to Nijni-Novogord

¹⁶³ Frances Trollope (1779–1863) Trollope moved to the United States in search of prosperity in 1827. Her original destination turned out to be a 'malaria-ridden swamp', followed by a life in Cincinnati that was 'a tragicomedy of failed business ventures, scandal, and illness.', Pamela Neville-Sington, 'Frances Trollope' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2008; Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 61.

¹⁶⁴ Edwin Taylor Brown, *This Russian Business*, 46.

[sic], I could not refute this statement off-hand. I felt that I ought to have been able to make some use of the fact that Augustus had never been there either, but somehow I missed the opportunity.¹⁶⁵ Whilst Brown was similarly unimpressed by the Soviet world, he was both deferential to, and wary of, Augustus's approach, as ultimately signified by his comment, made right at the start of his account, that he did 'not feel that any of my deeper doubts have been solved.'¹⁶⁶

Elizabeth Delafield's experience presents an even starker contrast between travellers. A 'Savoyard' she met whilst touring a collective farm displayed a near-obsessive scepticism about Soviet cultural diplomacy: "*On nous cache sûrement quelque chose*" she reports him saying, before, going on to observe that the living quarters they were being shown were not 'in the least a typical worker's dwelling' (based on her own collective farm experience).¹⁶⁷ However, Delafield found herself defending the showcasing to the Savoyard: his relentless criticism pushed Delafield to consider her own position, and found it less belligerent than his: 'How dramatic it all is. I wish I knew where he got all this spate of information, and how much of it is accurate – and I wish I didn't know him to be quite so violently prejudiced. How odd it is that everybody who comes to the Soviet Union is either insanely hostile, or insanely enthusiastic, about it.'¹⁶⁸ The pair visited another farm, after the Savoyard demanded to be taken to one at short notice as a tactic to avoid a prepared visit. Delafield suggested the farm was rather nondescript, but the Savoyard was intensely interested in capturing conditions precisely, even asking her if she was sure that she had seen rats, rather than mice, on the farm.¹⁶⁹ Her doubt was of a very different character and quality to the Savoyards', and so too, to a lesser extent, was Brown's from Augustus': the writers doubted, to different extents, whether any traveller could ever find a comprehensive, well-founded truth; their companions whether the Soviets would ever let them discover such a thing, which was surely just behind the Iron Curtain. In the former the doubt is about the self being able to discover any truth as the truth was

¹⁶⁵ Edwin Taylor Brown, *This Russian Business*, 47.

¹⁶⁶ Edwin Taylor Brown, *This Russian Business*, 7.

¹⁶⁷ Delafield, 176–7. V. C. Buckley noted with disappointment how some of his fellow tourists in Leningrad 'as good as called' their guide a liar, 'and argued with her in the most stupid fashion.' *With a Passport and Two Eyes*, (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1932), 62.

¹⁶⁸ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 199.

¹⁶⁹ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 190.

ungraspable, in the latter the doubt is about the ‘other’ preventing the truth from being discovered. In summary, empiricism and a more immersive approach to exploring Soviet life cut across these attitudes just as political allegiances did.

‘THAT AWFUL ALPHABET’: TRAVELLERS AND THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE

To close this first look at the discourse of travel, one skill should be examined as it highlights particularly well how the three themes of discovery, dissent, and doubt intertwine. This is the ability to understand Russian. Language has a clear role to play when it comes to sincerity and travellers’ methodologies and doubts.

The significance of needing Russian to be able to discover certain things about Soviet life was not an uncommon observation at the time. Indeed, for some Britons the importance of the Russian language was such that it was seen as the key to an essential knowledge about the Russian world and its moral/spiritual ontology. The classicist and Russian translator Jane Harrison wrote in 1915: ‘A people’s philosophy of life is, if you will hunt for it, always to be found in its language, and found most surely because expressed unconsciously. That is why if you want really to understand a people from the inside you simply must learn their language.’¹⁷⁰ Rather more concerned with learning the facts of the contemporary situation than the Russian soul, Walter Citrine wrote that ‘not one visitor in a hundred knows Russian sufficiently intimately to be able to converse fluently. This is a disadvantage which is not to be underestimated.’¹⁷¹ He recognised that he was reliant on the interpreter, and thus at a disadvantage.

Others were less concerned. Kingsley Martin wrote that ‘wise men explore for themselves’: ‘It has been done, by those with money, time, patience and Russian. Of these, linguistic prowess is the most easily dispensed with.’¹⁷² Archibald Lyall was less blasé about the language, and found travelling with a Briton who spoke Russian fluently very helpful, for he could and did rely on ‘Mr Curtis’ as he began to discover

¹⁷⁰ Jane Ellen Harrison, *Russia and the Russian Verb: a contribution to the Psychology of the Russian People* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1915), 5.

¹⁷¹ Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, vii.

¹⁷² Martin, *Low’s Russian Sketchbook*, 11.

what came to irritate him so greatly about Soviet life.¹⁷³ Yet for others knowing the language was an objective or accepted as significant, and yet was not necessarily treated as if of ultimate importance: Lyall noted that many of his fellow passengers aboard the boat to Leningrad were often ‘sat about with little Russian grammars in which they never seemed to make very much progress.’¹⁷⁴ Lars Moën’s 1934 guide, *Are You Going to Russia?* advised readers that, despite ‘that awful alphabet’, one could ‘forget about grammar’, should recall the ‘value of gestures’, and recourse to his handy phonetic phrases for each situation – hotel, train, frontier post. One could also read a chapter on basic Russian usage, should the traveller ‘insist’ on such a task.¹⁷⁵ Moën, defensive of the Soviet government, wrote later, in a chapter entitled ‘Getting about in a Soviet city’, that

In the early days of Soviet tourism, visitors were strongly discouraged from wandering about on their own, not because of that they might see but because of wrong impressions they might receive because of their inability to speak the language.

Such concern on the part of the Soviet authorities, had, he happily reported, faded somewhat – because more freedom was permitted foreigners, and so the language issue lost its severity:

At present the tendency is to leave the visitor more and more freedom and opportunity to go where he likes, conducted or alone. Therefore you will be interested in the means of getting about. True, you will but vaguely understand many things which you will see, but there is a keen pleasure in roaming at will among the individuals of a foreign country at work and play, forming one’s own impressions.¹⁷⁶

Ada Chesterton, meanwhile, paraphrased Wyndham Lewis and echoed Robert Byron: ‘the evidence of the senses is more reliable than the testimony of words.’¹⁷⁷ This explained to the reader both how she could both ‘mew’ at Russians and also

¹⁷³ Curiously, Lyall mentions his changing of the name (original unknown) of his companion to ‘Curtis’ for the publication of *Russian Roundabout*.

¹⁷⁴ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 13.

¹⁷⁵ Moën, *Are You Going to Russia*, ix; 30–53.

¹⁷⁶ Moën, *Are You Going to Russia?*, 120.

¹⁷⁷ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 105.

understand what the Soviet Union was all about.¹⁷⁸ Her adventures drew incredulity from Maurice Hindus, whom she met near Minsk at a ‘gala day’. Hindus asked her what she and Bunny (Chesterton’s travelling companion) were doing there and expressed shock at their doing so with no language: “‘Why, you must be mad!’”.¹⁷⁹ Hindus was more concerned, Chesterton related, with their safety – particularly as women – rather than doubting their ability to learn anything:

‘Look here,’ he said, ‘it’s really dangerous for you to wander about alone. I admit it’s plucky and all that, but you oughtn’t to do it. You simply can’t go through Russia by yourselves. You don’t know what may happen.’ [...] It was no use to argue. He was obsessed with the American belief in the fragility of woman, and could not stomach the notion of our tramping around all unprotected [...].¹⁸⁰

Others echoed Hindus in their appreciation of the importance of Russian, albeit with a focus on it as a tool of investigation – and in contrast to Martin’s and Moën’s confidence about freedoms afforded to the traveller, argued that it was linguistic ability that would endow one with the freedom to understand the Soviet Union. Violet Conolly took the same view as Citrine on the innate disadvantage a non-speaker faced, but from the more privileged position of being able to speak the language. This had significant ramifications for her approach to the Soviet Union: tours were especially ‘galling’ if one could speak Russian, because, she implied, the tour’s marginal utility thus evaporated.¹⁸¹ Gareth Jones argued for knowledge of Russian as a fundamental signifier of competence when discussing Soviet affairs: his comment noting of ‘observers of the Soviet Russia [being] worthy of credence’ was predicated on them being able to ‘understand and speak Russian,’ he wrote in *The Times*.¹⁸² Paul Flowers notes how Denzil Dean Harber, a disillusioned Communist, implored travellers to not only learn Russian, but to conceal their knowledge of the language from their hosts.¹⁸³ Not only was the language significant for finding information, Harber suggests, but it was also a source of potential danger for the traveller, at least to their objectives of

¹⁷⁸ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 49.

¹⁷⁹ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 75.

¹⁸⁰ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 76.

¹⁸¹ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, viii.

¹⁸² Jones, ‘Rulers and Ruled’, *The Times*, 13 October 1930, 13f.

¹⁸³ Paul Flowers, *The New Civilisation?*, 68.

trying to find something out. In contrast, Bernard Pares, who spoke fluent Russian, celebrated this fact but did not advocate it as a necessity for foreigners: for him, the language enabled one to mix with the ‘common folk’ – yet he did not stress this as a sign of his own sincerity.¹⁸⁴

Despite Citrine and Lyall being closer to Conolly, Jones and Harber in attitude than Martin or Moën, they, like the latter pair, do not appear to have considered a lack of Russian as a fundamental barrier to reaching a kind of understanding – Lyall did without Curtis on numerous occasions. John Brown confidently wrote that ‘with the aid of a dictionary and grammar I obtained a smattering of essential Russian words, so that I could make myself understood’, and whilst he practised his Russian on the crew of the *Smolny* to Leningrad, others did not, or at the least did not tell their readers, which is the point here.¹⁸⁵ Elizabeth Delafield’s publisher meanwhile, apparently wrote off her concerns about lacking Russian by saying Russian was “not as difficult as people think [...] and I guess what you didn’t understand, *you could make up* [my emphasis].”¹⁸⁶ Whilst Delafield was not at all convinced by this, as shown by the continual self-reflection about her role as a traveller in the Soviet Union, she and other Britons still travelled, they still observed, they still wrote an account without the language.

Other languages could help travellers. Hubert Griffith reported happily that by speaking German, he could converse with many Soviet mechanics who had trained abroad. This was especially pleasing in contrast to ‘unsatisfactory’ conversations he held with others that were conducted through an interpreter.¹⁸⁷ For Griffith, the issue of language highlighted how foolish he thought claims of mass Soviet deception were: he joked that should a foreigner be able to speak to a Russian, then ‘the whole edifice of deception would fall to pieces. The ark of their secrecy would be shattered!’.¹⁸⁸ Kingsley Martin noted that ‘a smattering of German is a great help, and as I, who have no ear for languages, have often discovered, one can rub along, even if rather

¹⁸⁴ Pares, *Moscow admits a Critic*, 33; 87.

¹⁸⁵ John Brown, *I Saw for Myself*, 173.

¹⁸⁶ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 2.

¹⁸⁷ Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia*, 48.

¹⁸⁸ Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia*, 10. Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton: ‘I had always been told that the Soviet Government refused to grant a visa to anybody who could speak Russian’, a notion which was confounded by his experience. *Russian Closeup*, 23.

foolishly'.¹⁸⁹ Bosworth Goldman wrote of people at Igarka in northern Siberia that 'many of the men I talked with told glaring untruths, or gave clichés learnt in schools in reply to my questions, except when we spoke in German, or better still French, since German is the most widely understood foreign language.'¹⁹⁰ Boorman implied similar with his infrequent discussions in German with people on trains during his visit in May 1936, and even goes as far to say that "It is surprising, for instance, the number of Russians who can speak English well, with only a slight accent, yet they may never have travelled far from their own city. Nearly every Russian I met could converse freely in English, German or French."¹⁹¹ Boorman's presentation of 'every Russian' is in stark contrast to the monoglot Soviet peasantry that Gareth Jones encountered and is indicative of just how problematic the sincerity of travellers is to their readers – and to the historian: Griffith and Boorman can talk to 'many', as can Jones, and present this sincerely, and yet their conclusions and experiences were wildly different. This isn't simply a matter of politics: if we compare Lyall, Citrine and Griffith to Jones and Conolly, and consider their representations of the importance of Russian, and thus ultimately the importance of the traveller as a useful observer if they did not know Russian, we see a clear difference. Jones's acceptance that some ('few observers') who could not speak Russian might have something useful to say about 'Russia' was even less generous than it initially sounds, given one repeated aspect of his writing was damning most other foreigners for being gullible and easily led. Conolly is exempt from Jones's demanding, self-privileging, criteria by knowing Russian, but Lyall and Citrine are not, and yet each produced work that ultimately supported Jones's conclusions about the Soviet Union in numerous – if not all – ways. Griffith produced a work Jones would likely have considered mendacious and contemptible, but he did so with confidence in his own ability and his not unreasonable logic. His lack of Russian did not undermine this confidence. Thus, not possessing the Russian language was not a definitive factor in determining whether a traveller considered their search for understanding as feasible or not, and nor was it a block to forming necessarily positive or necessarily negative judgements about the Soviet Union. Indeed, lacking the Russian language was ultimately, for many, of little consequence.

¹⁸⁹ Martin, *Low's Russian Sketchbook*, 11.

¹⁹⁰ Bosworth Goldman, *Red Road Through Asia* (London: Methuen, 1934), 68.

¹⁹¹ Boorman, *So This is Russia*, 45; 57.

Archibald Forman stridently defended his account, *From Baltic to Black Sea*, and his extended justification echoes Byron:

The author has been questioned on frequent occasions concerning his knowledge of the Russian language, and when he has confessed to but a rudimentary acquaintance with its complexities, he has had to refute the argument that he can have seen nothing. Whether he speaks the language or not, the traveller can at least use his eyes, and, provided the tourist is willing to explore on his own a little, it requires no very keen perception to obtain a fairly comprehensive idea of present conditions.¹⁹²

For such travellers, the language appears to have been considered as a contingent rather than definitive factor, an unfortunate hindrance, but identified and so somewhat negotiable. Thus, for those who did not speak Russian, travel in and of itself was still valuable as an experience: indeed, it became the key guarantor of authenticity, the signifier of expertise, the foundation of the lecture, the book, the article. Essentially, for some discoveries could be made in English, and with no threat to the sincerity of the venture. Others thought this misguided at best, dishonest at worst. Furthermore, it is noticeable that the vast majority of travellers did not discuss the significance of other languages of the Union: Jones made some notes of Ukrainian words, but otherwise Russian was the dominant language in terms of what travellers thought was/was not significant to learn.

Language necessarily places our own reading of travellers into a complicated position. The fact we can observe a traveller admitting a lack of Russian and yet communicating with Soviet people at various points, sometimes without a guide or translator mentioned and sometimes with, produces a complex problem for analysis. Reliance on translation, or perhaps gestures and broken English/Russian, necessarily prejudiced a traveller's reading of a Soviet individual's sincerity. However, for a traveller, the discursive framework in which they moved, and their preconceptions and understandings of the Soviet world, and, potentially, the role of different translators (e.g. Lyall's friend 'Mr Curtis' as contrasted to Citrine's guide-translator Karchan), all seem likely to have combined to frame a travellers' reading of

¹⁹² Forman, *From Baltic to Black Sea*, vi.

Soviet sincerity and thus offered a traveller a way to apparently bypass this prejudicial situation. That is, even if one could not understand directly, one could parse experiences and words into an understanding all the same. Soviet cultural diplomacy was a discursive influence, as much if not more than, a logistical one. This becomes clearer via an examination of the Soviet tour, in the next chapter.

SUMMARY

This chapter has delineated some of the foundational ideas alive in the discourse of travel to the Soviet Union, with numerous implicit appeals to sincerity made by travellers across the political spectrum being seen. The tension between different attitudes to the idea of discovery, and dissent about what was to be discovered (and even what could be discovered), can be excavated from all but the most unreflective accounts, with travellers' considering the need to negotiate Soviet state control in order to discover. This tension could reach such a point that an author like Ernest Benn rejected travel's utility entirely. On the other hand, Osbert Crawford's example shows how travel was perhaps not as necessary to 'discover' as presented by travellers' accounts. Furthermore, political loyalties were no guarantee of how a traveller would reflect upon their objectives and challenges: pro- and anti-Soviet travellers alike exhibit both concern with sincere self-presentation and awareness of the questions around the 'Iron Curtain', and, similarly, pro- and anti-Soviet travellers alike also evince very little reflection on these issues. It has also been shown that travellers privileged the skills and/or experience that helped them justify their own position as sincere observers. Doubt could weave in and out of view in a travellers' writings, and how these doubts could affect how travel was perceived, but rarely affected confidence in the essential validity of a traveller's experiences. The issue of the Russian language reveals a range of views about necessary skills. It also reveals, more directly perhaps, the most significant dichotomy of all, which lies underneath and behind all these questions of discovery, dissent, and doubt: the disparity between a travellers' mental framework for viewing the Soviet world, and the complexities of that world. This is a key finding of this thesis: that the locations, contexts and moments in which foreigners and Soviets met were diverse, multi-faceted, and of greater variety in tone and character and experience than either the travellers of the time thought they would be

in their imagined geography of the Soviet Union, and which the historiography has yet to examine in detail.

Indeed, the chapter also began to introduce the theme of ‘unofficial’ experience of the Soviet world, albeit in relief as much as directly. The next chapter looks at the Soviet tour in detail, as a way of focusing on the interplay of ideas of discovery, dissent and doubt in a specific context. The tour’s specific mental and logistical apparatus was a shared experience for a majority of travellers, and as such as discussed by many, even if only in relief. This helps us further map the discourse of travel, helping us understand where travellers thought discoveries about the Soviet Union – and its people – could best be made, if not on tour.

Chapter 2

The Tour

‘I have witnessed the whole process of “the staging” of this farce called “inspecting [the] USSR” – Joseph Douillet¹

‘[I]t was urged that [...] we please compile a list of questions concerning Turkestan and its peoples [...], so that we might, so to speak, “carry a guide within our own mentalities”’ – Ethel Mannin²

The Soviet tour was the instrument of the Soviet state to enable investigation by foreigners – and to showcase the future Soviet world as it was being constructed. As has been seen, awareness of the possibility of Soviet deceit was strong in the discourse of travel. Nevertheless, for many foreigners it was the guided tour that would facilitate their examination of the Soviet world. Crucially, it was a discursive location, a set of signs and stories that had as much – more, in fact – influence on travellers as an idea than as reality. Here many themes meet: discovery, dissent and doubt not least. By examining a range of attitudes towards the tour, we can continue the exercise of drawing out the threads of this discourse, better understanding its role in shaping the way British travellers explored the Soviet Union. By looking at travellers who sought to navigate or bypass the ‘smoke screen’ of Soviet cultural diplomacy, we can see what happened when the desire for discovery and the recognition of contested truths became so tightly bound that discovery was considered anything from inadvisable to impossible without action taken to mitigate the effect of Soviet cultural diplomacy.³ This effect was created by the structure of the tour: itineraries, guides, translators and showcase sites. This chapter looks at how travellers considered the tour in detail. Sincere reportage demanded at the least the recognition of Soviet performance (the tour as a show put on to make the Soviet world look as prosperous and dynamic as possible to foreigners), even if this fell short of damning Soviet hypocrisy (the tour as a sham to hide the realities of Soviet brutality and failure).

¹ Douillet, *Moscow Unmasked*, 21.

² Mannin, *South to Samarkand*, 76–7.

³ Violet Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, ix.

This chapter delineates a range of responses to the tour, which also helps us break down the idea of dissent, into more detail. It starts by considering a dichotomy between general reactions to the tour, showing how for some the tour was seen as incidental fact, and for others a pivot on which entire understandings of Soviet life could change. Sceptical responses ranged from accepting that the Soviets wanted to show the best they could to foreigners and yet still avoiding this where possible, to seeing *all* tours as misleading and conformist. In the background to much of the sceptical reaction is the idea of seeking Archibald Lyall's 'unofficial Russian', or Gareth Jones's 'real Russia'. Then the chapter looks in more detail at the range of views on the tour. Indeed, through this the dichotomy of 'official' and 'unofficial' comes into focus in a particular way. The historical complexity of Soviet culture does not bend to these travellers' framings and definitions of its various aspects, but that is not the point here: the question is how these travellers acted and thought. Questioning this opens a door, enabling us to explore travellers who doubted official Soviet sincerity to such a degree that they sought another kind, that of a hinterland (both of the imagination, and of geography), of the 'real', of the 'unofficial Russian'.

In the early years of the Soviet Union, foreign delegations found their itineraries easy to break, and despite the persistent efforts to improve them on the part of VOKS, and later Intourist, tours were not necessarily enlightening, and by no means always problem-free, and such failings of cultural diplomacy were witnessed by travellers from across the spectrum of opinions on the Soviet Union.⁴ In particular, the scholarship on VOKS and Intourist has shown in detail how the tour was not an airtight logistical exercise. Foreigners were not always corralled through Soviet society in splendid isolation, looking out of the train window with awe and curiosity at dumb, mysterious beasts, and nor were travellers entirely, stupidly, dependent on their hosts for further insight into the alien world, as Joseph Douillet (and Gareth Jones) scornfully implied.⁵ The windows and doors of the train carriages could open, the animals outside were vocal, and not everybody trusted that the train guard had their best interests at heart. Furthermore, contemporaneous events necessarily affected tours: given the dislocations caused by collectivisation, for example, many tourists could not help but

⁴ Wright, *Iron Curtain*, 198–200.

⁵ Douillet, *Moscow Unmasked*, 19–22.

encounter sights that were far from ideal from the Soviet point of view.⁶ Indeed, ‘the embarrassing failure of “cultural show” [...] was [...] hardly an isolated event’, writes David-Fox, whilst Sheila Fitzpatrick notes that many visitors ‘saw things they shouldn’t have done’ – either because the sites being shown were not up to scratch, or because the visitors ‘would insist on going off on their own and seeing the wrong things’. David-Fox shows how Theodore Dreiser’s visit in 1928 gave VOKS impetus to tailor their tours in such a way as to counter the fear of deception: visitors’ tours were to be tightly scripted, but in such a way as to hide that fact.⁷ The implicit hypocrisy of showcases was forefront in the mind of critical travellers, whilst the sincerity of Soviet purpose was the focus of VOKS and Intourist (even as currency demands punctured ‘social tourism’s façade). Despite this, travellers had experiences entirely away from the tour, as the historiography has noted, but has not explored.⁸ Indeed, Robert Byron noted (with perhaps a little contempt for some contemporaries) that:

This is not to say, as so many people infer, that visitor is only shown what the authorities want him to see. On the contrary, free movement within Russia today [...] entails fewer formalities than before the Revolution. The advantage of the conducted tours is simply their remarkable cheapness; and since they are, very conveniently, “conducted”, the tourist is naturally treated to the showpieces of the existing regime. But as these seemed to me, even by anticipation, both extremely uninteresting and fundamentally insignificant, I trusted to my own arrangements, and may here take the opportunity of thanking those who helped me make them. Travelling was consequently more difficult, but equally more entertaining.⁹

It is noticeable that Byron categorises these as ‘insignificant’, a reading that Gareth Jones would have disputed – not for their ‘truth-telling’ potential, but for the implications of their existence. Furthermore, even when tours did perform their function, it was not always satisfactorily done. Winifred Richardson frequently noted ‘unsatisfactory’ answers from guides and speakers during her trip to Leningrad in

⁶ David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 109–10.

⁷ David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 140–1.

⁸ David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 111, 120; Fitzpatrick, ‘Foreigners Observed’, 220–1.

⁹ Robert Byron, *First Russia, Then Tibet*, 5–6. Hubert Griffith’s account was subtitled ‘An Informative Record of the Cheapest Trip in Europe’.

summer 1931, and such complaints, which Hubert Griffith also expressed, were of concern to VOKS and Intourist, as were complaints about poor material conditions and about ‘having little chance to encounter the “real life” of the Soviet Union’.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the tour’s influence was profound, irrespective of experience or attitude. Angela Kershaw notes how ‘writers of reportage make explicit their awareness of Soviet attempts to create specific perceptual filters as a means of controlling travellers’ experiences of the USSR’.¹¹ Travellers’ visas were very often arranged by Intourist, their experiences of Soviet life were very often created whilst ‘on tour’, and the tour was a significant influence on their perception of *others*’ experiences of Soviet life too. This influence could be merely logistical, in ferrying them around the country: travellers like the Davies, as has been seen, saw the tour so unremarkable as to be almost the ‘natural’ way of seeing the Soviet Union. Others were a little more perceptive, if not much more sceptical. Harold Bellman noted, with a touch of the sardonic, how

[t]he Intourist is all-powerful in Moscow. Trams, buses and all forms of traffic were held up as we swept along, our drivers showing fine contempt for warning signals and street lights, while the patient proletariat stood by, their gaze curious yet not unfriendly as they watched these foreign “bourgeois-democrats” rolling past in luxury.¹²

Yet it is important to further investigate the idea of the tour. The reactions explored have been broad to this point, and there are subtleties to unpack.

If many writers displayed a significant degree of scepticism about Soviet cultural diplomacy, and indeed the Soviet project itself, they were by no means all in agreement about its power and scope. Nor were they entirely united on how specifically to discover a ‘real Russia’ and what that actually might be, where it was to be found, and what it meant for understanding the Soviet Union – let alone what a ‘real Russia’ meant for the Soviet individuals they encountered. As with their contemporaries, these individuals travelled and wrote in hope, implicitly or explicitly, of discovering at least part of such a picture, as variable as that might be. The issue

¹⁰ Winifred Richardson, *Diary of USSR visit July 8th – August 17th 1931*, (private collection); Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia*, 48; Fitzpatrick, ‘Foreigners Observed’, 228–9.

¹¹ Kershaw, ‘French and British Female Intellectuals and the Soviet Union’

¹² Bellman, *Baltic Backgrounds*, 61.

here is not the general reasons for travel, or the essential validity of such an effort, but rather their negotiation of their context in the Soviet Union.

The majority of travellers that were sceptical of the purpose of tours, and of the opportunities and experiences offered within their confines, nevertheless went on tour: indeed, some only became sceptical of the Soviet project via their direct experience of the tour. Others considered the tour as problematic not for the political and ideological purpose implicit in 'showcasing', but because they thought all such tours were, essentially, barriers to a more truthful – even romantic – experience. The nuances of reactions to the tour can be shown by brief explorations of six experiences, from feted guest of Soviet institutions, through unmanaged 'tramping' in Soviet countryside, to less liminal, more nuanced, experiences of the tour's nature and the questions of sincerity it provoked.

TOLERATING THE TOUR

First, the feted visitor. Walter Citrine was sceptical of Soviet cultural diplomacy (indeed, his biographer notes him as a 'leading communist sceptic' in Britain) but was met in Leningrad by representatives of VOKS and the Central Council of Trade Unions, in similar manner to George Bernard Shaw, André Gide and other famous visitors; his wife, Doris, frequently received flowers as they visited a new city or factory.¹³ Citrine offers us a clear example of a visitor who mistrusted the tour apparatus but nevertheless used it to explore the USSR. His way of tolerating this necessary burden was to be as independently minded as possible. Citrine writes of his earning the agreement of his hosts that it would be 'clearly understood that no restriction was to be placed on my freedom of movement, or opportunities to see what I wished.' Despite this, he 'knew that, even under these circumstances, I could do little else than skim the surface of things.'¹⁴ His account details him planning an itinerary with his hosts, which was agreed upon apparently without much incident, and then this plan was

¹³ Jim Moher, *Walter Citrine: Forgotten Statesman of the Trades Union Congress* (JGM Books, 2021), 183; Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, 238 & 304.

¹⁴ Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, vii–viii.

followed.¹⁵ Given Citrine's disadvantage in such a negotiation, this is of debatable value, and Citrine hints that he recognised this: his lack of language, of familiarity with local contexts, and his position as fêted guest of gracious hosts, meant his attempt to control his own itinerary was of limited impact. Interspersed with long conversations about working conditions at various factories on his trip, *I Search for Truth in Russia* recounts moments where Citrine suddenly demands to be shown a different building or place to that which he was being led: "Do not take me into that one," I said, seeing we were directing out steps towards a particular dwelling. "I want to see a typical house."¹⁶ He repeated this on other occasions, and even got up early, with his wife, to leave a Kharkiv hotel before his guide, Karchan, was awake: they found some slums, and once Karchan had caught up with them, Citrine said to him "I told you I wanted to see the worst as well as the best, but you always take care I do not see the worst."¹⁷ Whilst Citrine did not ever get away from his guide for an extended period, his example reinforces the fact that even carefully marshalled 'VIP' visitors could pick and pull at the seams of the Soviet tour apparatus.

HIDING THE TOUR

If we contrast Citrine's clear description of the framework of his tour, to Violet Conolly's writing about her own tour, we encounter a curious difference. The tour itself was, alongside the facts, figures and impressions Citrine acquired from Soviet bureaucrats, a repeated theme of his book, as he explained his negotiation of its confines. Conolly also went on a tour, though she was far less exalted than the secretary of Britain's Trades Union Congress. Conolly sought a 'consular visa', as she had reportedly possessed in 1928, but was refused ("we do not like your books", according to the official concerned), and she ended up being issued a tourist visa, which was of great disappointment to her – 'a tourist visa ties you inextricably to Soviet hotels and Soviet

¹⁵ Carefully managed itineraries were used with notable visitors: David-Fox notes that often these were pre-approved at VOKS. It is unclear precisely how much control Citrine really had in this case, but it is unlikely he was able to propose visits to whole new areas or radical changes of timing. *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 105. See also Stern, *From Red Square to Left Bank*, 93.

¹⁶ Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, 97.

¹⁷ Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, 205.

meal coupons and a constant trail of official supervision.’¹⁸ This was a sorry outcome for her, as she explicitly linked the power of Soviet authority to many foreigners’ representations of the Soviet Union, and thus the ‘[British] reading public’s understanding: ‘The long and short of all this is that the reading public has no idea of the extent to which the Soviet government can call the tune about Russia. Congratulations to Stalin and his henchmen, but let us try to see things straight!’.¹⁹

Conolly described getting a tourist visa, and she related her itinerary – ‘Central Russia [Moscow, Gorkii], the Caucasus, Azerbaidjan [*sic*] and Armenia’ to the reader.²⁰ She then proceeded to relate her travels, but it is not always clear who she was with – a guide, and/or a translator (who would be, strictly speaking, unnecessary given Conolly’s proficiency in Russian); other tourists.. She describes herself as a ‘free agent’ when travelling around Moscow, but in Gorkii she was ‘unfortunately lured into the modern Picture Gallery’.²¹ In Armenia her guide ‘hastened to assure’ her about a point of fact, whilst another (or the same?) guide ‘shrieked’ a few days later about iniquitous monks using their monastery for themselves before they were forced to open it to the People.²² Conolly described the tour infrastructure only in passing, or it is implied via visits to particular locations, such as spas and factories: she stated that visitors may refuse guides if they wish, and whilst Intourist ‘makes rail and hotel reservations’, the implication is that Conolly was fully aware of Intourist’s structures and strictures, and also a way to avoid them in refusing the guide. However, she apparently did not refuse the guide: she makes no mention of doing so, which is a curious incident given her dislike of the tour. This shows another nuance of the host-guest relationship, as other travellers certainly did reject such assistance: John Brown and Gareth Jones, for example. Ethel Mannin noted exploring Kharkiv without her guide, having stressed she did not need her for the rest of that day; a guide in Tiflis ‘agreed with us that it’ – that is, wandering at will, unchaperoned – ‘was the best way to get a real impression of the city. “One of you speaks Russian, and you have roubles

¹⁸ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, viii.

¹⁹ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, xi

²⁰ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, ix.

²¹ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 18 & 42.

²² Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 128 & 136.

– you do not need a guide”’, Mannin recounted the guide as saying.²³ Conolly’s writing focused on encounters between ‘I’ and the Soviet, not ‘we’ and the Soviet (be it other tourists, or a guide), be it at a factory (very likely a tour stop) or in a library in Odessa.²⁴ She minimised the tour in her representation of how she travelled around the Soviet Union because it was such an unwanted, and in her eyes, unwarranted, burden. In trying to ‘see things straight’ and report this to her readers, Conolly chose to minimise discussion of her tour, rather than drawing attention to her strategies for circumventing or mitigating its strictures.

BREAKING FROM THE TOUR

Archibald Lyall, like Citrine, discussed the tour at length. However, his reaction was markedly different to both Citrine and Conolly. His representation of the tour’s confines varied, and curiously so. Lyall wrote that ‘perpetually in Russia we had this feeling of being treated like an infants’ outing’.²⁵ He was in contact with other foreigners in various cities, whose presence emphasised the artificial world foreigners lived in whilst on tour – including Hubert Griffith, who was making another trip to that depicted in *Seeing Soviet Russia*. Lyall wrote of ‘Griffithites’, the group led by Hubert, as turning up in Leningrad, then Stalingrad, then on a train to Rostov-on-Don, and so on, as well as a group of journalists that Lyall noted got special transport and food.²⁶ During his travels, the tour became much more problematic for Lyall. As one of a pack of ‘cantankerous English individualists’, he changed from displaying a weary tolerance of the tour to wishing he could escape his guide, a Miss Ivanova, and her guidance.

Yet Lyall’s behaviour did not always tally with his sceptical attitude about other tourists and their processions. In Leningrad, he reported strolling around the Hermitage quite alone, and aboard a train he ‘fell in with a friendly Russian’ (he was not with his Russian-speaking friend Curtis here, thus his own limited Russian was employed) who invited him for a drink in the city. Lyall’s excuse for not going was that he was too cheap

²³ Mannin, *South to Samarkand*, 103; 193.

²⁴ Conolly used a small library in Odessa during an unplanned extended stay in the port: earlier in *Soviet Tempo* she wrote of the difficulty of gaining access to libraries in Moscow, and revelled in her access to the Odessa library, where she began to draft her book. *Soviet Tempo*, 169.

²⁵ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 58; 80.

²⁶ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 17; 110.

to buy the Russian a drink himself. This apparent lack of curiosity contrasts with his sympathy with a Miss Bartley, fellow tourist (and a CPGB member, Lyall reports), when she complained in Leningrad that ‘we’ve absolutely no idea how the Russian workers really live’:

‘I don’t like this Intourist atmosphere at all. [...] We’re far more out of touch with the people than if we’d never come here. Guided round and told what to see and think. I felt when I’d only been a day in Leningrad that I’d go back home if I could. Oh, I do wish I could really see something except what we’re shown.’

Lyall represents a somewhat contradictory position: he wanders at will in Leningrad, befriends Russians despite his extremely basic language skills and then rejects their invitation to have a beer with them, and simultaneously complains of the tour’s confines that prevent him and his fellow travellers from travelling as free agents.

However, over time the pressure of the tour became more influential, but it was only at its end that he reached the liminal moment of deciding to outright reject the tour and seek the ‘unofficial Russian’. Lyall felt the Soviet tour mollycoddled him, and he despised it for doing so, and this in turn exacerbated his anger at what he discovered – namely, poverty. To another traveller he said ‘at least we shall have the fun of being able to blow the gaffe on Russia when we get home.’²⁷ His tone had changed from one of detached bemusement to fiery anger at the tour: ‘I should be rather more impressed if I’d ever spoken to a single unofficial Russian who wasn’t fed to the teeth with the whole business’, he wrote of his time in Moscow.²⁸ Of his tour group, he alone extended his stay in the capital by a few days. He also rejected a guide and bought black market roubles. He describes this clearly to his reader: he explains it is how he circumvents Soviet manipulation; indeed, his methods of avoidance became central to his account of travel in the Soviet Union. He was thus free to wander without any sense of being marshalled.

²⁷ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 161. On the matter of numbers and a traveller’s ‘empirical’ observation, such precise counting is echoed by Citrine at the opera in Leningrad: ‘I counted one hundred and thirty performers on the stage at one time, and an orchestra of eighty.’ *Russian Diary*, CITRINE 19/1, fol. 111.

²⁸ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 141–2.

Ethel Mannin's account in *South to Samarkand* also pivoted on the idea of breaking away from the tour. Her desire to visit the fabled Samarkand trumped all others, and for her the attempt was to produce a 'travel book' about Samarkand, not a text about the Soviet world. Mannin is similar to Conolly or Lyall in her attitude the tour. She noted great irritation with tour guides at Kyiv, and again at Sochi:

We left Kyiv in a pelting rain, and in the company of as strutting and bossy and tiresome a female guide as ever attached herself unwanted to a couple of travellers who ever since they got off the boat at Leningrad had been trying to evade the attentions of this irritating tribe. 'Thank heavens, I thought, when we saw her tippeting [*sic*] away on her ridiculously high-heeled shoes, her fat hips wagging under their covering of tight skirt, thank heavens we shall soon be beyond the clutches of this deadly species who talk to one as though one were a half-wit, and order one about as though one were a child.'²⁹

An interesting contrast comes when a VOKS official suggests they go to Samarkand, if not on tour, then at least 'equipped with information which would enable us to understand what was being done, so that we might, it was suggested, "carry a guide within our own mentalities..."' – he encouraged them to read some literature on Soviet efforts in Central Asia. Here we get a sense of the discursive rather than the logistical tour, and the discrepancy between imagined realities of Soviet cultural diplomacy and the actual fact of travel there.³⁰ Indeed, Mannin's experience shows that the reality of off-tour travel was less binary than the 'Iron Curtain' suggests: a VOKS official encouraged their travel off-tour (albeit likely assuming they would have a visa when doing so).

Travelling with a Russian-speaking friend, Donia, they reached Baku as their visas expired. What followed was an illicit (following Orlov and Popov, a 'shadow' trip), but relatively successful journey across the Caspian, and then from Krasnovodsk to Samarkand. Mannin described their reaching Baku thus:

From now on we were on our own. No more tickets would be bought for us, no more hotel arrangements made. No wires had been sent to Baku. We were

²⁹ Ethel Mannin, *South to Samarkand*, 98.

³⁰ Ethel Mannin, *South to Samarkand*, 77.

supposed to have friends there. So there we were, with our coveted independence and our expired visas, on the edge of that forbidden sea which divided Europe and Asia.

Their gambit relied on the ruse that they had friends in Baku, whom they could stay with. They even, once in the port city, identified an address of a random building and gave that as their friends' place, whilst buying fourth class tickets for the sea crossing to Krasnovodsk. Once this was sorted, and VOKS believed them to be travelling on to Batum after their Baku sojourn, they left their hotel (where they had stayed at the invitation of the local Intourist manager, who was happy to provide service to travellers let down by the mysteriously absent 'friends') ostensibly looking for said friends, but in fact making for their ship. As they left the hotel, they thought they were followed by a porter. Acting nonchalantly, they carried their very heavy bags as though they were light, to give the impression of only walking to the 'friends' address, and thus in no need of a car or escort, or aid. Aboard the ship across the Caspian, they were uncomfortable, hungry, tired and often frustrated, but they managed to travel to Samarkand entirely 'off tour', without permits of any kind.

ANTI-TOUR

Gareth Jones took this antipathy to the tour even further. Whilst he did not tell his readers about his documentation, in 1930 and 1931 he attained a tourist visa, and in 1933 he got what was likely an equivalent of a 'consular' visa, using contacts in the German consulate at Kharkiv to gain an invitation south, thereby adhering to the *Narkomindel's* (Commissariat for Foreign Affairs) management of foreign journalists.³¹ To his readers he emphasised the need for knowledge of Russian, and to get away from the 'numerically insignificant' Communist Party, to make contact with 'peasants, miners, nobles, restaurant workers, private traders, priests'.³² His obvious disdain for guided tours rested on the fact that contact with such people was impossible on a tour. On his second visit, he acted as guide for Jack Heinz III, heir of the Heinz fortune. On

³¹ Theresa Cherfas, 'Reporting Stalin's Famine: Jones and Muggeridge – A Case Study in Forgetting and Rediscovery', *Kritika* 14:4 (September 2013), 775–804, at 790–1.

³² Jones, 'Rulers and Ruled', *The Times*, 13 October 1930, 13f.

his third visit, he travelled alone. The tour exists in Jones's reports primarily as a marker of deceit, a thing for him to reject, and thus enhance his own position as an investigator *par excellence*. As such, it is instructive to compare his representation of the tour, and of the foreigners on tour, to the experiences of Citrine, Conolly and Lyall above, as well as others like John Brown. Brown wrote how he 'hated the idea of groups of tourists being marshalled through palaces and museums by glib conductors. That would not be seeing Russia.'³³ Thus, he wandered around Leningrad and Moscow at will, even sneaking into the Putilov works in Leningrad, amongst others, to see 'Russia' up close (and more significantly, her armaments): 'During the next hour I roamed all over the huge works without hindrance'.³⁴ All of these writers recognised the tour's manipulative purpose, and all sought to minimise its hold on them, with various levels of success – most dramatically in the case of John Brown, who travelled on a tourist visa but essentially ignored the guides once in Leningrad.³⁵ Thus, none of them fit Jones's descriptions of 'gullible' tourists, a charge Griffith would have refuted with venom. The tour was a barrier for each in discovering what they sought in the Soviet Union, but it was never an insurmountable one, from Lyall and Brown's avoidance, to Conolly's 'internal' escape via emphasising select experiences in her work and minimising or coding others to reduce the tour's presence in her account. Jones was so sceptical of the tour as to make this doubt core to his identity as a sensible observer of Soviet affairs; the underlying implication of his writing on the USSR was that not only was he investigating matters as a qualified and skilled journalist, but that he was offering a superior, clearer view of affairs than other visitors, based in no small part on his recognition of the possibility for deceit, epitomised by the tour.

The above writers paint a picture in which the tour functions as the infamous 'Iron Curtain', a barrier to liminal experience which would be the true discovery of their travel. Furthermore, the works of Citrine, Conolly, Lyall, Mannin, Brown and Jones suggest an axis of toleration-through-to-evasion: that is, that the tour was always present, and that it is only ultimately by evasion that one could reach the clearest

³³ John Brown, *I Saw for Myself*, 172.

³⁴ Brown, *I Saw for Myself*, 190–2. Lyall notes not being permitted to see Putilov, due to the fact that 'tourists disorganised the work' and thus at the time no tours visited it. *Russian Roundabout*, 55.

³⁵ Brown, *I Saw For Myself*, 184–5.

picture of the Soviet Union. However, some travellers responded more positively to the tour, and still recognised a significant difference between the experience on-tour and off. Others complicate further the idea of the tour in the discourse by showing that tours were not necessarily politicised pivots on which impressions or reasoning about the Soviet experience turned; rather, these experiences affirm that the tour was ultimately most powerful as a symbolic influence, over its physical and logistical restraints.

PRO-TOUR

Hubert Griffith, challenging Douillet's aspersions, cast great doubt on the capacity of the Soviets to truly hoodwink foreigners, questioning whether the Soviet government had the resources or inclination to truly manage visitors effectively in this way, and he greatly resented being 'thought a complete idiot, without power to reason or to observe.'³⁶ Furthermore, he praised the tour as a way of finding information because it encouraged and enabled the visitor to see far more than they might otherwise do alone or without local knowledge: 'In the morning' (day after arrival) 'the business of "touring" began. The method of the Intourist authorities, wearing as it was on the nerves and on the shoe-leather, was brilliantly efficient. It showed us as much as possible'.³⁷ Griffith even describes the tours, the itineraries and his engagement with Soviet guides and others as liberating: 'the trouble, as far as it existed, was that we were shown too much, rather than too little'.³⁸

Griffith's experience is of particular interest when compared to Lyall's. Griffith spent several weeks on tour, travelling 'hard class' between Leningrad, Moscow, Nizhnii Novgorod, Kineshma and Ivanovo, a trip which he presents himself as having enjoyed thoroughly. On his return to Moscow he spent a week enjoying 'conversation and leisure' in the capital, where he could confirm 'the impression of all that I had seen quickly'.³⁹ Like Lyall, but without the need to buy black market roubles, he walked around Moscow, conversing with English-speaking Russians and other foreigners,

³⁶ Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia*, 9–10 & 45.

³⁷ Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia*, 38–9; 49.

³⁸ Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia*, 43.

³⁹ Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia*, 142.

which he greatly appreciated as it ‘gave me a sense, hitherto absent from the tour, and all the more valuable because of it, of meeting and mixing with a variety of people who had, for years on end, lived and worked and had their being under the Soviet Union.’⁴⁰ Griffith thus recognised that the tour did limit him somewhat, by restricting access to such people. Yet he noticed that ‘when I was travelling along and away from the rest of the party [i.e., the tour], I found that I hardly ever stopped talking’.⁴¹ This contact off-tour (even if mostly with foreigners, and only in Moscow; notably he met with prominent pro-Soviet foreigners such as Alexander Wicksteed, Maurice Hindus, and Louis Fischer), rather than undermining the tour and the motives behind it, actually reinforced to Griffith that the Soviet system as a whole was unjustly criticised by many other foreigners. The differences between the Soviet Union ‘on tour’ and ‘off tour’ did not disrupt his appreciation of the Soviet Union – rather, the ‘off tour’ experience affirmed the positive impression he had gained whilst ‘on tour’. Kingsley Martin and David Low felt similarly, but without the ‘off tour’ experience – despite Martin’s aversion to ‘*tourismus*’: Martin’s attitude is suggestive of cross-ideological resentment of superficial experiences:

A man may have a guide-book and a rucksack; he may wear knickerbockers and even travel on a specially conducted tour, and yet not be a tourist. *Tourismus* is a disease of the mind. Its germ is the idea that one may learn that which is valuable or in any way acquire virtue by the process of being shown things. It is the passive as opposed to the active method of education.⁴²

Martin sought to explore Russia, not be shown it. He also wrote, like Moën, that the traveller was not ‘prevented from going where he likes’ but he would encounter the immemorial inefficiency of Russia’.⁴³

Near the end of his account, Griffith listens to a German woman returning to Hamburg from the Soviet Union:

⁴⁰ Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia*, 144–5.

⁴¹ Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia*, 48.

⁴² Martin, *Low’s Russian Sketchbook*, 11.

⁴³ Martin, *Low’s Russian Sketchbook*, 12.

‘How do I like going back? – I wonder! To our own town of Hamburg – where all the facades are so fine, and behind the facades there is such despair and destitution...? After coming from a country where the facades are the only things that are dreadful—and behind them there’s everything that is sound...?’ [...] That phrase of hers about what may or may not lie behind a beautiful exterior, crystallised many ideas already forming in me. Russia is still on the surface a slum. But it is as near shedding its slum-surface as a snake is to shedding its skin in the Spring.⁴⁴

Here Griffith’s example reveals the subtleties of interpretation: the tour was not a façade itself but was rather useful as a way to see the façade of poverty, the ‘slum-surface’ that was going to be shed like dead skin through the Soviet ‘Spring’. Griffiths inverted the traditional idea of the Potemkin village, and in doing so casts the tour as an instrument of illumination, not blinding.

Lars Moën’s guidebook, *Are you going to Russia?* offered a great swathe of information pertaining to how to act and how best to explore in the Soviet Union, and this included acting ‘off tour’ – albeit with limitations. Moën told his British audience that, if walking in Moscow or Leningrad,

In the beginning you will probably be satisfied to follow one of the principal streets, away from the hotel and back again, which eliminates any need for asking your way. Sooner or later, however, you will want to walk to some definite place which will involve asking for information.⁴⁵

Soon enough you could be free to ‘wander through the streets with no especial objective, gathering impressions.’⁴⁶ Freedom, he was saying, is everywhere for the traveller – even if going ‘Into the Interior’, where, if a traveller relied on Intourist or was well-resourced, one could explore somewhat. But Moën felt this was not a sensible thing to do: ‘I advise you in the strongest possible terms not to try doing it entirely on your own.’ This is not because it is illegal or dangerous, but because it is awkward,

⁴⁴ Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia*, 180.

⁴⁵ Moën, *Are You Going to Russia?*, 137.

⁴⁶ Moën, *Are You Going to Russia?*, 139.

costly, and confusing.⁴⁷ Like Griffith, Moën does not allow a non-tour experience to be essentially worthwhile, because if the Soviets offer one service, why deny it?

OTHER PERSPECTIVES ON THE TOUR

Delafield's *Straw without Bricks* presented a subtly different appreciation of cultural diplomacy, and so too does Ada Chesterton's first Soviet travelogue, *My Russian Venture*. These accounts show that travel's conduct, its aims, and its reaction to cultural diplomacy, were more complex than pivoting on pro/anti-Soviet feeling, or, even, on pro/anti-tour feeling. Both Delafield and Chesterton travel to the Soviet Union with the intention of seeing it away from the tour, and both manage to do this, *à la* Jones or Brown. However, the significance of the tour is different for these writers. Delafield, without Russian, spent around a month on a farm near Rostov-on-Don. She wrote of making friends with the farmers, of trying to join in with their work, and of having discussions with them. She also noted that the farm was, at one point, a showcase site itself, visited by other foreigners on tours. She does this with minimal comment about the difficulties of getting a visa, and she left due to toothache, not at the behest of the GPU or Intourist.⁴⁸ Then, elsewhere in the Soviet Union, she did join a tour. On another farm, visited on this tour, she met her 'Savoyard', the ultra-sceptic mentioned in the last chapter.⁴⁹ This Savoyard puts Delafield in the interesting position of defending the showcase and the tour: 'Naturally, we, the foreigners, are taken to the show places. Naturally, the best is brought forward for inspection and the less good left in the background.'⁵⁰

Kingsley Martin and David Low had a similar experience: a hapless 'MacPherson' provided a foil for their own sceptical discussions about Soviet deceit, with them being irritated by MacPherson saying he was being lied to when somebody could not relate basic information, or expecting to learn anything he wished – which, Martin felt, would

⁴⁷ Moën, *Are You Going to Russia?*, 213.

⁴⁸ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 48.

⁴⁹ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 174–5; 177; 182–3.

⁵⁰ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 191–2; 177.

be unreasonable even in London: 'that doesn't seem to me so very different from Whitehall'.⁵¹ Martin also recalled:

Poor MacPherson. Everything made him suspicious. When the engines broke down on the boat and we started late from London, and there was a muddle about the cabins, he seemed to think the OGPU were keeping us back to search our luggage.⁵²

Delafield also admired the guides, to an extent: she notes their facility with languages, the range of knowledge they possess about 'factories, hospitals, museums and the like', and drily notes their 'superb set of formulas' by which they answer questions on Soviet life.⁵³ Indeed, Malcolm Barber, in Novosibirsk in 1939, wrote of his guide:

I had the feeling that he was one of the old stagers like some of the bearded craftsmen we had seen in the steel-works, and that he was not quite certain in his own mind that all this ant-like activity was making Novosibirsk a better place to live in. Mind you, his patter was perfect. His historical note was excellent. But was it, I wondered, a trifle soul-less? Was it like the work of a hack journalist, writing some article he hasn't the faintest interest in, just because he wants a couple of guineas?⁵⁴

Barber didn't seem to mind this too greatly, but Delafield found the tour guides overbearing, the atmosphere that cowed tourists to 'submit, without very much fuss', to constrictions and denials, unpleasant and unhelpful in reaching an 'impartial' conclusion.⁵⁵ In a contrast to the Savoyard, another foreigner, the American 'Mrs Pansy Baker', irritated Delafield for being relentlessly enthusiastic about Soviet life, on tour and off.⁵⁶

Delafield noted how foreigners met with foreigners to discuss other foreigners, were carted between hotels, and examined Soviet life as though it were a curious science

⁵¹ Martin, *Low's Russian Sketchbook*, 24.

⁵² Martin, *Low's Russian Sketchbook*, 24.

⁵³ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 232.

⁵⁴ Barber, *Transiberian*, 132.

⁵⁵ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 184–5; 199.

⁵⁶ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 78.

experiment.⁵⁷ The tour was crucial for this. Yet for Delafield, whilst the tour had a significant, mostly negative effect, putting travellers on old, tired tracks that only went so far, there was not a liminal threshold beyond which her appreciation of Soviet life would truly, fundamentally, change, as being ‘off tour’ for Griffith, Conolly or Lyall – or Jones, even as he never actually went on tour. The tour’s influence was as much discursive as real; true sight would not come by virtue of being ‘off tour’ alone.

Ada Chesterton, meanwhile, entered the Soviet Union with only a friend, ‘Bunny’, and visited Minsk and Ukraine, never on tour. She writes that she never liked ‘proceeding in mass formation’ or being a part of ‘crowd reactions’.⁵⁸ As such, the tour ‘did not attract me’:

My disposition moves to a more simple method of approach that leaves one free to follow less-frequented roads, uncover sudden beauties, secret springs. I longed to explore the wildest and most unfruitful, with the richest and most naturally favoured regions; to break away from the beaten track.⁵⁹

Throughout her account the tour frequently appears not as a symbol of deceitful oppression as such, but rather as a tiresome, functionally dreary thing that other people have to endure, but not she and Bunny (echoing Kingsley Martin’s condemnation of ‘*tourismus*’). Boorman wrote that he spent much time travelling where he wished:

I have wandered about the cities where ever I wished, I have gone up alleys and peeped into courtyards. I have also visited cities not on my original list. In fact I have gone anywhere within reason that an ordinary foreigner would be allowed to go in England.

So, one could certainly visit Russia on tour, just as one might tour Paris or London, ‘if you are the type of person’ who enjoyed such things. But otherwise, the tour was ‘not necessary’, he wrote, and as his wanderings were intended to exemplify.⁶⁰ Such an

⁵⁷ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 120–1;130–1. The ship Citrine was aboard, *en route* to Leningrad in 1935, was passed in the Gulf of Finland by the *Jan Rudzutak*. His ship received “fraternal greetings” from William and Zelda Coates, travelling home. Citrine, ‘Russian Diary’, CITRINE 1/19, fol. 78.

⁵⁸ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 9.

⁵⁹ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 10.

⁶⁰ Boorman, *So This is Russia*, 11–12.

attitude in Chesterton's case privileges her own adventuring spirit, and also chimes with her conclusions about the Soviet Union, which are broadly positive about communal living, and less so about Stalinist propaganda and the overbearing 'denial of the individual'.⁶¹ Writing of one American academic she met in Kyiv, who was on a tour with his colleagues, she snobbishly decided 'I have no doubt that this young man and the rest of the soilists [*sic*] returned to their respective homes in the belief that they had wrenched the heart out of the cradle of old Russia in a single day'.⁶² Furthermore, writing of an American woman who had acquired a Persian cat whilst in the Soviet Union and sought to take it home with her, Chesterton mused

It is always a puzzle and a fascination to me as to why these self-centred individuals should desire to travel. They carry with them their own environment, to which they insistently conform. They see only with the eyes of their normal existence, measure with the determined opinions of their everyday life, and return, generally speak, an authority on the discomforts of the countries they have visited, without any comprehension of the peoples. [...] "Experience," said Bernard Shaw, "is a matter of capacity." Which I suppose explains why there are some people who travel all over the earth and do not interiorly know one place from another, let alone the significance of their own home town.⁶³

This was not a matter, *à la* Jones, of finding a 'real Russia' that was politically different, but rather a place that was romantically significant (and of being of the right kind of traveller to find it): the urban part of the Soviet world was not appealing to her, drab and conformist as it was, as compared to 'the great majority of the Soviet population living in hope, working on the great 'common task' in the fields'.⁶⁴

Bound in this rejection of tour and of familiar aspects of a country was the wider cultural snobbery, evident from the late 19th century, directed by some who 'travelled' at those who were 'tourists' described by Paul Fussell as a matter of 'class-contempt', where travel – embodying a 'variety of means and independence' – was privileged

⁶¹ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 203.

⁶² Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 163. Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton also relates being 'angered' at foreigners only visiting Moscow. *Russian Closeup*, 94–5.

⁶³ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 222.

⁶⁴ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 257–8.

over the encroaching world of tourist clichés and packaged experiences.⁶⁵ Travel for Chesterton was not a matter of seeing the best Soviet achievements in quick succession, but rather a way of finding the spirit of a place, and doing this in a way not grubbily associated with the experiences of 'tourists'. Chesterton's attitude can best be summarised by her saying 'we preferred to take life as it came and attend on opportunity. Meanwhile, the climate was a pure joy, the country undreamt-of loveliness.'⁶⁶ Virulently anti-Soviet she was not, but rather, aspects of Soviet life were displeasing, and the tour was a symbol of these, but to a markedly different degree of severity and significance as compared to the views of Jones, Conolly, or Brown.

It is striking that her 1935 work, *Sickle or Swastika?* saw Chesterton take a very different approach. Gone were her suspicions about the tour and her overriding desire to see 'secret springs' (although she did describe her solo explorations of Moscow): she was a guest at the First Congress of Soviet Writers, August 1934, and thus given excellent food, accommodation and service during her stay in Moscow. There is still the impression she enjoyed a sense of difference from the ordinary tourist. She visited a commune near Moscow with an American working for VOKS, and whilst there other tourists arrived – Chesterton did not pour scorn on them as she did in her 1931 work, but she does note, before anything else, that 'there is a certain type common to all nations who, when in foreign parts, seem more eager to impart information as to the country they are visiting than to receive impressions or listen to facts!'.⁶⁷ However, the great majority of her trip, and her account, was concerned with guided tours, and rendezvous with figures as notable as Kornei Chukovskii, Samuil Marshak and Maxim Gorkii. This is one instance where we can see the shift in attitudes, and where the representation of travel *is* contingent on political attitudes: her experiences in Germany (she was anti-Nazi) and at the generous hands of VOKS go hand-in-hand with her determinedly pro-Soviet analysis in *Sickle or Swastika?*, which no longer saw such stark differentiation between the rural idyll and the mechanised city.

⁶⁵ Fussell, *Abroad*, 40–1.

⁶⁶ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 179.

⁶⁷ Ada Chesterton, *Sickle or Swastika?* (London: Stanley Paul, 1935), 250–1.

SUMMARY

Joseph Douillet's assertion that foreigners 'only' saw a sham is representative not of the tour's effectiveness as such, but of its discursive power.⁶⁸ All these travellers in some ways represent their travel as meaningful when conducted and managed independently as possible (even Citrine, who stressed his efforts to do this, as relatively limited as they were), rather than in the group, although their particular cases meant their ability to travel independently varied greatly. Yet within this broad attitude was variety. There was the explicitly individualist approach of Jones, which was in one sense so similar to Chesterton's own romantic idealism of venturing off the 'beaten track', and in all others so different, to the implied detachment from the tour in the self-representation of Conolly. Delafield's bemused study of other foreigners on tour contrasts to Lyall's deliberate, solo break with the tour, which in turn contrasts to Citrine's efforts to conduct himself as independently as possible within the tour apparatus. Travel in the Soviet Union was, even when in a group, at heart a matter of the (British) individual first encountering the Soviet collective, its symbols and its peoples: groups implied organisation, and organisation implies control – benign (Griffith), or malign (Jones). This control in turn reinforced the idea – for many, but by no means all – that Soviet sincerity was to be doubted generally, because cultural diplomacy existed, and this was then exemplified by acute, specific experiences. For some travellers the tour was less a severe problem, and less redolent of injustice, but there was still an influential schema of what was presented by cultural diplomacy and what was not. Whilst it is the former group – travellers like Jones, Brown, Conolly, Lyall, Delafield – that is the focus of this thesis, others, like Chesterton, Martin and Griffith, will remain in the picture, so as to remind us of the complexity that the dichotomy of 'unofficial' and 'official' might elide.

Accordingly, certain travellers sought a different kind of experience of the Soviet Union: one where Soviet people were assumed to be able to speak more freely, where the insincerity of cultural diplomacy, and the repression of the police and of propaganda, were not to be found. I shall move next to introduce a key idea regarding how the travellers considered the significance of who they met, and where they

⁶⁸ Douillet, *Moscow Unmasked*, xii.

specifically went, and also specifically how they travelled, introducing what they thought the 'unofficial' actually was. The next chapter explores British perceptions of the Soviet people and the latter's (imagined) geography, and the travel used to meet them, showing how this was intimately bound to the idea of an unofficial Soviet community, or communities, which were thought to live outside Soviet 'official' culture. There, in the imagined hinterlands of Soviet life, could be found the truth, free of insincere cultural diplomacy.

Chapter 3

Which Russians, and Where?

‘The tourist goes to Spain to see Spain, or to Italy to see Italy; but to Russia he goes to see Bolshevism. I went to Russia to see Russia’ – Robert Byron¹

‘The country and the city are changing historical realities, [...]. Yet the ideas and the images of country and city retain their great force’ – Raymond Williams²

To conclude this mapping of the discourse of travel, it is necessary to consider the travellers’ thoughts about the Soviet people themselves. With discovery, dissent and doubt as guiding themes, and the Tour as a meeting point of the traveller and cultural diplomacy *par excellence* – its true power lying in its discursive role rather than its logistical effectiveness – we are left to consider who travellers wanted to meet, and where they might be found. Here is detailed the imagined geography of the travellers, and their conceptualisation of the Soviet people.

The ‘who’ and the ‘where’ are closely bound. There is a thread, running through travel accounts of varied conclusions, that the city and the countryside were two sides of the Soviet experience, and a traveller should visit the latter to get a proper picture of affairs. Whilst the application and understanding of this dichotomy varied, with Gareth Jones once again most forcefully framing Soviet affairs in this way, these ideas were influential. When writing as such, these British writers placed themselves into a discussion about the nature of ‘Russia’ that had been ongoing long before 1917, such as the differences between capital and province. At the same time, this dichotomy of city/countryside, joined by others such as that of ‘rulers’ and ‘ruled’ also resulted in travellers placing themselves – more consciously – at odds with the Soviet government and state, sometimes even if admirers of the Soviet world. The question of ‘who’ and ‘where’ therefore ties into Michael David-Fox’s cultural competitive context: Westerners and Soviets alike sought to position themselves as the more cultured, knowledgeable party in their interactions. Travellers who posited the essential ‘who’ of the Soviet Union as being the peasant, and thus the countryside as the essential ‘where’, could thus place themselves as knowing the ‘truth’ of Soviet life better than

¹ Byron, *First Russia then Tibet*, 61.

² Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Vintage, 2013), 183.

the Soviet state and party itself. The 'who' and 'where' of travellers' conceptualisations speak of where truth was imagined to be found by travellers, and who would tell them this truth once the traveller reached that location. Therefore, the 'who' and the 'where' combine avoidance of the 'official' Soviet narrative with the seeking of the 'unofficial Russian'.³

This chapter explores these two key themes in more detail. It opens with a consideration of how travellers assessed 'the people' – what a Russian populist of the 1870s would call the *narod*, or a Soviet bureaucrat of 1933 the workers and peasants (travellers did not usually distinguish between *sredniak/bedniak*, but rather split the peasantry into *kulak* and otherwise) – of the Soviet Union, and what kind of role they played there, both in terms of Soviet politics and society, but also in terms of how they could provide insight to a foreigner. Then it examines these ideas via another theme, that of the city and the countryside, and so concludes the mapping of the imagined geography and conceptual framework travellers had when they sought to 'discover'. Here again it is noticeable that whilst the Soviet Union was the location and focus of study, it was the Russian people themselves that interested the vast majority of travellers. Other ethnicities were sublimated into the Russian 'whole' or considered in a much more fragmented fashion. That said, a differentiation between Soviet and Russian could be made, as will be explored below.

When it comes to foreign appreciation of the Russian people, the history of stereotypes necessarily forces itself before our attention. From Voltaire's celebration of Catherine absolutism to Charles de Perssonnel's '*Barbares Septentrionaux*' ('Barbarians of the North'), a picture of Russia as a place of necessary discipline facing boundless disorder existed in Western intellectual hinterlands.⁴ The discourse of travel examined here does not prove an exception as such, but it does add much nuance: criss-crossing currents of stereotype pervade, and it is worth considering a few examples from the corpus as a way of introducing some general concepts deployed by some foreigners that inform their accounts. As Martin Malia observes,

³ In terms of 'when', most visited in the summer/autumn, but others record being in the Soviet Union in winter also.

⁴ Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 197; 285.

contemporary perceptions of the USSR 'offer[ed] a recapitulation of all previous images of Russia, taken up again simultaneously or in rapid succession', although, as mentioned above, it is important not to take the idea of 'Soviet Russia never [...] [coming into] stable focus under Western eyes' too generally, for many individuals offered particular readings of the Russian peoples' character that were contingent on the USSR's particularities as they were encountered – indeed, these readings form the 'kaleidoscope' of views that Malia touches upon.⁵ For some travellers the 'Soviet' came into focus as being different – even opposed – to some other grouping/s, and this affected how they sought the truth of Soviet life.

The meeting of 'east' and 'west' underpinned much thought, as Malia has noted.⁶ Herbert Marchant made reference to contemporary British caricatures of Russians: 'Until a short time ago the aphorism "Scratch a Russian until you find a Tartar" was the sum of British comprehension of the Russian character.'⁷ Edwin Brown quotes his discussion of the Russian people with his companion Augustus, who explained how Russians exhibited a 'racial bonhomie'.⁸ Lockhart wrote that when in the Soviet Union, he found himself on 'another planet, where the inhabitants are as different from ourselves as Martians might be, and where all the old and known values are overturned.'⁹ Norah Rowan-Hamilton described the first crowds she saw, in Moscow, as 'like ants', a 'solid block of human beings advances like a wall'.¹⁰ Boorman noted the 'real team spirit' of people massed on Red Square on May Day, 1936.¹¹ On the other hand, Robert Byron and Ada Chesterton complained of the inefficiency and incapacity they encountered in the 'immemorial Russian bureaucracy'.¹² Indeed, often the observations of the 'Russians' were explicitly negative, in tone and in judgement. The travel writer Vivian Charles Buckley was very dismissive of 'Russians'. At lunch at a Leningrad hotel, he saw 'a crowd of about two hundred were standing around the entrance to the hotel, it seemed, to watch us'. Policemen 'bristling with arms' were

⁵ Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes*, 293.

⁶ Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes*, 292–3.

⁷ Marchant, *Scratch a Russian*, 5.

⁸ Edwin Taylor Brown, *This Russian Business*, 12

⁹ Lockhart, *Babel Visited*, 17.

¹⁰ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 23.

¹¹ Boorman, *So This is Russia*, 26.

¹² Byron, *First Russia, Then Tibet*, 5; Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 235.

there too. The foreigners went in for lunch – ‘the onlookers gaped at us’. Buckley compared them to film-fans in Hollywood, waiting outside a restaurant for a star to make an appearance: ‘so these poor, stupid, gaping Russian peasants, who had probably never even seen a foreigner, were hardly unique in their inquisitiveness’, he deigned.¹³ Harold Bellman saw ‘wretched people’ in Moscow, ‘numbed’ by revolution, a ‘nation suffering and having none to comfort them.’¹⁴ The general masses, Norah Rowan-Hamilton observed at the theatre, lacked colour and expression: ‘[I] looked round, row upon row of stolid faces, quiet and expressionless. Rows of stiff inanimate bodies, like good children sitting at attention. Do they feel nothing?’¹⁵

In summary: the people of the USSR were often described as anonymous, characterised by certain negative traits, and alien to the travellers. As John Carey notes in his study of British intellectuals (although this strikes one as true for much human interaction, as a function of dealing with abstracts), ‘Since the mass is an imaginary construct, displacing the unknowable multiplicity of life, it can be reshaped at will, in accordance with the wishes of the imaginer. Alternatively, it can be replaced by images, equally arbitrary, of “typical” mass men or mass women.’¹⁶ The Soviet people – ‘the Russians’ – were already perceived to be of a certain nature: stoic, numerous, downtrodden, even Oriental in some way.¹⁷ Interestingly, this had some similarities to how the ‘Russians’ viewed themselves. As David Brandenberger relates, in the mid-1920s Soviet ethnographers found that the peasantry did not distinguish between nationalities, either using a general ‘Russian’ label to describe their contemporaries, or focusing more on regional groupings (Tula, Samara, Kazan, etc.): ‘united more by chauvinism than by an articulate sense of national identity, when Russians did ascribe characteristics to themselves, they imagined an ethnic community colored by an abstract – almost maudlin – fascination with national suffering and the ability to endure hardship.’¹⁸ It appears that there was at least some

¹³ Buckley, *With a Passport and Two Eyes*, 63.

¹⁴ Bellman, *Baltic Background*, 48–51; 54–5.

¹⁵ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 99.

¹⁶ John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (London: Faber, 1992), 23.

¹⁷ Malia, *Russia under Western Eyes*, 91: the Russian ‘Oriental Despotism’ was one pole which foreign appreciation of Russia’s nature and global role gravitated towards, especially in the first half of the 19th century; David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 18.

¹⁸ David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 16.

overlap between foreign stereotypes of the stoic, downtrodden Russian nature and the understandings 'Russians' had of themselves as a group.

It is worth noting that many of these generalised views could also be positive in inflection, even if they could be as general and anonymised – as in the Davies' observation of villages from a train window showing an 'air of rustic efficiency' – as the negative observations made above.¹⁹ Julian Huxley was, if not positive, then curious in his describing visiting the Soviet Union by asking his readers to imagine 'a biologist in a world peopled only by vertebrates; and then introduce him to a lobster' – the Soviet was a 'wholly new type of social organism' to such an observer.²⁰ The Davies' observations at Lenin's tomb was of the 'masses' reverentially gazing at the man 'who had delivered them from medievalism', an obvious contrast to Ashmead Bartlett-Ellis's observation in the same place of people marching on Red Square passing by without looking at – let alone saluting – Lenin's tomb.²¹ In a further contrast, Boorman wrote of watching another parade on Red Square and marvelling at the 'unity' and 'implicit faith' the people had in their leaders. Elsewhere, he observed 'as for the [Soviet] people, they are well-nourished and they are undoubtedly happy' – Harben noted 'plump' legs as a sign of health in Moscow – (this text being accompanied by a helpful photo of 'A Russian woman and man'), whilst Soviet women were 'the same [as women] the world over!', for willingly queuing whilst shopping, eager for the chance of a good deal; his elision of a capitalist sale and a communist queue for provisions is indicative of how he read the Soviet world around him.²² Ada Chesterton, who was as gloomily negative about her experience of Minsk as Bellman was of Leningrad, related a far more positive, if similarly sweeping, view of the Soviet people in the countryside: at an outdoor exhibition near Minsk, she watched streams of workers and peasants pass a large statue of Lenin: 'Fascinated, I watched their act of homage, spontaneous, incredibly moving' as they 'paused as one man inside the gates to salute the compelling figure of their idol.'²³ Of the Sparta commune in Ukraine she wrote 'I never knew a place where such a rich and ripe contentment of body and soul seemed to

¹⁹ Davies & Davies, *A Trip to Soviet Russia*, 59–60

²⁰ Julian Huxley, *A Scientist Among the Soviets* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932), 1–2.

²¹ Bartlett-Ellis, *The Riddle of Russia*, 24–5.

²² Boorman, *So This is Russia*, 26 & 6 & 53; Harben, *Diary*, 22.

²³ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 71–2.

abide. There was a freedom, an eagerness, a burgeoning of the mind and the emotion that to me stamped the *communa* with a definite and most attractive personality.²⁴ Violet Conolly wrote of attending a play performance, which, in stark contrast to Norah Rowan-Hamilton's experience, showcased 'considerable emotion in the audience. [...] In spite of the resulting pandemonium, there was something very moving and genuine about this close sympathy between them [and the performers]', which she admired, and deplored the absence of such emotional connection between British theatre and its audience.²⁵

Essentialist observations of the Soviet people could even orientate around the problems of sincerity. John Brown wrote of the Russian character that 'telling the truth is little practised. Russians are naturally inclined to exaggeration and have a wretched habit of confusing facts with their own wishes. Thus a hotel clerk who was rung up at midnight denied that a guest was in the lounge, although the man in question was actually sitting there – a few yards away.'²⁶ Patrick Wright notes how 'Western suspicion that the Bolsheviks might use screens, masks, and dramatic tableaux to dupe their credulous and linguistically incompetent visitors was less an act of prophecy than a strategic redeployment of a theme long familiar from Russian literature.'²⁷ Maurice Baring had noted in his 1910 work *Landmarks in Russian Literature* that Russians were so sincere (in a sense) that their dishonesty was abundantly clear: Gogol's characters 'startle the foreign observer by their frank and almost universal dishonesty'.²⁸ Bosworth Goldman found in Russian-colonised Tashkent how feigned ignorance was a 'universal': 'I asked a man the way to the post office, and he replied he didn't know. Ten seconds later I followed him in through its main entrance twenty yards away.'²⁹ Peter Fleming wrote on this theme at some length, noting wryly that the 'Russians, though never much good at putting things through' might be better at 'carrying things off' – that is, faking it:

²⁴ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 199.

²⁵ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 105; the appeal of Soviet theatre to British playwrights like Hubert Griffith and Huntley Carter was significant; see Claire Warden, 'Moscow, Saint Petersburg, London: Hubert Griffith and the Search for a Russian Truth', in *Comparative Drama*, 49:1 (Spring 2015), 1–21.

²⁶ John Brown, *I Saw for Myself*, 234–5.

²⁷ Wright, *Iron Curtain*, 143.

²⁸ Maurice Baring, *Landmarks in Russian Literature* (London: Methuen, 1910), 70–1.

²⁹ Goldman, *Red Road Through Asia*, 179.

A talent for carrying things off implies a capacity for making a good impression on the superficial observer, and that capacity underlies the great and increasingly important art of salesmanship. Now the rulers of Russia to-day – the men of real power – have almost all got Jewish blood in them, and who make good salesmen if it is not the Jews? It is, I repeat, a curious thing that the Russians should be so bad at window-dressing. For they are bad. It requires an effort to look into the Moscow shop-windows. Those piles of wooden cheeses, that dummy ham, the cake on which the icing is enamel – surely they might be displayed to better advantage round the inevitable bust of Lenin?³⁰

Soviet sincerity was questioned therefore not only as a matter of cultural diplomacy, but also as a matter of stereotypes (anti-Semitic ideas were also expressed by workers to Jones: “Proletarians of world, unite” is Jewish. Only Jews are the same throughout the world’).³¹ As will be seen, the counterpoint to this was not necessarily the recognition of ‘honest Russians’, but rather the locating of truth away from Soviet reach – or at least, further from a Soviet ‘centre’ of control: cultural diplomacy was the stronger influence in the minds of these travellers when it came to determining the sincerity of Soviet people. It was this power that travellers were primarily concerned with, and their encounters with Soviet people show a more immediate, less generalised framing of Soviet individuals, even as stereotypes – negative and positive alike – abounded when the ‘mass’ were considered.

‘RULERS AND RULED’

Implicit in this observation of the masses, and explicit in observations about the Soviet hierarchy and its leaders, is an understanding of the significance of relationships between the state and its subjects, the Party and the population (the Party and the State are largely one and the same thing, in effect, in these accounts) – and in due course, the relationship between power and the personal. This is of more interest to us than the presence of generalised, essentialised understandings of a ‘Russian woman and man’, even as conceptual straitjackets continued to make an appearance.

³⁰ Fleming, *One’s Company*, 35.

³¹ Gareth Jones, Diary B1-13, March 1933.

The fact that the Soviet regime was ostensibly a government for the people, unlike during Tsarist Russia, was recognised as the essential tenet of its being. This was contested in the West, which argued as to whether the Soviet Union was a brutish tyranny, whether its dictatorship by the proletariat legitimately socialist, and whether achieving economic liberation was worth the cost of dictatorship.³² Travellers identified the hierarchy of Soviet society, but usually in broad terms. The government and party sat atop, the people sat below, and the relationship was seen as one of an imperfect rule trying to cajole a people to complete a great task, or a barbarism visited on the innocent, or something in between.³³ In terms of conclusion, reactions pivoted as the historiography suggests: for some, such as Gareth Jones, the distinction between ‘rulers and ruled’ (the subheading to a Jones-penned *Times* leader of 13 October 1930) was the distinction between oppressors and the oppressed. For others, such as Hubert Griffith, it was more of a mere fact of government – there had to be rulers and ruled, but the government earned its legitimacy via its ruling for the people. The focus here is how this idea permeated through the discourse of travel: how travellers sought rulers and ruled to find truth.

First, let us consider the narrative that generally pro-Soviet travellers offered as regards who they should talk to, in light of the concept of ‘rulers’ and ‘ruled’. The everyday amiability of ‘Russians’ could be used to make points about ruler/ruled dynamics: Griffith learned how to say, ‘good morning’, which earned him smiles and winks from Russians he passed. He decided this contradicted the “‘slaves being driven to work with the knout’” idea some foreigners had of Soviet life.³⁴ Kingsley Martin opined that the problem of communicating with Russians could reveal a multifaceted scene:

Russians are naturally chary of giving information that may be used in this [a negative] way. It is not only that they are likely to get into trouble and be accused

³² Malia, *Russia under Western Eyes*, 296–7.

³³ Both these views often rested on an assumption – ironically echoing a fundamental tenet of the Soviet *mentalité* – that every person encountered was necessarily political. Thus, Soviet people were seen to be, even implicitly, as unavoidably political animals in that their reactions were to be gauged as political statements.

³⁴ Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia*, 55.

of counter-revolutionary propaganda, but also that they are extremely patriotic and proud of their country. [...] But once you have got on to intimate terms with them, when they know that you have taken the trouble to understand their difficulties, they will talk – even responsible officials – freely and openly about the food shortage, the controversies inside the Communist Party, the problems of collectivisation and the difficulties of getting the factories to turn out quality produce.³⁵

Travellers more sympathetic to the Soviet Union were more likely to incorporate the Soviets' own official narrative of self-criticism (albeit only the most superficial aspect of it) as a way of explaining both Soviet material conditions, but also as a way of showing their – and the Soviets' – sincerity. The Soviet 'official' narrative was defended as a reasonable attempt to put a shine on things – not fundamentally deceive. Thus, whilst there could be a desire to also speak to non-guides, translators and others, there was not a uniform mistrust of these figures, and others such as factory bosses. Walter Citrine, to name but one, was reliant on them for the information he desired. Ada Chesterton, being generally favourable to much of what she saw in the Soviet Union, thought differently. She identified, explicitly, a difference between Stalin and the wider population. Writing on the closure of churches, she argued

Stalin wills for a complete Communism that eliminates individual expression, social or economic, but his will is not the people's, and though standardization obtains in the cities, in the country individual expression still persists.

'His will is not the people's' is unambiguously finding the dividing line between 'rulers' and 'ruled'.³⁶ Yet again, pro-Soviet attitudes were not necessarily united in how they framed and understood the complex relationships and arrangements of Soviet society.

Other travellers were much less sure that this official narrative of the guides and bureaucrats and press was to be trusted – and even those who did offer these narratives as useful explanations of the state of Soviet affairs were rarely unambiguously confident about them. For writers like Ada Chesterton and Hubert Griffith, discussions with the unofficial population could reinforce generally positive

³⁵ Martin, *Low's Russian Sketchbook*, 25–6.

³⁶ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 167.

attitudes about the Soviet Union: Griffith notes a walk across Moscow with ‘a Russian architect’, whose ‘quiet moderation’ about Soviet achievements Griffith found ‘was more impressive’ than propaganda. Griffith appreciated this encounter because it ‘gave me a sense, hitherto absent from the tour, and all the more valuable because of it, of meeting and mixing with a variety of people who had, for years on end, lived and worked and had their being under the Soviet Union.’³⁷ The unofficial Soviet reinforced the impression the official narrative had given Griffith. Chesterton found affirmation of the Soviet project’s promise in the farms and fields of Ukraine – the peasants showed her the future, rather than the guides telling her.

For those travellers who sought the unofficial as a confounding or contrasting narrative to the official, engagement with the unofficial brought a sense of divide between ‘rulers’ and ‘ruled’. As referenced in the first chapter, a sense of danger was not far from the minds of many travellers – even those who deemed it absent upon arriving in the Soviet Union. Indeed, this sense of danger was stronger as it related not to the travellers directly, but as to Soviet individuals, who lived in a society recognised by many (even pro-Soviet) to be politically repressive in a way unfamiliar to most Britons. Elizabeth Delafield related how this was discussed amongst foreigners in the USSR:

And we tell one another stories, obtained at second- or third-hand, of persons who uttered unguarded expressions of opinion, behind locked doors and closed windows, concerning Comrade Stalin, or the Abortion Law, or the Constitution, and then walked out into the street and were never heard of more. And of Russian wives married to foreign husbands, living in Paris or Geneva or Istanbul, writing indiscreet letters to relatives left behind in Moscow and one day vanishing abruptly and for ever from the country of their adoption.³⁸

The ‘rulers’, confident and powerful, would prevent the ‘ruled’ from speaking out. Thus, there are three themes at play here: the conceit and arrogance of the ‘rulers’, the isolation and/or suffering of the ‘ruled’, and the apparent threat of posed to the ‘ruled’ by the traveller provoking the paranoia and anger of the ‘rulers’.

³⁷ Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia*, 144–5.

³⁸ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 160.

The observed dangers and pressures for the 'ruled' were numerous and varied and examples will continue to surface throughout the thesis. They varied in significance and import. First came Soviet arrogance, implying a domination of their world. Violet Conolly, Elizabeth Delafield and John Brown all commented, with varying levels of severity, on how intolerable they found Intourist guides to be, exemplified in their attempt to coddle foreigners, and in the underlying conceit they betrayed about the Soviet enterprise. John Brown went further, complaining of some communists he met that they had a 'hard, over-emphasised, cynical matter-of-factness which antagonised me, exactly as had happened when I once met some English and Scotswomen Communists in Shoreditch Town Hall at an Austrian Relief meeting', whilst guides exhibited 'a Marxist conceit that beats anything you ever felt for cocksureness and despising the people that haven't got it. Their cool, insolent superiority – product of their one-way education and ignorance of the outside world irritated me, and I was in embroiled in hot arguments with some of them.'³⁹ Robert Byron despised how guides acted as though 'all fact is Marxist', feeling an urge to display a 'European' irreverence in response.⁴⁰ Elizabeth Delafield noted with irritation how her tour guide was so cocksure and had answers for everything that she found herself less enthusiastic about Soviet affairs than she might otherwise be.⁴¹ Walter Citrine reflected on how such enthusiasm could be complicated for the Soviets, too: his guide, Karchan, told him that 'Communists would do all sorts of things which individually they did not like, because it was in the interest of the State.'⁴² Citrine found the exaggeration of achievements unhelpful and aggravating.⁴³ Indeed, Citrine, relatively tolerant of Soviet propaganda, reported a 'foreign friend' whose views he appears to have agreed with:

if the Russians would tell visitors quite frankly that they had an enormous task and that they were only just touching the fringe, nobody would blame them. The trouble was that they gave people the wrong impression through

³⁹ John Brown, *I Saw for Myself*, 188; 222.

⁴⁰ Byron, *First Russia, Then Tibet*, 17.

⁴¹ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 76–8.

⁴² Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, 153.

⁴³ Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, 206.

showing them the best they had and representing this as typical of the whole.⁴⁴

Violet Conolly noted, meanwhile, that ‘the mind that questions officialdom is popularly unknown in Russia today.’⁴⁵

Dissent in this unofficial world was therefore noted with interest. Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton witnessed women complaining to members of the managing council of a factory about their lodgings: ‘They represented that type of woman who is able to give vent to her feelings in whatever company she may happen to find herself. [...] The women shouted and screamed and used unprintable language about the Bolsheviks. [...] I shall always admire the courage of these women. I now look back on the incident with the conviction that I never encountered a truer expression of feeling during the whole of my stay in Soviet Russia.’⁴⁶ Archibald Lyall encountered a group of people outside a church in Kyiv, most of whom (some left the scene conspicuously quickly, he wrote) surrounded him and cried “‘*hleba nyet*” (this was summer 1933), which Lyall, contrary to his guide’s explanations, understood as a serious and significant complaint about contemporary conditions (although the congregation of a church as a source of alms has a long history in Russian and Ukrainian culture).⁴⁷ Lockhart, continuing on his writing about the power of the GPU, noted how ‘a young Russian whom I met told me that a few days earlier he had discovered by pure chance that his most intimate friend, whom he met and with whom he talked every day, was himself a member of the GPU’, and concluded that this only evidenced the atmosphere of fear that Soviet people lived in.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, 142. Sir James Purves-Stewart, a doctor on a 1932 trip organised by the Society for Cultural Relations, noted that the foreigner is ‘at first amused, interested, and stimulated; later he becomes bored, and finally nauseated, by the plethora of blood-red banners with their communistic slogans’. *A Physician’s Tour in Soviet Russia* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1933), 167.

⁴⁵ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 43.

⁴⁶ Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, *Russian Closeup*, 66–7

⁴⁷ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 134–5. Adele Lindenmeyr notes the development of charities in late Imperial Russia that supplemented religiously inspired charity: ‘Orthodox theology consistently regarded charity as a personal spiritual duty’. ‘The Ethos of Charity in Imperial Russia’, in *The Journal of Social History* 23:4 (Summer 1990), 679–694, at 680–1. V. C. Buckley saw beggars outside a church in Leningrad and thought little of it. *With a Passport and Two Eyes*, 84.

⁴⁸ Lockhart, *Babel Visited*, 38.

Finally, there could be identification of a mortal battle between rulers and ruled. Gareth Jones spoke to a man he considered ‘*resolute, ruthless, cruel*’, who was travelling on a train to Kharkiv (Jones had climbed aboard after walking through famine-stricken villages), and who wanted to ‘smash’ the *kulak*.⁴⁹ Jones despised this official, using him as a symbol of Soviet cruelty in the face of mass suffering. Indeed, many of these travel accounts see significant attention paid to such expressions of discontent: the Soviet state produced suffering, and thus sufferers. Some travellers were interested in finding this suffering (Jones again as the most striking example), and their readings of them often fell into a simple ruler/ruled dichotomy that pivoted on the infliction of suffering, with the victims bearing the truth of Soviet life. Norah Rowan-Hamilton gloomily wrote of how ‘often we heard that word "They"! And always it seemed to bring a cold, sinister air over the conversation’: ‘they’ being the authorities.⁵⁰

There was also a particularly acute type of danger perceived by some foreigners: that their own actions might endanger Soviet people. Ernest Benn precisely offered this danger as another reason for his refusal to visit the Soviet Union. He thought that he might endanger Soviet people by trying to befriend them.⁵¹ Violet Conolly elaborated on how dangerous foreigner-contact might be for Soviet individuals. A ‘Mr A’ had worked as a guide and interpreter for some foreigners, and, she reported, was ‘banished from Moscow for three years’ when one foreigner had published a critical work on Soviet life after a trip on which Mr A was a guide.⁵² How true this was, and how Conolly could be sure of its veracity, is not known, but it was offered by Conolly as an example of how careful foreigners might need to be as a result of the cruelty of Soviet responses to its own individuals. That said, it did not prevent Conolly producing a highly critical account, albeit she named very few of the Soviet people she encountered. Bernard Pares related how a ‘perfectly harmless’ old acquaintance in Moscow would not see him due to ‘the risk.’⁵³ Less specifically, Lockhart related how he was warned that it might even be unfair for foreigners to push their luck on tour, by

⁴⁹ Jones, Diary B1-15, March 1933.

⁵⁰ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 151.

⁵¹ Benn, *About Russia*, 15–17.

⁵² Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 30–1.

⁵³ Pares, *Moscow admits a Critic*, 37.

asking guides to take them to places not on the itinerary.⁵⁴ Violet Lort recalled in her memoirs how her Russian tutor in Britain, a Madame Ivanova, had entrusted Violet with a coat, to give to Ivanova's grandmother in Moscow. Lort wrote that their guide, when told of this mission, told them "My goodness you can't do that, she will be absolutely suspect if you send her a coat. If you go, it will be even worse, and if you post it they will note it has been posted by foreigners and you will put her in great danger".⁵⁵ The guide advised that Violet might be able to give the coat to the woman 'somewhere else'; what is of interest is the guide's warning itself.⁵⁶ The subtleties of a Soviet individual's role worked in other ways: Henry Harben noted that those in 'government circles' might suffer more for such contact than 'unimportant people' – 'indeed, the foreigners working in the factories', he wrote, 'experience[d] nothing of the kind' – xenophobia, that is. Rather, 'foreigners with Russian wives assure us that their wives' relations hardly dare come to the house for fear of trouble with the authorities, and anyone of importance is suspect who has relations with foreigners'; 'although we found ordinary people willing and anxious to talk to us, the important people fought shy.'⁵⁷ Norah Rowan-Hamilton concluded similarly: 'were it not for the fact that they [government officials] live in a perpetual excitement of spying and being spied on, they and their wives would lead dull lives.'⁵⁸ Later in her work, Rowan-Hamilton relates the story of 'Madame X', a Russian in Leningrad who had chaperoned the French consul's daughter. Madame X had vanished after, it was said, talking to the daughter about the Peter and Paul fortress in Leningrad, and Soviet justice more broadly: "Madame X had left Leningrad and would not return."⁵⁹ This chimes with Michael Hughes' observation, and those made by Fitzroy Maclean in *Eastern Approaches*, of how British diplomatic staff found it hard to engage with Soviet individuals, such were the pressures on Soviet staff employed in the buildings, and on those working with foreign diplomatic staff – Maclean noting 'contact with foreigners was notoriously fatal'.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Lockhart, *Babel Visited*, 24.

⁵⁵ Violet Lort, 'Violet Goes to Russia' (unpublished manuscript), University of Leeds, MS.1441/1, 9–10.

⁵⁶ Lort's recollections state that the coat was sent to Muriel Paget, and eventually ended up with the grandmother.

⁵⁷ Harben, *Diary*, 56.

⁵⁸ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 55.

⁵⁹ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 284.

⁶⁰ Michael Hughes, *Inside the Enigma* (London: Hambleton Press, 1997), 230–1; Fitzroy Maclean, *Eastern Approaches* (London: Penguin, 2009), 24–5. *Eastern Approaches* was first published 1949.

Walter Citrine wrote similarly, after conversing with foreign residents of Moscow upon returning from the Caucasus:

[Intimidation] was so bad that few Russians cared to be seen talking to a foreigner. [...] [The foreign residents] were extremely interested to hear my descriptions of the housing conditions in Baku and other cities. It was the most difficult thing for resident foreigners to gain admittance into the new dwellings. In view of the fear of their Russian acquaintances of associating with foreigners, it was embarrassing to visit them.⁶¹

Hugh Dalton, on the other hand, noted that during his summer 1932 trip, he was told that whilst 'social contacts of embassies and consulates' with the Soviet population were 'very difficult', and that 'they' [Soviet people] won't accept invitations', it was the case that 'some are willing to come, if a lot are coming together, but not alone.'⁶²

Away from this formal bubble where contact was difficult and patchy, travellers enjoyed contact with Soviet individuals in various forms. Indeed, the fear of contamination was not universal, and what is noticeable here is how most stories about this fear were just that: stories told to the traveller, who then related them to their reader, rather than born of personal experience of such fear. It is certainly true that some travellers *did* encounter Soviet individuals obviously unwilling to talk, but what is striking is, as with the idea of the Tour, the idea of the fear of contamination was perhaps more powerful as an idea than a reality: that is, this fear was *not* the key determinant of foreigner-Soviet interaction, even as it most certainly was, at least, a latent part of the fabric of such interaction. Despite Robert Byron's remark that 'it is impossible to meet Russians except on specific business', Soviet people talked to foreigners, and if they did not, they (appeared) indifferent, not visibly scared: Peter Fleming wandered the streets of several Russian cities, noting how little attention was offered to him: 'He [the foreigner] is far better dressed than anybody he meets; he is clearly that rarity, a bourgeois. But nobody takes much notice of him; he is not made to feel a freak and an intruder.'⁶³ This indifference was repeated in a more specific,

⁶¹ Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, 297.

⁶² Hugh Dalton, Dalton papers, LSE, 1/54, fol. 5

⁶³ Byron, *First Russia, Then Tibet*, 66; Fleming, *One's Company*, 34.

more amiable, instance, too. Fleming spent some time on board a train on the Trans-Siberian railway, and in his compartment was

a young Russian, about whom I remember nothing at all. Nor is this surprising, for I never found out anything about him. He spoke no English, and I spoke hardly any Russian. A phrase-book bought in Moscow failed to bridge the gap between us. An admirable compilation in many ways, it did not, I discovered, equip one for casual conversation with a stranger. [...] I did not want to mislead him. So for two days we grinned and nodded and got out of each other's way and watched each other incuriously, in silence. On the second day he left the train, and after that I had the compartment to myself.⁶⁴

The simple point here is the pointed simplicity of the scene: two men sat in a train carriage, unable to communicate and entirely unthreatening to one another. This is not to say such a scene should be read as entirely innocent, but there is a weight of examples in these travel accounts that leads one to conclude that, as with the discursive influence of cultural diplomacy, the influence of fear and contamination was present more in the mind of the traveller (at *least*) than in reality. The reactions of Soviet individuals will be explored much more thoroughly in the latter part of this thesis, but for now it is key to keep in mind this observation.

SOVIET AND RUSSIAN

The dichotomy of 'rulers' and 'ruled' leads to a further fundamentally significant distinction made by certain travellers about the people they encountered: that is the difference between the people and things which were 'Soviet', and those which were 'Russian'. This allows us to interrogate the meanings of stereotypes and the matter of 'Rulers and Ruled' even further, exploring yet more subtle layers of meaning that travellers revealed in their explicit pronouncements and implicit assumptions. Edwin Brown wrote – although it was not a thought he explored thoroughly – that upon boarding his ship to Leningrad in London, he was struck by how odd he found the concept of a 'Russian Ship', when Russia was a land of 'plains and pine forests, dust,

⁶⁴ Fleming, *One's Company*, 46–7.

mud, villages, [...] and several feet of snow.’⁶⁵ Such ideas of a ‘backward’/‘authentic’ Russia and a ‘modern’/‘superficial’ Soviet run through many accounts of the time, and others worked with this theme to a much greater degree. Archibald Lyall recorded an extended conversation to this effect. Lyall was aboard a train with several foreign journalists, including Kingsley Martin on the trip that would be depicted in *Low’s Russian Sketchbook*. The party began to discuss the need to distinguish between what is ‘Russian’ and what is ‘Bolshevik’, and how to assess Soviet conditions, keeping in mind the fact of pre-revolutionary conditions. The discussion continued

‘...of course, at the same time, it’s most important not to allow one’s own personal misfortunes and discomforts to prejudice one at all. For one thing, the bugs were probably quite as bad in Russia before the War. One must try and ignore all that kind of thing except in so far as it really throws any light on the Russian character and way of doing things.’

‘Of course, what one must try and do is to distinguish between what is Bolshevik and what is merely Russian.’

‘I don’t believe that it is really possible. I believe the two are so inextricably wound up.’

‘I don’t know,’ I said. ‘I think one can say that the hopeless muddle they have made of, say, the agricultural problem, is distinctively Bolshevik, while the fantastic disorganisation of the transport system is merely Russian.’

‘That’s what I’ve been telling them,’ Kingsley Martin interposed.

‘At the same time, it’s an argument that cuts both ways. The people you see bathing and disporting themselves in the Park of Culture and Rest, and so forth, may look healthy and hearty merely because they’re Russians. It doesn’t prove that they haven’t been through things that would kill anybody except Russians.’

‘And conversely the street crowds in Leningrad and Moscow may not smile or laugh much because Russians have blank sort of faces and don’t smile and laugh anyhow. It doesn’t prove that they are unhappy.’

⁶⁵ Edwin Taylor Brown, *This Russian Business*, 8.

'My view is that the muddle they've made of things here in Russia doesn't affect the merits and otherwise of Communism a tittle. The English or the Germans might be able to make it work, while it's fairly clear that the Russians never would be able to make any system work.

An exasperated journalist said: 'One day I shall write a book called *Mother Russia*. If ever there was a second-rate, useless, worthless nation it is the Russians.'⁶⁶

In this discussion we see much ground already covered, namely the significance of stereotypes, and the sense of dichotomy between the rulers and ruled. What is also clear is a sense of difference between 'Soviet' and 'Russian' – in effect, a specific way of reframing rulers and ruled. Even as it elided, as was common, nations and regions behind 'Russian', it did allow for a more particular understanding of what the foundations and implications of rulers and ruled were in the Soviet Union, and how this would ultimately guide how a traveller sought the truth of the Soviet world.⁶⁷ It must be noted that this divide could mend and re-divide depending on the traveller and their experiences: like any conceptual framework, it only stood up to so much reality and was also contingent on preconceived notions.

Gareth Jones posited a significant divide between the Communist Party and the great majority of the country. He declared that the dictatorship of the proletariat was backed only by 10% of the population, the 'active', as against the 90% majority, the 'passive', with the minority called 'Communist'.⁶⁸ Jones's views centred on collectivisation, the severe aftermath of which he witnessed in eastern Ukraine and southern Russia in summer 1931 and spring 1933. The 90% were, in terms of Jones's

⁶⁶ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 110–11.

⁶⁷ Dorothy Galton, secretary of the School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies, accompanied Bernard Pares on his trip recounted in *Moscow admits a Critic*. Galton wrote of Pares: 'My best recollection of him on this visit was when he stood in the street looking at the bustling passers-by and delightedly exclaimed: "But they're just the same!" It was the Russians that he loved, not their particular brand of party or government.' Dorothy Galton, 'Sir Bernard Pares and Slavonic Studies in London University, 1919–39', 491; Isaiah Berlin wrote to his parents from Leningrad, September 1945, describing his joy at hearing Russian in Moscow: he 'had forgotten that such emotions & expressions existed', that these conversations 'are unlike anything to be heard anywhere else on earth.' Isaiah Berlin, in Henry Hardy (ed.), *Flourishing: Letters 1928–1946* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2004), 591.

⁶⁸ Jones, 'Rulers and Ruled', *The Times*, 13 October 1930, 13f; Jones 'Fanaticism and Disillusion', *The Times*, 14 October 1930, 15f.

framework, the peasantry, although he included many of the dejected urban Soviets in his 'passive' group. A world of hungry peasants is directly contrasted with his depiction of the brutal Communist on the train to Kharkiv:

He [the Communist] tells me that he is a member of the Politodel (the Political Department), and I prick up my ears, for the Political Department is that detachment of many thousands of Communists who have been sent to the villages to make a violent drive to force the peasants to work. He looks ruthless and cruel. 'We are semi-military,' he says. 'We'll smash the kulak (the peasant who was formerly better off) and we'll smash all opposition.' He clenches his fist.⁶⁹

This led to Jones identifying 'Two Russias', and then a 'Real Russia' – that which was not Communist, but rather ex-nobility or peasant, *lishenets* (a disenfranchised person) or worker. This idea had precedents in both Russian and British culture, as we shall see.

The divide was often conceptualised in subtler ways. Some travellers recognised the difference as being temporally focused: 'old' Russia and 'new' Soviet, even as they invested the distinction with less significance. Delafield found volumes two and three of the *Fairchild Family*, a novel by Mary Martha Sherwood, in Moscow. She wonders at their provenance, and buys them as 'part of English life, and the English tradition', which she contrasts to the Soviet world – but also to 'old Russia': 'Moscow [old or new] is no place for the Fairchild family', she concluded.⁷⁰ Bernard Pares's 'first and last thought' during his trip in late 1935-early 1936 was that the USSR 'with its principles and its policy and its press, seemed to me be something not essential to it [Russia], though not necessarily discordant': the Russian and the Soviet are not one and the same.⁷¹ Conolly's *Soviet Tempo* is suffused with a sense of division, not articulated, but implied, between the Soviet and the Russian – not as a matter of stark fundamental difference, but more in the sense of the Soviet as restricting Conolly from accessing the Russian, and existing alongside the Russian (even as she talks of 'Russia' and the

⁶⁹ Jones, 'Soviet Confiscate Part of Workers' Wages', *Daily Express*, 5 April 1933, 3a–e.

⁷⁰ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 153.

⁷¹ Pares, *Moscow admits a Critic*, 31.

'USSR' interchangeably); Baku, for her, is both Russian and Soviet, as well as 'Oriental'.⁷² It is noticeable that for Conolly there is 'Soviet fog' but a 'Russian life', that the 'creative spirit of Russia is in [Soviet] chains'.⁷³ John Lockhart noted that the Bolsheviks were a minority, but that the peasantry were politically irrelevant in any meaningful sense, with the Soviet propaganda directed at the population distressingly intense and powerful.⁷⁴ Ada Chesterton saw differences that have a symmetry with Jones's views. Chesterton made some attempt to explore a gap between the Soviet ideal and the Soviet reality: 'In Russia you learn to distinguish between Soviet facts and Soviet ideals,' and how, as seen, Stalin's will was not that of the people's, but nevertheless led to the abhorrent 'standardization' of Russian cities.⁷⁵ Her observations on Soviet ideals and realities were echoed by Kingsley Martin on Russians being 'chary' to give information lest it be read as a critique of the ideal, rather than the reality. Further to this, however, Chesterton also recognised that the 'left behind' could still have something going for them: at a church in Kyiv, she described a church service: 'I looked back on a sea of faces all watching with reverence and faith', 'he had a deep voice fraught with understanding [...]. And as I watched the dense mass of people passing through the big doors, listened to the tread of hundreds of feet, I realized that here was a force that, withstanding centuries and centuries of corruption and decay, would survive every kind of revolution'. Here 'Russia' lived on despite the 'Soviet' being in the ascendancy.⁷⁶

Age was significant for some travellers as a guide for reading affairs Chesterton also noted seeing 'unhappy people left over from pre-Revolution days', describing them as facing a future of 'little hope': 'dispossessed of their old life, too cowed and bewildered to understand the new, workers and intelligentsia alike are the helots of the cities. To-day has not use for yesterday in the USSR.'⁷⁷ Chesterton's curious reading of workers as 'helots' seemed posited more on where they happened to be (the cities), rather than signifying a fundamental issue with the Soviet regime in its own

⁷² Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 102–3.

⁷³ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 28, 159, 174–5.

⁷⁴ Lockhart, *Babel Visited*, 62–8.

⁷⁵ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 115; 167.

⁷⁶ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 167–8.

⁷⁷ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 69.

terms (after all, no true Soviet city should have helots). Elizabeth Delafield noted that the guides she met were all very young, and this was 'significant' – they were 'born and bred under the new regime'.⁷⁸ Delafield wrote that she wished 'one could talk to the old people, or the people living in remote villages, or the few remaining White Russians'.⁷⁹ Ethel Mannin, at the German colonist village of Gnädenburg (now Vinograd) in the northern Caucasus, wrote of people telling them that 'the old people, yes, they would be sad [that local youths had been conscripted into the Red Army], we were told; they were not infused with the spirit of the new world, the new life.'⁸⁰ Marchant wrote of his time at a dance party in Archangelsk, at which a 'Gold Coast fireman' of a cargo ship (who 'perhaps only a year ago had been running around in a loincloth') danced with Soviet girls from the local timber mills. There 'the floor was a slowly revolving mass of happy, enthusiastic, perspiring, Soviet youth', and his impressions of a contented youth were reinforced at Bolshevo, although Marchant's scepticism remained intact: the 'rapturous word pictures of the gratitude' felt by the youthful inmates of Bolshevo towards 'their Fair Godmother, the State, brought many an emotional lady [tourists] to the verge of tears.' Marchant decided the enthusiasm was genuine but was doubtful as to its wider resonance and significance.⁸¹ John Brown related the words of a Briton working in Leningrad: 'The chief complaint of the people was not against the Government decrees, he said. It was the grumbling of the old about the way in which the youth was given priority – the best jobs, the best food, the best homes.'⁸² Brown also wrote that 'the minds of young Russians were divided into neat compartments, into one or other of which everything they read, heard, or watched fell. There was no need for question or argument. Anyone who doubted them must have never read the Marxist scriptures.'⁸³ Archibald Lyall's desire to find the unofficial Russian stemmed from having seen 'dozens of these demonstrations of Young Pioneers'.⁸⁴ Gareth Jones evoked Turgenev in his framing of an encounter he witnessed between a member of the *Komsomol* and his father:

⁷⁸ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 231.

⁷⁹ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 249.

⁸⁰ Mannin, *South to Samarkand*, 160.

⁸¹ Marchant, *Scratch a Russian*, 36 & 69.

⁸² John Brown, *I Saw for Myself*, 185.

⁸³ John Brown, *I Saw for Myself*, 247.

⁸⁴ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 141–2.

Which Russians, and Where?

Son: 'Terrible conditions before revolution.'

Father: 'Nonsense, we lived splendidly.'

Son: 'But worked for employer.'

Father: 'But we work for far greater slave driver now. Now it's absolute slavery and they've ruined the peasant.'

Son: 'But our *Gigants*.'

Father: '*Gigants* indeed. When they've robbed whole country of bread, when people are dying of hunger everywhere, when the next crop will be worse still. The workers will be too hungry to work in these *Gigants*. They've cleared country of horses.'⁸⁵

Youth, for Jones, was not necessarily a useful guide however: as will be seen, he met younger members of Soviet society who criticised Soviet life.

For some, the potential distinctions offered as routes of analysis were apparently too numerous, the explanations unsatisfying: Norah Rowan-Hamilton lamented how 'people' (other foreigners in the USSR) talked about "Russia" and "the Bolsheviks", and asked

[W]hat do they mean? There are a dozen 'Russias.' Twenty different kinds of 'Bolshies.' A curious sense of – not exactly fear... more like excitement seized hold of me. What was really happening... out there in this nightmarish world?⁸⁶

That said, what is clear from this is how travellers, whether broadly pro- or anti-Soviet, saw certain categories of people as being the most likely sources of useful information on Soviet life. The influence of cultural diplomacy was pervasive, even in the negative, and this was linked to an understanding (of differing extents) of a tension between the rulers and ruled of the Soviet Union. It is also noticeable that others – Walter Citrine and John Brown for example – did not place much stress, if any, on the distinction between Soviet and Russian. Eliding a negative distinction was a boon for pro-Soviet

⁸⁵ Jones, Diary B1-13, March 1933.

⁸⁶ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 239.

writers: Hubert Griffith noted that given Soviet industrial success, the conceit that the 'Russian temperament' would make them bad engineers seemed foolish – the two did not contradict, he argues, and this implies an affinity between them.⁸⁷ Harold Bellman, who disliked much of what he saw, ultimately concluded that 'Russia is still Russia.'⁸⁸ More common across the corpus was a distinction made between the city and the countryside.

THE CITY AND THE COUNTRYSIDE

The imagined locations of the rulers/the Soviet/the official and the ruled/the Russian/the unofficial were significant, and here the act of travel and the discourse of travel come together most clearly. For both defenders and critics of Soviet cultural diplomacy, engagement with the Soviet world was often first experienced in Moscow and Leningrad, the two chief cities and key points of arrival via train or ship respectively. Yet the 'real Russia' was often explicitly posited, or at least suggested, as being best sought elsewhere: in other cities beyond Moscow and Leningrad, and even outside of the cities entirely. Certain writers offered their routes to readers as a way of showing their concern with finding a range of experiences on their travels, and/or, more significantly, a different kind of 'Russia'. It is important to establish that even as some posited a radically different 'unofficial' Soviet experience, others were less inclined to write of dramatic divides in experience, but rather related subtler ones. In sum, however, the city and countryside constituted distinct geographical and conceptual spaces for engagement between foreign and Soviet ideas, with much tension between them. Here too the themes of ruler and ruled, and Soviet and Russian, are woven into a greater whole.

The conceptual hinterlands behind the foreigners' readings of Soviet geography are significant. Regarding the city and countryside, there are significant differences between British and Soviet expectations. In both societies, elite understandings of the city and countryside formed powerful imagined geographies that dominated readings of the actual city and countryside. If we compare the two, we see how certain British

⁸⁷ Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia*, 168.

⁸⁸ Bellman, *Baltic Backgrounds*, 84.

understandings of the countryside – born of a reaction to the British industrial revolution of the 19th century – are almost directly opposed to those of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union. At the same time, a different British perspective is closer to that of the Soviet view, to some extent, and sees the difference between city and countryside less as a matter of romantic nostalgia, but rather a matter of the logistics and logic of negotiating Soviet cultural diplomacy. It must be stressed that these are both elite understandings of the city/countryside dichotomy and shouldn't be taken as expressive of the range or nuance or the internal conflicts of each culture's relationship with these concepts and spaces, but we can still point to likely influences in the discourse. The British travellers tended to be English middle-class professionals – although as John Brown shows, were not exclusively so – writers, doctors, journalists. An important elite British discourse of the time saw the British (English) countryside as expressive of Britain/England's true nature; or at the least, as a repository of finer values than the city.⁸⁹ This was expressed even by the successive Prime Ministers, Ramsay MacDonald and Stanley Baldwin, by numerous public figures present and past (the cleric William Inge, the popular philosopher Cyril Joad, the historian Richard Henry Tawney, the legacies of Rudyard Kipling, G K Chesterton and William Morris, among others) and by the middle classes themselves in a burgeoning appetite for living in the country, for books about 'national character' and 'traditions'. The cities that housed most of the population were secondary to the countryside's charms and essential connection to that which was considered most profound and meaningful in English life.⁹⁰ John Stevenson writes thus:

[From the 1880s] the Englishman was often portrayed as 'at heart a countryman', and national values as being based upon the timeless qualities of the landscape and village life. These ideas were carried forward into the 1920s by the Georgian poets and painters in a period when new challenges were being faced in the upheavals and uncertainties of 'modernity': the Great War, the Russian Revolution, the onset of the depression, and the rise of totalitarian governments of both left and right. A more prosaic but potentially even more subversive

⁸⁹ Martin Wiener, *The Decline of the English Industrial Spirit, 1850–1980*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 72; 100; 118.

⁹⁰ Wiener, *The Decline of the English Industrial Spirit*, 73–4; Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, 134–5.

challenge came from ‘modernity’ in a rather different guise, in the advance of a secular, cosmopolitan, consumerist mass culture, often American in origin. Against these threats to national identity could be pitted the unchanging values of the “English” countryside.⁹¹

Peter Clarke notes how J. B. Priestley’s 1933 *English Journey* contrasted the ‘declining industrial North’ and the ‘historic rural South’ against the sprawl of suburbia. Edwardian culture saw the development of ‘tramping’: walking from place to place for the joy of it.⁹² The countryside in the English imagination was a bulwark against both 19th-century industrialism and 20th-century modernity.⁹³ Raymond Williams explored these themes in literature, showing how the notion of a ‘golden age’ rooted in the rural past was deployed in English literature for many years before the 1930s, contrasting H. G. Wells’s pessimistic view of the developing urban world contrasts to William Morris’s ‘gentler and more idyllic vision’ of Britain.⁹⁴

Indeed, over the course of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, the countryside took on a ‘specific cultural vision’, which saw the dominant word usage change from ‘countrysides’ (multiple, literal) to ‘countryside’ (singular, conceptual).⁹⁵ In this countryside – and this attitude permeated both left and right – various pleasures were located; the masses were absent, and so too was the acquisitiveness of capitalism. Relentless change (whether it was read as alienating in a Marxist sense or not) was not evident. Tradition, antiquity and stability were prized as the countryside’s (and thus the nation’s) true inheritance – this sounds conservative *par excellence*, but the left imagined rural co-operation and economic justice as part of this scene too, over the squalor and individualistic greed of the capitalist cities.⁹⁶ The absence of peasants from British life, who vanished after the enclosure of land by the mid-18th century, left space for an idealised rural population: craftsmen, farmers, and retiring middle class families living in the benevolent shadow of the large country house, which remained

⁹¹ John Stevenson, ‘The Countryside, Planning and Civil Society in Britain, 1926–1947’ in Jose Harris (ed.), *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 191–212, at 192.

⁹² Hughes, *Beyond Holy Russia*, 53.

⁹³ Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, 149.

⁹⁴ Williams, *The Country and the City*, 35–6; 40; 274.

⁹⁵ Clare Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4–5.

⁹⁶ Wiener, *The Decline of the English Industrial Spirit*, 43; 58–9.

the pinnacle of English social capital. In sum, these ideas of the English countryside were strongly romanticised, and were generally very positive.

These views could even inform earlier looks at Russia, perhaps most famously represented by Stephen Graham's pre-1917 works based on numerous trips to the Tsarist empire. In the words of his biographer Michael Hughes, Graham was 'convinced' that in Russia – and specifically in the Russian peasantry – there could be found 'a precious kernel, an intuitive understanding of wholeness that transcended the material conditions of everyday life, and brought together the here and now with a sense of the eternal.'⁹⁷ For Graham, the urban world was sadly encroaching on the rural.⁹⁸ Hughes puts the idealisation of the Russian peasant in Britain at the door of Graham. Graham was strongly influenced by his father, a founding editor of *Country Life*, in his 'idealisation of the countryside', where the peasant was the source of 'greatness' in human spirituality, a bulwark against an industrialised and materialistic world.⁹⁹ Tolstoi's appeal to peasant simplicity also contributed to these perceptions of Russia in Britain.

The British relationship to 'Deep England' and its rural idyll can be over-stated. First, this is a distinctly English conception, and English politics and culture can (much like 'Russia' standing in for the whole Soviet Union) elide historical and contemporary complexities and differences between the constituent peoples of the United Kingdom. Second, the British experience was not so different in comparison to contemporary continental European cultures, as Peter Mandler argues. Mandler writes that the preoccupation with the rural idyll was largely part of a '*derrière-garde*', 'small, articulate but not necessarily influential' group in pre-war England.¹⁰⁰ Rather, Mandler suggests that the rapid urbanisation of the English population, and the attendant development of a culture 'more populist, commercial and present-minded' meant rural nostalgia was not required as Martin Wiener implies. It was the literal absence of the peasantry that made this nostalgia only so compelling for the wider population: most people lived and

⁹⁷ Hughes, *Beyond Holy Russia: The Life and Times of Stephen Graham* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2014), 5.

⁹⁸ Hughes, *Beyond Holy Russia*, 62–6.

⁹⁹ Hughes, 'Stephen Graham and Russian Spirituality: The Pilgrim in Search of Salvation' in Anthony Cross (ed.), *A People Passing Rude*, 163–75, at 165–6.

¹⁰⁰ Peter Mandler, 'Against "Englishness": English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia', in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 7 (December 1997), 155–175, at 160.

worked in cities (and most elites embraced new opportunities therein): the urban was the new reality, the basis for future progress. The connection with the land had been sundered long before the turn of the 20th century, rather than temporarily disconnected, as in peasant experiences in 19th-century France.¹⁰¹ Mandler concludes that in the inter-war period, whilst interest in the countryside grew, so too did the fact of suburbia: he describes English culture then as ‘post-urban’, rather than rural, seeking to *use* the countryside rather than preserve or recreate the imagined communities of Merrie England.¹⁰² There is a clear overlap between Mandler and Weiner here in the actual development of suburban lifestyles and the imagined geography of the English countryside being seen as providing a balm of sorts, rather than a radical solution, to the British population.

Indeed, these two aspects of British culture – the veneration of the countryside and the embrace of modernity and industrialisation – are both relevant here. Of all the travellers examined here, Ada Chesterton perhaps represents the former kind of conceptualisation of the countryside most clearly (albeit only in her *My Russian Venture* of 1931; in her 1935 *Sickle or Swastika?* she declared ‘the streets of Moscow were a perpetual tonic to me’).¹⁰³ Gareth Jones did not subscribe to such romanticism (of either country or the city). Jones used the term ‘tramping’, but his approach was not to take in the spirit of the fields and farms, *à la* Chesterton, but to seek, directly and swiftly, the ‘truth’ of the Soviet political reality. John Brown, however, did write *I was a Tramp*, published in 1934 as an account of his time spent amongst the unemployed of England. He walked and hitchhiked around England looking for work, rarely finding it. When he did so, it was often badly paid – or he was on the dole, which gave him a taste of the bureaucratic state and its uncaring, ineffective processes, which likely informed his Soviet experience.¹⁰⁴ Rather than a vicarious or sociological experiment, Brown’s experience was personal: he experienced poverty himself, until he first earned a place at Durham, and then won a Trade Union scholarship to Ruskin

¹⁰¹ Peter Mandler, ‘Against “Englishness”’, 162; 168–9.

¹⁰² Peter Mandler, ‘Against “Englishness”’, 171; 173.

¹⁰³ Chesterton, *Sickle or Swastika?*, 227.

¹⁰⁴ John Brown, *I was a Tramp* (London: Selwyn & Blount, 1934), 197.

College, Oxford.¹⁰⁵ Whilst these ideas are of course not about Russia, they form an important part of the hinterland likely to have at least informed British appreciation of the relationship between Russian city and Russian countryside. However, stronger, I venture, is the removal of the Soviet cultural diplomacy/power most readily achieved – so it was thought – by visiting the Soviet countryside. The crucial connection here is the idealisation of the countryside as a place of sincerity.

From a Bolshevik perspective, the countryside was infinitely darker, the elite view far more domineering. During the Volga famine of 1891–2, Lenin was unmoved, as his contemporaries sought to relieve the suffering of the peasantry. Historical determinism dictated that the peasantry must suffer under capitalism: only the paradigm shift of revolution would release them.¹⁰⁶ These attitudes could not soften with the acquisition of power. Four-fifths of the Russian population were peasant in October 1917, with just under half being literate, and their culture of religion, locality and working the land was imbued with memories of serfdom (emancipation – in a sense – came in 1861).¹⁰⁷ The Bolsheviks had built their power on the cities, which despite experiencing growth over the *fin de siècle*, were still islands in the empire's vast rural space. The peasant had to be made Soviet, and Stalin's gradual consolidation of power in the late 1920s (and increasing difficulty in securing grain from the countryside) enabled the step-change that was the end of the compromises of NEP and the introduction of a radical future via collectivisation. The Russian peasant and their countryside was to be subjected to forceful, seismic change, to be brought into the industrial future to enable multiple goals: consolidation of political Soviet power, the gathering of vast quantities of grain to export (to fund industrialisation), and to enforce Soviet cultural norms on the backward, benighted, belligerent *muzhik*.¹⁰⁸ The push and pull of this process was fierce and often violent, and developed over the late 1920s and early 1930s.

¹⁰⁵ John Brown, *I was a Tramp*, 217-8; 233-4; 'the "romance of the road" had turned out to be a sordid tragedy of bread, weak tea, blankets and baked clothes', 150. His desire to go to university was as much for the gaining of knowledge to help make socialism practicable in his own way as a desire to leave poverty behind. See also A. L. Rowse's review, 'Two Mr. Browns' in the *Spectator*, 28 September 1934, 450.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Service, *Lenin* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 88.

¹⁰⁷ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 19.

¹⁰⁸ James Hughes, *Stalinism in a Russian Province* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 7.

The general conceptualisation of the countryside and its people in Russian culture had a varied history, however. Some of the Russian intelligentsia of the 19th century suggested that 'Russia' was of the countryside, where its soul, its faith, its 'wholeness' was located, as opposed to the rational cities.¹⁰⁹ Aleksander Herzen reacted with revulsion when confronted with the often miserable reality of peasant life, but could also see some innate innocence in their nature (alongside a disappointing suspicion and ignorance) as he pitied them.¹¹⁰ Following Herzen, populists of various types saw a desirable model of equality in the Russian *mir* (an association of peasants that had enormous influence over peasant life).¹¹¹ Their feelings over the revolutionary potential of the peasantry varied, as did their engagement with the peasantry: some intellectuals 'went to the people', whilst others were content to write about the peasantry's role in future socialism.¹¹² The point, however, is that the peasant was seen as a source of great potential for placing Russia on a better path, morally and politically.

The Bolsheviks saw the peasantry and the countryside in starker, harder, terms, stratifying the peasantry into classes: the *kulak*, a wealthier peasant who was despised by the Bolsheviks, was dominating a rural proletariat, and the rural population as a whole was a source of too much religiosity, illiteracy and inefficiency, as well as political unreliability.¹¹³ The countryside was thus a place of struggle, a place for transformation: the 'primordial *Muzhik* darkness' would be replaced by the 'New Soviet Village' – content, prosperous, rather than 'hungry, drab, depopulated and demoralized'; in reality these 'New' villages were Potemkin villages, the projection of the socialist future in the present, created for the benefit of the Soviet educated classes (and peasantry) as well as visiting foreigners; most Soviet villages were indeed

¹⁰⁹ Rutten, *Sincerity after Communism*, 53–4.

¹¹⁰ Aileen Kelly, *The Discovery of Chance: The Life and Thought of Alexander Herzen* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 243–6.

¹¹¹ Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin, 2008), 242; Orlando Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 13–14.

¹¹² Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, 21–2; Anne Pedler, 'Going to the People: The Russian Narodniki in 1874–5', *The Slavonic Review* 6:16 (June 1927), 130–141, at 130–1; Derek Offord, 'The People', in William Leatherbarrow & Derek Offord (eds.), *A History of Russian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 241–62, at 245–54; Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891–1924* (London: Random House, 1997), 85–9.

¹¹³ Robert Service, *Stalin* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2004), 267; Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants*, 204–5; Hughes, *Stalinism in a Russian Province*, 204.

'hungry, drab' and so on.¹¹⁴ The cities – especially Leningrad, and above all Moscow – were the centrepieces of Soviet progress.

Thus, we can already sense a divide between potential British and Soviet understandings of the Russian/Soviet countryside, at a philosophical level more intuitive than the complexities of Marxist theory, let alone contemporary political and economic debate about Soviet life. For current purposes, what is important here is how these two radically different city/countryside dichotomies map onto foreign understandings and intuitions of 'official' and 'unofficial' Soviet life, and what this tells us about how and why travellers travelled as they did. Broadly speaking, travellers saw the countryside as less 'official', even as by Soviet standards it was a location of momentous struggle and change, to be controlled as much as any city (and thus tourists were shown showcase farms), and the instruments of Soviet power were directed at the peasantry as much as any urban populace. By examining the foreigners' logic (country = [more] unofficial), and the various ways that they characterised the city and the countryside, we can explore their assumptions underpinning their observations of Soviet life.

The Soviet city was nearly always experienced first, even if the countryside beyond was often the desired destination. For some, the city was seen as the centrepiece not only of Soviet life, but of the Russian world: Bernard Pares thought Moscow 'the heart of the Russian people.'¹¹⁵ Many other travellers gave a sense that a truth lay beyond the city's limits. Edwin Brown noted how Moscow gave him a sense of 'Russia' and its scale:

It is perhaps in Moscow that the visitor to Russia, the occasional hasty visitor, realises most vividly that he is both in a foreign country and in a new era of history. The half-Oriental aspect of the city makes one aware of Russia far more than the

¹¹⁴ Lynn Viola, *Peasant Rebels Under Stalin: Collectivisation and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 14; Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants*, 262.

¹¹⁵ Pares, *Moscow admits a Critic*, 31. Curiously, despite Pares's professed interest in the Russian peasantry, he spent all of this 1935–36 trip (of one month) within Moscow, venturing out only 'seven miles' to a Kolkhoz that 'was really at the gates of the new city', 77.

European streets of Leningrad, for Russia is not so much a foreign country as a foreign continent.¹¹⁶

Others took this much further: Walter Citrine regretfully noted that many peasants lived in 'districts remote and inaccessible to the ordinary visitor', and how 'English journalists' told him that he needed to leave the cities to understand more about the Soviet Union.¹¹⁷ Many discussed the cities extensively, and there are numerous things to comment on when considering their representation of the Soviet city and its implications for their understanding of Soviet life. First, the cities were where all these travellers met with other foreigners to discuss both what was happening in the Soviet Union, and how they knew it to be so. A common theme about Moscow and Leningrad emerges out of these accounts: Lyall implied the requirement to leave the main cities to understand Soviet affairs, trying to explain to a 'puzzled Russian intellectual' why foreigners praised the Soviet government by saying that such foreigners rarely left Moscow, and when they did they were shepherded on tour.¹¹⁸ Conolly wrote of the isolation of foreign journalists in the capital: 'the Moscow correspondents of the world press are securely muzzled by the fear of expulsion, and their dots on the i's of Soviet construction are inevitably erased by the censor.'¹¹⁹ Bosworth Goldman wrote 'I decided that the only thing to do in order to get at the truth was to go to the outlying districts myself.'¹²⁰ Norah Rowan-Hamilton observed that the further from the cities of Moscow and Leningrad, the closer one got to seeing through the 'veil shrouding this dark secret of an opposition movement': in effect, the violence of collectivisation and purges revealed the lie of the tensions between the Soviet and rest of Russia.¹²¹ Gareth Jones spoke and wrote about foreign correspondents based in Moscow with vitriol (here he was thinking of Alexander Wicksteed, Eugene Lyons, Louis Fischer, Walter Duranty: those Hubert Griffith found so useful to talk to). He described them as being 'masters of euphemism and understatement' and submitting to censorship, whilst 'the cities and towns of Soviet Russia are isolated oases in the vast extent of

¹¹⁶ Edwin Taylor Brown, *This Russian Business*, 111.

¹¹⁷ Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, viii & 126.

¹¹⁸ Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, 142; Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 172.

¹¹⁹ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, x.

¹²⁰ Goldman, *Red Road Through Asia*, xi.

¹²¹ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 200.

the Russian countryside. Inhabited by a small minority of the population, they are not the real Russia'.¹²² The 'real Russia' for Jones was the countryside of the peasantry.

The first thing to be said here, before 'tramping' after Jones into the Soviet hinterland, is that the city could exhibit 'unofficial' life to many travellers. Indeed, a 'German agronome [*sic*] named Braun' told Archibald Lyall that he should visit the markets of Rostov-on-Don and Kyiv, to see "most illuminating things there" which "your guides won't show" to him.¹²³ Lyall himself helped the aforementioned Miss Bartley gain information on where to go in Leningrad to see homeless children, as an alternative to the 'Intourist atmosphere'.¹²⁴ This could encompass making acquaintances with individuals entirely free of Soviet guides, to finding places and people that/who were suggestive of the discrepancy between tour guide rhetoric and other Soviet realities. Jones himself had whispered conversations with Soviet individuals in Moscow alleyways in spring 1933, and Conolly saw 'cold, ragged, underfed men and women' selling their wares on Moscow streets. Herbert Marchant relates encounters in the homes of Muscovites, as does Norah-Rowan Hamilton. Lyall found, when walking alone in Leningrad at 3am, 'a hundred and five people' (he 'counted') sleeping on the pavement.¹²⁵ Some, he noted, were probably waiting for the railway station to open – but others were in rags.¹²⁶ Indeed, Fitzpatrick notes how the foreigners (perhaps having read Lars Moën's instructions on how best to walk down a street) often wandered at will in the cities:

even the most sympathetic and receptive of visitors to the Soviet Union had a tendency to stray off the beaten track as soon as opportunity presented itself – going off for long walks on their own through Moscow streets.¹²⁷

Hubert Griffith had much unaccompanied time in Moscow during which he met his 'Russian architect', whom he found so engaging and whose description of Soviet

¹²² Gareth Jones, letter of 1 May 1933, printed *New York The Times*, 13 May 1933, 12h; Jones, 'The Peasant on the Farms', *The Times*, 12 October 1931, 13f–14a.

¹²³ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 69.

¹²⁴ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 58–9.

¹²⁵ Gareth Jones, Diary B1–16, National Library of Wales; Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 19.

¹²⁶ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 60.

¹²⁷ Fitzpatrick, 'Foreigners Observed', 234.

ambition was so 'impressive'.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, the idea that Leningrad, and especially Moscow, were not a proper representation of 'Russia' was strong.

The second point is that the locating of the truth outside the cities was not uniformly undertaken by all travellers. Violet Conolly was intensely frustrated by Moscow, which was 'the chosen city of the Soviet Union' where foreigners walked about 'bubbling' at Soviet achievements. She felt stifled there, 'deeply and artificially sheltered I was from the normal stress and current of Russian life'.¹²⁹ She was also told 'by a man' not to 'judge the USSR by the towns. If you want to know what the conditions are really like, go out five or ten kilometres in the country.'¹³⁰ Indeed, so annoyed was she in Moscow at feeling stifled and isolated, she sought to leave the capital as soon as possible, accelerating her itinerary: 'There seemed nothing for it but to set out on my travels to Armenia, the Caucasus, in fact anywhere, at once' – to leave on (some kind of) tour as soon as possible.¹³¹ Anywhere but Moscow was preferable for Conolly. John Brown, with less explicit urgency, but the same imperative in mind, related that 'I selected the route that would enable me to cover the most varied expanse of Russian territory – Leningrad-Moscow-Gorki-Kazan-Samara-Saratov-Stalingrad'. Fewer travellers penetrated east of the Urals, and by standard itineraries, Brown's route was relatively geographically diverse.¹³² Even when we introduce the experiences of Bosworth Goldman, Malcolm Burr, Malcolm Barber, who travelled through Siberia, and Ethel Mannin and John Grierson who ventured into central Asia, we can see how the appeal to geographical diversity was again significant in its discursive effects more than its actual impact: the reality of travel to the Soviet Union was again more complicated and more diverse than the idea of travel many travellers offered at the time.

The point here is the meaning invested in that apparent diversity by Brown. He wrote that his route would take him through 'the districts of the Mordvas, Maris,

¹²⁸ Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia*, 144–5.

¹²⁹ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 19, 28.

¹³⁰ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 110.

¹³¹ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 28.

¹³² The American writer Will Durant travelled across Siberia to Moscow, after entering from China: he wrote that he 'had entered Russia by the back door in the hope of remaining unnoticed and unescorted.' His experience of a stop-over in Omsk was extremely negative. *The Lesson of Russia* (London: Putnam, 1933), 19. The American pair of Helena Calista Wilson and Elsie Reed Mitchell spent around four years in the Soviet Union, and their *Vagabonding at Fifty: From Siberia to Turkestan* takes in 'one summer' spent travelling through Central Asia. (London: Hutchinson, 1930).

Kalmucks, and Tartars', and thus he would see reactions of different ethnic groups, make the most of opportunities in city and country.¹³³ Also significant is the seeking not of the countryside itself *per se*, but other – 'provincial' in the words of Boorman – cities. A sense of adventure could also be present. John Grierson told Walter Duranty in Moscow that he wanted to fly to the Caspian Sea and beyond 'because they [Astrakhan, Samarkand] were so inaccessible that very few people ever went there.'¹³⁴ Indeed, Grierson's project was predicated on the basic idea that 'it is hard to conceal the true state of a country from the flying man', as the pilot could see the 'unmasked air' of the country – it was not necessarily just about *landing* in places, but about *seeing* it from above, where cultural diplomacy could, presumably, not reach (although equally, Grierson could not see the details).¹³⁵

This appeal to diversity of experience, particularly as against the influences of Moscow and Leningrad, is found across the spectrum of reactions to the Soviet Union. Henry Harben wrote on this at some length:

We also arranged to spend three or four days on an excursion to some provincial town, and have chosen Nishni [*sic*] Novgorod for several reasons. [...] Kieff [*sic*] has been strongly recommended by all our Soviet friends, because probably it is very prosperous, and they think it will make a good impression. On the other hand they have all tried to stave us off Nishni, saying it is poor, there is nothing to see, the hotel is not good, and so on. We think it will be a wholesome antidote to our present enthusiasm to see a provincial town off the main line where nothing particular is doing; and we hope there to see something of the reverse side of the picture, if it exists, as the enemies of the regime assure us it does.¹³⁶

¹³³ John Brown, *I Saw for Myself*, 172. It is important, as Vladimir Novikov has noted, that Intourist offered 26 routes through the western Soviet Union in the 1930s: it was possible to see a 'variety' of places on tour – yet still these appeals to geographical variety remained significant. Simultaneously, however, it was also true that most foreigners were in Moscow and Leningrad: in most of 1936 there were 25,500 tourists in Moscow and Leningrad combined, and only 475 in Stalingrad. Orlov and Popov, *See USSR!*, 206 & 215.

¹³⁴ Grierson, *Through Russia by Air*, 51.

¹³⁵ Grierson, *Through Russia by Air*, vii.

¹³⁶ Harben, *Diary*, 43. In 1913 the Fabian Society published *The Rural Problem*, written by Harben as chairman of a Fabian committee tasked with finding solutions to rural decline (depopulation; poverty; production inefficiency). *The Rural Problem* (London: Constable, 1913).

Here Harben, who was by no means particularly notable for his antipathy towards the Soviet government (his reference to the ‘reverse side of the picture’ indicates the ‘front side’ he acquired from meeting so many pro-Soviet foreigners in Moscow, whom he appears to have trusted) spoke no Russian, and had no particular Russian expertise, explicitly posits an alternative Soviet reality located in a ‘provincial town’. Boorman was even clearer on this:

‘I have chosen Rostov-on-Don for this first article as a typical provincial city, *more true of the Russia of to-day* than Leningrad or Moscow. [...] Britishers who have only visited Leningrad and Moscow have not seen the true Russia of to-day, any more than a foreigner visiting London only will have had a true view of Great Britain [my emphasis].¹³⁷

This message was even contained in Soviet advice for foreigners. Ilya Erenburg, writing in the *Moscow Daily News*, implored the ‘Dear Tourist’ to ‘See Our People!’: ‘We have so much more to show you. Besides five hotel directors and fifty motionless figures [staff preparing a hotel for the arrival of foreign guests – Erenburg directly referenced the showcase of a well-kept hotel for foreigners] there are 150 million people who work, think and live.’¹³⁸ Whilst the Soviet writer did not directly state that the traveller should venture into the countryside, the implication is clear: the traveller should leave the hotel and go and see the people – where the truth of the Soviet world was to be found. Indeed, his reference to a hotel as a location of cultural diplomatic organisation is evocatively and chaotically described in Lyall’s account:

The October [Hotel] might have better been called the Grand Babel Hotel. The hall was always filled with a chattering mob of English, French, Germans, and Americans, alone and in parties, going out, coming in, arriving, departing, tripping over the eternal heaps of suitcases which lay about the floor and hunting for their guides, their luggage, or their rooms. [...] Tourists who had lost their parties and parties who had lost their guides drifted about the hall, and among them moved the guides themselves, always feverishly counting heads, and answering a

¹³⁷ Boorman, *So This is Russia*, 13.

¹³⁸ Ilya Erenburg, ‘Dear Tourist’, *Moscow Daily News*, 11 August 1934, 4 & 6, at 4a.

hundred fool questions as they did so, their [...] eyes travelling endlessly round and their lips, eternally counting.¹³⁹

Such spaces, it was argued, were worth escaping. It is worth noting, however, that neither Harben nor Boorman (or, for that matter, Erenburg) were acutely concerned with the problems of sincerity when it came to the tour – indeed, this is Harben's only such writing on the matter, choosing Nizhnii Novgorod (a frequently visited city for foreigners) because it was a place which 'Soviet friends' (guides, most likely) had tried to discourage Harben from visiting. He and Boorman posited a more authentic Soviet experience somewhere else. Harben never actually reached Nizhnii, which was not a great disappointment to him, and Boorman found Rostov-on-Don rather pleasant – and what is more, 'the women [there] believe in curves and are, as a rule, plump.'¹⁴⁰ The idea of difference was not necessarily one of stark changes in condition and feeling. Indeed, Harben and Boorman do not push an idea of an 'unofficial' so much as an alternative 'official', a less formalised, ritualised and more mundane Soviet life that the 'provincial city' might contain.

As we join travellers in the countryside itself, however, we can detect a stronger sense of different understandings of what the city and countryside meant to Britons and the 'official' Soviet perspective. In 1931 Ada Chesterton avoided Leningrad and Moscow entirely, seeking a 'more simple method of approach' in the Belarussian SFSR: 'My plan was to push across the North-east Polish frontier straight into White Russia, with the poorest soil, the reddest Communism of any republic in the Union, and once there to follow the leadership of chance.'¹⁴¹ This paid off, and she reached Minsk with her friend Bunny without interference from Intourist. Minsk and its people, however, were displeasing. Minsk's 'mean streets, tumble-down houses, huge squares flanked by high buildings, paintless and scarred with cracks' were 'stamped with desolation, hopelessness, and despair.' As mentioned above, its people were 'ragged, dirty', and rather like Bellman's Leningraders, 'drifted in a bemused stream,

¹³⁹ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 20–1.

¹⁴⁰ Boorman, *So This is Russia*, 6.

¹⁴¹ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 10.

their faces mournful and impassive.¹⁴² By contrast, when she and Bunny wandered from farm to farm, she concluded that

Conditions, from what I have heard and read, seem to be peculiarly bad in Moscow and Leningrad, to neither of which places did we go. But at the end of our journey, as at the beginning, I realized that the common, everyday life of millions and millions of Russians does not correspond either with either the dietetic or political state of these cities.¹⁴³

Chesterton did not like the ‘reverberating propaganda’ of the cities, and she romanticised those farms which she thought retained a ‘joyous comradeship’ over mechanised farming (again, her attitude generally was pro-Soviet, but simultaneously dismissive of the Soviet goal of mechanised agriculture).¹⁴⁴ Here are echoes of what Trilling describes as ‘the belief that the organic is the chief criterion of the authentic in art and life’: the machine and the city are inauthentic, the rustic and the comradesly is authentic.¹⁴⁵ Thus we see how even far from the cities, with no guides in sight, differences between one form of Soviet life and another are still identified – Chesterton was channelling a rhapsody about the rural ideal that echoed British discourse: co-operation over competition, community over the anonymous sprawl. Furthermore, her searching of the ‘interior’ was framed as a statement of her sincere investigation, and combatted anti-Soviet rumour:

The majority of foreigners are content, usually speaking, with a visit to the larger cities. They have not the inclination to explore the interior, and as a consequence the newspapers are full of the activities of the OGPU inquisition, so that to the uninitiated the whole area of 8,000,000,000 miles is enmeshed by a network of persecution and intrigue, and there are very few who have any desire to pierce below the surface of rumour or analyse the reactions of prejudice.¹⁴⁶

The locating of British – English – traditions in the Soviet countryside was made explicit by Joan Beauchamp, a co-founder of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Visiting a

¹⁴² Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 59.

¹⁴³ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 257.

¹⁴⁴ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 234; 125.

¹⁴⁵ Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, 127.

¹⁴⁶ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 258–9.

farm in the Northern Caucasus, she remarked that, upon seeing ‘a curious and interesting ceremony’ of socialist celebration, she had

at last I had seen something not unlike the legendary ‘Harvest Homes’ of Merrie England, which have now in my native Somersetshire dwindled into the dull and formal Harvest Festival of the village church.¹⁴⁷

Thus, Beauchamp consciously drew together the lived Soviet experience with the imaginative hopes of 19th-century British socialist rural utopianism, and placed this *melange* above the neutered, spent, English reality.¹⁴⁸

Chesterton’s experience can be compared to the subtly different experience of Elizabeth Delafield, who lived on a communal farm for a time. First, Delafield did not make this experience central to her account of Soviet life and spent little time on explaining why she chose to do this. Later in her work she wrote that ‘I wish one could talk to the old people, or the people living in remote villages, or the few remaining White Russians’.¹⁴⁹ The implication is that her time on the collective farm did not satisfy a need to find an authentic experience, perhaps on terms that would have satisfied Lyall’s idea of the ‘unofficial’. If Chesterton found an authentic experience, and in doing so apparently negotiated the problems of sincerity (no interference, no question of deceit, no doubting of interlocutors, an interior more representative of Soviet reality), Delafield, after an ostensibly similar experience, had not, and the problems of sincerity still bothered her greatly, as shown by her writing on conversations with various Soviet individuals, which will be considered more in due course. Furthermore, she viewed the farm far more dispassionately than Chesterton viewed her own experiences: for her, the ‘primitive conditions’ she saw other women living in were neither to be condemned nor vicariously celebrated.¹⁵⁰

The experience of Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton (Crichton) provides further nuance to this dichotomy and marries the tension over city/countryside as experienced by and between British and Soviet *mentalités* and those surrounding cultural

¹⁴⁷ Joan Beauchamp, *Agriculture in Soviet Russia* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1931), 10–11.

¹⁴⁸ See also Matthew Taunton, *Red Britain: The Russian Revolution in Mid-Century Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 214.

¹⁴⁹ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 249.

¹⁵⁰ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 35.

diplomacy and the challenges of sincerity. Crichton was dissatisfied with the attitude of

the many foreigners who are content to visit Moscow only, and who return full of enthusiasm for all that has been accomplished by the Revolution. Let them only visit some of these smaller places [for him, Konotop, a village] and see whether their first opinion needs revising. [...] Therefore it is essential to avoid the illusion that certain institutions exist when they may be only the fabrication of Moscow artists.¹⁵¹

Furthermore, in Kyiv he inquired about visiting a collective farm. He received discouragement from Intourist. Yet, 'far from discouraging me', these apparent difficulties in reaching the farm 'were the most welcome that I could have wished. I now felt sure that I should see something genuine and not a mere model established and maintained for the deception of foreign visitors.'¹⁵² However, rather than venturing alone, he arranged a visit with a guide (despite possessing some Russian himself). So, Crichton advocated viewing 'smaller places', but the guide did not figure as an instrument of the 'Moscow artists' in his planning of such a visit.

Fortunately for us, the presence of the guide enables us to see how differing cultural perceptions of the countryside manifested in a British and Soviet subject. The guide enjoyed the experience rather less than Crichton. Offered soup at the farm's canteen, Crichton tucked in, and 'found it very appetising'. The guide, however, 'took about two spoonfuls, and left the rest, whispering to me that it was quite extraordinary what rubbish [...] country peasants were content to consume.'¹⁵³ MMC concluded that this was sign of the 'remarkable antagonism' between town and country. Indeed, it is a sign of the competitive context of culture, where 'cultured' Soviet individuals looked down on their peasant neighbours, which in turn is indicative of the cultural aspects of collectivisation.¹⁵⁴ Crichton didn't appear to see anything particularly amiss with this, but when he later visited a hamlet of un-collectivised peasants, marooned in the middle of the collective farm's vast acreage, further nuance arises. Crichton thought they had

¹⁵¹ Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, *Russian Closeup*, 94–5.

¹⁵² Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, *Russian Closeup*, 109–10.

¹⁵³ Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, *Russian Closeup*, 117.

¹⁵⁴ David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 100; Lynn Viola, 44.

retained something ‘unquestionably higher’ in their non-collectivised state.¹⁵⁵ Here was some nostalgic past writ before him (although ‘rarely have I seen such poverty’) by which he identified, intriguingly, that the Soviet commune had lost a ‘quiet dignity’.¹⁵⁶ The guide’s views on the hamlet are unknown, but those of a Petr Alexandrovich, a member of the commune, are: Pier made ‘as many comparisons as he could between existence in this hamlet and in the farm’ (to the farm’s benefit), and asked Crichton what he thought of the progress the farm had made – to which Crichton offered ‘justified’ praise.¹⁵⁷

Herein is a dichotomy: the praise of rationalisation, and nostalgia for a past being destroyed via this rationalisation that Crichton had no possible grasp of beyond a romantic notion of peasant dignity. Here also are the tensions within the Soviet structure itself, embodied by Petr Alexandrovich and the guide. They, it would appear, had diverging opinions on the success of the farm and the significance of its peasants for Soviet culture. On a farm path, Crichton waved at peasants, who greeted him in return. His guide grumbled: ‘My guide always scoffed at this friendliness. “In the towns people do not greet you. They are far too busy”’, and Crichton wonders ‘what could Moscow mean?’ to these peasants.¹⁵⁸ What Crichton’s example shows is how even within the city/countryside dichotomy, layers of significance and meaning are found: the farm is a better thing to visit than the city; the guide enjoys it less than the foreigner; the kernel of the old ways found within is still somehow spiritually supreme to all.

Finally, in contrast to this ‘alternative official’ scene in the countryside, Gareth Jones predicated understanding the Soviet Union on contacting ‘peasants, miners’ and other non-Party Soviets in the countryside, imbuing the idea of the ‘unofficial Russian’ of Lyall with a power and significance unmatched by most travellers. Jones wrote in 1933 of visiting the countryside, where he ‘had every chance to see the real situation, for I travelled alone, walked through villages and towns, and slept in peasant homes. The Soviet Foreign Officials were on every occasion, courteous, and spared no trouble in their efforts to help me. [...] I was able to go about freely without hindrance.’¹⁵⁹ This

¹⁵⁵ Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, *Russian Closeup*, 128–30.

¹⁵⁶ Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, *Russian Closeup*, 128–9.

¹⁵⁷ Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, *Russian Closeup*, 128; 139.

¹⁵⁸ Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, *Russian Closeup*, 141; 143.

¹⁵⁹ Jones, ‘Goodbye Russia’, *Daily Express*, 11 April 1933, 12c–f.

comment built on those he had made before, from his second visit to the Soviet countryside, Samara:

The writer, who had no difficulty in travelling wherever he wished and wandered on foot to whatever farms he pleased, was able to gain the confidence of a large number of peasants in different parts of Russia. The unanimity of their views was striking.

The 'real' situation was that of the countryside. For Jones, this built on engaging with workers and peasants in and around Leningrad, Moscow and other cities, but it was the peasant village that constituted the mental, physical and spiritual core of *Russian* life: 'The real Russia is to be found in the distant villages never, or rarely, seen by the traveller.'¹⁶⁰ Given his visits during the height of collectivisation and its attendant disasters and disruptions, the village and the experience of the peasant was pivotal in counteracting the story offered by the Soviet government. The peasant was *Russian*, collectivisation was *Soviet*, and Jones felt pity for the former and outrage at the latter – a far cry, furthermore, from John Gilbert Lockhart's sense of distance from the Soviet 'Martians', as seen above.

Given the focus on leaving the cities, transport became a concern for all these writers, although to differing extents. This was another, smaller, area in which the tensions over cultural diplomacy and official/unofficial realities played out. By far the most frequently referenced long-distance travel was by railway. Boats, particularly on the Volga, also feature in some of these works, but it is trains that dominate these narrative accounts. Both Conolly and Jones saw the train as a key source of information, as much as a utilitarian service. Even on tour, the train provided space for contact and discussion with Soviet individuals. In *Soviet Tempo* Conolly places significant emphasis on the train; even as she was on a tour with guides in the cities and towns, she was still able to find what she sought: encounters with Russians without mediation, by travelling 'hard class'. Indeed, conversations with fellow passengers are the dominant source of insight in her book. She wrote that she looked forward to travelling by train for, 'at all events in the third-class carriages I would be

¹⁶⁰ Jones, 'The Peasant on the Farms', *The Times*, 12 October 1931, 13f.

living and talking to Russians for days on end'.¹⁶¹ Similarly, albeit with less exposition offered, Maitland-Makgill-Crichton enjoyed conversations with various people, particularly Red Army soldiers, on trains.¹⁶² Jones described to his readers that 'to see Russia one must travel "hard class," and go by a slow train. Those tourists who travel "soft class" and by express trains, get only an impression, and do not see the real Russia.'¹⁶³ Elizabeth Delafield meanwhile, travelled 'hard class' to Rostov-on-Don, and noted very little about the experience. Ada Chesterton, on the other hand, once again displayed her taste for the romantic whilst travelling aboard trains: 'A young woman, incredibly cramped for space, curled herself round a tired child in one of those breathlessly lovely elastic poses that the Russian, as by instinct, so easily assumes.'¹⁶⁴

Thus, for some the train represented an opportunity to evade supervision, and to be given ample contact with 'real' Soviet individuals – even when on a tourist visa. For others, even in 'hard class', the experience was – at best – stitched easily into a wider, general appreciation of Soviet life, and at worst was uncomfortable and unremarkable. Hubert Griffith also enjoyed trains thoroughly, finding them a perfect opportunity for engaging with Soviet individuals, although how precisely he did so is unclear: his lack of Russian means his stories of sometimes having 'the *whole* [his emphasis] of the railway-carriage against me' when debating theatre with a 'group of Russian theatre devotees' are unclearly founded, unless all these devotees spoke English or German (the coincidence of a meeting between playwright and a group of linguistically capable Soviet theatre lovers might merit reflection that Griffith did not offer his readers; the focus on the dramatic was key for Griffith in his effort to find 'Russian Truth').¹⁶⁵ Trains were less significant for Lyall, although the aforementioned friendly Leningrader who invited him for a drink was encountered on a train. It is possible this was down to a

¹⁶¹ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 28.

¹⁶² Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, *Russian Closeup*, 21; 91; 112.

¹⁶³ Jones, 'Soviets Confiscate Part of Worker's Wages', *Daily Express*, 5 April 1933, 3a–e. Conolly is reported to have spoken at a talk (given by Isaiah Berlin: 'Why the Soviet Union chooses to insulate itself', see Isaiah Berlin, *The Soviet Mind* (Washington: Brookings, 2016)) at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in 1946. William Coates (he of *Anti-Soviet Lies Nailed*) remarked that in 1923 he found the 'Russians' very talkative, and Conolly replied that he 'was very lucky if he was able to secure any continuous contact with Russians, besides his railway conversations.' See transcript of talk produced by Henry Hardy and kept at Wolfson College, University of Oxford, <https://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/lists/nachlass/whysovunfull.pdf>.

¹⁶⁴ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 47.

¹⁶⁵ Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia*, 157–8; Clare Warden, 'Moscow, Saint Petersburg, London: Hubert Griffith and the Search for a Russian Truth', 9.

lack of experience, and the lack of linguistic ability: Jones and Conolly had previous Soviet experience, whereas Lyall's ignorance of Russian, and his shepherding as part of a group tour, may have limited his exposure – although Griffith presents an interesting contrast here. Even if the tour didn't hinder him in this respect, Lyall's account does not show him to consider the train as a particularly interesting location for finding 'unofficial' Russians. In this he was joined by the Davies, who, to their horror, found themselves booked in a berth with two strangers: 'we did not undress nor sleep a wink'.¹⁶⁶ Winifred Richardson, meanwhile, noted only 'Breakfast. Bread hard boiled egg & tomato (bought at station) weary-flat country. Occasional peasants' of her time on a train.¹⁶⁷

Citrine marks a stark contrast to these examples: he and Doris were given a carriage to themselves, serviced by a personal chef. However, Citrine, did venture down the platform in Moscow to investigate 'hard class': he observed little more than the discomfort of a cramped carriage. He recognised the difference between his comfort and the gregarious, stuffy cabins he peered into, and he recognised that in his splendid isolation he could not 'make real contact with the other occupants of the train', a fact he regretted.¹⁶⁸ Going by these cases, trains were seen as valuable spaces for contact with Soviet individuals.

SHAPING THE OTHER

It is clear how complex readings of Soviet life could co-exist whilst sharing categorisation as 'official' and 'unofficial' – or 'real', or 'true' experiences. This is further shown by comparing Jones's demands of visitors to understand the Soviet Union through certain key signifiers – knowing Russian, travelling 'off tour', visiting the countryside – with the fact that Citrine, Lyall, Brown, Marchant, Delafield and Conolly, who all would have sympathised with much (if not all) of Jones's feelings about and assessment of the Soviet Union, did not visit the countryside beyond select farms or small towns. Conolly visited Leningrad, Moscow, Gorkii, Tiflis, Baku, Odessa and

¹⁶⁶ Davies & Davies, *A Trip to Soviet Russia*, 59–60.

¹⁶⁷ Winifred Richardson, *Diary*.

¹⁶⁸ Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, 142; Special trains were a feature of tours for delegations and visiting dignitaries. David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 105.

smaller towns in between. Citrine followed a very similar route, Leningrad to the Caucasus via Moscow, Gorkii and Kharkiv. In the Caucasus Citrine visited villages, he and Doris being driven out into the countryside by a guide. Lyall took in the old capital and the new, then Stalingrad, Kyiv and back to Leningrad. Both he and Citrine visited farms on tour.¹⁶⁹ The issue at hand here is thus not just what was visited, but also how it was visited: only Jones found his 'real Russia' by his standards. Meanwhile, Chesterton and Delafield experienced life on Soviet farms, but drew subtly different lessons from their experience to Jones, who would have no doubt despised Chesterton's account. All these travellers 'got outside Moscow', which all felt necessary in understanding the Soviet Union, but this mere fact alone is only the start of the story, not the end. By establishing this, we can see how traveller sincerity relied on numerous ideas alive in the discourse, as they sought a Soviet world and people imagined to be located and constituted in subtly different places and ways. The location of the 'unofficial' in the countryside and the attendant questioning of the 'official' on tour in the cities and at showcase sites recalls a more fundamental, essential questioning of Soviet sincerity and authenticity. As Angela Kershaw has noted, pro-Soviet travellers 'paradoxical' celebration of traditional Russia, that the Soviets sought to 'demolish'.¹⁷⁰ This paradox can be explored further, however.

Katerina Clark argues that Moscow was reconstructed/reconstituted as a 'single set of semiotic references' for the Soviet civilisation, the chosen city in which the Soviet Union sought to express itself most vividly, becoming a model for replication across the Union.¹⁷¹ Similarly, Stephen Kotkin identifies cities as the prime category of social cohesion post-1917: 'epitomes of progress, and therefore the prime bulwarks of the existing order'.¹⁷² Cities were complex, however: David Hoffman notes how peasants in Moscow often eschewed Soviet official culture – that is, parks, lectures, films – in favour of spending time at Izmailovski and other places, to 'sing peasant songs, and join in folk dances', their culture's resilience and adaptability being underestimated by

¹⁶⁹ Standardised *Intourist* itineraries were established by the early 1930s – David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 108.

¹⁷⁰ Kershaw, 'French and British Female Intellectuals and the Soviet Union'.

¹⁷¹ Katerina Clark, *Moscow: The Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism and the Evolution of Soviet Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 15.

¹⁷² Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilisation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 18.

Soviet officials.¹⁷³ This combination of symbolic significance and complex mingling of urban and rural clearly contrasts to the travellers' representation, as varied as it was in intensity, that Moscow was somehow inauthentic of the Soviet Union.

Indeed, the broad reaction of foreigners to the 'Soviet civilisation', or more specifically the Stalinist civilisation, is so central to these accounts that it affected and changed the representation of the Soviet Union as a whole – 'real Russia' or not. Hubert Griffith found an affirmation of his belief in Soviet promise in Moscow, via conversation and through simple wandering and seeing. In this he was not alone: even with criticisms of shabby paintwork, of individuals in poor clothing, and worries expressed about homeless children and much more besides, many visitors visited the Kremlin, Red Square and Lenin's tomb, the Park of Culture and Rest, and schools and institutions throughout the city, and came away with the conclusion that, yes, these sites might be chosen, they might not be replicated in practice throughout the whole Soviet Union (yet), but their essence, the force that either created anew or was salvaging and re-purposing Tsarism's flotsam, was suffusing the 'Socialist Sixth of the World'.¹⁷⁴ It was perfectly possible for a traveller to assert that 'the real sights of Soviet Russia are its factories', because they were 'pointed out as cathedrals and castles are pointed out to travellers in Europe.'¹⁷⁵ Yet the attitude of many other travellers indicates a different narrative at work. Attitudes to the atmosphere of Moscow (and Leningrad) were often suffused with suspicion, so, conceptually, the Soviet city was considered simultaneously sincerely Soviet, but not sincere in determining the real state of affairs in Soviet life. This had an effect even as travellers in these cities encountered scenes and people most certainly not on the itineraries of Intourist or VOKS, and furthermore, appear to have generally enjoyed a greater amount of liberty than when on tour outside the city. Once a traveller reached the countryside, be it framed as an 'alternative official' or 'unofficial' source of information, the clash between Soviet-urban and the Russian-rural, and thus between the Soviet narrative of the future and the travellers' nascent narrative of 'real Russia' becomes clearer.

¹⁷³ David Hoffman, *Peasant Metropolis: Social Identities in Moscow, 1929–1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 158–9.

¹⁷⁴ Hewlett Johnson, *The Socialist Sixth of the World* (London: Gollancz, 1939).

¹⁷⁵ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 81.

Thus, what is seen here is ultimately the divergence between 'Russia' and 'Soviet' being fixed on countryside and city, and how certain travellers innately considered themselves not only capable, to some extent, of understanding the 'real' Russia on the back of a visit (or a few, at most), but how some felt better able to understand and explain – to tell the truth about it – than the Soviet authorities could themselves. This occurred even as they missed or ignored aspects of Soviet culture that were in fact sometimes representative of longer-term Russian cultural/historical trends. Indeed, the use of Moscow as a symbolic space had a long history before the Soviets sought to remodel the city as a centre of global human belief – whilst St Petersburg's (its very name following Germanic rather than Russian conventions) founding as a symbolic capital and as a 'modern' city was of the utmost significance for Russian history.¹⁷⁶ Thematically, the travellers unconsciously echoed various groups in Russia's intellectual history: the dividing of Russian cities (St Petersburg above all) from the Russian countryside, or the Russian rulers (the Tsar and government; the *Dvorianstvo*) from the *narod* (i.e., the ruled); the disagreement about the *narod* between Slavophiles and Westernisers in the 19th century; between Bakunin's revolution from below and Tkachev's advocacy of revolution from above to drag the *narod* from the mire; the viewing of Moscow as the 'heart' of Russia as against the usurper St Petersburg, with the countryside as the 'anti-capital' and the idealising of the peasant commune over the urbane – into this tradition the traveller stumbled, with their own understandings drawn from another culture.¹⁷⁷ Indeed, their very presence was only the latest in a tradition of particular and abstract foreign engagement and influence that, in terms Russian cultural history, was so often a fulcrum point for competing domestic understandings of what Russia – and later what the Soviet – essentially was.

Furthermore, in a somewhat ironic twist, the reliance on the group identity of 'Russian' by travellers was predicated on an imagined national grouping that the Soviet hierarchy, more than any other force, began to shape via propaganda and cultural

¹⁷⁶ Katerina Clark, *Moscow, The Third Rome*. 24–5; Robin Milner-Gulland, *The Russians* (London: Blackwells, 1997), 221–6.

¹⁷⁷ Derek Offord, 'The People', 253–4; Robin Milner-Gulland, *The Russians*, 222; Gerald Stanton-Smith, *D S Mirsky: A Russian-English Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4. *Dvorianstvo* as a collective noun should not obscure the different sub-groups and the varying access to power enjoyed by some of this elite over others.

directives from the mid-1930s, when previously such an identity was not understood by many Russians as a Briton understood what the term 'British' implied.¹⁷⁸ On the other hand, the division of 'rulers' and ruled', whilst overly simplistic as compared to any given Soviet individual's potential experience of the dynamic, was relatively similar to popular understandings within the USSR regarding power structures. Sarah Davies observes:

ordinary people defined themselves with such categories as 'we,' 'the workers,' 'the people,' 'the *nizy*,' 'the peasants,' 'the Russians,' and 'the masses.' These categories tended to overlap and be used rather indiscriminately to identify the whole stratum of people excluded from power. The other: 'they', 'the *verkhi*,' 'responsible workers,' 'party members,' 'the state,' 'the rulers,' 'the new bourgeoisie,' 'the new capitalists,' 'engineers and technical workers,' 'Jews,' and less commonly 'rotten intelligentsia,' 'academics,' and '*tsar'ki* [little tsars].' Popular self-identification more defined by *against* than *with*. 'The role played by the 'them' in defining 'us' therefore assumed a disproportionate weight.'¹⁷⁹

Indeed, this essential divide (and its link to the city/countryside dichotomy) echoes Aleksander Herzen's notion of 'official Russia' and 'unknown Russia', or 'educated and peasant Russia', as Orlando Figes puts it.¹⁸⁰ The genealogies of internal divides in Russian society and culture had complex roots, and the travellers perpetuated them from a different perspective. Indeed, in the travellers' own terms where the line between 'Soviet' (the stand-in for 'educated', *per* Herzen) and 'real Russian' (peasant or otherwise) was drawn, and how and why (if at all) varied, but a thread linking all these views was a confidence that the British (Western) observer could discern the essence of this world better than the Soviet state, whose concern these matters were, and whose intellectual forebears and foes had wrestled with for decades previously.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 28–30, 43–4.

¹⁷⁹ Sarah Davies, 'Us Against Them: Social Identity in Soviet Russia, 1934–41' in Sheila Fitzpatrick (ed.) *Stalinism: New Directions* (London: Routledge, 2000), 47–76, at 48–9.

¹⁸⁰ Alexander Herzen, 'Letter to Jules Michelet', collected in Moura Budberg & Richard Wollheim (trs.) *From the Other Shore & The Russian People and Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) 165–6; Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 87. *Vis a vis* Jones using 'Two Russias', it is instructive to recall Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil, or the Two Nations* of 1845: Disraeli's novel employed the idea of a divide between the working classes of Britain and their 'betters'.

¹⁸¹ It is noticeable that the idea of 'Holy Russia', strong in Britain pre-1917, does not feature explicitly in these conceptualisations.

Again, the matter of contemporary truth, the concern with sincere exploration to discover that truth, the concomitant negotiation of Soviet cultural diplomacy – all these are evident in the travellers' mentalities, but were also only part of the far broader and more complex cultural space they were moving within.

SUMMARY

To conclude the first section of this thesis, let us briefly sum up the argument so far. Travellers of varying professions and backgrounds (primarily of middle-class professions or from the labour movement) sought to discover truths about the Soviet Union. They did so in the face of dissenting opinions from their contemporaries, and the doubt they felt about their own ability to find such truths. This doubt did not preclude them from assessing and judging Soviet life. Dissent also figured via the presence of Soviet cultural diplomacy, both imagined and experienced. The theoretical and actual influence of Soviet guides, translators, tours and propaganda had a significant impact on travellers, whether they were on tour or not – and many were not.

The way the travellers conducted their ostensible search for truth was influenced by these twin ideas of dissent and doubt. Many travellers sought to leave Moscow and Leningrad, to explore smaller cities, towns, and the countryside. Here truth was thought to reside. Travellers employed essentialism when discussing Soviet individuals, projected their own values on to Soviet experiences, and constructed frameworks for viewing Soviet life out of a Western – British – subjectivity. In this mode, they sought to understand and explain a land by turns fundamentally alien, or perhaps peculiarly familiar, but perennially fascinating – and in demand of explanation, which they could provide, or at least help build, such an endeavour being accurate as compared to the story – the propaganda – offered by the Soviets themselves.¹⁸² As such, we have seen that these travellers' representations of their travel is connected to their subsequent representation of the Soviet Union itself, but that general biographical facts like political allegiance can tell us only so much about this travel.

¹⁸² David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 101.

In the second part of this thesis, I shall consider the encounters between travellers and Soviet individuals directly. Now that the discourse of travel has been mapped, there is a clearer understanding of how travellers approached their encounters with Soviet people (and it is clear that there were many such encounters, of more diversity and complexity than has previously been considered), which in turn will help us consider both how travellers acted in these encounters, but also how the Soviet people they met acted and reacted around the intrusion of inquisitive, necessarily ignorant foreigners into their daily lives, and what this suggests about their context and their own experiences. To help shape this part of the study, the quote from Sarah Davies above is very important: the idea of there being an 'us' and 'them' is central to understanding how travellers and Soviet people interacted, and what this can tell us about the meanings therein. Here the examination of sincerity moves on from imagined geographies and the discourse of travel to questions of agency, trust and the complexities of lived experience.

Part II – Encounters

Introduction II: 'Us and Them'

'Tightly corked up in my little English bottle, I could only ask dim questions about the thoughts in the minds of these people. What do they see?' – Kingsley Martin¹

'GJ: "Я капиталист"

Child: "Нет, ты красный"²

The encounters in the travel accounts are of such a range and complexity that there is no simple way of dividing them into neat, compartmentalised groups. If we were to approach the matter by dividing Soviet responses as 'open' and 'closed', we would quickly find that there are so many of both, and that these occurred across the 1930s in all manner of situations. If we were to divide matters by place (home; workplace; public space; transport), we would run into the same issue: the range of issues raised is too broad to easily say something definitive about each of these locales. If we were to consider topics as the category of analysis (e.g., religion; agriculture; everyday life; shopping; industry; work) we find the same: what travellers experienced in relation to each of these varied widely in many overlapping ways. Whilst there are some noticeably consistent factors involved (e.g., the already mentioned emphasis placed by some travellers, especially Jones and Conolly, on travelling 'hard class' on trains; the responses of religious individuals to questions about the opening/closure of churches), a survey across the corpus reveals that encounters of all types (open; closed; positive towards travellers; negative towards travellers; generally 'pro-Soviet' or 'anti-Soviet' in tone) are found in too many places and situations to make those things the categories of analysis.

Therefore, this part of the thesis is structured around two relationships between a traveller and a Soviet individual. The first is Walter Citrine's time with his guide, Karchan. The second is Elizabeth Delafield's friendship with a woman on a Ukrainian commune, Eva. These, broadly, enable consideration of concepts that are clustered around the idea of the 'official' and the 'unofficial' respectively, but in a loose-enough way to avoid privileging deterministic structures over the subtleties of the history as revealed in these texts. As ever when using the schema of 'official'/'unofficial', there

¹ Kingsley Martin, *Low's Russian Sketchbook*, 44.

² Gareth Jones, Diary B1–15, March 1933.

are overlaps and elaborations that cross-over this simplistic divide: Soviet society was not a place where the official was ever entirely absent, and how people functioned in the everyday is complex, and how they responded to travellers is varied. The exploration of encounters generally evocative of these terms is structured around the relationship at the heart of each chapter. Therefore, there is shape to the study, but what it reveals is ever-greater complexity, rather than producing the neat categories we might wish were possible. The mapping of the discourse of travel enables us to see the travellers' perspectives more clearly, and thus to properly account for them as we use their recording of many encounters, which confound and diverge from the discourse of travel in so many complex ways. In doing so, we can achieve a more nuanced appreciation of the dense and thorny meanings embodied in the encounter between foreigner and Soviet, showing the divergence between discourse and experience.

The first chapter examines Citrine's own engagement with questions about Karchan's position in Soviet society, and other travellers' engagement with Soviet individuals with the term 'official' in mind. That is matters and language concerned in some way with: state, party, service (in the sense of the state 'providing service' to travellers), and also concepts like subterfuge and repression – but also openness, engagement, co-operation. Once again, this is not simply pro/anti-Soviet, nor is it always about cowed 'unofficial' and tyrannical 'official'. The second relationship, between Elizabeth and Eva, enables exploration of encounters that centre on slightly different concepts, around the 'unofficial': domestic, private, the everyday, friendship – even as these terms are necessarily complicated by the context of the Soviet system and some, like 'defiance' and 'acceptance' are seen in both chapters and are contingent on travellers' readings much of the time. In both chapters there are defences and criticisms of aspects of Soviet life offered by Soviet individuals, and there are friendly and less-friendly reactions to foreigners, but the relationship with the guide (Karchan) and the relationship with the peasant (Eva) enables a review of both overlaps and differences in the experiences of travellers, and the relevant actions of Soviet individuals. Here too are the travellers' own responses to experiences, be that cynicism, incredulity, engagement, enjoyment and, crucially, some insight into how they gauged what was sincere and what was not.

Indeed, all these accounts exhibit an engagement that consists of what was talked about (a particular aspect of Soviet life: material conditions, religion, hunger), but more significantly, reveals consideration on the part of the traveller on the sincerity of the Soviet world. The topics of conversation and of interview were of interest to the foreigner in and of themselves, but ultimately, they were a way of performing and questioning sincerity. What these accounts also enable is an examination of the Soviet individual via concepts drawn from the wider historiography about Stalinism and the way individuals lived in that political and moral system. This played a vital role in the sincerity of their own engagement with travellers, and is considered, again broadly speaking, as such: the chapter on Citrine and Karchan enables consideration of the 'usable self' in Stalinist society, whilst the chapter on Delafield and Eva enables study of the 'private'/'public' dichotomy. For both, the third aspect of 'us and them' is crucial and helps us consider how and why travellers fit into Soviet understandings of group identities. A summary of the historiographical/theoretical hinterland for each of these three areas follows.

'US AND THEM'; 'US' AND FOREIGNERS?

The binary of 'us and them' links the two aspects of this section of the thesis. One of the questions being asked here is how travellers were perceived and responded to by Soviet individuals. 'Us and them' should, as with 'official' and 'unofficial' (and public/private, examined below), not be taken as an absolute organising principle for all peoples, places and contexts. On this binary, Sarah Davies writes:

Simply, different identities were articulated on different occasions and for different purposes. The 'us/them' (*nizy/verkh*) identification was typical of language that was 'popular', in the sense of nonofficial. While the official language of the Soviet regime under Stalin stressed the harmony of social interests, popular language emphasized conflict. Although the categories of 'official' and 'popular' cannot be absolutized, since both emerged from a common culture, shared a frame of reference, and appropriated each other's terms, it is also clear that the conflictual

image was characteristic of unauthorized, or what the regime termed 'anti-Soviet' and 'negative' expressions.³

Nizy ('the low'), and *verkhi* ('the high'), have a particular meaning necessarily more about power than the simpler *my/oni* (we/them). Davies shows the essential power relationship at work – the state, party, bosses and 'responsible workers' or 'the new bourgeoisie' on the one hand, and everyone else, from 'the workers' to 'the masses' to 'the people', through to the *lishentsy*, the exiled, the imprisoned, on the other. This could be expressed by Soviet people as a moral dichotomy: people often framed 'us and them' as good/evil, light/darkness, truth/deceit.⁴ Davies also shows how this divide was economic: indeed, the difference in economic standards 'was the most immediately perceptible and intelligible facet [of inequalities of power] in everyday life': power was seen as looking after its own economically.⁵ There are numerous complexities therein. Vadim Volkov describes the growth of this new Stalinist middle class, comprising elevated peasants and workers, trained via *kul'turnost'* – thus a 'worker' could be found in either of two distinct positions, being 'responsible' or one of the 'people' – being a 'ruler' or a 'ruled' in the terminology of Gareth Jones. Pressure was also placed on marginal groups: beggars, prostitutes, tinkers, delinquents.⁶ Soviet society was constituted not only by the new excluded, the *lishentsy*, but also the longer-standing liminal figures of Tsarist society.⁷ Thus for Soviet individuals 'us' might encompass a variety of groups and interests.

Culture is an area of Soviet life that shows how interwoven and complex any divide between 'us' and 'them' becomes, just as with 'official and unofficial'. The case of Pavlik Morozov, the boy who was allegedly killed for informing on his family, and thus became a Soviet martyr, is revealing of the fears of the State, its methods for shaping its population, and popular resentment towards this – his myth came to be loathed in

³ Sarah Davies, 'Us against Them: Social Identity in Soviet Russia, 1934–41', 47–8. Identities were complex, and continuities could be found in new paradigms. David Hoffman notes how peasants-in-the-city had a varied and complex identity encompassing both city and country, present and past, and the Soviet city itself was not a very stable referent, given the scale of change taking place. Hoffman, *Peasant Metropolis*, 2–4.

⁴ Davies, 'Us against Them', 56–9.

⁵ Davies, 'Us against Them', 61–3.

⁶ Volkov, Vadim, 'The Concept of *kul'turnost'*: notes on the Stalinist civilizing process' in Sheila Fitzpatrick (ed.) *Stalinism: New Directions* (London: Routledge, 2000), 210–230, at 214–15.

⁷ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 126–7

many quarters.⁸ In the 1920s many Soviet authors sought – to varying extents – to marry adventure novels with the new paradigm around them: detective stories, tales of rooting out inner foes and hidden caches belie both a fascination with American influences, and a desire to explore worker versus capitalist themes in exciting fiction.⁹ This also saw expression in science fiction, but it is the popularity of the detective story that is of particular interest here: an interpolation of fears of inner foes and subversive activity into a 'popular' culture interested in works expressive of the rapid change and violence of the new Soviet world.

Furthermore, there were channels of communication running through Soviet society that necessarily add nuance to the ruler/ruled dichotomy. If the Party, its organisations such as the Komsomol, and other state organs like the Red Army maintained a careful watch-and-listen over the people, the people also complained.¹⁰ This dichotomy of 'us and them' should also not be read as being two unified and solid blocs facing one another: doubt, mistrust, opportunism and vengeance all existed. Class solidarity was, as David Brandenberger suggests, not an especially powerful force for many, even as the authorities used it as an organising principle of security and surveillance. Jonathan Waterlow's work is useful in emphasising the importance of particular relationships and contexts over the supposedly hard-and-fast class (or other) identities and their theoretical consequences. Waterlow noted how jokes defined opposition, often against the Party, or related groups, such as the Stakhanovites. Similarly, the 'us' could be *lishentsy*, or non-party members more generally – but also, crucially, it could also include one of 'them' dependent on circumstance (e.g., a particular boss popular with staff).¹¹

Given this context, we can ask who a foreigner was to a Soviet individual. In Soviet official discourse, the outside world was a place to both fear and to supersede. Capitalist encirclement and the history of 'Allied intervention' were a bedrock of Soviet popular discourse regarding Western Europe and the USA. The unofficial feeling

⁸ Catriona Kelly, *Pavlik Morozov: The Rise and Fall of a Soviet Boy Hero* (London: Granta, 2006), 11–12.

⁹ Robert Russell, 'Red Pinkertonism: An Aspect of Soviet Literature in the 1920s', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 60:3 (July 1982), 390–412, at 393–4.

¹⁰ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 169.

¹¹ Jonathan Waterlow, *It's Only a Joke, Comrade* (Privately published, 2018), 251.

regarding foreigners is harder to determine. Whilst this subject is an important part of this whole thesis, it is worth having a brief review of the general main points of East/West dynamics in the period, particularly as it relates to 'popular opinion' and/or the relationship of official and unofficial Soviet views and reactions to foreign matters and peoples.

Timothy Johnston splits Soviet official engagement with the outside world into two 'spheres': the first of these, the diplomatic identity of the USSR, concerned the political and military posture of the USSR within the international community. Foreign relations were at the heart of the Bolshevik political imagination. Intervention, encirclement, Fascism: foreign states were a source of existential threat. Indeed, Britain itself was seen as perhaps the enemy *par excellence*: there was a war scare in 1926–7, in part exacerbated by anti-Soviet commentary in Britain after the General Strike, and Soviet belief of British involvement in the Pilsudski coup in Poland. In 1927 the Arcos incident saw formal ties being suspended between the two states. In short, the chief imperial power of the day was considered a foe – indeed, Britain had invaded during the Allied Intervention of 1919.¹²

The Soviet authorities were intrigued, furthermore, by public opinion regarding foreign affairs – the secret police monitored views of foreign affairs, and topics such as the Nazis and the Spanish Civil War were notable for the attention paid to them by individuals (the Soviet press covered foreign affairs extensively).¹³ Sarah Davies relates how 'in this period of acute international tension, the external relations of the USSR with other powers were at the centre of everyday interest.'¹⁴ The threat of war was very present in Soviet culture: the media 'made frequent reference to external aggression', and this was compounded by the narrative of the internal 'war' being fought out within the USSR, against counterrevolution, drunkenness, illiteracy, and so on. Furthermore, the idea of war as a catalyst for dramatic change (borne out by the events of 1905 and 1917) was still very powerful. Some Soviet people looked forwards

¹² Jon Jacobsen, *When the Soviet Union entered World Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 206–7; 222.

¹³ Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 170–1.

¹⁴ Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1934–1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 93–4.

'Us and Them'

to a potential war, whilst others regarded war 'as a policy perpetrated by those in power, by which the ordinary people suffered.'¹⁵

Coupled with fear was the idea of the 'USSR as a morally righteous actor on the world stage.'¹⁶ Even as the Third International was diminished and 'Socialism in One Country' became paramount, the USSR embodied the better alternative to the road taken by the West. Official propaganda made much of the workers' alleged 'internationalist feelings during the Spanish Civil War, manifested in their willingness to donate money to the Republican cause.' Davies argues that many 'doubtless [...] did share such feelings, and some even wanted to go further – volunteering to fight or suggesting the Soviet Union should send in its army. But others thought the USSR was meddling where it should not and were more loath to help.' The dynamics of Soviet engagement with the struggle abroad were influenced by domestic concerns as much as anything: bread shortages were seen as resulting from being too kind to the Spanish, for example.¹⁷

The second sphere is that of culture. David-Fox's competitive context has already been identified as a fundament of Soviet-foreign relationships, particularly at the level of government, cultural organisations and the interaction of prominent foreigners with the Soviet state. As Johnston notes, this was also a continuation of the Slavophile/Westerniser debate, a distinct diversion and even inversion in the story of East/West cultural flow, but part of that longer tradition nevertheless.¹⁸ Eleonory Gilburd comments how pre-1917, 'Europe was loved as passionately as it was hated', and Westernisation of Russian elites ran parallel with their alienation from the rest of the populace.¹⁹ The Bolsheviks sought, despite the relative conservatism of Stalinism as it developed over the 1930s, to dissolve this tension and lead world culture for the sake of the European and the Soviet alike; yet international congresses and festivals were held in the 1930s alongside foreigners being represented as figures of fear in Soviet propaganda, especially during the Terror.²⁰ This complex push/pull regarding

¹⁵ Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia*, 95.

¹⁶ Timothy Johnston, *Being Soviet: Identity, Rumour, and Everyday Life under Stalin, 1939–1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), xxviii.

¹⁷ Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia*, 96.

¹⁸ Johnston, *Being Soviet*, xxviii.

¹⁹ Gilburd, *To See Paris and Die*, 3.

²⁰ Gilburd, *To See Paris and Die*, 4.

foreign influences was founded on a common theme, however: Soviet primacy and the need to maintain it.

Timothy Johnston notes how the Soviet authorities veered between 'Slavophile' and 'Westerniser' poles in regards treatment of specific Western cultural output: 87% of films screened in the USSR in the 1920s were foreign, but by 1932 there were none; jazz saw similar fluctuations.²¹ Foreign workers and their science and expertise were instrumental in developing Soviet industry, but this saw a significant change from 1934, when the 17th Party Congress determined 'domestic' technology would drive Soviet success.²² Similarly, Soviet achievements in polar exploration, aeronautical feats and other successes of Soviet daring and ingenuity became celebrated as part of a domestic, superior culture that was bearing its own torch into the future.²³

The following two chapters consider how travellers fit into – if at all – the general schema of 'us' and 'them'. The similarity to ideas of 'unofficial' and 'official' in the discourse of travel is clear. By describing 'us' and 'them' we can immediately detect a necessary tension – the presence of Soviet power is felt. But there are instances in these chapters where 'us' and 'them' does not relate to power as such, but more simply as the traveller and the Soviet individual being different, with no necessary opposition to any 'them' – or where tensions could intensify or dissolve contingent on what was being discussed.

THE USABLE SELF

The chapter on Citrine and Karchan allows some consideration of the 'usable self' of a Soviet individual as they navigated this new civilisation and this environment of precarious trust and frequent distrust. The historiography on the Soviet individual and their engagement with the Soviet – Stalinist – world in social, political, and cultural terms is extensive, and riven with disagreement and complexity. Stalinism has been examined over the years with several key frameworks in operation. The totalitarian school, developing as Western study of the Soviet Union was professionalised after

²¹ Johnston, *Being Soviet*, xxxix; Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917–1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 85–99.

²² Johnston, *Being Soviet*, xxxi.

²³ Johnston, *Being Soviet*, xxxi.

the Second World War, posited Soviet society as a top-down apparatus of power, wherein the lower orders were at the mercy of the ruthless Soviet order. A second method of interpretation, focused on social history, later began to explore the opportunities created by Soviet order and policy, arguing that many groups in fact actively and willingly engaged with the Soviet order, to further their own interests and those of the group. The older phenomenon of *blat*, of corruption expressed by the trading of favours and patronage, was also a significant part of this: people exploited personal relationships for gain.

A third school, marked by the 'cultural turn', has considered Stalinism as a combination of these things. Here Stalinism is considered as a civilisation in and of itself, made up of interrelating groups that exercised power, sought opportunities, and resisted and/or evaded strong coercion where possible, but that also articulated a sense of purpose and identity to itself that was willingly engaged with. Stephen Kotkin writes of how Stalinism was a product of processes long and short-term, of strategy and of localised issues faced by people beyond simply 'black magic' and 'pitiless' ideologues: Stalinism was the 'historically conditioned merger of long-held geopolitical objectives with potent social concerns'. It was not simply a new political order atop a pre-existing society, but a new way of life.²⁴ Kotkin's concept of 'speaking Bolshevik' articulates this: that people learned how best to navigate the ideology, the coercion, the failures and the opportunities of Stalinist society, by presenting themselves as participants in the new Bolshevik world, even if behind this conformity there might be secrets, doubts, fears and dissenting thoughts. Some historians within this broad school, such as Jochen Hellbeck, have taken the emphasis on Soviet agency considerably further than Kotkin. Hellbeck argues for a Soviet 'subjectivity': a sense of self able to perceive the world in Soviet terms and engage accordingly, exhibiting a 'triple valuation of self-expression, collective action, and historical purpose': a sense of transcending the petty and providing service to historical forces.²⁵ This has been

²⁴ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 23.

²⁵ Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 350, 362–3.

disputed by others: Alexander Etkind asks if the coercion involved can ever produce something truly subjective (such individuals essentially being unfree).²⁶

Timothy Johnston neatly summarises two core issues inherent to even the most recent scholarship: he suggests there are two paradigms of Soviet relationships with power – that of ‘resistance’, and that of ‘discursive’ immersion. The idea of resistance over-emphasises aspects of the perceived totalitarian mode, in effect: actions by less powerful people are perceived as necessarily ‘resisting’ the coercive control of the upper orders. Meanwhile, Johnston argues that the notion of Soviet discourse permeating every corner of Soviet life in an essentially totalizing manner is also replicating the totalitarian model: he observes that Lynn Viola and others have studied other languages, other ways of speaking of one’s life and outlook that were used by Soviet individuals and groups. He also observes that for all the ‘New Man’ rhetoric of Soviet cultural policy, the new human was never achieved. The Soviet regime never produced their new type of individual, yet they undoubtedly had a singularly powerful effect on those under their rule. They influenced people into a new way of living that crucially combined past and present understandings of what was sensible and desirable in an individual’s day to day negotiation of life. This includes both those actively engaged in the Soviet effort (the focus of works by Hellbeck, and Igal Halfin) and those outside these groups who participated in this effort to a varying degree of intensity and sincerity. This work does not seek to reference or explore this conception of Soviet subjectivity *per se* (the presence of such coercion seems an essential problem for the idea of a true subjectivity).²⁷ However, it is concerned with numerous aspects of the Soviet individual’s relationship with power, which ultimately shaped a particular kind of experience – one combining elements of the new Soviet world at its most strident and sincere, and the reactions of the individuals living in Soviet society.

The role of the ‘new Man’ and ‘new Woman’ in Soviet culture illuminates the challenges of sincerity faced by Soviet individuals in the period. The new Soviet

²⁶ Alexander Etkind, ‘Soviet Subjectivity: Torture for the Sake of Salvation?’, *Kritika* 6:1 (Winter 2005), 171–86

²⁷ The ontological possibility of a perfectly ‘free’ subject is perhaps higher than the possibility of finding one in history, but in relative terms, Soviet individuals were politically and socially less free than their contemporaries in Britain. Even if any given subject is not perfectly free, it can still be confronted with more potential to exercise its liberty than a subject living within a much more repressive system, and so be said to shape its own subjectivity.

individuals, according to the party, were 'totemic' in the 1920s and 1930s. They were to be 'rational, independent, and resolute', throwing off Russia's worst traits and adopting new values, individually and collectively. The creation of this new person was sought in numerous ways. Influence and edification from mass literacy programmes, the ritualization of public holidays, the celebration of Soviet achievements in labour, science, exploration and feats of ingenuity, youth groups such as the Komsomol, radio and cinema. These were joined by the discipline of sessions of self-criticism, anti-religious campaigns, anti-alcohol campaigns, purges and arrests.

These shining 'New' people cast long shadows, in which actual people lived, negotiating the demands placed upon them by the pressures of the future and the past; concealing or relinquishing negative – as per new, evolving moral standards – legacies. Indeed, these idealised figures represented 'the suppression of unwanted elements of the old [i.e., pre-Revolution].'²⁸ The fear of counter-revolution was persistent in the Soviet body politic, with enemies and dissidents identified in various strata at various times and locations, most infamously in the Great Terror in 1936–8. '[R]evolutionary militants', Sheila Fitzpatrick writes, 'tend to be obsessed with authenticity and transparency', and the way to determine such authenticity is to probe and test an individual's sincerity; being vigilant about this was a 'cardinal virtue' of a Soviet Communist.²⁹ Geoffrey Hosking uses the example of the Soviet 1930s as the 'land of maximum distrust'. Hosking argues the requirement for absolute trust in the Party was part of the Manichean world of the Bolsheviks – and if one fell outside the 'boundaries' of trust, it could result in utter annihilation.³⁰ He includes Bukharin's letter to Stalin, written in late 1937 before the former's show trial. Hosking notes it as an 'intimate, agonized, and ambivalent letter', and this gives a sense of the complexity of trust in Soviet society: Bukharin simultaneously accepts and appeals against the circumstances he finds himself in.³¹ Yet it is important not to over-emphasise this or translate the particular world of the Party to all of Soviet society: Hosking is right to

²⁸ Lynne Attwood & Catriona Kelly, 'Programmes for Identity: The "New Man" and the "New Woman" in Catriona Kelly & David Shepherd (eds.), *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution, 1881–1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 256–290, at 256.

²⁹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 3.

³⁰ Geoffrey Hosking, *Trust: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press / Oxford Scholarship Online, 2014), DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198712381.003.0002, 20 [accessed 3 April 2022]

³¹ Hosking, *Trust*, 11.

observe the widespread distrust in individual-state relations of the time, but as Jonathan Waterlow observes, person-to-person trust could, and did, play a key role – indeed, was a fundamental space of activity.³² In short: how Soviet people acted in relation to the pressures of their repressive society, where politics and ideology infused everyday life and material conditions and social dislocation were difficult to navigate, was a function in how they reacted to foreigners. The Soviet world was one fraught with distrust, but it was not the place of the absolute collapse of trust, even as errors of trust impacted upon – and anxiety about such failings permeated – people's lives in numerous negative ways.

Sheila Fitzpatrick's *Tear off the Masks!* explores a range of experiences relating to the identity of the individual and their location relevant to Soviet power, ranging from willing adaptation to new norms, to imposture and the rewriting of personal histories. Whilst aspects of Soviet of 'identity' (*Litso*) were officially primarily limited to 'class' and 'political', Fitzpatrick notes that

Individuals have multiple identities, that is, self-identifications that mark their location in the world and relationship to other people. Assuming identities to be the classifications that a person accepts as applicable to him/herself and expects the outside world to recognize in him/her, a single person may simultaneously embrace the identities of, for example, man, worker, Communist, husband/father, Russian.³³

Furthermore, Fitzpatrick shows that ideas of performance are central to this Soviet discourse: 'Revolutionary Russian (Soviet) society, with its pervasive anxiety about class and political identity and rich array of practices of masking and unmasking' demanded individuals, especially those on the margins, to enact 'dramatic self-presentation.'³⁴ A sincere performance was required for all manner of reasons, and Fitzpatrick shows how 'The Life', an 'all-purpose Soviet identity card', could be a 'work of art, polished to a high gloss', the manipulated autobiography that was required when 'seeking employment, applying for admission to higher education, or undergoing the

³² Jonathan Waterlow, review of 'Trust and Distrust in the USSR': *Special Issue of Slavonic & East European Review*, by Geoffrey Hosking *et al*, in *Ab Imperio*, 2014:1 (2014), 398–406, at 399–400.

³³ Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!*, 10.

³⁴ Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!*, 13.

periodic personnel checks', i.e. purges.³⁵ Stephen Kotkin describes Soviet people undertaking everyday negotiation with the Soviet state 'by assessing, making tolerable, and, in some cases, even turning to one's advantage the situation one is confronted with.'³⁶ This state enforced imposture on the people. Some imposture is always present in society, but the revolution exacerbated and compounded this demand, and so 'concealment was a normal condition of Soviet life'.³⁷ Fitzpatrick notes 'Communist discourse about identity in the 1920s and 1930s was Manichean. You were either an ally or an enemy of Soviet power.'³⁸ Golfo Alexopoulos writes 'the official picture of Soviet [social] aliens consistently portrayed them as masters of deception.'³⁹ Thus a core dynamic of Soviet life was orientated around sincerity: exposure and concealment of that which deviated from the light of historical truth.

The patterns of Soviet coercion shaped the Soviet individual at all levels, and the Bolshevik focus on Party members is indicative of central concerns regarding 'authenticity and transparency'. Igal Halfin's work explores Communist biographies 'on trial', how terror in the Party 'was the result of the never-ending interrogation of the self'.⁴⁰ An individual had to bear witness against themselves, for only they had insight into their soul – counter-revolution was a 'state of mind', not a 'course of action'. Thus, confessions were very significant for Soviet jurisprudence, because the 'self' was the ultimate category of analysis, the object to be shaped and improved by the Party.⁴¹ Reporting on one's past was important for Party members in 1920s and 1930s, and so too for those outside the Party. Kotkin's study of Magnitogorsk shows that "reporting on one's work history" was a 'primary individualization technique among the workers of Magnitogorsk that pervaded all official documentation'.⁴² Oleg Kharkhordin explores this development as a way of highlighting the process of individuation during the Soviet Union. He suggests that by the 1930s the Party's focus had shifted from the *klassovoe*

³⁵ Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!*, 91.

³⁶ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 22.

³⁷ Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!*, 3–4; Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 132.

³⁸ Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!*, 103.

³⁹ Golfo Alexopoulos, *Stalin's Outcasts: Aliens, Citizens, and the Soviet State, 1926–1936* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 90.

⁴⁰ Igal Halfin, *Terror in my Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 4.

⁴¹ Halfin, *Terror in my Soul*, 10, 13.

⁴² Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 171; Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 221–5.

litso of an individual (that is – the Russian word *litso* encompassing face/façade, but also the essential features of something – here the 'class features' of an individual) to focusing on the self, hidden 'beneath' these features; an expression and a refinement of the state's paranoia.⁴³

For Party members, there was self-criticism and purge; for all individuals there were masks. The self of the sincere Party member, of the subject willingly engaging with Soviet life, as in Hellbeck's study of Stepan Podlubnyi, was to be reshaped. Other individuals sought to at minimum represent their selves in a way conducive to their needs. Soviet power sought to shape its people, but also to 'unmask' foes. The point here is that 'the discovery of a usable self' (i.e., a mask of some kind) was of vital importance to Soviet individuals.⁴⁴ This usable self might be represented by a constructed *litso* (here the meanings of face/façade being key), found in autobiographies, passports, employment applications, education applications, responses to denunciations, used during purges, and so on – it was the unthreatening self-representation an individual could offer state and society. Those people whom the regime considered 'social aliens' (nobles, priests, bourgeois, *kulak*, NEP traders, criminals) were transformed into *lishentsy* via removal of voting rights, ostracism and denial of opportunities (educational, employment, organisational enrolment), and in many cases internal exile or imprisonment. People therefore sought to reshape their autobiographies to elide dangerous pasts and invent 'usable' selves to act in Soviet society. *Lishentsy* sought escape: figuratively, as in discovering a usable self, or literally – Fitzpatrick notes 400,000 or so successfully escaped exile between 1932 and 1940.⁴⁵ This reshaping was defined in light of what Johnston argues was the 'official' Soviet identity, actively promoted by the Stalinist government and of which the state 'tended to... have a very closely defined and coherent picture'.⁴⁶

At the level of the individual, however, David Brandenberger notes that Soviet ethnographers reported in the 1920s that society was 'divided and fractious': class identities and popular support for Soviet power 'were only inconsistently reflected in

⁴³ Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*, 177–180.

⁴⁴ Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!*, 152.

⁴⁵ Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 124.

⁴⁶ Johnston, *Being Soviet*, xxv.

the discourse on the popular level.⁴⁷ This patchy support was perhaps influenced in part by the pre-1917 emphasis on the self as the location of ethics and social organisation in Russian culture: Mark Steinberg notes how in contrast to 'the Orientalizing stereotype of Russia's essential collectivist culture', 'a strong countercurrent [*sic*] in Russian intellectual life continuously and vigorously asserted the prime importance of the individual and the self'.⁴⁸ Soviet attention to the individual (Halpin's biographies 'on trial') was concomitant with the emphasis on class identity as the prime social grouping. Golfo Alexopoulos explores the ambiguities of this interaction between ideology and the everyday:

The practices of exclusion and inclusion expose the nature of the Soviet political community that emerged in the years of socialist construction. On the one hand, the boundary separating insiders from outsiders appears ambiguous. People became outcasts for a multitude of reasons [...]. Those without rights did not represent a uniform segment of society [...]. If not united as a social group, Stalin's outcasts nonetheless share certain behaviours and cultural attributes.⁴⁹

They, Alexopoulos continues, were fundamentally defined as such by whether they were bourgeois – that is exploitative, or proletarian – that is victims of exploitation. To 'earn re-entry into Soviet society', social aliens had to demonstrate 'loyalty to Soviet power through activism and socially useful labour' – or reconfigure their *litso* to appear loyal (or reach an accommodation on an individual level, often via an emotional appeal for clemency, that was often successful).⁵⁰ This complexity is reflected in the application of stricture: Fitzpatrick notes that whilst the Party identified classes and groups as 'social aliens', the criteria exercised at a local level could vary – the 'class enemy' could be found in many places, to suit many aims.⁵¹

If the usable self in Fitzpatrick's terms is fashioned and expressed in the intercourse of power and the individual, there are other creative possibilities found here also, for all individuals. Timothy Johnston takes Kotkin's 'speaking Bolshevik' and 'little tactics

⁴⁷ Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 19–20.

⁴⁸ Mark D Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910–1925* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 64.

⁴⁹ Alexopoulos, *Stalin's Outcasts*, 185–6.

⁵⁰ Alexopoulos, *Stalin's Outcasts*, 186.

⁵¹ Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 117.

of the habitat' to describe various modes of behaviour that Soviet people practised: 'reappropriation' (using Soviet rhetoric in alternative ways to that of the state's purposes), 'bricolage' (the assembly of a thing out of many varied others, potentially mixing Soviet rhetoric with slang or other alternative discourse), 'avoidance' (shirking, participating in *blat*, changing jobs/housing/region).⁵² Rumour was also important for people: how Soviet individuals acquired knowledge beyond that disseminated by the state and how this shaped their perceptions of the world around them (though Johnston argues news and rumour were not necessarily always in competition).⁵³ In sum, Johnston argues Soviet people 'innovatively negotiated their way through Soviet society.'⁵⁴ Jonathan Waterlow develops this discussion by deploying the concept of 'cross-hatching', the assembly of a language and sense of self that combined the Soviet present with the either pre-Soviet past or earlier-Soviet past – despite the inter-war period being a time of revolutionary intensity, the shifts in Soviet policy, most notably the NEP-period, meant the pressures and possibilities facing individuals changed. The mix of new and old was crucial, as was the particular context within which an individual engaged with a particular Soviet 'official' news item or policy or place. Waterlow argues it enabled Soviet individuals to take official terminology and ideology and to judge 'these on their own terms' – they were not receptors of a hypodermic model of influence participants who joked (often blackly) about their circumstances. Waterlow suggests they created for themselves a kind of 'clandestine idiom', similar to that of the Italian mafia, that coded meanings in apparently innocuous statements.⁵⁵ This meant trust groups were important: finding someone or people to trust was vital so that the pressures of Soviet life could be shared and expressed. Waterlow argues that trust could have been, therefore, given for reasons other than terrified expediency, as assumed in the totalitarian model of atomised individuals (and by some of the travellers, as we have seen).⁵⁶

To summarise: Soviet individuals, facing a society led by those troubled by a paranoia about insincere behaviour, often had to create a mask, to conceal sins of their

⁵² Johnston, *Being Soviet*, xxxii.

⁵³ Johnston, *Being Soviet*, xxxvii-xxxviii.

⁵⁴ Johnston, *Being Soviet*, xli.

⁵⁵ Waterlow, *It's Only a Joke, Comrade*, 125–9.

⁵⁶ Waterlow, *It's Only a Joke, Comrade*, 225–30.

past or present (or to prevent the detection of supposed sins: Waterlow comments on the 'spirit of certainty' on the part of Soviet authorities, who, having found one sin, were determined to find others then assumed to be present), by which they could progress through life.⁵⁷ Beyond this usable self, they also responded to Soviet ideology and iconography neither entirely innocently, nor could they be detached: they were immersed in it, but this didn't entail their being completely dominated by it – they also appropriated it for their own ends. Trust groups were very important: Soviet individuals were neither necessarily atomised, nor were they always willing participants in the great social project. They concealed things as a matter of course, and, with individual variability and circumstances accounted for, could seek to express themselves to others on matters that might have been considered dangerous. The relationship between power and individual was tense, and this necessarily had a great effect on individual sincerity: Irina Paperno writes of certain texts written by Soviet intellectuals 'as [...] imply[ing] that the Soviet regime created an emotional economy of duplicity, deception, and ambiguity.'⁵⁸ When, therefore, we examine how a traveller engaged with a Soviet individual, whether Party member or not, these are behaviours of relevance as unearthed by the historiography, to test against the words and behaviours recorded in travellers' accounts. Furthermore, given the varying application of discipline against 'class enemies', what is becoming clear is that how a particular Soviet individual may have acted was very specific to their context, and the possibilities and opportunities therein. This is fundamentally important.

THE PRIVATE AND THE PUBLIC

A notion of the private and public worlds, and their associated values and meanings, are rooted deep in our sense of self and its relation to society at large. But how these are expressed and interrelate differs between societies, and the differences between a traveller's and that of an individual living under Stalinism were significant.

In terms of a liberal understanding of private/public, Jeff Weintraub assesses private/public as having two fundamentally discrete axes by which the binaries can be

⁵⁷ Waterlow, *It's Only a Joke, Comrade*, 162.

⁵⁸ Irina Paperno, *Stories of the Soviet Experience: Memoirs, Diaries, Dreams* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 209.

assessed: what is hidden or closed versus what is open or accessible, and what is individual versus what is collective.⁵⁹ All of these are relevant to this study. Fundamentally what is explored is the former: how Soviet individuals possibly revealed and possibly hid things, and how British travellers framed, gauged and assessed what Soviets were saying/doing them in light of their understanding of Soviet power and its impact on Soviet people. Yet the second is also significant, because this individual/collective dynamic is at the heart of the Soviet experience and directly influences that which was closed and that which was open. There are two main (interconnected) points of interest here: first, the influence of Soviet ideology on everyday life, and second the communal living that formed a significant part of that life. These had a direct relevance to how a traveller might have considered the Soviet people they met and gauged the validity and meaning of their comments – especially when, in the case of certain visits to homes (the location *par excellence* of privacy for a Briton).

Peter Holquist argues that in a totalitarian system the distinction between state and society, and between public and private, begins to erode. He uses the example of Nazi Germany, where the regime 'channelled participation to sculpt behaviour rather than seeking to elicit support.'⁶⁰ The Soviet system is similar in this respect. What was at stake was not 'popularity', but the capacity of the state to mould 'society's human material into a more emancipated, conscious, and superior individual.'⁶¹ Surveillance, ideological coercion and cramped physical living conditions in cities combined to erode the distinction between life on the street and at home. The communist selves 'on trial' as related by Halfin mark the apex of this blurring of public and private. Jochen Hellbeck also explores this in detail. In his study of Soviet diaries, he examines the difficult nature of Soviet 'privacy', as opposed to the public world, specifically as it relates to the matter of sincerity:

⁵⁹ Jeff Weintraub, 'The Theory and Politics of the Public/Private Distinction' in Weintraub and Kumar (eds.) *Public and Private in Thought and Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 1–42, at 4–5.

⁶⁰ Peter Holquist, "'Information Is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work": Bolshevik Surveillance in Its Pan-European Context', *The Journal of Modern History* 69:3 (September 1997), 415–450, at 416.

⁶¹ Holquist, "'Information Is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work"', 417.

The problem of applying a public-private binary to Stalin-era diaries and subjectivities is that it projects a liberal understanding of selfhood into the Soviet context. The binary contains an assumption that Soviet individuals, like liberal subjects, strove for individual autonomy, and that hence their self-expression as individuals by definition evolved in tension with social or state institutions. Furthermore, the liberal model makes a universal claim that all individuals cultivate the private realm as a sphere of unfettered and authentic individual subjectivity. However, Soviet diarists raise questions about the universality of the pursuit of autonomy and of the private as a realm of integrated selfhood. The notions of private and public remain useful to the extent that they were employed as concepts in the Soviet setting, but it is important to grasp the historically specific meanings underlying these concepts and informing their use.⁶²

Hellbeck's observations get to the heart of the matter: private and public might be useful as organising concepts, but they are not divided by a clear border given the state's coercion and the active participation of individuals. Vadim Volkov, writing on *kul'turnost'* ('culturedness'), notes that from the perspective of the Stakhanovite Busygin, privacy (in his case expressed as close, silent, lonesome reading of Bolshevik texts) was not the same as someone reading alone in their bedroom in Britain: it was 'connected with political self-education and the cultivation of Bolshevik consciousness.'⁶³

Oleg Kharkordin develops this discussion further. His work suggests that the private and public as understood by a 20th century Briton is not a sensible way to assess Soviet culture. He develops this by suggesting a new schema: the Bolsheviks cultivated the *lichnaia zhizn'*, the 'personal life' of its people and sought to deny the *chastnaia zhizn'*, or 'private life'. The 'personal life' was to be Bolshevik and could only be done so in view of the Party and mutual surveillance by peers: it was not possible to be Bolshevik without being visibly so.⁶⁴ In English, these two concepts of private and personal lives are essentially (politically) synonymous, but Kharkordin argues

⁶² Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind*, 85–6.

⁶³ Volkov, 'The Concept of *kul'turnost'*', 228.

⁶⁴ Oleg Kharkordin, 'A Genealogy of Private Life in Soviet Russia' in Weintraub and Kumar (eds.) *Public and Private in Thought and Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 333–361, at 342–3.

that in a Soviet context the division makes sense as a way of describing the purpose of the personal in Soviet ontology. Indeed, going back to the discussion above of the usable self, Kharkhordin makes the argument that in focusing on the personal in this way, the party in fact created a distinctly Soviet 'private sphere': 'Soviet dissimulation was instrumental in constructing the Soviet individual'.⁶⁵ People hid things from their peers and from power. The details varied, but the context and the need to do this, so formed them as distinctly Soviet people.

Svetlana Boym observes there are essentially two conceptions of life in Russian culture: Russian tradition 'holds little respect for what is described as [a] "Western, bourgeois" idea of privacy'; she argues that Russian life is founded rather on two understandings of 'life' – everyday existence (*быт*) and the existence of being (*Бытие*) – that is, 'everyday life' and a 'real life'; mundane/philosophical, survival/transcendence.⁶⁶ Boym suggests that the distinction between a 'private life' (foreign, inauthentic) and a 'Russian life' (authentic) developed via 'cross-cultural travellers, Russians going to Europe and European visitors to Russia', and seeing how the other lived.⁶⁷ Yet again, the British traveller entering Soviet space was participating in a Russian cultural dynamic of longstanding; Boym notes how readings of sincerity and authenticity were fundamentally tied to foreign conceptions as against Russian conceptions and frameworks: 'One country's polarities of nature and culture, private and public, do not clearly translate into other languages'.⁶⁸ This continued in the Soviet world: 'although the Soviet ideal person was the opposite of the Russian personality on the grounds of religious idealism, the constructs were structurally similar: self-sacrificial, anti-individualist, and ascetic' – i.e. things to be shaped in Kharkhordin's 'personal life' – the New person was to be concerned with 'social needs' above all others.⁶⁹ This, as described above, changed somewhat over the 1930s, from the state's change in focus from class to individual, and in the development of the new Soviet bureaucracy with attendant privileges.

⁶⁵ Kharkhordin, 'A Genealogy', 350.

⁶⁶ Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 29 & 73

⁶⁷ Boym, *Common Places*, 74.

⁶⁸ Boym, *Common Places*, 76.

⁶⁹ Boym, 88–90.

We therefore circle back to the combination of ideology and the everyday: the everyday being ideological, the personal being public, the political being intimate; the foreigner understanding all of this through a framework that was not built to observe Soviet culture and society in its own terms. This thesis employs the public/private binary because it is how travellers perceived the nature of spaces and performances of domestic and public lives, and as a way, following Katerina Gerasimova, of expediting the study of cross-cultural history in familiar terms.⁷⁰ Nevertheless the range of issues here, from the personal/private or everyday/'real' to the sincere/authentic (Kharkhordin notes that Soviet dissimulation was not like Western sincerity, *vis* "the theatrical presentation of the self" – it was the creation of a self, rather than the representation of a pre-existing self) are extremely significant and are an integral part of the overall 'public/private' binary.⁷¹

Thus, that which would generally be considered 'private' by a traveller was potentially anything but. Reviewing post-Soviet publication of Soviet-era diaries, Irina Paperno notes 'an intense drive [from the diarists] to reveal what happened to them in private', either behind closed doors or within themselves. She relates a theory of the writer Mikhail Prishvin from 1937: that of 'the moral theory of the double man': "The intimate man is the good man. But there exists the public man: he is a coward. All that is good – this is the private man; all that is bad – the public."⁷² This appears to be a relatively familiar conception of the private and the public: the public forces a performance, a kind of (in)sincerity, on the agent, whilst privacy equates to authenticity of some kind. However, when this is framed via Kharkhordin's personal/private life model, it gives the tensions in Soviet society an extra subtlety. Chukovskaia's diary of Anna Akhmatova's life focuses on the private being 'deformed' by the Soviet world, where the poet's shared living situation meant she lived in Leningrad with her estranged husband, Nikolai Nikolaevich Punin, his former wife and their daughter, and the family of the Punins' former servants.⁷³ Such a configuration of relationships was not unusual across the Union. Especially for Akhmatova, given her suspicions she was

⁷⁰ Katerina Gerasimova, 'Public Privacy in the Soviet Communal Apartment', in D. Crowley & S.E. Reid (eds.), *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 207–230, at 207.

⁷¹ Kharkhordin, 'A Genealogy', 350.

⁷² Paperno, *Stories of the Soviet Experience*, 18.

⁷³ Paperno, *Stories of the Soviet Experience* 17–18.

being spied upon, but for all who lived in such environments, the political was intimate: the division was not sensible in the same way to those immersed in that world as it would have been to a British traveller. Living conditions exemplified and enforced this Soviet paradigm.

Kotkin notes that in the 1930s 'living space [...] came to signify [...] a reorientation of housing away from the family and toward the collective' – indeed, housing 'was called upon not merely to shelter people but to mould them.'⁷⁴ Barracks at Magnitogorsk (and other major industrial locations), each replete with a 'Red Corner', were inherently lacking in privacy; mud huts, built by workers themselves and frowned upon by the city authorities, afforded workers some space to themselves.⁷⁵ Yet both were intended to be temporary. So were communal apartments, but these became a feature of Soviet life for decades. Appropriated apartments became, via the urban population boom (23,000,000 peasants moved from country to city between 1926 and 1939) and lack of investment in construction, communal apartments, 'established as a social institution' in Soviet cities – in 1931 Leningrad, average living space per capita was 6.2m²; in 1930 Moscow, it was 5.5m², dropping to 4m² in 1940.⁷⁶ Gerasimova writes how the institutionalisation of the 'spatial structure' of apartments 'brought about a system of horizontal control': people may have had their 'own' room, or a room for their family, but they were never far from meeting people in the shared corridors, kitchens, bathrooms, and thus never far from an 'involuntary observer and controller'. Nor were they far from figures given key roles in the maintenance of the building and its integration into the state, such as those in charge of registration, or those who constituted the 'comrades courts' that censured transgressors.⁷⁷

Indeed, Sheila Fitzpatrick notes how the re-introduction of internal passports and urban registration in 1932 saw foremen and superintendents build a 'regular relationship with the police, keeping an eye on residents and acting as informers'.⁷⁸ In the 1930s the new bureaucracy could acquire larger apartments for themselves, but

⁷⁴ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 158; 180.

⁷⁵ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 176.

⁷⁶ Hoffman, *Peasant Metropolis*, 1; Gerasimova, 'Public Privacy', 211–2; Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 46.

⁷⁷ Gerasimova, 'Public Privacy', 212–14.

⁷⁸ Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 46.

millions of others lived as *kommunalki* for the period (and beyond). Even within bedrooms, families would divide space as best as possible, but bodily functions, arguments, physical intimacy and the rest of what a Briton would consider fundamentally private, were held in 'public privacy' – both sensed by others within the room, and also leeching out into the rest of the apartment via proximity, thin walls and unavoidable, repeated contact with others (strangers included) once one stepped out of the room.⁷⁹ Gerasimova notes that communal living 'brought about the alienation of people from their habitat', rather than the home being a location of impermeable security.⁸⁰ Fitzpatrick writes

Life in a communal apartment, side by side with people of different backgrounds and classes who were strangers sharing facilities and the responsibility of keeping them clean, without privacy and under constant surveillance by neighbors, was extremely stressful for people.

She also notes this was not uniform: some apartment residents came to constitute 'a kind of extended family', where trust and mutual aid flourished over suspicion – children noticeably more often attuned to such a life than the already-adult when the life of a *kommunalki* was thrust upon them.⁸¹

The point I wish to draw out of this immensely complex scene is as follows: the ideological and social environments of Soviet living spaces potentially tells us something about Soviet individuals, be they housed in communal apartments or in communal farms and dormitories, or even in their own apartment. Furthermore, that the public and the private were fused together in crucial ways. Indeed, whilst employing the 'foreign' concept of privacy is a necessary accommodation to facilitating the exploration of cross-cultural differences, it should not be allowed to lead the study uncritically. How travellers entered and existed in these spaces can tell us something both about the discourse of travel and travellers' expectations of Soviet privacy, and thus their reading of Soviet sincerity *vis* the 'unofficial', and also how Soviet people viewed foreigners *vis* their intrusions into the places and modes of their, if not 'private', then their 'personal' lives, just as we will explore how travellers encountered different

⁷⁹ Gerasimova, 'Public Privacy', 219.

⁸⁰ Gerasimova, 'Public Privacy', 224.

⁸¹ Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 48–49.

aspects of the Soviet usable self. Again, this helps us consider where travellers sit in the 'us' and 'them' binary.

THE ENCOUNTERS

In summary, these encounters are considered by what they show us of the Soviet 'usable self', and the dichotomy of 'public/private' to give structure to this rich history. More than this, these broad areas help us explore the sustained complexity of Soviet life and unpick the variable, complicated and overlapping meanings visible in the encounters. These concepts are departure points, not destinations. Rather than finding simple answers, we find more insights and a new perspective on those most knotty of historical problems: subjectivities, trust, and truth, bound together here by the concept of sincerity. The questioning of sincerity as it arose between traveller and Soviet is complex, and it was performed in several different ways: with a direct question from one to the other, by action, or by the travellers to their readership. In the sources at hand, there is a noticeable imbalance in the direction of questioning: from traveller to Soviet outweighs the questioning of the traveller by the Soviet. This is a factor of the place the relevant calculations took place: in the unrecoverable mind of the Soviet individual. What we can see is the result of Soviet individuals choosing to engage with the foreigner to some degree; any significant doubt about the traveller's sincerity may have precluded an encounter. Thus, the writing by foreigners observing and commenting on Soviet sincerity is more common. Here we see many examples, even beyond those about the tour and the Soviet official world, and here are interleaved relationships and fleeting encounters, as explorations of the sincerity of the Soviet was both part of the traveller's report given to their readers, sometimes withheld from the Soviet individual themselves, and a matter of explicit discussion between the traveller and the Soviet. Broadly speaking, these encounters, whilst divided by substance – e.g., the point of discussion could be quite varied – and location and time (here are examples from 1929 and 1939, from Belarus to Siberia), the uniting factor is the sincere search for the truth.

Gareth Jones provided explicit examples of the sincerity of foreigners and Soviets being questioned alike. In a *Times* article based on his 1930 trip to southern Russia and Ukraine, he reported being doubted as follows:

On being asked several questions, one skilled worker became silent and said: 'I am afraid of talking to you. A lot of foreigners, Latvians and others, belong to the OGPU'. [...] 'There are spies – most of the Komsomoltsi, [...] for example – who report you. You may be a spy.'⁸²

This is a moment of the traveller recording his sincerity being directly, explicitly questioned by a Soviet individual. More common was the reverse, the suggestion that the Soviet individual's sincerity was questionable. Jones again provides an example, from the countryside near Samara in 1931:

individual farmer (beard, dark, pitted with small pox) said: 'we are afraid of talking. How do you know when the people are telling you the truth or lies in the villages?'⁸³

For our purposes these two quotes from Jones neatly bring numerous dual aspects – performance and reception, British and Soviet, discourse and experience – of the thesis together: questions about the possibility for Soviet sincerity ('we are afraid of talking...'), and a questioning of foreigner sincerity ('...to people like you'). This shows the tensions provoked by Soviet power and the nature of everyday life during Stalinism, and the potential meanings of encountering the traveller for the Soviet individual.

The following two chapters are essentially one large investigation, and each should be read with the other in mind: they are two parts of the same whole, divided to make them manageable. Broadly, chapter four considers the Soviet individual interacting with the foreigner in something like a 'public' capacity: where representatives of the 'official', and other Soviet individuals, were present. The usable self is brought to the foreground here as this chapter is more directly concerned with the interaction of the 'official' and 'unofficial' as perceived by travellers. Chapter five considers how the public/private/personal distinctions in the life of the Soviet individual develop this scene, and how travellers experienced encounters and conversations with people in all three spheres.

⁸² Gareth Jones, 'Fanaticism & Disillusion', *The Times*, 14 October 1930, 15f.

⁸³ Gareth Jones, Diary B1–12, August–September 1931

Chapter 4

Citrine and Karchan: The Usable Self

‘One had some street talks, but it was only rarely that they developed into anything of general interest’ – Bernard Pares¹

‘We converse for quite a long time. I am astonished to find what a lot we manage to convey to one another’ – Elizabeth Delafield²

Walter Citrine’s relationship with his guide, named only as ‘Karchan’, brings questions of sincerity to the foreground as they related to a representative of the state. Karchan, it appears from Citrine’s archive, was Citrine’s guide and translator for the vast majority of his 1936 visit to the Soviet Union. This chapter examines the relationship between a traveller and a guide, and related interactions between other individuals: Karchan the guide is also seen by Citrine, and by this thesis, as Karchan the Soviet individual – his role as a guide is crucial, but so too is his subjectivity distinct from that role. These encounters help us explore ideas such as subterfuge; the discipline of the state; interviews; and the presence of the ‘official’ during engagement with the ‘unofficial’. These encounters also enable exploration of the idea of the usable self through travel accounts: how Soviet individuals acted *vis* travellers and what they revealed, hid, performed – and how travellers assessed the sincerity of Soviet individuals. It shows us that whilst the discipline of the state is of clear significance for these encounters, there were many opportunities for encounters, even with the ‘official’, that confounded the expectations of travellers and the discourse of travel’s generalisations and complicate our reading of Soviet life.

ENGAGING WITH THE SOVIET MIND: I

Before Karchan is introduced in his account, Citrine’s suspicion of a Soviet veneer is a key part of *I Search for Truth in Russia*. Aboard the *Smolny* to Leningrad, a fellow passenger was reading William Chamberlin’s *Russia’s Iron Age*. This passenger ‘nervously’ told Citrine that a crew member, the ‘bald-headed man who looks like a

¹ Pares, *Moscow admits a Critic*, 36.

² Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 188–9.

Jew, and the one you said you thought was a spy', had asked to see her book, and then whisked it off to the captain. Citrine had apparently advised the woman to put the book in a different cover, 'so they would not see the title of the book as they might not like it'.³ This stratagem evidently failed in some way. 'The Captain' found the tome and then said he was going to 'burn the book, and should like to burn the author', such were its criticisms of the Soviet Union.⁴ This account sets the tone for Citrine's exploration of sincerity in Russia.

The spectre of repression was confirmed for Citrine upon arriving in Leningrad: trying to sleep in his new hotel room, he was awoken by screams from the street outside. He looked out his window and saw a woman being forcibly led away by two men. He saw no other windows open, and withdrew to bed, disturbed. Furthermore, he met with the British Consul General who told him (although Citrine did not relate this to his readers) that the diplomatic staff in the city 'suffered from isolation very much'. The Consul General reported:

'Some time ago, Albert Coates, the conductor, came here to give a concert. After this was over the Consul General went to the dressing room to congratulate him. There were a good many Russians standing near, mostly people of the former intelligentsia and they, too, were very full of praise.' Coates invited everyone to the hotel for dinner, and the Consul General took his wife with him. When they got there, Coates said, 'I am in a very embarrassing position. I invited you to come here for dinner but after you had gone, the Russians told me that if you came they would have to stay away as they were afraid to be seen at the same dinner table was [*sic*] you.' 'They were afraid of being accused of working with us in some way. That is the terrible fear that is always present', said the Consul General.⁵

Citrine's experiences early on in his travels confirmed vividly what he had suspected from afar: that Soviet cultural diplomacy would be insincere, and that engaging with Soviet people would be a matter of negotiating an atmosphere of fear and isolation. The figure of Karchan became a focal point for Citrine's doubts and concerns about

³ Walter Citrine 1/19, fol. 75–6.

⁴ Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, 22–3.

⁵ Citrine, 1/19, fol. 178. See also Michael Hughes, *Inside the Enigma*, 232.

Soviet sincerity and the limits placed on his own 'search for truth' in the Soviet Union. Citrine was prepared to question, directly and vigorously, a Soviet official's sincerity and motives, whilst he was also aware of the potential dangers a Soviet person might face in interacting with foreigners. A reading of *I Search for Truth in Russia* alongside Citrine's working materials for the book reveal that he withheld the name of his guide from his publication. Citrine's withholding of Karchan's name emphasises his suspicion of the context in which he travelled: it is conceivable that Citrine wanted to protect Karchan from potential disciplinary action from the authorities (although as Karchan was Citrine's designated guide, it would at best only have given Karchan plausible deniability). Indeed, the differences between Citrine's unpublished and published accounts are few, but where they exist they tend to be significant: Karchan's name most of all, but also the inclusion of comment on matters of repression (e.g., recall the comment about the conductor Albert Coates made by the British Consul in Leningrad to Citrine). Citrine appears to have published the great majority of his experience as recorded in his diaries but did not publish a small selection of material that related either to identifying Karchan explicitly, or perhaps could in some other way cause trouble for others. Citrine's account enables us to consider Karchan's reactions in light of the Soviet concern with 'authenticity and transparency', and how the mask of Soviet individuals could be revealed by interaction with travellers: how subtle and dramatic adaptations to the usable self could be seen.

Citrine's account of his relationship with Karchan pivots on several conversations. After visiting the Kaganovich ball-bearing factory in Leningrad, Citrine and Karchan discussed the qualities of Soviet life: what Citrine called a 'straight talk'.⁶ 'I liked this chap immensely', Citrine tells his readers, but the Briton 'had a feeling, however, that he was a Secret Service man' – so Citrine 'resolved to test him.' Citrine questioned Karchan directly: "are you a member of the GPU?". Karchan turned his back on Citrine, and 'looked through the windows of our hotel'. Then, he 'said quietly enough, "I am not, but every worker is expected to report what he hears if it is injurious to the interest of the Soviet State.'" Citrine leapt on this: 'I suppose you report my conversations everyday?':

⁶ Citrine, 1/20, fol. 10.

‘No, your views were well known before you came to Russia. They know them from you as well as they could obtain them from me.’

Citrine tried ‘to draw him out’, by saying he was perfectly open in his criticisms, but how should a Soviet know what was ‘genuine criticism’ and what was ‘hostility’, as Karchan described it to Citrine. Karchan responded with a vague phrasing: ‘He would know anything which threatened to bring the capitalists back to Russia.’⁷ Citrine’s use of slightly more evocative language in his published writing, depicting Karchan’s gazing out the window and his ‘quiet’ response to Citrine’s probe, is suggestive of Citrine’s engagement with Karchan: he is interested and troubled by Karchan’s role as a guide and interpreter, and he is also interested and troubled by what their engagement means for Karchan himself. Karchan is a figure of both suspicion and sympathy, and Karchan presents to us a clear example of the Soviet individual defined by his responsibilities to the state.

TRAVELLER AS THREAT

To assist in this exploration, it is necessary to broaden the scope to other travellers and Soviet individuals, before returning to Citrine and Karchan further on. It was not only Western travellers who suspected that subterfuge was a key ingredient of the encounter between foreigner and Soviet. There are some encounters that pivoted on Soviet questioning of the sincerity of the traveller. Norah Rowan-Hamilton’s account *Under the Red Star* records a peculiar scene on a ‘German colonist’ farm in the Moldavian ASSR. Rowan-Hamilton and her fellow travellers walked into a situation in which a man was being questioned by soldiers about something that remained a mystery to the Britons. They asked what was going on:

Several voices began to explain. We caught the word ‘spy’... then suddenly the room was empty. Only the light of the dying sun remained, like a pool of spilt wine on the wooden floor.⁸

⁷ Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, 111–12.

⁸ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 208.

The literary colour of this scene aside, it seems possible that Rowan-Hamilton heard and knew ‘шпион’ (spy). Rowan-Hamilton’s story is an example of Soviets doubting and possibly fearing foreigners – quite what was going on is unclear, but the tone of the scene is apparent. Gareth Jones shows this explicitly as noted above when a peasant determines “‘you may be a spy’”.⁹ Orlov and Popov explore this idea in relation to foreigners in their work. See *USSR!*: ‘the theme of espionage was widely reflected in Soviet literature, cinema and poster art of the 1930s’; Intourist guides were, by 1937, instructed to be vigilant, recalling every word they could, and paying close attention to whom the foreigners spoke.¹⁰ Intourist staff themselves came under suspicion during the Terror.¹¹ Yet whilst this was relevant to guides, and the wider cultural fear about espionage was visible to all Soviet people, the encounters herein are not primarily between guides and foreigners – guides are largely absent (Karchan aside) – and we can even see guides acting in ways contrary to the prescriptions Orlov and Popov relate.

Rowan-Hamilton is not accepted as one of ‘us’ by the peasants, possibly because of the presence of the soldiers, and Gareth Jones being thought a spy shows he certainly was not accepted, even without the apparent presence of any ‘official’ figure: indeed, the comment that ‘a lot of foreigners [...] belong to the OGPU’ is particularly indicative of this. Rowan-Hamilton writes as though for some Soviets she is a possible spy to be feared – or so she suspects (and as Jones showed). Whatever the truth of the ‘spy’ situation, questioning of foreigners’ sincerity is noted in other accounts besides. Violet Conolly, for example, mentions being asked, amongst numerous other questions, whether she had ‘really come alone and independently, or was I sent on a mission by my Government?’¹² This explicit questioning suggests that travellers could be viewed as, if not ‘them’, then as a potential threat to Soviet order in some sense – being on a ‘mission’ certainly suggests subterfuge. The idea of foreign aggression was certainly a feature of these interactions. John Henry Richardson recorded that:

The Russians one met were, however, very keen to ask questions about the position in other countries. There is a widespread belief that the world economic

⁹ Gareth Jones, ‘Fanaticism & Disillusion’, *The Times*, 14 October 1930, 15f.

¹⁰ Orlov & Popov, *See USSR!*, 409–10.

¹¹ Orlov & Popov, *See USSR!*, 410.

¹² Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 62.

crisis may at any moment result in a socialist revolution in one or more countries.

The view is also general that an attack upon Soviet Russia by certain of the capitalist countries is imminent.¹³

This is particularly noticeable when related by Bernard Pares in Moscow, where he describes being repeatedly told that fear of a 'joint attack from east and west was the same on the street as it was in the Foreign Office.'¹⁴

Such questioning was seen in settings where one would expect to see it too: encounters between foreigner and the police. Here again, however, are subtleties. John Grierson faced inquiries from the OGPU after his arrival by air into the USSR saw him land at Minsk. Whilst he was received warmly by 'a swarm of men in diverse uniforms' who looked after his aircraft, an OGPU representative arrived with an interpreter: Grierson was asked why he had landed in Minsk, and if he knew Minsk 'was in a fortified area'.¹⁵ He was, however, allowed to continue on to Moscow due to a telegram from an 'American Press Agency' stating he was expected in the capital. Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton's passport was taken from him at a small station on the Ukrainian frontier, and he had to explain his purpose of travel to 'an official'. After questioning, he was permitted to continue.¹⁶ Questioning could also come indirectly, revealing itself in text after the fact. In the mid-1920s Malcolm Burr spent several months at the mining town of Bodaibo on the Vitim river (a tributary of the Lena) and ran into trouble when he bought some *valenki* from a local shop. As he was not familiar with the felt boots, an assistant showed him how to use them correctly. A few days later, Burr was surprised to read an article in the local newspaper about him patronising the Soviet worker by making them wrap his feet. Burr's expedition to purchase appropriate footwear had been turned into a tale of capitalist exploitation.¹⁷ Burr relates that 'Mr Kolbasov' (i.e., Mr Sausage) – as he named the author of this piece – engendered a scenario where the assistant was made to apologise before his comrades at the next local Party meeting. Burr read this scenario as proof of Soviet

¹³ Richardson, *Impressions of Soviet Russia*.

¹⁴ Pares, *Moscow admits a Critic*, 37.

¹⁵ Grierson, *Through Russia by Air*, 27-30.

¹⁶ Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, *Russian Closeup*, 92-3.

¹⁷ Burr, *In Bolshevik Siberia*, 169-71.

ignorance about capitalists.¹⁸ All of these examples suggest the foreigner as a potentially threatening presence to Soviet people, in terms of martial/political/legal 'transgressions' – and in the case of Burr, the foreigner being represented in terms of Soviet propaganda's expectations regarding capitalist exploitation (although the shop worker was happy to simply help a customer). The traveller was, therefore, possibly a threat for the usable self of the Soviet individual. Reactions to this threat, however, varied even within this limited range of examples.

This sense of doubt on the part of Soviets could also be inferred rather than stated: Ada Chesterton wrote of a 'Bolshevist officer' on a train to Kyiv: 'we were conscious of his hostile curious glance. As foreigners, I suppose we naturally excited his suspicions; but he struck a little chill on that friendly day'.¹⁹ Archibald Lyall, whilst staying in Moscow after abandoning his tour, was assaulted outside the Hotel Metropole. This attack was, he thought, made upon him because he was identified as a foreigner: not so much a questioning of his sincerity as a direct challenge to his presence there.²⁰ Whatever the reason for the attack, the fact that Lyall noted this as his understanding of its cause is significant in itself – it suggests an awareness of tension between foreigner and Soviet, of the presence of the former as being potentially resented by the latter – sincerity be damned.²¹ Gareth Jones notes a conversation that combined both hostility and openness. In Moscow in 1931, he ran into a 'scandal' where a woman was shouting at a crowd. A drunk man approached Jones:

'Where do you come from?' "Oh indeed that's the country we're feeding. Sending all our food abroad. How can we live now? They're shooting workers & jailing them. We're forced to do everything. We can't have a say. There's always a show of hands. If only we could vote secretly!'

The man's first act is to place Jones-as-foreigner if not into 'them', but certainly not with 'us': '*you* in other countries receive all *our* food.' But then he complains to Jones about living conditions and repression: Jones can still act as an outlet of unhappiness for the man. Whilst this is not a questioning of Jones's sincerity, it shows how tension

¹⁸ Burr, *In Bolshevik Siberia*, 172.

¹⁹ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 103.

²⁰ Orlov and Popov note that crime committed by Soviet individuals against foreign tourists did occur, although the most common crime was petty theft. See *USSR!*, 444.

²¹ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 165-8

and engagement could co-exist for a Soviet individual in terms of definitively placing the foreigner outside the 'us' group but retaining an element of openness.

These few examples that show us how Soviets engaged with the question of foreigners' sincerity, or their mere presence, are more significant in their rarity (relative to the foreigners' question of Soviet sincerity, as will be seen below) than their content; this theme is perhaps the clearest example where avoidance and absence speak loudest. Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton asserted that his experience at the railway station was the only time he had been treated as someone other 'than if I had been an ordinary subject of the USSR.'²² In a stark and revealing contrast with his experiences buying footwear, Malcolm Burr was also offered weaponry: arriving at Irkutsk *en route* to Bodaibo, the manager of the local government Trust, an Ivan Ivanovitch, entrusted Burr with a handgun and ammunition, to go with a licence for Burr's own shotgun. Ivan Ivanovitch, Burr noted, felt it was necessary for the foreigner's own safety.²³ Bosworth Goldman noted that people were 'anxious' to help him reach the Altai from Novosibirsk.²⁴ It seems, therefore, that whilst there were instances of explicit or inferred doubting of foreigners' sincerity made by Soviet individuals, be they in relation to general or specific instances, they were exceptions that proved a more general rule: that foreigners' accounts do not contain many instances of their sincerity – or their presence – being openly questioned. Thus, in sum, whilst there are instances of foreigners being stopped, questioned, considered as threats in person or in print, there are counterexamples: the 'official' world of police and local authorities could assist foreigners in their travels (providing service) as well as ask questions of their presence. This is telling when we recall the stories of fear and repression many travellers retold early on in their accounts: Soviet sincerity was not as complicated as the traveller might have previously assumed (even as it is already clear that the usable self was made apparent even in these situations). Whilst the moral hierarchy writers like Jones established remained in place – the rulers and ruled were a fixture of Soviet life – for other travellers the reality of the Soviet Union was less Manichean, and thus encounters with the 'official' were not necessarily perceived to be encounters with

²² Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, *Russian Closeup*, 92-3.

²³ Burr, *In Bolshevik Siberia*, 24-5.

²⁴ Goldman, *Red Road Through Asia*, 136.

representatives of evil. Furthermore, it suggests travellers do not inhabit either the 'us' or the 'them' of Soviet identities, but a third group: necessarily alien and outsider, sometimes to be avoided, sometimes to be questioned (Conolly being asked if she was on a 'mission'; police checking Crichton's documents) or aided (Malcolm Burr by Ivan Ivanovitch and by a shopkeeper).

THE DISCIPLINE OF THE STATE

A return to Citrine and Karchan introduces examination of the usable self by the travellers themselves. Later in Citrine's journey, on a train to Baku, he had another 'straight talk' with Karchan, from which a different reading of Karchan's nature and agency becomes clear – and it is of great importance as a contrast to the reading of Karchan-as-spy. Citrine argued that the Soviet Trade Unions 'were only puppets of the Communist Party'. Karchan argued in return that the Unions were "'persuaded"' to follow the lead of the Communist Party, 'but admitted that the Party dominated Trade Unions and Government alike.'²⁵ Citrine asked Karchan to explain how the Party conducted its purges. Karchan explained how members' biographies were questioned and critiqued by the workers – 'both Party and non-Party' – who sought signs of Revolutionary obedience. Citrine retorted that this sincerity test 'made a spy of every man on his neighbour', and that this must create an atmosphere of fear in which members are continually frightened and are driven to sycophancy. Citrine then once again moved the subject to Karchan himself, stating rather than questioning:

'It grieves me to see an intelligent, educated man like yourself, locking up his brains,' I observed. 'You have lived in other countries. You know as well as I do the necessity for healthy criticism in political life.'

Karchan's response "'we criticise in the Party Conferences"' did not satisfy Citrine:

'Candidly, I think you are afraid. You know the consequences which would follow if you were known to criticise any of [the Party leadership], and you will not take the risk even in the company of your best friend.'

²⁵ Citrine, *I Search for Truth*, 255.

Karchan deflected: “We have cartoonists and they criticise things when they think they are wrong”, and to Citrine’s question as to whether Stalin has ever been directly criticised in the Party, Karchan replies “no doubt there have been instances, but I cannot recall them.” Citrine gave up at this point, writing, ‘of course, when one remembers that any Communist may be hauled up before a meeting and asked to explain some casual remark [...] it is easy to understand why they are so careful.’²⁶ Here Citrine is critiquing Karchan’s usable self and observing one end of the axis of Party discipline, the other end of which Igal Halfin explores in his study of the purges and self-criticism. Citrine recognises an element of insincerity in Karchan and expects more from/wishes more for him (‘an intelligent, educated man’). These exchanges demonstrate that Karchan is still at one remove from Citrine, because true mutual understanding is blocked – at least – by the weight of Party discipline. Karchan-as-spy and Karchan-as-cowed-man are both important for Citrine, and his reading of Karchan’s sincerity is channelled through an understanding of the power relationships Party discipline was built upon. Again, let us turn to other travellers to consider this reading of the usable self further, and ask how the traveller themselves caused shifts in Soviet self-presentation. Crucial to this consideration is the idea of Soviet power and the impression of a ‘cowed’ people.

John Lockhart noted a conversation that generated similar conclusions to that of Citrine, when discussing the GPU with ‘a young Russian friend’: ‘

he had discovered by pure chance that his most intimate friend, whom he met and with whom he talked every day, was himself a member of the GPU. Undoubtedly, and despite a recent attempt to put them in their place, they are a big and unpleasant factor in Russian life, though many of their activities appear to be more futile than sinister. [...] On the only two occasions when I spoke to members of the old upper class I noticed that they were exceedingly afraid of being overlooked or overheard by somebody. And that somebody was the GPU.²⁷

Bosworth Goldman, right at the end of his account, related being asked by an acquaintance to follow through the streets of an unnamed town (‘in Siberia’). Goldman

²⁶ Citrine, *I Search for Truth*, 256–7.

²⁷ Lockhart, *Babel Visited*, 38–9.

was led to a 'long room fitfully lighted' where 'twenty men were gathered [...]. The scene might have come from a Hollywood film of secret revolutionary societies' activities'. There the men railed against 'the Bolsheviks and everything they had done'. When Goldman and his companion left, the latter sobbed: '[...] never shall we do anything since the OGPU are everywhere, and we are afraid to tell others what we think, for assuredly we shall be found out.'²⁸ Furthermore, Violet Connolly's writing reveals an interesting addendum to this idea of discipline cowering a Soviet person involved with the party, for it shows a possible extension of that discipline beyond the Party. In Kharkiv Connolly found an impromptu guide, an unnamed woman. This woman was showing her around the streets, and reacted in a very noticeable way, Connolly thought, to the pair reaching an area that was in a poor state:

She followed my eyes to the ruts and the squalid dwellings on each side of the road. Then, conscience-stricken, she hastened to point out that this was one of the worst streets in the town, and that Charkow [Kharkiv] had some magnificent public buildings. I agreed, but added that it was a greater surprise to find these unsavoury houses still inhabited by Soviet workers than to find new public buildings and some new flats. There was nothing worse than these rabbit-warrens in the capitalistic world.

Connolly's impromptu guide 'looked thoroughly frightened at this stage, and begged me to return to the centre of the town where "it was more interesting".'²⁹ Quite what made the woman scared in particular is not precisely knowable: possibly it was mention of 'the capitalistic world', or it was the obvious contrast between the 'magnificent public buildings' and the shoddy ones she had inadvertently let Connolly see, and her agency in this development in her role as impromptu guide, or all of the above. What is most pertinent here is that this woman appeared to work towards, to some degree, the objectives of Soviet cultural diplomacy, or at the very least with the idea of showing the foreigner 'good' things was clearly of some significance, and a corollary understanding that to act against these aims, even inadvertently, was not desirable. Questions of the usable self here are joined by the influence of cultural diplomacy, and how it interrelated with Soviet understandings of foreigners. Connolly's example is noticeable for its

²⁸ Goldman, *Red Road Through Asia*, 266.

²⁹ Connolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 52.

uniqueness: far more often were Soviets willing to show poor material conditions (or explain them away), rather than react with fright.

A contrasting nuance to this reaction is added by Rowan-Hamilton's reporting of what happened when her party returned to Odessa from a visit to a village. A porter at their hotel had been asked where the foreigners had gone: 'Ispolkom' was reported as being 'angry' at their absence from Odessa. The porter's response shows again another variation, in quite a contrast to the apparently scared peasants:

'They threatened that if such a thing happened again I shall be tried for neglect of duties. Another time tell me where you go... you need not tell the truth...'³⁰

The porter played a knowingly insincere role: he does not care about the truth of events, what matters to him was being able to present a usable story to communicate as necessary to other Soviet people. Not so much his self is revealed as the contours of information he needs to possess in order to navigate the situation safely.

Examples of other travellers assessing the Soviet people they met were cowed (as Party members or otherwise) are numerous and some bear particular mention: Gareth Jones's work on the USSR was predicated on contrasting people's suffering or silences to cruel, loud authority. Indeed, whilst few travellers reached conclusions as furious as Jones about the Soviet Union, the idea of 'the cowed people of the USSR' was key for many travellers' understandings of Soviet life – whether the traveller found this reflected in reality or not: stories of repression particularly animated Hubert Griffith in his writing, for instance, as he sought to dispel notions that the USSR was simply a place of vast suffering. For Jones, the idea and fact of suffering was central to his understanding. Aboard a boat on the Volga, Jones tried to engage a doctor in a conversation about nationalist movements in the Soviet Union:

Doctor who wished to be silent:

G.J 'I expect there are a lot of nationalists in C. Asia'

D. 'Oh, the scenery is beautiful there.'

G.J 'There must be lot in Georgia too.'

³⁰ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 208.

D. 'You must see the m[oun]t[ai]ns in Georgia; Caucasus – wonderful.' etc.³¹

The doctor's reticence to engage (on a topic of political seriousness, which Jones must have appreciated) was clear. The doctor's usable self could stretch to engaging with foreigners: he knew what he must not talk about, and so he did not talk about it: he did not trust Jones. The traveller was not always an outlet for grievances or difficult discussion (especially when they asked particularly probing questions about sensitive issues, as Jones was well-practised in doing). Norah Rowan-Hamilton asked her guide (showing her around Tsarkoe Selo in Leningrad) to dinner. The woman, a 'Madame V', was 'a little spare figure in a shabby black ulster and close black hat', whose family had left the Soviet Union but she had remained to care for an ill sister. She was not the 'official' guide, but rather someone brought in to guide Rowan-Hamilton and her companions for an impromptu tour.³² Madame V expressed clear sympathy towards the vanished royals, but when she was invited to dine with the foreigners, 'the tears came into her eyes':

'Oh, if you *knew* how I long to accept! It would mean so much to me to talk to people like yourselves for once. But I daren't. You understand? They would immediately think... I have to be so careful... we all have. A charge of 'counter-revolution' is so easily made.'

Yet Madame V also expressed views such as 'the country is a prison – physically and mentally. Neither bodies nor minds are free.' Madame V seemed comfortable with expressing her views whilst performing her assigned task, that of guiding foreigners, but not of deviating from that task – it was the latter that was the marker of danger for her.³³

Indeed, context was fundamental. Other Soviet individuals voiced their views stridently to Jones, revealing not only their suffering, but also that they were not so cowed as to be unable to speak up. A little after his journey by boat, on a farm near Samara, a girl 'of about 23' asked Jones 'when will there be an end to our misery. We

³¹ Gareth Jones, Diary B1–12, August–September 1931.

³² Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 298–9.

³³ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 306–7.

have suffered & are suffering so much.³⁴ In 1933 Jones met peasants in Kursk, who told him

‘We’re starving. Two months we’ve hardly had bread. We’re from the Ukraine & we’re trying to go north. They’re dying quickly in the villages. Kolkhozes are terrible. They won’t give us tickets, & we don’t know what to do. Can’t buy bread for money.’³⁵

Other travellers noted individuals suffering in other ways. John Brown wrote of talking to a priest aboard a boat to Saratov. The priest was surrounded by workers who, as Brown spoke to the priest, ‘laughed and interjected rapid comments which [he] failed to comprehend’:

I gathered that they considered the priest something of a rascal and a parasite, however. The priest seemed in no way afraid of their hostility, and went on sipping his tea without a tremor. Was he satisfied? No – a flash showed in his sloe-black eyes. [...] He went about a big district visiting his friends, he said. Many old people were still believers. I asked the men if they disliked the priest very much. Apparently they did, but it was a passive dislike – they would not interfere with him unless they were prompted by authority.³⁶

Brown’s description of the priest presents him as a figure evidently ostracised by his society, and thus a victim in some sense, although Brown appears to have admired his quiet resolve. In the example of Jones talking to the peasant woman, and the peasants in Kursk, the usable self is apparently irrelevant. His presence does not provoke any adaptation of their sincerity; indeed, Jones is a useful outlet for grievances: these peasants are suffering and they express themselves precisely thus, which was crucial for Jones’s reading of the entire Soviet world and each of his encounters within it. Brown’s priest, on the other hand, presents the usable self keenly, particularly given Brown’s framing of the ‘hostility’ of the workers around him. The priest signals his displeasure at the situation, but also explains he and his friends are still faithful; the workers meanwhile are like children awaiting the playground bully’s nod – the threat of

³⁴ Jones, Diary B1–12, August–September 1931.

³⁵ Jones, Diary B1–15, March 1933.

³⁶ John Brown, *I Saw for Myself*, 214.

discipline hovers in the air but is not applied forcefully here. Like Jones, suffering for Brown was to some degree a guarantor of sincerity. What is again clear from these examples is how contexts varied: suffering is expressed in the absence and presence of witnesses alike.

Violet Conolly also had an encounter with a religious figure, and she too considered them as being repressed. At a church in Tiflis, an 'ex-nun' (her convent had been closed) and Conolly conversed about religion in Russia, and in the outside world. The woman gave Conolly a note to pass on to Conolly's aunt, a nun in Ireland:

She became very excited when I told her she was a foreigner and interested in the position of the Church in Russia. Like a bird she fluttered over to a bench in the darkest part of the church, whispering: 'Please forgive me, but do sit a little while with me here. Do they still believe in God outside Russia?' She was trembling all over, and a very great deal seemed to hang on the answer to that question. I assured her that Russia was one of the few countries in the world where men and women were not free to worship as they pleased.

The note, Conolly found, read "Oh! You happy ones, I beg your holy prayers for one praying with you, PASHA." In contrast to this note from the ex-nun Praskovia, Conolly then witnessed a service at the church that was full of 'dumb superstition'. Conolly does not betray much about her reaction to this particular incident but setting it in context with her overall views of the Soviet Union, it is likely the encounter moved and angered her, even if her admiration for the church service was limited.³⁷ The encounter with the individual contrasts curiously with the 'dumb superstition' of the service, and is suggestive of how the encounter with the individual forcibly drew the matter of sincerity to attention, whereas the encounter with a mass brings to mind John Carey's writing on the intellectual looking at the crowd. Conolly seemingly found Praskovia's plight more meaningful than the rote religious ritual: the individual's sincerity was of more interest than any mass 'authentic' act in this case. Clearly here the Soviet individual viewed the traveller as a conduit to another world, where faith was revered rather than reviled: Conolly is, again, not exactly 'us', but she does offer a way for Praskovia to appeal to distant religious kin. Another incident of this nature occurred in Odessa,

³⁷ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 116–18.

where a woman approached Conolly, just before she was to leave the Soviet Union, asking “Are the churches closed abroad too? [...] We know nothing about the real state of the world here.” Conolly felt guilty that, for all her anger and frustration felt in the Soviet Union, she could ‘leave this nightmare of terror and constraint’, whilst ‘so many innocent victims, like the woman I had just spoken too, had no chance of escape.’³⁸

In summary, these encounters reveal several things. First, that the traveller could be viewed as an unwelcome vector for questions, and an outlet for grievances. Second, that the variability of Soviet responses is clear – simply contrast Jones’s doctor with the peasants in Kursk. The usable self was revealed by the foreigner forcibly in the avoidance of discussion, but also in the fact of it, and especially in the explicit insincerity of the hotel porter whom Rowan-Hamilton met. That self, when confronting the foreigner, could be evasive or expressive, it could be moved to fear by questioning, and it could be moved to strategies like lying (the porter) or passing on secretive messages (Praskovia). Third, that for some travellers, the idea of state discipline, and of suffering people, was central to their reading of the Soviet world: Jones, Brown, Conolly and Rowan-Hamilton all use these examples as part of their reading of the Soviet system as being fundamentally repressive, and thus expressions of suffering were seen as sincere, and it was individuals that brought this most clearly and forcibly to the travellers’ thoughts.

INTERVIEWS, QUESTIONS, ACCESS

This understanding of a suffering people, cowed either to silence or obedience, is certainly not unique to these writers, and nor is the fact of a greater variety of experiences than these ideas of a fundamentally repressed society might suggest. To consider the nuances more closely, let us return to Citrine’s specific experience, which allows us to tease apart how different agents in this power relationship acted, and how this was significant for Citrine as a reporter of Soviet affairs. An interesting dimension to this came with interviews. Karchan acted as Citrine’s interpreter at several interviews. Citrine visited a lock on the Moscow–Volga canal, accompanied by Karchan, and met ‘Firin’ (a ‘GPU official’) and an engineer named Prosterov. After

³⁸ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 169.

being shown the workings, Citrine asked about Mikhail Pavlovich Tomskii, former Chairman of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, who had been dismissed from that post in 1929 as part of Stalin's move against the 'Left Deviationists'. His hosts demurred: Tomskii was on holiday, 'he had just gone for six weeks.' The truth was immediately under the test, with his hosts themselves drawing attention to the question of sincerity: 'they asked me did I believe they were deliberately keeping these people from me, and I replied, "it looks very much like it."' Citrine noted that 'most appropriately', a 'thunderstorm had come on' whilst they were discussing this.³⁹ Tomskii was produced for an interview at the 'State Publishing House' a mere five days later. Sitting opposite his acquaintance, Citrine

looked at Tomskii very carefully after our introduction. He seemed just the same as when I last saw him eight years ago. His hair was somewhat greyer, but he had all his old vigour and his little slanting eyes glinted just as merrily as ever.

Citrine and Tomskii had a long conversation, with Karchan interpreting. Tomskii explained his new work in publishing. Citrine was impressed by Tomskii's vigour, but he wrote 'then again I did not know what the position of our interpreter [Karchan] was. He might conceivably be a GPU man, and Tomskii might quite well know this.'⁴⁰ Citrine questioned Tomskii's ability to be sincere because Karchan was present. In other talks, such as with the *News Chronicle* journalist S. Rodman, Citrine writes that he warned Rodman 'not to be too open' in front of Karchan.⁴¹ Karchan was both the cowed individual whose situation 'grieved' Citrine, but he was also an agent of a government Citrine suspected had been treating Tomskii badly, and in front of whom he believed it unwise to be too open – this despite Citrine directly challenging Karchan's sincerity and making the difference between them on matters of the truth absolutely apparent.

A contrast to Citrine's experiences with Tomskii, *sans* the complication presented by a figure such as Karchan, is found in the experiences of John Brown and Gareth Jones. John Brown sought interviews entirely unarranged. Not long after his arrival in Moscow in 1933 he managed to end up sitting at the desk of Karpov, whom Brown denoted as 'chief financial consultant to the State Planning Commission' (Gosplan).

³⁹ Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, 80–2.

⁴⁰ Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, 132–5.

⁴¹ Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, 154.

Karpov seemed 'astonished' that Brown should have appeared without an appointment, but then proceeded to discuss matters of Five-Year Plans and the bright Soviet future.⁴² Speaking in French, it seems Brown likely assumed the role other foreigners had when visiting the USSR (most famously, perhaps, H. G. Wells interviewing Stalin in 1934), simply without an appointment. The point here again is that, even despite a little initial tension at Brown's unexpected appearance, the Soviet individual, even an 'official', could be well disposed to discussing matters with the foreigner. It is conceivable this was related to the idea of 'providing service' for foreigners.⁴³

Brown's desire to gain access stretched to other episodes: in Moscow he seized a shovel that had been stuck in a pile of earth and asked the foreman if

'I could jump down among his gang. He laughed and pointed to my clothes. I took off my jacket and waistcoat, folded them, put them on some boards – in sight – and lowered myself down. The men seemed more anxious to talk than to work, but after a few minutes of questions and gesticulation they left me alone.'

Indeed, this idea of gaining access more broadly was crucial for some travellers' perceptions of Soviet sincerity. John Brown tried to 'wander' into the Moscow Kremlin to see if he could gain further interviews with even more senior people, but he was denied entry at every turn.⁴⁴ In Leningrad he climbed a wall into the Putilov works, and walked about for an hour, finding little of interest as compared to the promise its closed nature had suggested, before wandering home.⁴⁵ Bosworth Goldman, meanwhile, entered a hospital in Novosibirsk treating GPU men wounded in skirmishes with Dungan rebels in North-West China (the Soviets worked alongside the Chinese government in suppressing such activity).⁴⁶ Goldman was told that this was from 'the Manchurian war', which he doubted given the distances involved. Furthermore, Goldman noted being told that news of such a hospital in Novosibirsk was incorrect –

⁴² John Brown, *I Saw for Myself*, 247.

⁴³ David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 103.

⁴⁴ John Brown, *I Saw for Myself*, 249. Brown had form for this: when developing his journalism in London, he snuck into the headquarters of the British Union of Fascists, basing an article on what he saw and heard there. *I was a Tramp*, 261.

⁴⁵ John Brown, *I Saw for Myself*, 199–200; 190–3.

⁴⁶ Andrew Forbes, *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia: A political history of Republican Sinkiang, 1911–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 120.

yet a patient in the one he visited told him that it was the “best of the three” in the city. Goldman clearly found this interesting from a geo-political point of view: he realised he had found something relatively unknown in Britain – that is, the military outcomes of Sino-Soviet relations in the Altai, and the way this hospital was both denied by some and clearly present was indicative to him of its significance.⁴⁷

Similarly, Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton wished to enter a ‘House of Culture’. The guide did not immediately agree, so Crichton protested, and was then allowed to enter. He advised ‘any visitor to the USSR who wishes to enter any particular building to approach the matter in that way.’ Furthermore, he argued that entry to places a guide might be wary about showing would, if foreigners pushed for it, be inevitably granted if the traveller wanted to see something enough: if only some foreigners were permitted access, he wrote, ‘the whole ideal [of Soviet cultural diplomacy] is shattered. The logic of this is irrefutable.’⁴⁸ What Crichton did here, in seeking to show how travellers could explore buildings and locations if they pushed for it, was to suggest the traveller could, by their own actions, simultaneously subvert Soviet cultural diplomacy and effectively reveal its fundamental superficiality, bypassing the insincere to find truth. However: as this thesis shows, the relationship between cultural diplomacy and the behaviour of foreigners is more persuasively read as a discursive than purely logistical relationship, wherein the evidence of experience was used to confound or confirm an understanding of Soviet cultural diplomacy, but more revealingly exposes the shape of the discourse of travel and the discursive interactions foreigners had with Soviet life.

Indeed, Gareth Jones’s arranged interviews with numerous officials and other representatives of the party and state, including Nadezhda Krupskaya, Maksim Litvinov, and Karl Radek, reveal further layers of this complex interaction of discourse and experience: ‘access’ was only part of the task. Each of these interviews saw Jones probe his interlocutor about Soviet affairs; noticeably, he asked the author Vladimir Germanovich Lidin, whether a Soviet writer could describe famine in a Soviet village. Lidin’s reply was ‘prevarication’, Jones noted, Lidin saying the hunger was ‘temporary’,

⁴⁷ Goldman, *Red Road Through Asia*, 132–3.

⁴⁸ Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, *Russian closeup*, 39–40.

and a more 'long-term' view was required on the part of observers.⁴⁹ For Jones, interviews were a chance to gain information and quotations useful for his reports to David Lloyd George in London, Ivy Lee in New York, and/or his own articles for *The Times*, but they were also opportunities to question sincerely/to question sincerity. Aside from the content of the discussion, the point here is that these interviews, unarranged or arranged, could and did occur with state or party representatives, and could see the frank exchange of views and information, without the mediation Citrine felt in the presence of Karchan. Collectively, however, it is clear that an integral part of these encounters was not simply the information gathered (or sought but not received), but also the discursive context, the performance of sincerity. What lay behind each discrete question a traveller could ask of their Soviet hosts, or of a peasant or worker, was a consistent question: can I trust you? Can the answer you give me be trusted? Are you being *sincere*?

For Beatrice Webb, this was not so much of a concern: 'we interviewed extensively', she wrote of her and Sidney's time in Stalingrad, June 1932, and her diary records no concern with the sincerity of what they were shown during a series of interviews, showcase visits and excursions with guides.⁵⁰ For Citrine with Karchan, interviewing was a complicated set of questions beyond those explicitly discussed. For Brown, an impromptu interview turned out to be a convivial experience from which he learned about some of the workings of the Soviet state direct from a responsible party – the question of sincerity was not apparently particularly relevant, but only once Brown had gained access. Likely this was because what he talked about with Karpov was probably much on the lines of what a guide would have said to him: Gosplan's function, the plans for the future, and the Five-Year Plan's achievements. For Jones with Lidin, it was clearer: Lidin did not respond to Jones in a way the latter considered sincere – like Karchan's prevarications with Citrine, Lidin gave a formulaic answer to Jones's searching questions. Here the usable self is complicated, and an 'official' representative could be seen as a liar (Lidin), as a figure of sympathy (Tomskii), or a useful source of information once access was gained (Karpov).

⁴⁹ Jones, Diary B1–15, March 1933.

⁵⁰ Beatrice Webb, 1932 diary, LSE Special Collections, PASSFIELD/1/5412.

Interviews also offer some insight into Soviet views of the foreigner. Questions and answers were exchanged with Soviet people other than bureaucrats and Party figures – and Soviets often asked travellers questions about life and conditions in Britain. John Brown also features here, in a case showing both directions of questioning: he met a student who attended an engineering polytechnic in Moscow. The student invited Brown to an ‘adult education class’ one evening. At this, Brown was essentially interviewed:

‘This is a tovarisch from England.’ I am introduced to everyone. They are interested. What do people in England think about Russia? Am I a member of the Young Communist League? Is it true that England has millions of unemployed? How have I been able to come to Russia if I am only a worker? The questions poured at me, but I had come to ask rather than answer.

Brown’s interview did not last long, for he also asked questions of his hosts, but he came away disappointed at their ‘rote’ learning of Stalinist phrases.⁵¹ Brown was very much an ‘other’ in this case and the questions show Soviet discourse about foreign affairs clearly, mixed with perhaps more mundane questions like ‘what do they think of us?’ and ‘how communist is England? Meanwhile, John Grierson felt exasperated at being asked questions in Astrakhan by a woman who was ‘unfortunately [...] very curious about this strange aviator’ and asked him many questions:

‘Was London as nice or as big as Astrakhan?’, ‘was my aeroplane made in Germany or America’, and so on, always demonstrating her pathetic ignorance of anything outside Russia.’⁵²

Grierson (never making clear how he could communicate with the woman) eventually snubbed her and continued with his journey. Such questions and behaviour suggest a lot of curiosity on the part of the woman, but Grierson did not find this an opportunity for mutual learning, but rather as an irritation. Indeed, whilst such irritation is less noticeable than travellers trying to answer questions, many travellers noted the types of questions Soviet people asked them: often about foreign life, often with a sense of their understanding being shaped by Soviet ‘official’ discourse about foreign affairs.

⁵¹ John Brown, *I Saw for Myself*, 261

⁵² John Grierson, *Through Russia by Air*, 80.

This is in the above examples about subterfuge and foreign aggression, but also in more generally curious questions: about capitalism, foreign understandings of the USSR, and so on.

Interviews could be displeasing for other reasons. Elizabeth Delafield, accompanied by a 'German professor' in a Rostov-on-Don kindergarten, had a similar experience to that of her time with the Savoyard: the professor told Delafield in 'guttural French, that he would like to interrogate each child individually and in private.' Delafield observed that a lack of time, and the young age of the children, meant he would 'get little of value from them', and the interviews were not held.⁵³ The implication from Delafield is that the professor was expecting too much from people who could not provide it – like the Savoyard, being more focused on unearthing some vast secret that lay behind every Soviet face – even the children – rather than setting the Soviet perspective into its proper context. Again, Delafield appears to take a broader perspective on Soviet life than some of her contemporaries: the Professor and the Savoyard (and Grierson) all display irritation-through-disbelief at Soviet life. Delafield presents a more nuanced appreciation of Soviet sincerity, treating the Soviet individuals in question as more than sources of potentially useful information, attempting to develop an understanding of those people whose conditions animated so much foreign interest. Her writing suggests more interest in their biographies – or at least, their basic lived reality as human beings – than the Savoyard or Professor thought was relevant to their own interest.

Violet Conolly was greatly irritated to be surprised by a photographer ('Comrade Ovzor') on a train to Odessa. The man 'got his notebook and pencil out' after taking a photograph of Conolly in her 'ancient pink dressing-gown', asking her to 'give him some autobiographical details and tell him how interesting I found life in the Soviet Union'. Conolly was affronted. The man appealed: 'wasn't it very interesting to find a foreigner in third class and why should anybody mind telling everything about themselves, when people really wanted to know[?]'. Conolly noted that Russians could ask then 'most intimate questions in the course of casual conversation, without the slightest embarrassment on either side.' The man proceeded to tell Conolly of Soviet

⁵³ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 166

achievements, at which Conolly bristled: ‘your plumbing doesn’t work, your wiring and telephones are awful’, and ‘your motor cars are a joke.’ Ozvor appealed to the future bounties promised by communism and left. Conolly felt ‘a prig’, but she was pleased at his departure.⁵⁴ These interviews show how Soviet sincerity could be predicated on engagement with individuals as individuals, or it could be predicated on being given access, literally or figuratively, to the ‘real’ Soviet experience, with an inherent assumption that that experience would present itself ready for understanding via the travellers’ subjectivity. Conolly’s interview at the hands of a Soviet enthusiast has echoes of cultural diplomacy: the man expected Conolly to be thrilled with developments, and sincerely sought her opinion, yet left when Conolly responded forcefully, ‘more in sorrow than in anger’.⁵⁵

Beyond these instances of irritation at interviews, however, there is more to unpack. First, foreigners could also represent sources of information about the Soviet Union itself. Ethel Mannin met a man in ‘Prochladnaya’ (now Prokhladnyi) in the Caucasus who asked her and her companion Donia not about foreign affairs, but about what the Moscow Metro was like.⁵⁶ More often, questions about foreign affairs could reveal concern with the competitive context, either within the Soviet system, or between the Soviet world and the West. Violet Conolly, aboard a train to Sochi from Kharkiv, was ‘plied [...] with the usual questions’ from two ‘youths’: ‘where did I come from? What did I think of the USSR? Wouldn’t I like to stay for good in their country?’. Here the substantial points were her feelings and understanding of the Soviet Union, and her making a choice between the Soviet Union and her home. Conolly replied coolly and in keeping with her scepticism: ‘they were so naively sure that no people in the world was as well off as they, my ungracious reply must have been like a cold water douche’ she reflected, as she told them ‘of course I prefer to live abroad.’⁵⁷ The youths did not ‘seem very much disturbed’ at the idea that they were not permitted to leave the Soviet Union, Conolly noted. The questions between the foreigner and Soviet here reveal a concern with the competitive context that David-Fox describes.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 159–62.

⁵⁵ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 161.

⁵⁶ Mannin, *South to Samarkand*, 176.

⁵⁷ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 62.

⁵⁸ David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 19–20.

Other train journeys revealed the other side of this engagement. Aboard a train to Tiflis Conolly's fellow passengers 'were obviously very much intrigued to find themselves travelling with a foreigner and couldn't take their eyes off myself and my luggage. [...] They told me that I was the first foreigner that they had ever spoken to and begged to see my passport. The list of countries to which I could travel without visa or permit was a revelation of liberty to them.' One said, 'there is a wall around Russia to-day.'⁵⁹ On a train to Baku in a carriage with an Armenian mother and daughter, Conolly found herself being asked not if she wished to stay, but if it was true the outside world was a happier place:

'Shsh,' said the daughter, looking at the door and bursting for information about the outside world, 'now do tell us, is it really better here than there?' Then she proceeded to finger my silk dressing-gown, my face cream and other trifles.⁶⁰

This experience was matched by another, recalling both the Armenian's questions and those of the ex-nun in Tiflis. In Odessa, Conolly was asked by a woman:

'Are the churches closed abroad too?' she asked eagerly. 'We know nothing about the real state of the world here. But the young people think they know everything when they have read our newspapers. It's worse than any other privation, being so isolated from everything one cares about.' She smiled a wistful goodbye to me as she disappeared into a doorway, obviously afraid to indulge in a longer conversation with a stranger.

In both the cases quoted here, the Soviet individual asks the foreigner for news of the outside world, with the inflection being that the foreigner comes from a place that might possibly be 'better' than the Soviet Union. Travellers were novel information sources for Soviet people, and whilst their questions could often orientate around 'official' Soviet terms (Conolly being asked if she was on a mission; questions of Brown about the economic state of England), they could also reveal fundamental concerns of the individual (Praskovia to Conolly) and more everyday curiosity ('was your plane made in Germany or America, *Djon Greerson?*').

⁵⁹ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 109.

⁶⁰ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 93.

Here the Soviet individual appears to assume much of the foreigner's sincerity: they ask open questions about life abroad, even about difficult topics like religion or the British revolution, with a clear understanding of the potential for difference between foreign and Soviet realities, and thus also indicating the importance of hearing interesting and different information from a new source (and Conolly explicitly stating that she herself recognised the potential danger of such conversation for a Soviet individual). Conolly is understood as being potentially sincere about foreign life because she is, simply, from that world. Bosworth Goldman, commenting on his own engagement with Soviets, pondered if 'intelligent' Soviets liked contact with foreigners as 'relief from the eternal propaganda' of Soviet life.⁶¹ The youths who asked Conolly if she wished to stay in the USSR, did not question her sincerity, even as her answers are not conducive to their Soviet optimism: for them the Soviet bubble is not perceived as a problem, and Conolly's rejection of the possibility of life in the Soviet Union is not, Conolly's wording suggests at least, taken as a sign of her being a deceitful or threatening agent.

The presence of third parties could shape conversations in other ways. Bosworth Goldman recounts his experiences at Igarka on the Enisei river. He described talking to people there who 'told glaring untruths, or gave clichés learnt in schools in reply to my questions', and thus displayed his awareness that Soviet individuals could speak in terms *expected* by the foreigner as per their understanding of propaganda. That said, 'all were frankly interested in us, though they were furtive about their own views and about receiving cigarettes from us', 'us' being Goldman and the others who had arrived via boat on the White Sea and were travelling downriver, bound for Krasnoyarsk.⁶² Others were less furtive. Later, aboard their vessel for the journey down the Enisei, the *Spartak*, Goldman visited several villages on the shore. At one, Goldman found he had

inadvertently gathered a large crowd when I was trying to explain to a student of the river marine service that it was unjust to compare unemployment in England and Russia. Such controversial topics as methods of sale, the false rouble exchange, the difference of industrial ages, and of temperamental and

⁶¹ Goldman, *Red Road Through Asia*, 77

⁶² Goldman, *Red Road Through Asia*, 68.

geographical conditions inevitably raised a very noisy discussion. They were obviously as ignorant of Western civilisation as we in England are of their practices and ideas. The meeting was eventually broken up by the Ogpu man.

Again, Soviet interest in foreign affairs is clear, and there is some suggestion of disagreement or contradiction. Goldman noted that 'it was unjust to compare unemployment in England and Russia', which is suggestive of the way statistics could be used in Soviet society to present a picture of collective success as compared to capitalist suffering. The people Goldman spoke to exhibit an understanding of foreign life contingent on a particular – likely state-driven – reading of comparative statistics that Goldman identified as misleading, perhaps as it related to the political significance of unemployment in the respective systems (the Soviet achievement here was likely an unpleasant trap for sceptical foreigners to fall into). As with Conolly, Goldman's experiences were sincere in that genuine engagement and conversation – argument even – were had between foreigner and Soviet. The interweaving of cultural diplomacy and political control are clear in both – with Conolly, in the discussions about religion, and with Goldman in the presence of a man whom Goldman identifies as a secret police officer – but what is more visible is the interest Soviet individuals had in foreign matters, and their apparent willingness to engage with foreigners about these matters – to question, to learn, and thus to trust, to some extent (more obviously in Conolly's case than Goldman's), the word of the foreign stranger.

'Interviews', loosely termed, therefore provide considerable insight into sincerity as it was viewed by the traveller, and we can glean some information about Soviet perceptions also. For a few travellers like Gareth Jones, interviews were chances to question significant figures on Soviet matters. For others, like John Brown, it was a chance to test the limits of permissibility and gain unplanned access to people who could give him information (much as other travellers sought in the countryside, away from the cities). For both these men, the idea of gaining access was significant. Yet the questioning could come the other way, revealing Soviet interest in foreign affairs and the apparent assessment that travellers, as representatives of 'the foreign', were worth engaging with to acquire information. How that information was parsed and processed beyond the recording of the encounter itself we cannot determine beyond recourse to the general conclusions of the historiography; it does not seem unreasonable to posit it having some influence on the 'usable self' of the individual,

even if more immediate, domestic pressures were of chief concern. Here the travellers acted as conduits for, if not rumour, then an alternative information source for Soviet individuals: how these relatively rare and discrete bursts of outside information affected the usable self, one can only speculate, but it is a clear and important dynamic of the Soviet reaction to foreigners, and again places travellers outside the ‘us’/‘them’ dynamic – or, at least, when the Soviet individual was open, brings them into the ‘us’ temporarily, in order to better understand the world as presented by ‘them’ – that is, the official Soviet discourse.

‘OFFICIAL’ AND ‘UNOFFICIAL’ TOGETHER

These instances described above are in some ways clearer and less complex than that of Citrine and Karchan, however, so returning to this pair is important to further untangle these complex issues of sincerity: their relationship means multiple aspects of Karchan’s identity, of the contours of his usable self, become visible, and therefore he represents a far more complicated picture to both Citrine and us than Soviets met only once. We have already seen how Karchan inhabited several roles for Citrine that come into tension with each other: Karchan-as-spy, Karchan-as-cowed-individual, Karchan-as-ambiguous-guide. An explicit game of performance and doubt continued in Citrine’s engagement with other Soviet people, *via* Karchan. The aforementioned Kaganovitch ball-bearing factory visit brings another interesting scene to our attention. Citrine is puzzled by a wall-chart showing the work achieved by the workers in that area of the factory, and it is explained that it is used to effectively shame less-productive workers. Citrine is enraged, and begins to question those around him, including the identity of the people put forwards to talk to him:

“Moreover, how do I know they are foremen? They may be workmen. I can’t understand why any decent self-respecting man would want to be a foreman under such a system as this.”⁶³

Citrine’s disgust at the treatment of the workers (a ‘damnable system’) is enough to make him question the identity of the foremen he has met. This suspicion intensifies

⁶³ Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, 88

when he talks with a worker. Citrine asked what he did before he became a labourer at the plant. He had been “a printer”. Citrine was confused: why would he give up skilled labour for un-skilled?

Here the young fellow, who was quite obviously trying to hide something, shouted an answer to them which was translated to me as, ‘He says his health was not good and the doctor advised him to change his occupation.’ This was quite a good reason.

Citrine’s marginalia include a note: ‘a young man tries to take me in.’⁶⁴ Scepticism about what he was hearing only increased when he met an *udarnik* (shock worker), apparently paid between 400 and 800 roubles a month that year. The man’s story does not add up for Citrine: his wages doubled to a relatively high rate, but he had been ill for a significant period of time. ‘There was some conversation between the officials and him, and he said he had been on and off work during that period.’⁶⁵ Citrine was not satisfied, but his anger shines through most clearly in his notes, not his book:

I said to Karchan ‘do you expect me to believe that story? Do you think I imagine that even a Soviet wages system would be so muddled as to pay this fitter, who is not an exceptional man from other fitters, beyond the fact that he is a shock worker, as much money as you pay the commercial director of the Putiloff factories?’

Citrine wrote that he ‘did not believe a word [he] was being told here.’⁶⁶ Citrine’s reading of a shock worker’s wages might underplay their status: from the early 1930s *udarniki* could be compensated significantly better than other workers.⁶⁷ Yet for Citrine this meant the ball-bearing factory had anomalous accounting, and/or his hosts were liars. The differentiation between ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ is not helpful here – it is the veracity of the whole that is in doubt. The ‘young man’ hides something from Citrine for reasons unknown, not necessarily the presence of Karchan and others, whilst the *udarnik* and the wall-chart suggest the sincerity of the general enterprise is in question,

⁶⁴ Citrine, 1/19, fol. 242.

⁶⁵ Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, 90.

⁶⁶ Citrine, 1/19, fol. 244–6.

⁶⁷ Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practices, and Consumption, 1917–1953* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 180.

from bottom to top. In a sense Karchan's presence does not do much beyond facilitate his questioning – but that is significant, because Karchan is relied upon to provide answers to Citrine, even as a cowed man.

The presence of others (specifically representatives of the 'official') was seen to influence how Soviet people acted in examples from other travellers. Returning to Goldman's argument at a river port, 'the OGPU man' is relatively obscure in Goldman's account, but the traveller did write, tellingly, that later the OGPU man told him – in French – that he had been carrying 'benzine' (i.e., petrol) close to a fire by talking with the student and the crowd as he had done.⁶⁸ What is of interest in this case is the involvement of the 'official' and the 'unofficial' in the interaction. The people talking to Goldman apparently do so willingly and with some gusto, and it is the intervention of authority that ends the meeting. Goldman does not note any obvious censure, and the 'OGPU man', rather than seeking to escalate matters (at least with Goldman), gives him a warning suggestive that Goldman was in some sense playing with a potentially hazardous situation. It is not precisely clear what hazard is referred to, but given the tone Goldman presents, of a 'very noisy discussion' of 'controversial' matters (the possible irony here would indicate a sense of disparity between Goldman's estimation of the moral import of these matters, and the estimation of the 'student of the river marine service'), it is conceivable that the 'OGPU man' thought it better to end discussion of 'controversial' matters between foreigner and Soviet to prevent a heated argument, as much as anything else. Possibly it was an effort to stymie Goldman telling Soviet individuals unwelcome facts about outside life, but given Goldman already had an apparently willing duelling partner in the form of the student, who seems to have been prepared to defend Soviet life, the aim of avoiding disturbance seems more likely. The matter of sincerity as it arises here concerns the intervention of the 'official' to prevent further interaction of the foreigner with the 'unofficial'.

Norah Rowan-Hamilton used instances of recalcitrant speakers to support her overall view of the Soviet Union as being a place of repression – indeed, her understanding of the Soviet Union was strongly influenced by her encounters with individuals 'speaking out'. During her trip to Vasylykiv in Ukraine, she visited a village,

⁶⁸ Goldman, *Red Road Through Asia*, 93.

and wondered if she was seeing one of Catherine's 'Potemkin villages'.⁶⁹ In the village, she and 'D', a fellow Briton who spoke Russian, were invited into the house of 'Stephan Iliovitch'. 'D' conversed with the inhabitants, primarily women. They talked about their bread-making, and the conversation raised questions about their ability to engage and discuss such matters with foreigners:

'What do you use to make it?'

The low, broad brows of the young woman contracted. She looked round hurriedly, this way and that, then she came close to us as if she feared to be overheard. [...] 'Anything. Whatever we can scrape together. The Government takes our wheat... anything that can be made into bread for the townspeople. We can starve, but they—' Her eyes flashed dangerously.'

'H'sht, h'sht, Marya, be careful what you say!' exclaimed the old grandmother, and she glanced out of the window.'

'I don't care. It's true. We eat now what we used to give the beasts, and they, poor things... we are killing them off. We can no longer feed them. Besides... it saves the animal tax, and we get something for them from the town markets. The 'workers' eat them in their grand houses in Moscow.'⁷⁰

As the grandmother continued to talk about how there seemed to be a connection between the cruel landlords of her youth and the Soviet authorities, 'Tovarisch N and M', who accompanied Rowan-Hamilton, D and the other foreigners, entered the scene. The grandmother 'seemed lost in thought' and fell silent. Rowan-Hamilton gave Marya 'a few kopecks'. This experience reinforces the narrative of cowed subjects and fearsome officials, although these women react more openly than, say, Conolly's impromptu guide did in Kharkiv. On the outskirts of the same village, Rowan-Hamilton met a woman:

As I turned to go back to the village a woman with a pale, refined face stood beside me. 'It is going to snow,' she said in a low voice, in French, and as she spoke a few flakes, soft as feathers, touched my cheek. I looked at her in

⁶⁹ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 138.

⁷⁰ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 144–5.

amazement. A peasant woman... in the Ukraine... speaking French! She was poorly dressed, but her clothes were neat, and she had a soft, charming voice.

'You like this village?' She was saying.

I smiled and replied with the usual meaningless words that one utters on such occasions.

'I *hate* it!' she exclaimed, so vehemently that I felt as if she had cut my face with a whip.

'But...'

'I have only been here three months,' she continued hurriedly. 'My husband and I lived in Leningrad. Then suddenly we were told to leave. To come here. But at the station we were separated. My husband was taken to the south... near to the Moldavian border, I believe. And I was sent here. It is terrible. I know no one, I am a stranger. They are all peasants... You understand?'

'But why do you not go to your husband?'

She looked at me and laughed.

'I cannot leave here.'

Then the 'Comrades' appear again:

'What does she say? That she cannot leave us? You have not understood. Of course she can. Everyone is free to come and go as they please. But she is teaching in the school. She teaches French. She cannot go because she is afraid to lose her job.'

I looked at the teacher from Leningrad. Her large grey eyes seemed to be saying something. I smiled back in comprehension. Then I turned to Tavarish N. 'Of course. It would be foolish for her to throw up her job. She was saying that.'

At the bend of the road I looked back. She was following me with her eyes. I seemed to hear her say: 'I cannot leave here,' and tears came into my own eyes.⁷¹

⁷¹ Norah Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 161–2.

Rowan-Hamilton's inference adds colour to what the basic before/after of the scenes shows the tension between the 'Comrades' and the exiled woman, and the competing narratives about this woman's life.

Gareth Jones saw an even more dramatic example of shift in behaviour when he stayed the night on the Stalin kolkhoz, near Samara, early September 1931. He arrived at the farm on the afternoon of the day on which the 'individual farmer' had asked how he could believe anything people in the villages told him. On the evening of his arrival, a 'keen supporter' had extolled the benefits of the peasants' new situation to Jones and Jack Heinz III. The next morning, however:

Woke; the keen supporter came; talked then whispered to the vice-pres, then he came & there was a complete change in his attitude. 'It's terrible, we can't speak or we'll be sent away. They took away our cows and now we only get a crust of bread. It's worse, much worse than before the Rev. But 1926–7, those were the fine years.' Absolute change in attitude & features. 'We've got to keep quiet or they'll send us to Siberia. We're afraid.'⁷²

The 'keen supporter' had only been keen, it seems, in the presence of a large group of people including officials. Here sincerity is delineated clearly: unlike the moral complexity Citrine saw in his relationship with Karchan, here the Soviet individual offers a stark *volte face*, revealing one performance to have been insincere, and then offering what is apparent sincerity to the foreigners – Jones was well-disposed to understanding and empathising with this change. There are not many instances of such a dramatic 'before/after' change in behaviour, but it is striking in the change, and how closely it conforms to foreigners' ideas of how Soviet people would act *vis a vis* the risk of being sincere when other people might hear what was said: the usable self of the 'keen supporter' is brought out by the presence of the traveller, and once other Soviet people are absent, another self appears. On other occasions, a shift could be observed in a single conversation. Violet Conolly, again aboard a train (to Baku), recorded the shift in the reaction of a 'Jewish woman' after someone asked after Radek, whom she had mentioned:

⁷² Jones, Diary B1–12, August–September 1931.

‘Where is Radek now?’ intervened one of the other passengers from the corridor. The Jewish woman shrank up as if she had been bitten by a snake. Unwittingly a forbidden name has slipped from her lips. News of Radek’s arrest had appeared only days before.

Conolly read this as an example of the way conversations about *dramatis personae* in ‘Russia’ were ‘far too dangerous’: the woman shifted from voluble to silent after realising who she had mentioned.⁷³ A different aspect of this idea of adapting to new conditions and acting safely as per expectations comes from Ada Chesterton, who wrote of meeting a man she determined as being part of ‘the last remnant of the old *intelligentsia*’: she described him as needing to ‘carefully’ cultivate ‘an even greater squalor of appearance than the normal’ to avoid being identified as a beneficiary of the old system.⁷⁴ What is of interest here, beyond the identification of Soviets needing to act a certain way to be safe, is Chesterton’s description of this altering of appearance in terms of squalor – not simply behaviour, but looking as poor as possible. Adaptation was a key part of a Soviet individuals’ armoury of survival, and here foreigners relate momentary and longer-term adjustments made by individuals in response to developments beyond their control. Here the subtleties of sincerity are apparent: in the situations recounted by Rowan-Hamilton, Jones and Conolly, a Soviet individual changes their attitude and openness with the foreigner based on the presence or absence of other individuals: the appearance of such people in Rowan-Hamilton’s case, and their disappearance in Jones’s case. In both instances, the traveller would have very likely considered the communication made without the presence of others the more sincere: it reinforced ideas of the cowed individual, the ‘unofficial’ story being smothered/restrained by the ‘official’. Conolly’s offers a subtler situation, one in which the calculus of adaptation is made not because of the literal presence of someone else, but because of the invoking of their name – but the effect is similar.

Chesterton’s mention of the man of the ‘old *intelligentsia*’ reveals a more intriguing issue of sincerity. Here an individual is recognised as having to sustain a performance, but, unlike with Jones’s peasant who gave the performance in the evening and the ‘truth’ the next morning, Chesterton does not refer to a switch in behaviour that clearly

⁷³ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 98–9.

⁷⁴ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 63.

shows a Janus-like existence. Rather, it is everyday life that exemplifies this adaptation, she identifies that ‘in Soviet Russia an implacable antagonism toward those people who before the Revolution were able through favourable circumstances to receive an education which the ordinary peasant or workman could not afford. So long as he and others like him retain the externals of the indigent they are comparatively safe.’⁷⁵ It is not clear how Chesterton arrived at the distinction of genuine poverty from the cultivation of the appearance of poverty, although the urban environment perhaps explains her willingness to refer to ‘squalor’ given her antipathy towards the Soviet city. For her reading of the man’s sincerity, the identification of a performance is enough: she recognises the ‘usable self’, and this emphasises to her the power structures of Soviet society – although she does not relate an extended discussion with the man that could reveal the nuances of this further.

Norah Rowan-Hamilton’s experiences provides further illumination of the roles other Soviets played in determining an individual’s response, of people changing their behaviour dependent on context. Rowan-Hamilton’s time at a café in Kyiv are worth exploring in some detail, as within it are several nuances that are revealing of issues of sincerity and the usable self. She dedicated two sections of her book to an episode that saw she and her friends find a place of ‘warmth and good food’. The café was run by a ‘Nepman’, who kept a large cat in the café: indeed, Rowan-Hamilton named the place ‘At the Sign of the Cat’.⁷⁶ In sum, there is an effort to portray this place as unusual, somewhat unreal, an island of difference in the uniform sea of Soviet life. In the café, Rowan-Hamilton observed the patrons: nobody spoke, ‘their complexions were faded to a dull, opaque white.’⁷⁷ Their host barely spoke, but he did come to tell of his past: he had been in the city only four months and had arrived in Kyiv from somewhere else he would not name.

Later in her account, Rowan-Hamilton recognised that a woman working in the VOKS office in Kyiv frequented the café. The woman realised Rowan-Hamilton knew her from the café, ‘went pink and then the colour was wiped clean from her face, and her eyes implored silence.’ Rowan-Hamilton’s reading of her expression is again given

⁷⁵ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 63.

⁷⁶ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 164.

⁷⁷ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 166–8.

literary colour, but this sense of tension was reinforced later in her account of the café. After a time, the Nepman became friendlier. The 'little man' talked of 'Old Russia', and he would not talk of 'New Russia' for "“there are listeners everywhere. [...] That is why people who come here prefer to sit with their backs to the wall.””⁷⁸ The Nepman explained that the government were repressing his kind of business, and then, cryptically told of how he got his goods: “there are ways”.⁷⁹ They discussed the ways the government was forcing Nepmen out of trade (high taxes, confiscations, barriers to obtaining stock).

The next evening, after a dim visit to a 'state-owned café', the foreigners returned, this time with 'our Communist friend', who had accompanied them on several excursions. When the Nepman and the Communist saw one another, their 'two pairs of eyes plunged into one frozen stare.' The Nepman 'staggered', 'he crumpled up, like something that had once been alive, and that was now only an automatic toy.'⁸⁰ The woman from VOKS was also present, and she 'turned to stone, absolutely dumb'. Apparently, the presence of 'our Communist' was, according to Rowan-Hamilton, recognised by these other Soviets as a problem for themselves. The change in behaviour is physical: it is described as startling and dramatic. There are several things to note here: the presence of the woman from VOKS on numerous occasions and the tacit way nothing was apparently said between foreigner and VOKS worker in the café; the Nepman's openness and his later fearfulness; the apparent lack of concern the Communist had for visiting the Nepman's café; and Rowan-Hamilton's seeming lack of reflection about whether taking the Communist there was a sensible idea for the sake of the Nepman, a curious absence given her evident belief in the danger for Soviet people to speak out, and especially in light of her clearly seeing this particular episode as an example of Soviet cruelty and repression. The episode is simultaneously overwrought (and thus revealing of the foreigner's discursive framing of such a world) but also revealing of more mundane realities of foreigner-Soviet interaction: it is clear that Rowan-Hamilton saw the sincerity of Soviet individuals as contingent on their context and who else was present, and that she herself had a role to play in managing the

⁷⁸ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 183.

⁷⁹ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 189.

⁸⁰ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 191.

balance of performance and authenticity on the part of the Soviets – which makes her visit with ‘our Communist friend’ a curious act, albeit a revealing one. The Nepman and the woman from VOKS both exhibit accommodation and adjustment to their circumstances – the former in trying to run a café despite difficulties, the latter in going to a café that she knew was run by a Nepman.

In contrast, we also read of situations where Soviet individuals were open with foreigners apparently ‘despite’ the presence of an official representative – building on Bosworth Goldman’s dockside conversation recounted above. Sometimes this openness came from the representative of the ‘official’: Violet Conolly’s journey to Sochi saw her talking to ‘Marusha’, whom Conolly identified as an ‘agitator’, and ‘Alexei Chrinochenko’, a member of the Party. Alexei asked Conolly for her address in ‘England’, so that she could send him works on scientific developments.⁸¹ Thus, sincerity was not only a matter of revealing or concealing truths, but as this encounter makes explicit, on open engagement about matters much more general and apparently uncontroversial (the fact that Alexei asks for her address is striking when compared to the expectations of fear travellers had, and also when compared to the ideas of the usable self and paranoia about foreign agents). On another train, to Odessa, Conolly witnessed an argument between two Azeri women and a ‘hundred-per-cent emancipated Communist woman’, over the former wearing *chadri* (niqabs). The Communist argued these were symbols of ‘female degradation’, and the Azeri women disagreed forcefully.⁸² Norah Rowan-Hamilton encountered such openness when a man on a farm tried to explain his difficulties to the foreigners, who were accompanied by a man in a ‘snuff-coloured coat, ‘an official and a Communist’:

He turned to some of the other peasants for confirmation, but no one liked to say yes or no, and his thin face flushed, and his eyes suddenly grew defiant. ‘We work and sweat and starve, but what do we get for our pains? How can we pay back our loans?’ ‘That is enough,’ said our brown-coated Communist, and his voice sounded harsh and gritty.⁸³

⁸¹ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 60.

⁸² Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 143–4.

⁸³ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 158.

Rowan-Hamilton wrote 'it surprised us that a peasant should speak so openly before an official. I do not think a "worker" would have done so. But everywhere in the villages I was struck by the peasants' independence.'⁸⁴ Jones related similar incidents. Soon after getting up and having the conversation with the ostensibly 'keen supporter', Jones and Heinz visited the village Soviet. The passage in Jones's diary is worth quoting at length, containing as it does a whole range of issues regarding openness in the presence of the 'official':

Then went to the village soviet, an old man came, whispered: 'It's terrible in *Kolkhoz*. They took my cows and my horse. We are starving. Look what they give us. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. How can we live with nothing in our *dvors* [yards]? And we can't say anything or they'll send us away as they did the others. All are weeping in the villages.'

He was in the room next to the committee room, and they all spoke in whispers. Jack and I went out. The old peasant followed us and whispered in the dark. [...] corridor: 'For god's sake don't say anything.'

We stood outside; there was a horse tied to a gate. Old man: almost with tears: 'That was my horse. I fed it well and look at him now; scraggy.' Then boy came, jumped on the horse and drove away using his whip. Old man followed horse out of sight with his eyes, said nothing, sad look in his eyes. [...]

As we stood outside the group said how terrible it was. All nodded and sighed. Then a *komsomolka* [female Komsomol member] came. 'Old wives tales,' she said of grumbling. When the president of Soviet came and the horse and cart was ready an old woman came hobbling up. 'Oh, do something for me. They took away my cow.' Weeping. 'How can I live[?] Oh-oh. They won't give me anything, please, I beg, I beg. They say I can't get anything because I can't work but I'm ill. How can I work? And I have my little girl to feed. My *dvor* is empty; the land has been taken away. We are dying.' Wails. Laughter from young *komsomolka*. 'Shut up old woman, you ought to work.' 'But how can I work? I'm ill.' Imploring look,

⁸⁴ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 158.

hands stretched out. President of [the] Soviet: ‘Well don’t come bothering us now. We’ve got better things to do. Get off, old woman.’⁸⁵

Here Jones records both reticence – “for god’s sake don’t say anything” – and open dissent and discontent in the face of a *komsomolka* and the ‘President of [the] Soviet’. What is clear from this sample is that the willingness of individuals to speak out about their situation varied significantly and is not easily determined by time or location. It is not the sincerity of the foreigner that is under the microscope here; rather, it is the behaviour of the Soviet individual, in the presence of a representative or representatives of the government, party, police, state institution or local authority, and the traveller’s assessment of that individual’s sincerity. So too is the role of the ‘official’ in determining and shaping the sincerity of what the traveller encountered. For Jones, the repression of dissent was confirmation that the suffering being expressed was ultimately truer of the Soviet experience than anything else. This was how he assessed what he had found as being sincere, and others, like Violet Conolly and Norah Rowan-Hamilton, were similar: that which was sincere was that which revealed repression in some sense. Here too the idea of the usable self, of a performance, is revealed by the old man in the ‘corridor’, and then contrasted to the old woman in the open air: she speaks out, loudly and stridently, about her situation, utterly aware of the presence of the farm’s president and Communist Youth members.

In contrast Ada Chesterton visited the Sparta commune near Kyiv with a woman she named Miranda. Miranda was a survivor, Chesterton implied:

About eight-and-thirty, with humorous eyes and a soft, melancholy mouth, Miranda – there are reasons why she should be so named – brainy, cultured [Miranda spoke English], and with an unassuageable [*sic*] curiosity for life, had survived the Revolution, and with the loss of her possessions, the dispersal of her friends and most of her family, had struck roots in the new ménage.⁸⁶

Miranda became Chesterton’s companion for much of her time in Ukraine, Chesterton described Miranda as loyal to the new government, enthusiastic and even *chic*. She worked for a ‘government department – I did not ask which one’, translating English

⁸⁵ Jones, Diary B1–12, August–September 1931.

⁸⁶ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 181.

playwrights into Ukrainian.⁸⁷ Miranda, Chesterton and Bunny went on several trips together, including to the Sparta commune. Chesterton adored the commune: 'I never knew a place where such a rich and ripe contentment of body and soul seemed to abide.'⁸⁸ They were shown around by a 'manager' – Miranda facilitating the meeting – whom Chesterton thought resembled Christopher Columbus, thus dubbing the man Columbus. Together they toured the farm and a nearby village. They were asked questions about foreign life, and asked questions about peasant life in return. There was no dissent to be heard, according to Chesterton's account. Miranda is an unofficial guide of sorts, a representative of the 'official' but taken by Chesterton as being free of the darker, more robotic side of Soviet life. Thus, for Chesterton it appears that the divide, which in her writing is between automated city and spiritual countryside, is dissolved somewhat by Miranda, who is an embodiment of positive Soviet identity. Openness from the peasants on the farm is evidenced by Bunny making friends with 'young men and maidens, old men and silent cows', of their eating dinner together and with the Britons being gifted wooden spoons – all on, as Chesterton was at pains to state, a trip that was not easy to arrange via normal cultural diplomatic/tourist means.⁸⁹ This was another claim to a greater sincerity: in undertaking a trip that was harder to arrange, the implication was that she was accessing something more authentically Russian/Soviet, and thus her observation of that world could be all the more sincere. Furthermore, the absence of suffering is not an issue for Chesterton's reading of Soviet sincerity.

There is more to say, however, on the matter of the outspoken peasantry more generally, to set perceptions in context. The Russian-born American writer Maurice Hindus wrote that it would be 'impossible to overestimate the significance of this burst of audacity in the peasant.' The revolution, Hindus argued, made the peasant into somebody: 'The peasant has discovered himself, and thus his voice.'⁹⁰ Thus Hindus (and in a sense, so too Chesterton) read the voluble peasantry as a sign of Soviet success; for Jones, it was actually the way to confirm Soviet failure. Yet this was not a situation in which volubility could be tied to Soviet power alone – or at the least,

⁸⁷ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 181.

⁸⁸ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 199.

⁸⁹ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 202 & 191.

⁹⁰ Maurice Hindus, *Red Bread* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931), 151–2.

simplified down to a pro/anti-Soviet axis of feeling on the part of the peasantry. Foreigners observed, to varying degrees, peasant communication about, and with, government which had always existed, usually expressed in a combination of rumour, news (newspapers and village meetings indeed increasingly prevalent in the village from this point) and folklore, laced with Soviet rhetoric.⁹¹ Peasant correspondents, whose role was to monitor local opinion and officials, had been actively encouraged by the regime in the villages during the 1920s, and were still active during collectivisation.⁹² They, and increasingly other peasants through the 1930s, wrote letters of denunciation and complaint to the authorities. This was an established tradition: 'it was nothing new, [...] for peasants to take their grievances outside the village, complaining to local authorities and writing petitions and denunciations'.⁹³ Travellers were not the only conduit for complaint and the venting of frustrations about life in the countryside – it seems likely a range of possibilities is present here, from peasants complaining to both state *and* traveller, or the traveller or state alone, or neither (let alone the active resistance explored by those such as Lynn Viola). The main point here is to include the traveller in this information economy and consider the particularities of the relationship between peasant and foreigner, including the traveller's own perception of the encounter and its meanings: in the case of Hindus here, we see clearly how approval of Soviet edification clouds assessment of the nature of the state-peasant relationship: the allure of 'hidden transcripts' is again not illuminating.

That said, sometimes these encounters were rather more idiosyncratic in nature and speak richly of a world of complexity beyond the travellers' understandings. Elizabeth Delafield related a curious episode that is striking for its difference in the depiction of the encounter between 'official' and 'unofficial' to those given above.

⁹¹ Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants*, 268.

⁹² Matthew Lenoe, *Closer to the masses: Stalinist culture, social revolution and Soviet newspapers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 32.

⁹³ Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants*, 256. See for example the letters and OGPU reports collated in C J Storella and A K Sokolov (eds.), *The Voice of the People: Letters from the Soviet Village, 1918–1932* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), especially 291–361. For example, a letter to *Pravda* from 1930 detailed a meeting of peasants seeking to disband a collective farm, at which a woman shouted "We are r-u-u-u-i-n-e-d! We are dying of hunger!", whilst the 'The [Party] activists remained solemnly quiet', 349, or the considered letter to *Pravda* from Guliaevo village, also in 1930, that declared 'we came to be convinced that our country is heading for ruin and poverty' as a result of Soviet policy: 'We peasants see that you all lie', 358–9.

Delafield went swimming in the sea on a beach in or near Odessa. In the water, she began a conversation in broken English/basic Russian with a woman she names 'Venus', a beautiful woman enjoying the sunshine and water. Delafield returned to the shore, where two guides were guarding her belongings (which Delafield thought useless: she notes she had swum alone several times and had had no trouble). Then, in a moment, Delafield relates how 'Venus' and the two guides got into a heated argument. Delafield was never quite sure what the argument was about – she thought that the guides were 'off guard' – 'nature in the raw', as Delafield put it:

She [Venus] says that she will speak to whom she likes and, alternatively, that she spoke not one word. She adds something that I do not understand but that it is obviously highly vituperative.

Katya replies – I am certain of it – the Russian equivalent of: 'Call yourself a lady!'

By this time quite a circle of Comrades has gathered round. Two young men are being appealed to by the guides. Why? They have had nothing to do with any of it. The supporters of Venus are an elderly woman with a sardonic laugh [...] two naked children, and a bony youth in a pair of blue shorts and spectacles.

A curious, rather somnambulistic effect is imparted to the whole scene by the fact that Venus, throughout, continues to take off the things she wore in the sea and to put on others [...] while she screams at the guides and they scream at her.

No – one is unjust. Only Katya screams.

The little guide, the younger and more intelligent of the two, does not scream. [...] She sits down on the sand, and begins to cry.

Delafield presented this as Venus being attacked for talking to her, Delafield, the foreigner. The scene that follows is evidently dramatic, but also undermines the guards – Venus appeared to not take it too seriously, and others watch on, apparently for entertainment (arguments, tears: good sport). It is not immediately clear that what is going on here relates to questions of 'official' and 'unofficial'. Delafield sees it as being a question of a transgression on the part of Venus, but the argument itself is hardly good cultural show, and the involvement of others does not suggest a matter of fear or cowed individuals. Rather, the episode shows again the complexity and subtleties of these encounters and how dynamics of Soviet life supersede any idea the foreigner

has about the situation – though, the question of sincerity re-surfaced: later, one of the guides dismisses Venus as a prostitute, which delighted Delafield because she had been repeatedly told by her guides that there were no such people in the USSR.⁹⁴

SUMMARY

It is helpful to return to Citrine and Karchan for one final, contrasting point. At an aluminium factory near the Dnieper dam, Citrine was ambushed by his hosts with a public interview, at which the workers asked Citrine questions about himself and Britain, and his thoughts about the Soviet Union. Citrine saw that ‘the real purpose was to get me to discuss international Trade Union “unity”’, a topic of heated discussion throughout his trip, as his hosts tried to persuade him into advocating closer links between Moscow and foreign trade unions, which Citrine resisted.⁹⁵ Citrine was thus a targeted figure of Soviet intention. In his book, Citrine responds gamely but carefully, but in his papers, he records his anger with Karchan at being ambushed thus:

We then went back to the hotel after I had told Karchan that he should have protected me from this and accused him of knowing I was being drawn into it. He denied this very strongly, and I believed finally that he didn’t know anything of its being arranged.⁹⁶

Karchan played a curious role. He was recognised by Citrine as a guide and also, potentially, as a spy, but Citrine believed him when he denied involvement with operational aspects of Soviet cultural diplomacy (which, as his guide, he would likely have at least foreknowledge of), on matters of real political significance for the Soviets and their treatment of Citrine. Whatever the truth of his involvement, Citrine believed him to be sincere in his denial, and yet also thought the man was a ‘spy’, the epitome of deceit. What Citrine’s relationship with Karchan shows is how individual relationships could both embody *and* problematise more essential understandings of sincerity. Citrine liked Karchan, was willing to be led by him, and essentially put his journey in Karchan’s hands, and yet also frequently distrusted him, criticised his sincerity directly,

⁹⁴ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 238–40.

⁹⁵ Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, 47; 199.

⁹⁶ Citrine, 1/20, fol. 246–7.

and did not have faith in the truth of much of what Karchan showed him. Finally, Citrine pitied him, which encouraged his sympathy when reflecting on Karchan's denials and equivocations.

The encounters between foreigners and Soviet individuals offered a chance for foreigners to gauge Soviet sincerity and certain experiences fit the mould that pre-existing expectations set for them. The discursive framework explored in the previous chapters established a particular understanding of what Soviet responses would be to foreign questions: a tension between the official and unofficial narrative, silence and acquiescence in the face of representatives of the 'official', and, for travellers like Jones, the presence of suffering as the guarantor of sincerity. Indeed, many of these encounters appeared to pivot, fundamentally, on power: the 'official' and the 'unofficial' interacting, repression and censure being close to the surface. The cowed individual Citrine saw in Karchan was replicated elsewhere, such as the peasant whose manner with Jones changed overnight.

The Soviet individuals seen here exhibit a range of responses to foreigners. The encounters help us see the usable self, often via the presence of an 'official' entity, be that a person or the invisible hand of state discipline and cultural norms. In some of these cases, this includes Soviet individuals withholding information from foreigners (the doctor on the Volga boat with Jones) and avoiding them (the peasants Norah Rowan-Hamilton encountered), or betraying discomfort at certain situations they find themselves in with foreigners (Conolly's impromptu guide in Kharkiv); Ada Chesterton identified a man as living a life built on the need to 'carefully cultivate' a front to society. This man, Karchan and the porter Norah Rowan-Hamilton described all display the usable self meeting an observer from outside the system. The porter said he did not care what the foreigners are up to, providing he can tell his superiors an acceptable story. Karchan is critiqued, openly by Citrine, and his equivocations and reasoning reveal a discord between, at the least, Citrine's expectations of what an 'educated man' should do, and what the state enforces upon that man. Whether via their mere presence or their direct questioning, travellers revealed the complexity of Soviet identity.

The presence of other Soviet individuals shows both a complicated and relatively straightforward picture. It is straightforward in the sense that some individuals were

very open with foreigners in the presence of others, including those of the 'official', whilst others were very reticent (most notably the 'keen supporter' Jones met), or changed their behaviour swiftly (the woman who mentioned Radek to Conolly). It is complicated in the sense that whilst an 'open'/'secretive' binary clearly exists, there is not a clear reason as to why the differences occurred. The 'keen supporter' who changed his tune about Soviet life overnight, and the crying 'old woman' complaining openly to the farm president were on the same farm at the same point in time. At other moments, such as Jones's meeting with peasants in spring 1933, the material situation was so dire that openness about suffering is explicable simply by its undeniable reality, but at others, such as the farm near Samara in 1931, it appears individual psychology played as much a part as anything else. Rowan-Hamilton's time 'At the Sign of the Cat' shows interesting layers of meaning relating to Soviet identity. The Nepman and the VOKS woman alike reveal selves accommodating and adapting as they can; the introduction of the 'Communist' reveals these selves to be precariously held.

What is clear already is how travellers existed outside the 'us/them' binary more often than not. Travellers are not identified as 'them', although they could certainly be determined as a threat in some sense: the influence of official discourse and the dangers of engaging with the outsider played a role here. Sometimes foreigners were questioned about their activities, but they were also rendered service without question – Malcolm Burr being given firearms for his own safety (even if in 1924–5, it slots into the experiences seen throughout the 1930s). Those determined by the traveller to be sincerely pro-Soviet individuals, such as those students who questioned Violet Conolly aboard the train to Sochi from Kharkiv, asked questions clearly orientated around the competitive context, implying the outside world was a place to compete with. Yet they did not see Conolly as an enemy as such – she was a curiosity, as was Bosworth Goldman when arguing about unemployment statistics at a Siberian river port, and so too John Brown when being questioned at a Moscow evening class. Travellers represented a source of new information that could simply inform Soviet individuals about the outside world. This could even go to the extent of Andrei Chirnochenko asking Violet Conolly for her address to correspond on scientific matters. Foreigners were an opportunity for learning and exchange, often about interests and concerns shaped by Soviet cultural imperatives. Given the significance of rumour for Soviet

individuals, such information could feed into the complexities of shaping the usable self, albeit likely at a remove from the everyday needs and pressures of Soviet life.

Furthermore, encounters were opportunities not only to learn information, but to give it. The peasants told Jones their story because he offered a reliable-enough outlet to do so. We cannot tell if these same peasants were amongst those who wrote to *Pravda* or to the Politburo themselves, but the fact of this communication at least suggests the possibility that travellers could offer a conduit for expression that for some Soviets was felt to be worthwhile: their 'hidden' transcripts were actually very much on show. Sometimes travellers were clearly determined to be, if not 'us', then more likely to be sympathetic to 'us' in situations where there was a clear element of repression in play. Travellers did not perhaps become part of trust groups *per se*, but embodied opportunities for expression because they were not considered 'them'. This could be expressed via appeals for travellers' co-operation: the VOKS woman's eyes 'implored silence' of Rowan-Hamilton; and if that is relying too much on the travellers' interpretation, the old man and the 'keen supporter' on the farm both tell their woes to Jones and implore his silence to help protect them. It could also be expressed more physically. The nun Praskovia gave Conolly a note, the sense of connection to foreign believers of clear importance to the woman, and this act being more powerful – more sincerely meaningful – for Conolly than the 'dumb superstition' of an ('authentic'?) religious service.

The next question is how these encounters shaped travellers' perceptions of Soviet sincerity. In a sense they did not affect much: the discourse of travel was powerfully shaped by expectations of how to explore the Soviet world, and who one needed to speak to in order to find truth. For Jones, suffering was the proof of sincerity. For Chesterton, the rural idyll was the place where people could be most sincere. For others, the idea of the unofficial was near-enough pre-determined to be the sign of sincerity. Gaining access was viewed as important for John Brown, Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, and Jones: repeatedly we have seen travellers seeking to visit places not on an itinerary, and John Brown walking into commissariats and factories as a way of bypassing cultural diplomacy. Jones arranged interviews and used them to probe and critique the Soviet 'official' narrative, observing what he saw as the insincerity of people like Lidin. However, for others, such as Delafield and Conolly, with her search for the 'Soviet Tempo', engagement with individuals as individuals was the key to

sincerity – what mattered more than ‘blowing the gaff’, to recall Lyall’s phrasing, was engagement with people to understand their situation. Jones is perhaps the most interesting case in this regard: he wanted to engage with Soviet individuals and tell their truth to the outside world, exposing Soviet lies and Russian/Ukrainian realities. He did this via interviews and tramping through the countryside, and he found political dynamite: famine and terror. Yet further than this, his talent at engaging with Soviet people means his diaries also record lives that are far more than that that bitter conflict between lies and truths, and more insightful than what Delafield’s Savoyard, or the German Professor, or any number of travellers mentioned earlier in this thesis, achieved with their cynicism or idealistic blandishments and their reduction of Soviet people to a generalised mass.

When we study these encounters, we see how complicated they are when contrasted to the frameworks of the discourse of travel and travellers’ expectations. The idea of the usable self, allowing for a more nuanced perspective of Soviet people than the discourse of travel does, is shown to be fraught with complexity when it came to its encounter with foreigners, to the point that contradictory behaviours could be seen from an individual over time, or between individuals at the same moment in time. Soviet individuals certainly revealed this usable self to and via their interactions with foreigners, and they engaged with foreigners as a way of giving and receiving information, but they also revealed much else: what travellers could consider a sincere self, complaining, thinking, reflecting about their lives and conditions, alone with foreigners and in the presence of the ‘official’. However, there is still more complexity to explore, and Elizabeth Delafield’s experiences with Eva offers another relationship through which to consider the range and meaning of travellers’ encounters with Soviet individuals, and see how another complex concept in Soviet life, the private/public binary, also proves both limiting and illuminating. In turn, this shows us even more that whilst the presence of Soviet power was unavoidable, traveller and Soviet interaction could reveal much more besides.

Chapter 5

Elizabeth and Eva: The Public, the Private – the Personal

‘Bolshevism has abolished private life’ – Walter Benjamin¹

‘To get to the Marvskis’ room you had to hold your nose’ – Herbert Marchant²

Elizabeth Delafield’s relationship with Eva, a woman who helped Delafield get used to life on the Seattle Commune, is a useful contrasting case to that of Citrine and Karchan and the other examples drawn from the travel accounts that relate, broadly, to travellers engaging with the official Soviet world. Eva is not a representative of the state but was a woman who had returned from emigration abroad to work on a communal farm, with whom Delafield developed a relationship over time. We have already seen issues of location in the subtext of the previous chapter: Gareth Jones and Norah Rowan-Hamilton and Ada Chesterton in villages and peasant homes, Walter Citrine and John Brown in workplaces, Violet Conolly on trains. This chapter takes this further, considering foreigners’ interaction with the ‘unofficial’ in more detail. As we have already seen however, the line between ‘public’ and ‘private’ is complicated – think only of Jones’s conversations on the farm with the ‘keen supporter’, or the implication behind Malcom Burr’s purchasing of shoes being given a political spin by the local newspaper: politics suffused everything, making a divide between public and private only so helpful as a distinction. Delafield’s time on the Seattle commune shows us how this binary could function in peasant life, whilst other experiences show the nuances of public/private via foreigners engaging with Soviet domestic life in cities – including in communal apartments. How do these travel accounts allow us to explore the idea of Kharkordin’s ‘personal life’, alongside a ‘private life’ and a ‘public life’ in the Soviet Union? It is again clear that the travellers present to us a range of experiences that do not neatly fall into ‘official = closed’ and ‘unofficial = open’ – these categories are too interwoven. At the same time, the chapter allows further consideration of travellers’ assessments of Soviet sincerity and to tease out more and more nuances of this interwoven world. It considers first Delafield’s time

¹ Walter Benjamin, ‘Moscow’ in *One-way Street and Other Writings*, 187.

² Marchant, *Scratch a Russian*, 79.

on the commune, then the idea of Soviet ‘openness’ as a tool of certain pro-Soviet writers to make the Soviet Union appear in a better light, and the fact of Soviet ‘openness’ more generally, considered against both these pro-Soviet moves and the historiography. Then comes Delafield’s engagement with Eva in more detail, followed by consideration of how Soviet people related their views of foreigners, famous or not, to travellers. Finally, it returns to Delafield’s experiences with Eva, and other Soviet individuals to demonstrate further how the domestic spaces travellers and Soviets met in could be the settings of scenes that confounded and conformed to travellers’ expectations of Soviet sincerity and add further detail to our understanding of Soviet people.

DELAFIELD ON THE SEATTLE COMMUNE

Delafield’s time on the Seattle commune is related in the first section of her travel account, *Straw without Bricks*.³ It does so out of chronological order, an unusual device in these types of texts: the stay on the farm came part-way into her trip, after visits to Leningrad and Moscow, before the familiar train ride south, on this occasion to Rostov-on-Don. This is suggestive both of its significance, it being the reason she made the journey, but also how her experience of living on a communal farm was a curious mesh of ideology, friendship and a noticeable lack of control placed upon her, which sets the tone for the rest of the book. Delafield arranged her visit via a sequence of personal contacts. She described how she was ‘refused a “workers visa” outright’, and that the only way she would be able to visit a farm would be ‘possibly as one of a “group” of tourists, shepherded by a guide-interpreter.’ Although she travelled on tour elsewhere in the USSR, her visit to the farm was intended to be a solo venture. She visited Rostov-on-Don with only the name of a contact to follow, an American who worked on the Seattle Commune, with whom distant and brief contact had been established via the US embassy in Moscow. The Commune, established in 1922 largely by Finnish

³ Delafield calls the Seattle farm a ‘commune’ throughout, whereas by 1936 it was likely a collective farm, of a different quality and register to the foreign communes of the 1920s, which, pre-collectivisation, were supposed to be foreign-led exemplar sites for local peasants to overcome their ‘backwardness’. Seth Bernstein & Robert Cherny ‘Searching for the Soviet Dream: Prosperity and Disillusionment on the Soviet Agricultural Commune, 1922–1927’, *Agricultural History*, 88:1 (Winter 2014), 22–44, at 25, 33.

Americans, 'many of whom had come to the United States from the Russian empire', was about 150 miles south east of Rostov-on-Don.⁴ Intourist refused to help her locate this individual or reach the farm, but the wife of this American visited Delafield at her hotel – this woman suggested Delafield pretend to the local Intourist and police representatives that she was a friend of her husband's, and wished to visit the Commune to participate in its work; those who founded it were part of a swathe of socialists who had 'arrived with dreams of building self-sufficient communities that would form the foundation of communism on a larger scale.'⁵ Delafield, armed with advice on how to navigate the Soviet system authorities, given to her by a Soviet individual, achieved her goal: she was allowed to visit the farm, unguided, and without a translator.

Her arrival was late at night, to no fanfare; she was collected from a station down the line from Rostov-on-Don by a Russian speaking 'youth', who gave her a lift to the farm. She joined the 'Comrades', as she called them, for breakfast the next morning, 'feeling exactly like a new girl at school' (John Brown's 'working' whilst digging on the Moscow metro works was received in a way evocative of this too: a sense of unfamiliarity and muted surprise). The traveller would always be noticeable, but they would not necessarily be an exciting diversion; again, they were not 'us' but nor were they 'them'. At breakfast Delafield was greeted by the farm's Secretary, who called her 'Comrade Dashwood' (Delafield explained her married name of Dashwood was easier for the Russian tongue). The Secretary, a 'slow, amiable man', spoke relatively decent English, and gave her a tour of the farm.⁶ Delafield uses this as a chance to relate the vital statistics – population, size, governance structure – an echo of the myriad guided accounts of farms and factories that other foreigners gave. She noted that her requests to work on the farm were met with 'amiable evasions', and her tour concluded with a chat in the Secretary's office, where they discussed more about the farm: its punitive system, its Controlling Board and Executive Council, and so on. In this simulacrum of the guided tour, the background issue of repression comes to light: Delafield was told of 'a comrade who "spoke bad against the government"' and this

⁴ Bernstein & Cherny, 'Searching for the Soviet Dream', 23.

⁵ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 6–7; Bernstein & Cherny, 'Searching for the Soviet Dream', 23.

⁶ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 8; 12–13.

was considered so serious that his case was sent up [...] to Moscow', and that this comrade was never heard from again, for reasons 'not very difficult to guess.'⁷ Such themes don't dominate Delafield's account, either at the commune or away from it, but a sense of unease is present in her writing throughout her travels. This is compounded by her understanding of cultural diplomacy: first, the Seattle Commune had once been used as a showcase but was no longer used so. When it had been, she was told that foreigners 'had to have a special meal prepared for them, and they interrupted the work, and were generally considered to have been a nuisance.' Second, after her time at the commune 'I visited – as a tourist and conducted with a party, by interpreters – several other farms', near Rostov-on-Don and Odessa. 'They were all "show" places [...] giving no insight into the lives and minds of the people working there.'⁸ Thus, a significant influence on Delafield's understanding of her experiences was the possibility of state repression as she understood it via stories told to her on the Seattle commune, and a cultural diplomacy that gave an insincere impression of Soviet life.

However, at the other end of the scale from this understanding of repression and of the cultural diplomatic façade is the fact of her existence on the farm: she noted that she 'never really understood why I had been allowed to go there, and to remain as long as I did', which was several weeks. The Intourist reaction when she informed them of her experiences was of being 'slightly awed at the thought of my having gone' to the farm 'at all' (rather like Maitland-Makgill-Crichton's exasperated guide on his visit to the village near Kyiv, the reaction here is indicative of the competitive context within Soviet society: the urban individual reacting with some condescension or confusion when a foreigner sought the rural beyond the showcase). Intourist also, requested she did not 'encourage any other tourists to demand the same privilege, as it would certainly not be granted to them'.⁹ It was not the police, or Intourist, or deprivation that ended her stay: it was toothache. 'My credentials were never questioned, and nobody so much as asked if I had a passport at all. I could, I am perfectly certain, have stayed on there for months.'¹⁰ Indeed, Delafield settled into a, if not happy or particularly comfortable, then tolerable position in the commune,

⁷ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 17–18.

⁸ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 59.

⁹ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 20–1, 59

¹⁰ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 48.

enabling her to cast her novelist's eye over Soviet life. She never stopped being a fish out of water, but she did stop feeling like the 'new girl'. Key to this, and to much else about her understanding of Soviet life, were the friends she made, notably women, and in particular Eva, an Estonian who acted as the farm's pharmacist, doctor, and midwife. Eva's husband named Delafield 'Lady Dashwood', not, Delafield thought, because of Delafield's bearing, but because all women were known as 'ladies' – the 'cow-lady', the 'bread-lady', and so on.¹¹ It is a useful name to keep in mind when examining Delafield's experiences: the falsities underlying the name, its signifying her being welcomed into the community, its suggestion of certain class status to a British readership – all are evocative of the position Delafield found herself in on the farm, between wanting to 'work' on the socialist farm and coming from a capitalist milieu, and between the falsehoods of cultural diplomacy, her modification of her own name, her stories told that enabled her to reach the farm, and the sincerity of personal contact once there. All of these co-exist with the simple relationships Delafield presents as the heart of her story of the commune, and the unhurried, unpressured existence she found on the farm. The public/private dichotomy is shown to be, via this relationship, only so illuminating.

The farm itself requires a little further introduction, as its nature is relevant to our discussion of sincerity, and the public/private dichotomy. 'Seattle' was an obvious name given the Pacific Northwest location of many of the founding emigres (they met in Seattle to agree on the venture), but it is also similar to the Russian *seiatel'*, meaning 'sower'.¹² The commune was to be modern and run under Communist oversight, a beacon of socialism under construction. The commune faced many difficulties, due to its location (near marshes), disagreements and hard living: many of the original founders left in the 1920s, replaced by more and more Russians, as well as other ethnicities: Poles, Ukrainians, Estonians and Serbs. Russian came to be the ruling language of the farm.¹³ In short: the farm was a place worked by many people very familiar with the outside world, even if their number had declined significantly since the

¹¹ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 42.

¹² Mikko Ylikangas, 'The Sower Commune: An American-Finnish Agricultural Utopia in the Soviet Union', in *The Journal of Finnish Studies* 15:1&2 (November 2011 special edition: *Victims and Survivors of Karelia*), 52–86, at 57.

¹³ Ylikangas, 'The Sower Commune', 71–2; 77.

founding. Delafield was speaking to people immersed in Soviet life, but who were not always of the entirely Russian or Ukrainian background of many other peasants encountered by foreigners.

Eva is introduced as the ‘most intelligent woman in the Settlement’. Tall, ‘about forty’, with short blonde hair, and a ‘strong, rather handsome face’, Eva could speak English, German and Russian, with some French, and had lived in the United States before returning to Eastern Europe.¹⁴ Eva and Elizabeth formed a bond that enabled the latter to observe the Soviet system through the lens of a person whom she liked to spend time with, and who she felt she could trust with opinions and arguments against that system. Eva’s husband was chairman of the farm’s Executive Board, and both were ‘forceful and intelligent personalities’. She reminded Delafield of Kipling’s Mrs Hauksbee, in that she ‘she was oddly hard and cynical on the surface, and fundamentally she was very kind,’ and Delafield valued her intelligence greatly. Her description of Eva is followed by a single line paragraph, ‘she had a weak heart, and no children’, an evocative suffix to the description of a woman she admired, scrutinized, and romanticized.¹⁵ Her encounter with Eva focused Delafield on ideas of civilization and sincerity, and our focus on the role of the foreigner in the Soviet domestic space.

Eva was not the only acquaintance, however. Delafield eventually found some work in the farm bakery, where she helped Anna, a Russian, and Julia, a Pole, with the heavy, tiring work of kneading dough and baking bread. Anna spoke only Russian, so Julia translated for Delafield, but both spoke to her directly, and a friendly equilibrium was established, although Delafield noted that ‘they had a conviction, which nothing could shake, that I was very frail and delicate and ought not to be allowed to work.’¹⁶ Delafield showed them the contents of her handbag, and Delafield noted how the ‘primitive conditions most of them had always lived’ in made a lipstick seem fascinating, and also wondered how Eva and Julia, used to life outside the borders of the Russian empire and the USSR, reacted to reintegrating into such a ‘difficult experience.’¹⁷ However, that aspect of the rural ‘primitive’ was less significant to

¹⁴ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 18–19, 25.

¹⁵ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 25.

¹⁶ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 34.

¹⁷ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 35.

Delafield than that of the Soviet ‘less “civilized”’. Being able to communicate with Julia, she was closer to her than Anna, and visited Julia in her home – ‘that is to say, the one room in which she and her husband lived.’ There Julia showed her

what was evidently her greatest treasure – a photograph album. It was filled with snapshots of American friends, and with photographers’ pictures – all taken in America – of wedding groups.

Julia and Eva came to represent for Delafield an obvious marker against which Soviet conditions could be assessed as ‘primitive’ in terms of material conditions, and noticeably *less* ‘civilized’ than those lives they led in North America in terms of freedoms. Delafield wrote of Julia missing ‘the shops, and the amusements, and social life’ of her time there, ‘continually’.¹⁸

There were other aspects of Soviet domestic life that were less jarring in their juxtaposition of circumstances, however. Next door to Delafield’s room, lived the farm’s Schoolmistress, her ill husband, and their two children, aged six and three. The youngest, Mischa, was a ‘merry, round-faced little creature, his bullet head completely shaven, and he was too young to be shy.’ Delafield invited Mischa into her room one day, and he explored with gusto, before laughing hysterically at a photo of Delafield’s children. Mischa talked to Delafield ‘a great deal, quite earnestly, and seemed quite unaware that I never understood a word he said and took little or no part in the conversation.’¹⁹ Mischa brought a friend to play, Xenia, and the two played with toys whilst Delafield watched, or performed chores – it is never entirely clear. Xenia’s sister, Nadya, joined in, but bullied Xenia away, being a ‘large, sturdy child.’ Their mother came

and made a long speech about them, which I guessed was to the effect that I was to send them away when I was tired of them, and I nodded and said Yes,

¹⁸ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 36. Individuals on the farm were committed to varying levels: ‘their stake in the commune was based as much in their family’s finances as in their convictions.’ The Seattle project outlasted all others due to its members being more financially tied to its success. Bernstein & Cherny, ‘Searching for the Soviet Dream’, 24, 26, 29–30, 36–7.

¹⁹ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 38–9.

yes, yes, and patted their shorn heads to indicate that I liked them – as I did, especially Mischa.²⁰

What is striking about this experience is how unremarkable it is as contrasted to the discourse of travel's tropes of fear and evasion – even in its unusual context of a foreign interloper, appearing from the blue to 'work' on the farm, and who could not speak Russian, having Russian children playing in her room. This was done partially to give their parents some peace, but also because she enjoyed seeing children play. There is no political, security or ideological aspect to the scene, at least to Delafield's mind, and she received no reproach or worry from the parents, or others, about her presence – on the account of the children, or indeed relating to anything else.

SOVIET OPENNESS: A RHETORICAL DEVICE?

The openness found here is mirrored in the accounts of Ada Chesterton and Hubert Griffith, but it is significant to contrast their depictions of Soviet openness with Delafield's, because there is a crucial difference. Ada Chesterton and Hubert Griffith both set a very particular scene regarding Soviet sincerity, and the frequency of their encounters/opportunities to engage with sincere Soviet people. Chesterton, saw villages and farms as places of openness: she was shown around one village by a chap called 'Hans' who seemed no obstacle to her seeing more of the wonderful farming life of the Soviet Union – aside from some villages 'untouched by the renaissance, where a cruelly low level of life and conditions generally obtained.'²¹ Hubert Griffith, travelling on trains, wrote of how

I found my companions in trains invariably willing to talk. On long all-day or all-night journeys one of them, seeing that I was a foreigner, would come up and try a little German or a little French. [...] Discussions – once lasting nearly all night – would invariably ensue. Their thirst for knowledge about England was insatiable, and their thirst for knowledge of what a travelling Englishman thought of them was as great.²²

²⁰ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 40.

²¹ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 120

²² Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia*, 157.

This scene of openness was depicted as part of Griffith's concerted effort to show the Soviet Union was not shrouded by an iron curtain but was as alive with curiosity as anywhere – perhaps more than anywhere – and thus a foreigner could find out all they needed from the people themselves. Yet the scene these instances of openness present to us needs further investigation. Griffith and Chesterton incorporate such frankness into a wider narrative about foreign insincerity and Soviet sincerity, attacking the former to defend the latter. Soviet sincerity could be deployed by travellers as an argumentative device: it was proof that the Soviet Union was not a place of terror and censorship.

Neither Chesterton nor Griffith, however, engaged with Soviet people extensively in their homes. Gareth Jones records numerous instances of engaging with Soviet people in their homes, all of which was used to back his view that the Soviet Union was fundamentally on the wrong course. After a reception with the Soviet Press Office at Spiridnovka in Moscow, Jones went for a walk in the city. The passage is worth quoting at length, for it indicates how hospitable domesticity for a foreigner, the ebb and flow of people in a confined space (moving in and out of the discussion) and the squalor of domestic life could be experienced by a foreigner with the skills to find it:

I walked along street, entered courtyard, went into house. Dirty, dangerous – wood walls etc. Woman came out 'what you want?' 'See how people live'. She took me into tiny room, one small bed. 'Three of us live here.' Then into another room, smaller, ikon in corner. Old woman, pale, ill 'Three here, but when my sons came there were five. In some rooms there are five, seven, or eight.'

Then – *Pioneerka* came with swollen eyes & her mother, swollen eyes with tears. Old woman said 'I have to leave Moscow by the 25th because they have given me no passport. I know no one in the world. I have to go beyond 100 *versts* from Moscow. How can I live there?'

Mother said 'we have been refused passports & we have all to go. My daughter cannot stay in school, cannot do her exam. We have no money. They give us no bread card. Where can we go?'

Old woman: 'My husband gets 70 rubles a month but they haven't paid them for a month.'

Another woman came ‘They are cruelly strict now in the factories. If you are absent one day you are sacked, get your bread card taken away & cannot get a passport.

‘Life is a nightmare. I cannot go in the tram, it kills me – nerves.

‘It is more terrible than war. If you say a word now in the factory you are dismissed. There is no freedom.

‘They are dismissing people everywhere & take away their bread card.’ Pale, hungry, nervous. Mother said hysterically ‘I cannot get milk for my child.’ [...]

‘We are terrified that we will get no passports. Where can we go? Everywhere persecution, everywhere terror. One man we knew said ‘my brother died but he still lies there & we don’t know when we can bury him, there are queues for the burial.’

‘There is no hope for the future.’

Domesticity, in Jones’s experience, was full of pain and suffering, concomitant Soviet openness about such conditions, and a clear divide between ‘us’ and ‘them’, where ‘they’ are repeatedly invoked as the cause of the misery of ‘us’. It is a stark and bitter contrast to the way openness was deployed by Chesterton and Griffith. Jones’s views of Soviet sincerity were, undoubtedly, coloured just as Griffith’s were, by his political views, but he did not assess openness *per se* as a necessary sign of the truth of the Soviet Union. Instead, he took the *substance* of that openness as his evidence. The very kernel of his most powerful and painful experiences is found in the Soviet home, in an episode from eastern Ukraine, March 1933:

Peasant hospitality. [...] Peasant prayer. ‘They tried to take away my ikons but I said I’m a farmer not a dog.

‘When we all believed in God, we were happy & lived well. When they tried to do away with God, we became hungry.

‘In former days we would be hospitable. A man could travel all through Russia and say ‘Дай ради бога’ [‘give for the sake of God’] and all gave. But now what is [one] to say? If one says ‘Дай ради бога’ you may be talking to a Communist & he’ll say ‘God is dead, get away with you. How can I give for the sake of God’

and if one says ‘Give for the sake of Lenin’, Ради Ленина, one may be talking to a Christian & he’ll say ‘Give for the sake of Lenin, akh!’ & spit & say ‘go away’. So it is difficult to live, also because there is nothing to give.’

Woman making home-made clothes, spindle purring away, naked foot up & down. ‘Before revolution we used to make fine boots in the villages [...] & now they’re against all this. The Communists won’t give us work to do at home.’ Some of the designs were very artistic, red, gifted people.

Child played with me, laughed, pale, glassy eyes, swollen stomach. Pressed buttons, & I sang: [...]

Laughs.

This experience was the central moment of Jones’s relationship with the Soviet Union, and domesticity and the pervasiveness of Soviet power combine here in a terrible nadir, rendering the words of the peasants utterly sincere for Jones. Questions of private and personal collapse under the weight of famine. For their part, the workers and peasants seemed determined to tell their story to a foreigner, and the home – even the urban space with people passing back and forth therein – was the place to do this.

Herbert Marchant also presents openness, but in a less rhetorical and/or dramatic way to these writers and does so with domesticity as the implicit focal point. After a visit to a communal farm (on which he pointed out issues with the production statistics, much to the displeasure of the chairman of the ‘management board’) he found himself alone in the village of ‘Kagra’ in Ukraine. He noted, upon recounting his search for a place to stay, that the people (referred to obliquely, under the umbrella of ‘in Soviet Russia’) ‘were still frightened of foreigners; foreigners might be White Guard spies, or counter-revolutionaries.’ This is followed by his noting that most doors in the village remained closed to him: he knocked, and either found nobody answering, or did not receive the answer he desired – echoes of subterfuge and fear abound here. There is a ghost of fear in the background: he does not state it, but his observation about spies and counterrevolutionaries is followed by a lack of hospitality. Only at the last resort did he find welcome: a ‘Mira Mitrova’ could help. Marchant was invited into what he described as a dacha, where a ‘party’ was taking place – silence greeted his arrival, swiftly replaced by jovial greetings. Marchant is introduced as an “Englishman”, and Mira Mitrova announces the party is celebrating the sale of some carpentry – noted as

being illegal by Mira, which is rubbished by Maxim, her husband – and Marchant joins in.²³ Marchant is, as with so many other travellers, asked questions about England, and the son tells him about the famine of 1932–33. Mira dances, and Marchant enjoys his time, celebrating their company.²⁴ The home is a scene of merriment, hospitality and mutual learning; Marchant's presentation of matters begins with a nod to the idea of paranoia and fear, but the episode unfurls with only positive connotations, despite discussion of darker matters like the old hunger.

Another chapter in Marchant's book shows how travellers could treat Soviet individuals and groups as a discursive device, but in yet another way different to Griffith and Chesterton, and again with the domestic and openness at the heart of the matter. In Moscow, Marchant spent time with two families whom he intriguingly merged into a composite, the 'Marvskis'. He described this family as a construct, taking 'the members of two Muscovite families to make up the Marvski ménage.' This family, whilst a composite invention, gives a 'final picture' which was, Marchant assured his readers, 'typical of thousands of Moscow households.'²⁵ The 'Marvskis' discussed the news with Marchant; 'Senya' tells Marchant of his previous imprisonment.²⁶ Thus, in stark contrast to Delafield with Eva, or Citrine with Karchan, and even Marchant with other individuals he engaged with, the 'Marvskis' become a figment, a synthesised representation of real people. Marchant does not give an explicit reason for this device, but the discursive justification is given: they are 'typical' of Muscovites.

This makes his description of their living place an interesting problem, for it is extremely specific. Conceivably he described a real place but installs the composite family in a room there, whereas in reality he encountered but one of his 'sources' there. The family are given a 'room' in a 'very old house' in Kitai Gorod. Outside, rubbish is strewn around, and children play there: they cried "Ingleeshman" when Marchant arrived, 'and scuttled like rabbits'. In the houses all around were 'innumerable families'. To get to the Marvski's room, you 'went through the old wooden door on the right, just under the clothes-line, into a cold dark passage, where the communal wash-house and

²³ Marchant, *Scratch a Russian*, 100–102.

²⁴ Marchant, *Scratch a Russian*, 105–8.

²⁵ Marchant, *Scratch a Russian*, 79.

²⁶ Marchant, *Scratch a Russian*, 87–8.

lavatory served as a meeting place for the thirty inhabitants.²⁷ The Marvskis lived in a room off this ‘wash-house’. The scene Marchant portrayed is of enforced intimacy: a ballerina lodges in part of the Marvski’s room, behind a curtain. Marchant did not describe what Gerasimova called ‘the alienation of people from their habitat’ – in fact, Marchant’s time in such a domestic space is not marked with suspicion or fear or constant interruption, but rather quiet discussions about Soviet life: some hope for a better future, some complaints about current conditions, GPU repression; Marchant went parachuting with a son, Felix, in the Park of Culture and Rest.²⁸ Marchant’s arrival was noted by the children, and he was greeted explicitly as a foreigner. Conceivably he was familiar to them, to engender such a reaction. He entered without trouble: the “‘House manager’” is noted only as someone checking who spends the night in the rooms, and he had ‘little to complain of’.²⁹ Marchant did not explicitly frame these encounters as a matter of finding the ‘private life’ of Soviet individuals, but equally he did not make comment about discussion – sometimes on frank matters, such as the arrest of relatives, work camps (the chapter of Marchant’s book this episode is related within is entitled ‘Punishment without Crime’) and the woes of wives left behind when men were taken away – being muted, careful or circumscribed for any reason. Certainly, there is rationalisation offered: an Uncle Maxim declared that the state requires sacrifice, and whilst mistakes are made, “‘Justice in our country is a power whose function is to suppress class enemies, enemies of the people.’”³⁰ Maxim laughed at Marchant’s understanding of revolution, and then ‘went chuckling off to bed’ – but presumably, Maxim’s bed was somewhere very nearby; Marchant’s description seems more suited for a dwelling with multiple rooms.

Unlike Griffith and Chesterton, this is not used to argue the Soviet Union was more open than its critics thought, but like them both Marchant here summarises to the point of eradicating nuance, in favour of making a broader point, which for Marchant was that the voices of Moscow sang much the same tune. Furthermore, it suggests that Marchant did not encounter much of a problem when faced with such a domestic scene: the ‘personal’ is clearly interpolated with the ‘private’, but the foreigner is not a

²⁷ Marchant, *Scratch a Russian*, 79–80.

²⁸ Marchant, *Scratch a Russian*, 85.

²⁹ Marchant, *Scratch a Russian*, 80.

³⁰ Marchant, *Scratch a Russian*, 88–93.

threat in this context. Marchant's experiences are in tune with his stated purpose: to 'delve' into matters and see for himself. He presented a series of episodes in which there is an implicit commentary running alongside his narrative: domestic scenes are sites of sincere Soviet people, where one can learn about their views and feelings, about affairs broadly and in their own lives, because they exhibited openness to the traveller. Yet his creation of a collage does leave us with a grain of doubt about his representation of Moscow life, even as other episodes in his book do not (we have to assume) employ this gambit. Neither Jones nor Marchant engaged with the 'personal life' of Soviet people in an explicit sense, but both presented and/or used a series of explorations of the 'private' lives of Soviet people, because domestic encounters form a significant portion of their works, in Marchant's case interwoven with experience of showcases and travelling by train and bus, and in Jones's with interviews with Soviet officials.

This openness was not unusual. A few further examples suffice to join those already given above – there are dozens in the corpus. Violet Connolly's travel on trains led her to similar conclusions: of a conversation on a train to Gorkii in 1936, she noted her interlocutors there 'were extremely polite and anxious for conversation with the foreigner.'³¹ Peter Fleming's journey on the Trans-Siberian to China saw him, somewhere just east of the Urals, engaged in discussion with an 'extremely intelligent' young man about theatre and Marxist theory. Fleming noted he was 'fanatically Orthodox' (in Soviet terms) – indeed, this fact made him quite sincere, Fleming thought.³² On the Vitim, Malcolm Burr got drunk and danced with locals.³³ Bosworth Goldman spent time with a 'Boris' in Novosibirsk. Goldman drank with 'the men of Boris's house' and the women cooked, and later 'we became talkative'. Goldman did not note particular topics, but rather a gloom about the future.³⁴ Later he discussed the new classes of the Soviet Union with disgruntled people on a train to Tashkent. Having 'eluded my keeper', Goldman heard of the "aristocracy" of the present regime', and how they – like the supposedly vanquished aristocracy of Tsarism – still occupied the

³¹ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 33-4.

³² Fleming, *One's Company*, 53–55.

³³ Burr, *In Bolshevik Siberia*, 77–9.

³⁴ Goldman, *Red Road Through Asia*, 133.

'soft' class carriages.³⁵ Gareth Jones met Vova, a boy in Leningrad who freely discussed with the journalist his scheme to acquire foreign currency from foreigners to buy goods in Torgsin shops.³⁶ In sum we see sharing of information (relatively) freely, in offices, homes, trains and in the fields, with travellers talking to officials and peasants, workers and the 'fanatically Orthodox' Soviet, such as the youth of Fleming's train journey. The 'private' life was clearly accessible, although the mingling of public and unofficial (e.g., dances) are clearly present; travellers like Chesterton and Griffith used this identification of the private being accessible as evidence that the public/private distinction was not so morally charged as Jones argued. Rather, what they experienced was the complex relationship between public, private *and* the personal, wherein domestic spaces and the absence of the official could still see a distinction between private and personal lives – between that which was secret to the individual and that which ideology sought to mould.

It is true that alongside this openness could come censure of some kind: the 'official' intruding directly on the 'private' space. Herbert Marchant's time with an estranged couple, Varka and Alexei in Moscow came to an end because Alexei's unnamed friend had advised the authorities that Alexei had been talking to a foreigner of 'counter-revolutionary opinions' (which Marchant reads as being any 'Englishman who is not a "Party Member"'). Here is a subtle blend of different categories: the couple were estranged but living together – their private lives were bound together still by the conditions of the time, and then Alexei and Varka were 'warned' not to continue seeing Marchant, and so their relationship came to an end. Marchant's presence in their 'personal' lives, the life of the engaged Soviet individual away from the street and park, but still under the eye of the state, was unacceptable. Until this point, the pair had been open and accommodating to Marchant: unlike Jones's 'keen supporter', who feared a warning or reprimand, the pair received one and acted accordingly – but the possibility of this outcome had not precluded an engagement between foreigner and Soviet at a level more intimate than strangers meeting by chance.³⁷ Bosworth Goldman related an even more dissolved situation, where in Bukhara he watched a film with two

³⁵ Goldman, *Red Road Through Asia*, 167.

³⁶ Gareth Jones, Diary B1–12, August 1931.

³⁷ Marchant, *Scratch a Russian*, 60.

conscientious young communists – a boy and a girl, the latter having ‘spread her sex-appeal over us like butter on new bread’ – and then drank and danced with others that he met. His two companions warned him: “These are bad people; you should not mix with them.” “It is bad to drink,” and “It is forbidden to dance thus”.³⁸ Then the boy drank so much he had to have his stomach pumped.

ENGAGING WITH THE SOVIET MIND: II

Whilst Delafield’s account was never focused on these issues of sincerity in an explicit sense, as used in defence of the Soviet Union (Chesterton, Griffith) or against (Jones), and was rather more like Marchant’s writing in its muted notation of the fact of Soviet openness, these issues did surface in her conversations with Eva. Their relationship developed swiftly, via advice, loans, and enjoying each other’s company. Eva warned her ‘never to leave any of my belongings unwatched, never to take money or my watch to the wash-house, and to lock the door of my room every time I left it.’³⁹ She lent Delafield proper boots and a coat, when a rainstorm revealed Delafield’s preparations inadequate. She also continued Delafield’s tour, showing the writer the work she did in the dispensary, where she made, to Delafield’s mind, very questionable concoctions to inject into the children, who all ‘set up a most frightful howling at the sight of Eva’, such was their fear of her needle.⁴⁰ Delafield was perturbed by Eva’s lack of training, and her lack of hygiene: no sterilization, no disinfectant, no washing of hands, especially in the face of malaria and tuberculosis.⁴¹ Delafield queried her, tentatively, on matters medical:

Eva, I think, was a little bit offended at my suggestion of [calling for] a doctor. She told me rather curtly that when he did come he was principally occupied in dentistry. She herself, she added – perhaps rather sinisterly – had not strong enough wrists.⁴²

³⁸ Goldman, *Red Road Through Asia*, 217.

³⁹ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 27.

⁴⁰ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 44, 29–30.

⁴¹ Bernstein and Cherny note the farm was located near a ‘river infested with malaria-ridden mosquitos’. Bernstein & Cherny, ‘Searching for the Soviet Dream’, 31.

⁴² Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 29–30.

This aspect of Soviet rural privation, as with the other incidents that brought notions of the 'civilized' to Delafield's mind, was less significant for her than the chance to engage with Eva's mind. Her relationship with Eva constitutes a significant lens through which to examine Delafield's understanding of the Soviet ontology. She admired Eva because she was

the only Communist [Delafield's attribution] I ever met in Russia who was sometimes willing to admit that perfection had not, as yet, been achieved in every single direction under the new regime.⁴³

Delafield 'never saw books or papers in Comrades' homes, except Eva's'.⁴⁴ Eva's obvious intelligence stretched to the shrewd reading of Delafield herself, discerning that the Briton was used to public speaking, and that she was a writer – which impressed Delafield. However, Delafield noted that 'it was not easy to make Eva talk about herself, and I never learnt her story, as I should have liked to do so.' In fact, all Delafield could get was glimpses of her past, and her mind:

The most revealing thing she ever said was one day when I took out my fountain pen in order to write down her full address [Delafield wished to send Eva hyacinth bulbs]. 'You gotta pen, have you? I thought I'd a gone crazy for mine, to start with – but I don't never think about it now. You get used to anything, with time.'

It is telling that a sign of privation (the lack of a pen) was also the most 'revealing' thing to Delafield: as a symbol of creativity and intellect, its lack meant more than the absence of lipstick, powder, or smelling salts. Indeed, like the absent friends and social life that Julia mourned, this was more significant for Delafield's reading of Soviet life than much else she experienced: the 'deadening' of the creative individual.

Nevertheless, Eva willingly discussed issues with Delafield, which was part of what made her so interesting to Delafield:

⁴³ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 26.

⁴⁴ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 32.

Her intelligence impressed me more than that of anyone I met in the Soviet Union. [...] She [...] was quite willing to admit the existence of another point of view.⁴⁵

Eva asked Delafield about the position of women in England, and they discussed religion in the USSR. Eva was 'for its abolition' and was 'much less tolerant' than many others, Delafield noted. However, Eva also said:

'You can't take it away from the old people,' she admitted. 'They've always believed, and I guess they always will.'

Delafield asked if there was no chance for prayer at all. Eva 'shook her head':

'There was a church once, not far from here, but it had been shut up for a long time, even when we came. It's been pulled down now, and they're using some of it for the farm buildings.' It was true. I had seen some pieces of heavily-gilt [wood] moulding in the carpenter's shop, and a panel of wood with a painting on it of the Madonna.

Such a system of repression is not one Delafield can admire, and the nature of that system comes up for debate:

'Sure, everybody won't never be equal, or stay equal,' she admitted, in talking about Socialism. 'I guess personality's always going to count. Some people'll get to the top, and others'll stay at the bottom. All the Communism in the world ain't goin' to make human nature different. What it does, is give every feller his chanst [sic].'⁴⁶

Eva displayed a 'sense of humour' and a 'sense of satire' – 'a quality seldom found in primitive surroundings' (revealing of Delafield's attitudes about the average peasant, and thus explaining her particular interest in, and admiration of, Eva's wit). This relationship gave Delafield access to a knowing, thoughtful, Soviet individual, whose ability and willingness to recognize fault contrasts with the guides and interpreters Delafield spent much of her time with elsewhere in the USSR. Tellingly, she also admires Eva's dislike of 'any form of artificiality', which likely resonated with Delafield's

⁴⁵ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 46.

⁴⁶ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 47.

own feelings about cultural diplomacy.⁴⁷ Eva's sincerity is taken for granted, irrespective of her views on Soviet matters: unlike Jones, Delafield did not consider suffering the necessary indicator of sincerity. Rather, Eva's intelligence and her prolonged engagement with Delafield, convinced the traveller – such was Delafield's ultimate interest in the Soviet experience, the individuals she met, rather than their role in the grand story. This experience shows the private/public dichotomy, explored in such a quiet and out-of-the-way context, as being inadequate for gauging Soviet reactions. The discipline of the state, Eva's subjectivity, a friendship with a foreigner, and the hope for the future are all evident here. News of repression sits alongside mundane discussion, boredom with the cultivation of a friendship, openness with recognition of limits.

Eva's intelligence was also appreciated by Delafield for other reasons, and indeed, this is a scene replicated with subtle differences across several travel accounts: the view of other foreigners on the part of Soviet individuals when talking to a traveller, and how certain travellers could enjoy a commonality with a Soviet individual, often at the expense of, or with some sense of necessary difference to, other parties, Soviet and foreign alike; in short, sympathy and common ground, and even friendship.

When she was leaving the Seattle commune, Delafield was invited to give a short talk 'on England and English affairs', after which a concert would be held.⁴⁸ Eva translated for the Briton, although Delafield tried to use some Russian too. Delafield told her audience that people in Britain were very interested in 'the Soviet experiment', and she praised the showcase sites she had seen, and the position of 'women workers in the USSR':

I was also very glad to take the opportunity of saying how much struck I was with the universal kindness and courtesy shown to foreigners, by Russians. I had gone about by myself a great deal, and had lost my way with all the thoroughness and frequency of a person devoid of any sense of direction, and again and again had benevolent Russian strangers gone miles and miles out of their way solely in order to conduct me to my destination.

⁴⁷ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 47.

⁴⁸ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 50.

The audience listened to her ‘halting Russian, not only with grave courtesy, but with sufficient intelligence to make out what it was all about’. She also told them of Westcountry rural life (living in Kentisbeare, Devon), ‘carefully avoiding the fatal words “capitalist system”’.

However, she also sought to criticize, and here Eva’s role became more interesting, for Delafield’s Russian failed her, or was considered not suitable:

Everywhere I had been in the USSR I had found that the faintest hint of criticism was not so much resented as looked upon as the unfounded mutterings of jealousy and ignorance – but I saw no reason, on this occasion, from abstaining from it altogether. So I told the Comrades that, much as I admired many of their institutions for children, I regretted the attempt to submerge all individuality, and felt strongly that, whilst herd life might be suited to the majority, it would never succeed in producing the creative artist.

Nevertheless, she thanked them and told her audience ‘as I honestly could, that I should always be glad of my experiences amongst them.’ This was in no small part due to Eva, and also gives insight into how the experience of a relationship didn’t dispel the wider sense of repression. Eva translated this, and Delafield writes that ‘I could follow her Russian well enough to know that the translation was full and accurate. She had been taking notes all the time.’⁴⁹ Eva’s honesty pleased Delafield, but so too did her tact, when ‘the Comrades’ began to ask Delafield questions (much in the same vein as those asked of Brown, Conolly, Goldman et al, above) – on Abyssinia, on unemployment in Britain, on Romain Rolland, on Germany, on abortion:

One Comrade – I thought a little aggressively – demanded point-blank which way Comrade Dashwood intended to vote when the Revolution reached England. I am nearly certain that he said “when,” and that Eva translated it as ‘if’.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 51.

⁵⁰ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 52–3.

Delafield explained that the Communist Party in Britain was, in effect, a non-entity, and that she herself would vote Labour. Eva translated this as Delafield being supportive of the workers:

the natural result was that I was understood to have declared myself an enthusiastic supporter of Communism, and was heartily applauded.⁵¹

Eva couched Delafield's responses: she translated her criticisms, but what she did not translate was the scepticism about a British revolution. Delafield noticed this tact and appreciated it. Conceivably it arose as much from Eva's wish to protect Delafield's feelings from an adverse reaction in the crowd as it did from any deep-rooted ideological belief: Eva's beliefs, as will be seen below, were pro-Communist. The relationship cultivated in the 'private' space was key, but the 'personal', Eva's belief in the great project and her own complicated relationship with it, was ever-present.

PROMINENT FOREIGNERS IN THE EYES OF THE SOVIETS

This interest in foreign perceptions of the Soviet Union was not uncommon, as already seen above. In this area, another issue of sincerity is noticeable: comment by Soviet people on other foreigner's reactions to the Soviet Union, and so the reading by Soviets of a foreigner's sincerity. Violet Conolly spoke to a polar explorer, an Ivan Ivanovitch, aboard a train. Ivan railed against André Gide's 'recantance' [*sic*] as described in Gide's 1936 *Retour de l'URSS*, although Ivan had not read the text. Conolly notes:

'We don't like two-faced people like André Gide,' he said bitterly. 'They come here, are feted by everybody, send telegrams of congratulation and thanks to Stalin, and then what do they do? As soon as they get home they write a lot of lies about Russia.'⁵²

Conolly stood her ground and defended a foreigner's right to thank the USSR for its hospitality and yet also critique what they had experienced. She did the same when a school teacher upbraided Gide, Walter Citrine 'and the rest', for their writing "terrible

⁵¹ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 54.

⁵² Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 76.

things about us” after receiving the benefits of Soviet hospitality.⁵³ Indeed, it seems likely that one part of this was the critique of the Soviet system generally, but another key part was the understanding that if one received gracious hospitality from a host, it is not expected to hear such criticisms in return: manners were expected of the foreigner when making comments about Soviet life. As such, this is also perhaps indicative of a general expectation on the part of Soviet people: that foreigners would be sincere in their reactions to Soviet life *in situ*, rather than apparently saying one thing to their hosts and another to their readers.

Travellers found that incredulity on the part of Soviets was directed at other famous foreigners, but for the opposite reason. Jones made note of comments he heard about George Bernard Shaw (of whom Jones held a very dim opinion). In July 1931 Shaw had visited the USSR, making a much-publicised tour. Jones, arriving in the USSR shortly after Shaw had left, found the writer a hot topic. A ‘priest’ in a village near Nizhnii Novgorod asked Jones:

‘What is wrong with Bernard Shaw? Is he mad? He saw nothing at all. If only he could see one hundredth of what the peasants are suffering.’⁵⁴

Then, an engineer on a boat on the Volga remarked:

‘All the intelligentsia in Russia are acquainted with Bernard Shaw. They’d love to strangle him. (gesture). The fool, coming for 10 days & seeing nothing but Potemkin’s villages.’⁵⁵

A doctor in Moscow told Jones that on the matter of ‘GBS’:

‘All the intellectual people there are mad. He must be insane. He was wonderfully treated; they gave him caviare & he thought that all the workers of Russia had caviare. They gave him champagne & he thought all... ditto: whisky. If only he had seen the way the workers live.’⁵⁶

⁵³ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 154–5. The fact that Citrine was named suggests his *I Search for Truth* was received negatively by the Soviet press.

⁵⁴ Jones, Diary B1–11, August 1931.

⁵⁵ Jones, Diary B1–11, August 1931.

⁵⁶ Jones, Diary B1–11, August 1931.

Archibald Lyall also describes Soviet incredulity at foreign views of the USSR. In Moscow, he recorded part of a conversation with ‘a puzzled Russian intellectual’ about visitors who sang the praises of the Soviet Union once back home. Lyall explained the tours to him (assuming such an explanation was required), but the intellectual was still puzzled:

‘Even so,’ he answered, ‘how is it possible for anyone, even people like that, to come here and not see what’s under their very noses?’

The ‘intellectual’ observed that flaws were even reported in the Soviet press: he ‘wailed’ that the flaws were ever present, in fact. Lyall does not report any firm conclusions reached beyond this anguished incredulity, here not simply a matter of foreigners reporting only the ‘good’, but the wilful ignorance required in the making of fundamentally uncritical reports.⁵⁷ Here, then, is sincerity being questioned both ways once again. There is the critique – by Soviet people – of other foreigners’ sincerity, and then there is the implicit recognition, I venture, of the traveller’s own sincerity as they discuss this matter with the Soviet people who have such dim views of ‘GBS’ and co: thus, there is a recognition of difference by Soviets about foreigners, predicated on the foreigners’ thinking about the Soviet world.

OTHER FOREIGNERS IN THE EYES OF THE SOVIETS

This discussion between traveller and Soviet of other foreigners could even see gossiping and playful sniping at the expense of unaware tourists. Herbert Marchant’s time with Varka (‘Varvara Ivanovna’) – who, Marchant related, worked in the ‘Moscow Central Park of Culture and Rest’ – was often spent in her room in Moscow. They exchanged English and Russian, an enterprise of mutual learning. Marchant relates a story about how they together considered the foreign tourist in Moscow:

‘On Russian days Varka described her Intourist visitors to me. We used to sit and hate them together. Between us we arrived at the following generalizations: not very charitable ones, we admitted, but Intourists are a class about which it is extremely difficult to be charitable: Intourism as a whole – American, English, and

⁵⁷ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 172-3.

others – is characterised by its stern opposition to the theory that life is too serious to be taken too seriously. (So are the Bolsheviks – but Varka could not see that): it has no sense of humour: its early prejudices may be greatly accentuated by a stay in the Soviet Union, but in no way changed.⁵⁸

Immediately we get an echo of the preoccupations of travellers to the USSR as discussed above: the nature of travel, and the dim view some held about the tour and those who went on tour, and the criticism given to those of dogmatic predispositions. However, what is key here is the fact that these ‘generalizations’, Marchant reports, were shared between him and Varka. Similar to Delafield’s reflections about her experiences with Eva on the commune, and Eva’s tactful translation of Delafield’s words, we see Marchant present the relationship with Varka as one of honesty, of a deeper understanding than that achieved by ‘Intourist visitors’, yet still with an air of tension or distance (‘Varka could not see that’ the Bolsheviks were as dogmatic as stubborn foreigners with preconceived notions of Soviet life). Again, the domestic space showcases the complexities and nuances of encounters with Soviet people. Here too are the interwoven strands: the topic is foreign visitors and their (in effect) sincerity and ability to engage and understand with the Soviet world, and the relationship between Marchant and Varka shows how assessments were made, here implicitly, about the sincerity of the other, as evidenced by the distinct position Marchant occupied from other foreigners – in Varka’s home.

Ada Chesterton played a brief role of similar nature with the guide of the American woman who wanted to take home the Persian cat. Chesterton noted the guide being exasperated with the American, and Chesterton sympathised, combining her disdain for this woman’s petty focus on a cat with her own position as a worthy explorer of Soviet life⁵⁹ This makes explicit her own sense of superiority to tourists, similar to Marchant’s implicit superiority as an accepted foreigner worthy of sharing gossip with. What matters here, then, is the sense of a hierarchy of some kind in terms of foreigners and their sincerity: it is suggested by both Chesterton and Marchant that they have achieved a more sincere engagement with Soviet society, and thus found a more authentic relationship with Soviet individuals, even if only fleeting. On the part of the

⁵⁸ Marchant, *Scratch a Russian*, 53.

⁵⁹ Chesterton, *My Russian Venture*, 221–2.

Soviets involved, it is again clear that there was no lack of possibility for them to carp and joke with sympathetic representatives of the 'Other', and indeed recognising the different levels of sincerity a foreigner could reach: the cat woman and the tourists Varka and Marchant 'hated' were somehow focused on the wrong matters – even when, as between Marchant and Varka, there was extensive disagreement about what the 'right' matters were. Travellers could be distinguished from one another, some more like 'them', some a little more like 'us', albeit not necessarily about matters pro/anti-Soviet, but rather about having a better understanding of Soviet life than other foreigners who were observed with some contempt.

ENGAGING WITH THE SOVIET MIND: III

Eva came to see Delafield off, after the interview and party of the night before. The novelist was to catch a train back to Rostov-on-Don with 'Comrade David', a man of the commune:

Eva came and sat with me during breakfast, and I think she was sorry to see me go. I gave her the only book I had with me, and she asked me to put her name in it, and I promised to write to her from England and to try and send her some bulbs.⁶⁰

Delafield's parting with Eva was not given much attention in *Straw without Bricks*, but the significance of Eva to Delafield is great. What significance Delafield had for Eva is harder to determine, but what is clear is that Delafield's experience suggests that foreigner-Soviet contact was by no means contingent on snatched conversations and duplicity, although the presence of the variably named 'Lady Dashwood' or 'Comrade Dashwood' was contingent on certain falsehoods and misunderstandings. Rather, a friendship, enabled and sustained by a shared language (English) gave Delafield an insight into Soviet life that reinforced certain ideas – that of the sad lack of freedom in the Soviet Union – but also showed her a capable woman able to defend the Soviet system to an outsider, and do so with integrity and intelligence. What this episode says to us is that, even against the persistent influence that is Soviet state control and

⁶⁰ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 56–7.

cultural diplomacy, foreigners could interweave themselves, to some extent, into the everyday life (that is, both the private and the personal lives) of Soviet people – be that minding children on behalf of parents, kneading bread, or discussing Soviet policy and conditions as other travellers did with Soviet people on trains, on the street, in their houses and at their work. Eva's 'personal life', as a supporter of the system, is clear, and Delafield does not note any sense of there being some mortal tension in Eva's everyday existence – certainly, there are signs of a certain positivity about her past life, and a sense of desire to express herself (the pen incident shows this) but Delafield saw a 'personal life' and did not find great terror and dissent there, by any means. The foreigner in the rurally 'primitive', less 'civilized' Soviet world was still at a remove from that life, but they could easily see its shape and parts of the interior world of Soviet reality. What Delafield found in the Seattle Commune was not revelation or horror, but boredom, curiosities, and friendship, with no hint of any significant trouble, for herself or for those she talked to.

The Seattle Commune was a particular construct, however: as noted above, it was founded largely by foreigners and even in 1936, when Delafield visited, it was inhabited by a number of people, Eva included, who had lived outside the Soviet Union. This conceivably had an impact on their engagement with a foreigner, not least Eva's being able to speak English and the frames of reference they had for dealing with non-Soviet individuals. However, if we consider Delafield's encounters with the Russians on the farm (for instance, her neighbours and their children), or Marchant's time with the 'Marvskis', Mira Mitrova and Varka and Alexei, or Jones with peasants in Ukraine, we can see that whilst the Seattle Commune might have been a relatively exceptional place for foreigner-Soviet interaction (at least in terms of travellers' accounts; Delafield herself noted it was not a typical farm) Delafield's experiences there were not vastly different to other experiences with Soviet individuals, who may have had little to no conception or experience of foreign life. Indeed, Delafield herself related another story, similar to that of Marchant with the 'Marvskis', later in *Straw without Bricks*.⁶¹

With her friend Peter in Moscow, Delafield was invited to visit a 'man who writes books – a Russian.' The invitation was for between 12 and 1am. Delafield, Peter and

⁶¹ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 60.

'an American acquaintance' visited to find the man was not at home. 'We all settle down in his kitchen – situated on the staircase, and which he shares with five other families in the same building.' Like Marchant, Delafield evoked a cramped and busy communal life. In due course their host arrived with friends of his own, and 'we all sit in the bed-sitting room and talk': topics range from abortion, the new Metro, a poet who had been forced to work on a bridge over the Neva, to 'the state of literature in England'. Here is, as ever, the range of topics encountered by travellers: social issues, Soviet achievements, repression and questions about foreign life. Whilst Delafield noted, with her customary self-deprecation, that she was tired and could not occupy an important role in the conversation, she was present: that simple fact is what is of interest here.⁶² Seven people, three foreign and four Soviet, engaged in conversation in a Moscow communal apartment, presumably primarily in Russian, late at night. Before Delafield left, a woman asked her for stockings, aspirins, lipsticks and other accessories; Delafield agrees to meet her the following day, and the lady arrived at Delafield's hotel to buy a range of things from her. Upon leaving, the woman says 'Hush! Not so loud'.⁶³ This episode is representative of a range of issues considered in this chapter. The Soviet home is a place of discussion and mutual interest, where a traveller could engage with individuals considered sincere on a range of matters, from transactions to discussions of repression and Soviet achievements. It was so too on the farm, but also, intriguingly, in communal apartments that, whilst we lack many specifics, appear to at the least be alive with the possibility of travellers and hosts alike being overheard and seen by any number of observers. At the same time, the discipline of the state is never entirely absent: the woman engaged in the 'shadow side of tourism' with Delafield, and made sure to warn Delafield to not speak 'so loud' about their transaction.

It is also instructive to compare the experience of Bernard Pares to Delafield. Pares devoted a relatively large section of his short book, *Moscow admits a Critic*, to 'A Talk' he had at the home of 'a young man holding a specially important post in the Government.' This man invited Pares for dinner (albeit it is not absolutely clear if this took place at his apartment). They talked for three hours over supper, Pares very much

⁶² Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 137.

⁶³ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 139–40.

the ‘managed’ foreigner: his host had read Pares’s *Russian Memoirs*. The man told him, echoing the snide observations shared between Varka and Marchant, that ‘foreign observers’ were not very satisfactory, as they did not understand matters well enough. Pares and his host discussed Hitler, scholarly ties between Britain and the Soviet Union, Russian émigrés in Paris, and the increasing success of the Soviet plans. In summary, Pares enjoyed what he viewed as a very informative and engaging chat with someone well-placed to give insight into Soviet life: a government official, most likely connected in some way to VOKS. If this did indeed take place at the official’s home, then the private/personal is entirely absent in terms of Pares’s representation, other than the impression his being invited for dinner would give to his British audience.⁶⁴ The personal, the private and the public are sublimated into one whole. However, Eva and Delafield, or Marchant and Varka, or Jones and the peasants of eastern Ukraine, are different. These encounters show in varying ways how the public/private dichotomy is insufficient for explaining the complexity and range of influences on Soviet-traveller encounters, and also how the personal/private distinction of Kharkordin was visible in multiple different ways via these encounters. These and other encounters informed travellers’ views about Soviet sincerity significantly. Of course, such encounters were not necessarily the rule – not every travel account features such meetings – but they are much more common than the scholarship would suggest.

SUMMARY

Soviet individuals like Eva and Karchan became complex moral agents in the eyes of foreigners, rather than merely confirmatory or conflicting symbols, politically and morally distinct from the generalised views of crowds *et al* examined previously. If Karchan embodied the tormented individual for Citrine, the focal point of state and Party discipline, Delafield’s time on the Seattle commune with Eva was of a quasi-domesticity, so free of overt Party discipline and state intervention as to, one feels, leave Delafield a little confused as to what she had actually found – conceivably because even with her relatively open-minded approach, Soviet life presented without the patina of cultural diplomacy, of visible state power, of acute reminders of the

⁶⁴ Pares, *Moscow admits a Critic*, 85–9.

associated power dynamics, was harder to untangle and unpack for the foreigner. It is noticeable that Delafield, and others like Marchant, did not stress the point about 'private' Soviets as such: they presented relatively domestic scenes without the presence of the 'official' as part and parcel of their search for truth. Yet at the same time Delafield also noted an 'utter lack of privacy' on the Commune. Here is a very complex *denouement*: this lack of privacy was 'uncivilized' in its material effects, and was also 'deadening' on matters 'emotional and intellectual'.⁶⁵ Delafield's use of 'privacy' is in the liberal sense (the private home as opposed to the public square), but it clearly speaks of both the Soviet private and the personal: a domestic space touched by power and ideology. Yet she also had access to the Soviet private life aside the 'personal' of Kharkordin's terminology: looking after children, exchanging gifts, and looking through photograph albums with a friend. In other words, the context of a commune evinces the complex intertwining of the personal and the private that constituted the Soviet moral economy, rather than the simpler, less illuminating public/private distinction Delafield intuitively reached for. At the same time, the travel account gives us insight into both.

This chapter has again shown that the questioning of sincerity was multi-directional. Soviets asked explicitly whether the foreigner could be trusted or acted as if they thought it worth a chance and engaged with the foreigner on a range of topics: poverty, suffering, Soviet success, education, social life, foreign affairs, religion and more. There are also examples of Soviet individuals arguing with foreigners about Soviet matters, and criticising foreigners for not understanding Soviet matters properly, for being ungracious guests, and being seen as potentially harmful, either to the Soviet project, or to the Soviet individual, or both. Thus the official world, of the competitive context, and of paranoia, is visible in the travellers' framings of these encounters, and in the words and actions of many of the Soviet individuals encountered. Across all of these accounts there is the engagement with the individual over the collective, a subtle inflection of Beatrice Webb's desire to focus on the 'moving multitude of men' and her exploration of social systems via their participants, rather than their leaders and

⁶⁵ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 60.

intellectuals: here are not heroes, villains, the Tsars, the Stalins and Lenins, but rather the peasant and the worker.⁶⁶

Yet what is revealed is not, fundamentally, the Soviet schema as understood by many British observers with their focus on outcomes, costs, benefits and prospects, but a complex system made up of the intertwined lives of individuals, living under a banner of 'the collective'. What is also clear is how varied Soviet behaviour could be, and how non-prescriptive this was, per the understandings influential in the discourse of travel. As Michael David-Fox observed, Soviet 'vigilance' about foreigners was encouraged amongst the Soviet population, but it is clear that the possibility to engage with foreigners was widespread, frequent, and not simply about foreigners looking to strengthen interpretations of whether the Soviet Union was 'good' or 'bad' by casting (even as they sometimes did) Soviet people into roles as those tormented and emboldened by Soviet power.⁶⁷ The encounters between Soviets and foreigners are numerous and discursively complex, and the Soviet individual reacted to foreigner in a variety of ways: to learn, to tell a story, to give hospitality, and to trade items and enjoy companionship.

This chapter and the last have shown how, *vis* the 'trust groups' that Waterlow's work explores, that what is significant is not necessarily the space or presence of certain people, but the specific encounter and the relationships and dynamics suggested by the actions and speech of the participants themselves. The concepts of 'private' and 'public' might overlap with 'unofficial' and 'official' but are not synonymous with them, just as the usable self of the Soviet individual could be revealed in numerous ways. Indeed, Timothy Johnston comments on the interpolation of the official and the unofficial in a public – even ritualised – space:

Evaluating the public behaviour of Soviet individuals is often very difficult: we cannot be sure who is performing the rhetoric and who is speaking sincerely. However, it is also clear that meetings, marches, and campaigns were often

⁶⁶ Beatrice Webb, *The Co-Operative Movement in Great Britain* (London: S Sonnenschein, 1891), 91.

⁶⁷ David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 121.

delicately transformed by the participants into an opportunity to socialize, drink or settle scores with enemies.⁶⁸

In this complicated world, there are few absolute rules that consistently and definitively guided behaviour. There were always possible exceptions (trains, as noted above), but the message here is that the distinction of public and private was not one of them. As Waterlow comments, the social meaning of spaces was defined by its inhabitants: relationships were far more telling than space as a guide to behaviour.⁶⁹ This examination of these accounts has shown this to be true of foreigners and Soviets encountering one another, and has added more to the picture besides: Soviet people, when it came to responding to the presence of foreign visitors, turned away or told stories; evaded and embraced; questioned and gave information to foreigners across various pressure points of the 1930s and across the Union, from Belarus to Siberia.

The way Soviet individuals read a foreigner's sincerity – and thus whether they were willing to trust them and so disclose information – was influenced, certainly, by a background of paranoia, propaganda and purity-testing on the part of the Soviet. Yet it could also be strongly influenced by the local demands of a particular time or place (most obviously with Jones's encounters with starving peasants in Ukraine, 1933), and travellers in these instances likely witnessed expressions and outbursts that these accounts show to be contingent on individual psychology, and the historiography and primary sources such as letters to the centre show to be expressed elsewhere: complaints about collectivisation, anti-religious activity, corrupt officials, and so forth. Yet beyond this is a sea of less straightforward experience, and these chapters have sought to explore how the Soviet usable self could certainly welcome a foreigner and consider them as less of a threat than the 'them' of state and party, and also how travellers could cross into the 'private' and 'personal' lives of Soviet individuals with minimal difficulty, at least compared to travellers' expectations of Soviet paranoia and fear, and whilst these were not

⁶⁸ Johnston, *Being Soviet*, xxxii-xxxiii.

⁶⁹ Waterlow, *It's Only a Joke, Comrade*, 242–4.

necessarily commonplace for all travellers, they are common enough to suggest they were not radically exceptional either.

When we take our eyes from the horizon of wider meanings, from the long decade and the breadth of travel to the Soviet Union and look at the discrete meeting of the foreigner and the Soviet, at the relationship of Citrine and Karchan, and of Elizabeth and Eva, they can be summarised as follows. In both cases the reality of power is never far away. In Citrine's case, he questioned, doubted, pitied and wondered about Karchan, and the pressures of this power were clearly at work on and through his guide: Karchan had to knowingly speak lies, Citrine suspected. Karchan had to manage Citrine's role as per objectives of Soviet cultural diplomacy. Karchan might have spied on Citrine, but he was also a figure of worry for Citrine for Karchan's sake, not just Citrine's. In Delafield's case, there was discussion of Soviet power, of politics, of life before the commune, of the possibilities and hopes for the future. Yet what is most striking about the latter relationship is that once the discourse of travel was stripped away, and away from the performance of Eva as a Soviet individual interpreting for the foreigner Delafield, and away from the impromptu tour of the farm, and the struggle Delafield had in getting there, matters became less rigid, and even more complex. Once the relationship was between two women, things became harder to express for Delafield, for there was located the fabric and intuitions and simple pleasures or banal annoyances and confusions of everyday human life itself: a fabric of life that required, perhaps, art to express it, rather than *reportage*. That is what Delafield, I believe, was seeking in the Soviet Union more than anything else, even as she was not entirely sure how to respond to what she found. Eva's comments, on the other hand, and the fate of the Seattle Commune, show that even when such an accommodation was reached, the pressure was never entirely removed: the domestic private life Delafield wrote of was still the personal of Oleg Kharkordin's conception, and thus the shadow of the 'ikon of a new religion – the gigantic Red Star' was always present.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, this complex life could be far more accessible and far less rigid than the discourse of travel permitted, and even, perhaps, the stories we still tell ourselves about the Soviet world today.

⁷⁰ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 316.

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THE TRAVELLERS: LOOKING BACK

At the end of this study, we leave this rich world of the encounter behind us, and we turn to the conclusions of the travellers. Here, at the ends of their accounts, came an interesting mix of reflections and further discursive strategies. If the encounters explored in chapters four and five represent an ‘opening’, to some degree, of perspectives and understandings presented to travellers by the Soviet world, the conclusion often saw a closing, where the traveller retreated into the discourse of travel, and the debate about the Soviet Union – a position from which they had often begun their journey. Thus, they often returned to the discourse’s overriding expectation of them: their seeking of ‘heaven and hell, Right or Wrong’ in the Soviet Union.¹ Yet there is some variety here, worth exploring. Some, like Byron and Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton offered their conclusion as simply the end of their journey: no pages of further reflection. Byron concluded his section on the Soviet Union thus, on leaving Odessa:

At one o’clock in the morning I looked from my porthole. We were moving, crunching through the ice-floes in the wake of an ice-breaker. The lights of Russia receded. Then we reached the open water, and already the wind seemed a little warmer.²

The subtle nod to relief at leaving the Soviet Union is about as much direct comment Byron chose to make at the conclusion of his work. Charles MMC on the other hand, offered what could be read as a slight dig at those who wondered without exploring. He noted Poles asking him what it was like “‘over there’”, just across the border in the Soviet Union (he left via train). He also notes that they never visited it themselves, leaving it up to the reader to determine his implication. Going by his relatively even-handed views of Soviet life, it is conceivable that here he was commenting on the way people ought to go across that border, to find out for themselves, just as he had done.³

¹ Byron, *First Russia, Then Tibet*, 61.

² Byron, *First Russia, Then Tibet*, 124.

³ Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, *Russian Closeup*, 166–7.

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However, other travellers offered much more focused conclusions, articulated as reflections on experience.

Walter Citrine and Gareth Jones exemplify the conclusion dominated by the thematic consideration of Soviet life, and moral/political outrage, respectively. Citrine's *I Search for Truth* ends with a long chapter, setting the Soviet Union in its international context. Citrine relates the series of improvements he had witnessed, giving further tables of data (on consumer prices, for instance) and noting the status of key areas of Soviet life as he saw them: anti-religious campaigns, living conditions, the economy and working conditions, family life. He ended his book with optimistic anticipation of the new constitution (i.e., the 1936 Soviet Constitution), of which he wrote 'Socialists and Democrats throughout the world will await with hope and sympathy its fulfilment in practice' – he hoped that freedom would follow.⁴ Citrine's conclusion does not focus on his travel as such: at the last, he took the 'balance sheet' approach.⁵ Gareth Jones's conclusions were offered as part of his newspaper articles, particularly those in 1931 and 1933, and are supported by his diaries and letters. Jones considered the Soviet Union a terrible place, a plan gone wrong. In his *Daily Express* article of 11 April 1933, he concluded

What then is the lesson of Soviet Russia? It is that a State cannot live upon the doctrine of class warfare and that the ideas we have in Britain of personal freedom and of the rights of each individual man are not so far wrong and must be defended at all costs.⁶

Jones's readings of Soviet sincerity were contingent on his understanding of the moral and political nature of the Soviet world, meaning suffering was a sincere sign of truth, and equivocation and optimism for the future was, at best, a sincere sign of deceit. For both Citrine and Jones, the political was never far away. The debate on Soviet matters (and as to whether its experience was applicable at all to British conditions), the expectation of travel as an enlightening, insightful exercise in some sense, the

⁴ Moher, *Walter Citrine*, 193.

⁵ Citrine, *I search for Truth in Russia*, 339–62.

⁶ Jones, 'Goodbye Russia', *Daily Express* 11 April 1933, 12c–f.

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summarised conclusions about a vast state: these were the duty of the traveller – or, for Jones, as an eyewitness to horror.

Bernard Pares concluded, similarly to Citrine, with a summary view of key Soviet issues: the support of the peasantry for the state, the persecution of religion, questions of how liberty could develop in the Soviet Union.⁷ Bosworth Goldman and Hubert Griffith also retreated into this discursive space at the end of their works. Griffith, in capitalised letters, railed against wasteful and inegalitarian capitalism, and asked if the USSR did not have something to teach the West.⁸ Goldman pondered the applicability of communism to England, and the developmental state the USSR was in; a tale of a GRU raid on an acquaintance's house (looking for gold and foreign currency) was taken as evidence of the trajectory of the socialist state and its 'gold hunger'.⁹ Archibald Lyall described being asked by people outside the Soviet Union as to what he had experienced: in Hamburg, he visited a bar. He tipped his waitress generously, and she cried. He recalled the words of a waiter, who had asked him about the state of Russia: "There is no paradise". That is, he concluded, places outside the Soviet Union suffered from similar problems too.¹⁰ Herbert Marchant gave a brief consideration of the same balance sheet: he was 'sure' that things had improved since 1917, that the USSR would be 'prosperous', but that communism would not come to pass for a long while yet – and that, rather obviously, nobody could tell what is to come.¹¹ Norah Rowan-Hamilton concluded her account without the same reflections, but she did offer a picture of new/old Soviet/Russian, rulers/ruled as her final comment on her experiences. Describing the celebration of Christmas, she determined that:

But here and there, in some poor, over-crowded room, behind locked doors, a little Christmas tree is furtively lit, and the old Christmas greeting is murmured under an ikon of the ancient religion, whilst from outside, through the curtained window, shines the ikon of the new religion – the gigantic Red Star of Soviet Russia.¹²

⁷ Pares, *Moscow admits a Critic*, 89–93.

⁸ Griffith, *Seeing Soviet Russia*, 193–4.

⁹ Goldman, *Red Road Through Asia*, 261–5.

¹⁰ Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 206–7.

¹¹ Marchant, *Scratch a Russian*, 207–10.

¹² Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 316.

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In summary the idea of the traveller having achieved at least some grasp of the character and prospects of the Soviet Union was evident even in accounts like those of Rowan-Hamilton, who betrayed doubt about her capacity to see.

Yet there could also be much more uncertainty, and less of a focus on the balance sheet and the expressly political, and conversely further reflection on the matter of travel, of investigation and being a sincere observer itself. Violet Conolly's initial conclusion to her work was full of bitterness:

As we plodded quietly across the Black Sea I had ample time to chew the cud of Russia. I was exhilarated to be leaving the USSR, though personally I had fared very well there. I had gone to Russia hypnotised by the misfits and misery of capitalist society. Now what I had seen of Russia had taught me to count my blessings as never before. [...] Russia was too cruel, too blatant, too simplified for me. Too impatient with the vagaries of the human spirit.¹³

Intriguingly, she followed this with a post-script, in which she noted:

I wrote this book fresh from Russia in a mood of violent disillusionment with the abuses of the Soviet system, thus emphasising these anomalies more than the ideals of the Revolution. The further one is from the Russian scene to-day, the easier it is to dot one's I's, to see things blurred at close quarters by the predominating impressions.¹⁴

Conolly stated that travel itself is no guarantor of insight: one needs to reflect further upon one's experiences. She was 'glad' therefore to include in her postscript a few comments about some of the positive aspects of Soviet life: the enthusiasm for arts, sciences and literature, the political equality of women, and the contrast Soviet seriousness has with the 'banal' and 'trash' popular culture at home. A heated critic of the Soviet Union, Conolly nevertheless thought that her travel experience itself could colour her views unfairly and sought to offer a corrective – a minor one, to be sure, but important to her purpose as a sincere observer nevertheless.¹⁵

¹³ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 174.

¹⁴ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 187.

¹⁵ Conolly, *Soviet Tempo*, 187–8.

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Indeed, doubts about the capacity of travel to enlighten abounded even after the fact. Archibald Lyall reflected:

As I gathered my suitcase to go ashore at Holtenau, I remembered that silly conversation with the blueshirts on the Volga, and I wondered whether there were any real Russia at all, whether Russia were not a mirror which reflected what every man brought to her, or whether Russia were not a magic crystal in which each man saw a different thing.¹⁶

This echoed Norah Rowan-Hamilton's confusion at the 'nightmarish' world she experienced, which she called 'Looking-Glass World' after *Alice in Wonderland*: here we recall her comment that 'there are a dozen "Russias." Twenty different kinds of "Bolshies"'.¹⁷ Herbert Marchant stated that because he was asked for his view by people (in Austria, where he took a holiday after the Soviet trip, noting how much more pleasant it was, even as the Soviet Union seemed rather romantic once he was outside it), he thought he should form an opinion on matters:

Well, I had got my worm's eye view of the Soviet Union. I had got to know people – most of them peasants and workers, but then peasants and workers *are* Russia; always have been. [...] Nothing I had seen or done had proved anything important – I had never thought it would. But what did I think of it all, now, looking back, the adventure over?¹⁸

It was then he offered his brief views on the peasantry, on the chance for achieving communism, and so on. Yet there is a sense that Marchant did not view this as especially significant, and that his 'worm's eye view' was of more importance in and of itself than what he could say that might be 'important' to anyone wanting real insight into Soviet affairs.

This was made explicit by Elizabeth Delafield. Delafield ended her book with a chapter called 'To Speak my Mind', in which she continued her act as the foreigner trying to play the role of the inquisitive foreigner 'correctly' and struggling to do so. She notes that arguing with convinced communists was 'idle' and 'practically impossible',

¹⁶ Archibald Lyall, *Russian Roundabout*, 203.

¹⁷ Rowan Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 239; 316.

¹⁸ Marchant, *Scratch a Russian*, 205–6.

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yet she resolved to try.¹⁹ She tried to 'speak my mind' to a doctor and a guide she thought rather friendlier and open than others she had met, but at each turn she was thwarted: the doctor averred that foreigners could learn '*nothing*' from such a short trip, and that true assessment of Soviet life could only come generations later.²⁰ The guide rebuffed all criticisms, leading Delafield to conclude

One can only congratulate the Government on the thoroughness with which it has seen to it that everyone coming into contact with foreign visitors upholds the theory that Soviet Russia has attained to earthly perfection within the last twenty years and has no longer anything to learn.²¹

Yet Delafield is determined that 'nobody really knows the truth'. She does compare, very briefly, the progress and energy of the Soviet project with the lack of humour, imagination and manners she disliked. Hiding her manuscript in her clothing at the dock in Odessa, worried it would be confiscated, she finally leaves the Soviet Union, concluding:

I wish I *had* spoken my mind, just once, in the USSR. Even though I know that nobody would have paid any attention to it, and even though it occurs to me to wonder whether I am absolutely certain of what my mind really is, concerning the new Russia.²²

Here, Delafield cannot reach the conclusion of her thoughts about the Soviet world as her contemporaries might expect of her: they wanted insights, understandings, and conclusions. Delafield could not offer them any in such a pithy way. There was little reflection on the experiences of meeting Soviet people *per se* in these conclusions (apart from Jones, who was determined to transmit the message of peasants and workers to the outside world). Yet these clearly formed an essential part of so many of these accounts, and perhaps were the reason conclusions were hard to reach: the

¹⁹ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 241.

²⁰ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 243–4.

²¹ Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 249.

²² Bosworth Goldman's photographic film was confiscated by the GPU at Tashkent, but he later received the prints (for they were published in his book). *Red Road Through Asia*, xi. Elizabeth Delafield, *Straw without Bricks*, 262.

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Soviet people themselves had shown the traveller that Soviet life was irreducible beyond the broadest conclusions, at least after one, or a few, short trips.

One final thought that is suggested by the epilogues and the sense of uncertainty and/or generalised conviction that pervaded so many of them: there is a curious lack of historicity in many of the accounts. Certainly, Jones represents a clear exception, being fundamentally concerned with a very particular time, place and trend in Soviet life (in 1930, 1931 and 1933 alike, agriculture and the peasant were at the apex of his interest), and his reporting of the famine was contingent on this. Elsewhere, whether from friend, foe or the confused, there is general discussion of the Plans, the background of terror and repression, the elongated and attenuated processes such as the expulsion of the *kulak*, or the reintroduction of piecework in industry (to name but a handful of the many, many topics referred to). The 1936 constitution is mentioned by some travellers as a sign of Soviet progress or a test-case for sceptics to see if a new world really had been achieved. In summary, some significant historical developments were recognised as being of key importance at the time; indeed, that is what many of the less-reflective travellers, like Ashmead-Ellis and the Davies, focused on: the balance-sheet of history.

Yet it is interesting to note how Delafield, in 1936 Ukraine, does not mention famine once, only three years after the same part of the Union was ravaged by the famine Jones witnessed (whilst Marchant does discuss the famine with Ukrainians, also several years after the fact). Travellers give us access to a contemporary worldview that was yet to parcel the murder of Kirov, the Terror, even the famine of 1932–33 and the Stalin Constitution of 1936 into their historiographical boxes wherein their significance and meaning could be assessed more objectively (even as the Terror certainly caused a decline in such travelling). Another world war was a possibility on the horizon, not the catastrophe of the 1940s. Famine was a tragedy of peasant experience, but the traveller was not walking through spaces valorised by late-20th century historical memory; they walked through lives – even those ‘private’ – coloured by the promise of the Soviet future yet most readily explained via ideas of the discourse of travel and about ‘Russia’ and its people, even as the experience of the tempos of everyday life as it existed within domineering, evangelical, complex Soviet discourse meant the reality of that world was an overwhelming thing.

CONTEMPORARY REVIEWS

The reception these works received at the time varied perhaps more than we might expect. It is certainly true there were reviewers who thought there were too many accounts about the Soviet Union published, and they were not often thought to offer unique or even useful insights into the Soviet world. This can be seen in the review of Edwin Brown's *This Russian Business* (amongst several other works, and compared unfavourably to Hindus's *The Great Offensive*, also reviewed) by John Heath in *International Affairs*:

It is difficult at this time of day to be sure of doing justice to books written by travellers who have made one of the usual Intourist excursions to Russia and want to tell the world about it. Had Mr. Brown been the first of these travellers to rush into print, *This Russian Business* might have passed, if not exactly for a masterpiece, at any rate for a competent and useful piece of work. As it is, we do not feel that, with all his merits, he has much to add to the army of witnesses who have preceded him.²³

These works were often included alongside each other in great batch reviews, to save space. Whilst Edwin Brown's book was dimly received, and other works were considered rather more interesting, there is a sense of overload. The Scottish writer A. G. Macdonnell noted 'there must be few modern writers who have not written something, if only a newspaper article, during the last ten or fifteen years about Russia.'²⁴ The American political scientist Grayson Kirk wrote 'of the making of books about Russia, there seems to be no end.'²⁵ Indeed, such views extend to more recent times: Angela Kershaw categorised many accounts as being of 'generic variety'.²⁶

²³ John Heath, 'The Great Offensive, This Russian Business, Out of the Deep: Letters From Soviet Timber Camps and Modern Russia: the Land of Planning', *International Affairs* (12:5; September 1933), 683–684, at 684.

²⁴ A. G. Macdonnell, 'Miss Delafield in Russia', *The Observer*, 28 February 1937, 8.

²⁵ Grayson Kirk, Reviewed Works: *Soviet Tempo* by Violet Conolly; *Observation in Russia* by Sidney I Luck; *Government of the Soviet Union* by Samuel N Harper', *American Sociological Review*, 3:6 (December 1938), 887–888.

²⁶ Kershaw, 'French and British Female Intellectuals and the Soviet Union'. This 'generic variety' was not unfamiliar to these travellers. Violet Conolly wrote in *Soviet Tempo* how '[foreigners] all plagiarise one another in Russia', 171.

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Kirk thought Conolly's *Soviet Tempo* (reviewed alongside two other books on the Soviet Union) 'failed to provide any general illumination', thinking her political prejudices coloured the book too strongly.²⁷ Reviewing Conolly, E. H. Carr thought she did 'not quite' do justice to the achievements of the Soviets, but also that her work, being 'readable and convincing', helpfully 'pinned down specimens of several familiar Soviet types.'²⁸ This comment suggests that these works were seen primarily confirming and exemplifying pre-existing understandings and narratives: the Soviet agitator, the aspirational worker, the grumbling peasant, with the 'balance sheet' of Soviet successes and failures looming over them all. Archibald Lyall's *Russian Roundabout* was reviewed (again, very briefly, squashed in amongst dozens of other book reviews) with some disdain in *The Saturday Review*: Lyall's open mind led not to anything insightful, it is suggested, but rather a lack of conviction. 'His mind is evidently still open!' the reviewer notes, after Lyall feebly concluded his account with "So that both sides, perhaps, were really right"²⁹ – the political conclusions (or lack of conclusiveness) being key to the review.²⁹ Another article from *International Affairs* reviewed Julian Huxley's *A Scientist among the Soviets* and Hubert Griffith's *Seeing Soviet Russia*, amongst others, all in very brief reviews. Huxley was 'too self-conscious' to be 'content with a plain traveller's tale' and did not record the details of conversations with Bukharin and Radek despite mentioning they took place. Griffith's work, on the other hand, was a mere – but honestly so – 'record of a holiday trip', which, nevertheless, took aim at the selectivity of British newspapers in showing negative images of the USSR to their readers (and further comment on this, came there none).³⁰ The anonymous *Country Life* reviewer of Norah Rowan-Hamilton's *Under the Red Star* decided her work, whilst 'somewhat depressing', was 'veracious' – yet focused the extremely short review entirely on whether the book shone any light on 'whatever the great Communist experiment has achieved'.³¹ Margaret Cole reviewed Bosworth Goldman's *Red Road Through Asia*, deciding that despite its rather 'petulant' anti-Communism, she liked Goldman's observations, particularly of

²⁷ Grayson Kirk, 'Reviewed Works', 887–888.

²⁸ E. H. Carr, 'Soviet Tempo', *International Affairs* (17: 2; March–April 1937), 289–90.

²⁹ Anonymous review of *Russian Roundabout*, *The Saturday Review*, 3 June 1933, 545.

³⁰ Huxley was perhaps not self-conscious enough for this thesis. Anonymous review, *International Affairs* 11:4 (July 1932), 569–71.

³¹ Anonymous review of *Under the Red Star*, *Country Life*, 25 April 1931, 69.

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Siberia (and she gave Goldman a relatively thorough review), but also crucially saw that Goldman's work confounded tales of cruelty in Soviet labour camps in the taiga; the work was 'entertaining, if not very profound'.³² Politics was rarely far away from the reviewer's mind themselves, whether the review was thorough and pro-Soviet like Cole's, or pithy and very much anti-Soviet like the anonymous piece on Ethel Mannin's *South to Samarkand*, under 'Shorter Notices' in *The English Review* of January 1937:

Miss Mannin made her journey to Russia to discover the New Commonwealth. It was not as clean as she expected, and she wisely decided that she prefers cleanliness to Left-Wing progress. A decision to be applauded.³³

Yet there was also praise for other works considered here too, especially those that managed to give readers a sense of insight into Soviet life away from statistics. V. S. Pritchett reviewed John Brown's *I Saw for Myself* primarily for what it said about Nazi Germany rather than the Soviet Union, although Pritchett praised Brown's 'unconventional' way of observing, which despite some 'guesswork', 'is a realistic and lively piece of journalism, much better than most of the kind'.³⁴ *The Highway's* anonymous reviewer of *I Saw for Myself* (again, a very short text) decides Brown is 'independent and sensible', and free of 'cant and catchword'.³⁵ Herbert Marchant's *Scratch a Russian* was praised in *The Geographical Journal*: 'one may learn more about Soviet Russia from this little book of some 50,000 words than from many more ponderous tomes.' Marchant's examination of the character of Soviet people, 'his sympathy, his sense of proportion, and a keen sense of humour', is welcomed, although the reviewer does focus their conclusion on the likely outcome of Soviet progress once again.³⁶ Elizabeth Delafield's *Straw without Bricks* received a short review in the *Irish Times* that decided her book 'does tell us much about life in Soviet Russia, and it bears the stamp of truth'.³⁷ The writer Mary Stocks reviewed *Straw without Bricks* in the *Manchester Guardian*. She decided that it 'gets us very little nearer to an understanding of the aims and structure of the U.S.S.R., and that in actual

³² Margaret Cole, 'Through Siberia and Turkestan', *The Highway*, October 1934, 22–3.

³³ Anonymous review of *South to Samarkand*, *The English Review*, January 1937, 137.

³⁴ V. S. Pritchett, 'Gone Mad', *The Spectator*, 5 July 1935, 22–3.

³⁵ Anonymous review of *I Saw for Myself*, *The Highway*, November 1935, 26.

³⁶ 'A S E-S', untitled review of *Scratch a Russian* in *The Geographical Journal* 91:2 (February 1938), 170.

³⁷ Anonymous review, 'Miss Delafield in Russia', *The Irish Times*, April 26, 1937, 5.

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observation it does not carry us much beyond the travellers' tales and summer-holiday experiences which are becoming familiar to an ever-widening circle in this country.' That said, Stocks praised Delafield's style and humour: the novelist-traveller is welcome, whilst the political novice-traveller is less so. Stocks did note the time on the Seattle commune as the strongest part of the book, deciding 'our sociological brickmakers. [...] would be fools to neglect it.'³⁸ A. G. Macdonell decided Delafield is far from dull, unlike most screeds on the Soviet Union, and praised the section on the Seattle commune in particular. He lost interest when the work veers off into what he decides are commonplace observations: that is, when the work comes to resemble the overly-familiar travel account.³⁹ The reviewer of *Under the Red Star* in *International Affairs*, whilst deciding Rowan-Hamilton had 'added to the ever-growing number of books written by tourists', and that her book 'has not, and does not profess to have any political importance', thought her work 'unusually well done' in its relation of stories from the Soviet world.⁴⁰

Some travellers' works could receive more in-depth reviews, à la Margaret Cole's of Bosworth Goldman's *Red Road Through Asia*. E. J. Coyne in a longer review for the Irish journal *Studies* thought Conolly's *Soviet Tempo* was 'moderate, balanced, sane', and 'of the numerous travel books on Soviet Russia, the present reviewer knows none better than *Soviet Tempo*.' Interest in Conolly's exploration goes hand in hand with considering the book as an 'appeal' against 'Socialism', stronger for readers than 'any sociological proofs or economic statistics.'⁴¹ A. T. Wilson reviewed Goldman's *Red Road Through Asia* and decided that 'more is to be learned from these pages than from the scintillating essays of journalists', seeing Goldman as 'dispassionate' and 'much more informing', although he concluded the review with comment and quotation relating to communisms applicability to Britain – again, politics was rarely far away.⁴² Walter Citrine's *I Search for Truth in Russia* was given a relatively lengthy review in the *New York Times*, where the Russian-born economist Michael T. Florinsky thought Citrine's work handily disproved the idea that 'no one can

³⁸ Mary Stocks, 'Miss Delafield looks at Russia', *Manchester Guardian*, 12 March, 1937, 9.

³⁹ A. G. Macdonnell, 'Miss Delafield in Russia', *The Observer*, 28 February 1937, 8.

⁴⁰ Anonymous review of *Under the Red Star* in *International Affairs*, 10:2 (March 1931), 277–8.

⁴¹ E. J. Coyne, 'Soviet Tempo', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 26:104 (December 1937), 689–691.

⁴² A. T. Wilson, 'Across Siberia', *The Spectator*, 17 August 1934, 229–30.

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write about the U.S.S.R. in an objective and judicial manner'. Citrine's 'privileged position' enabled him to see 'many things that are not visible to ordinary mortals' (Florinsky, it seems, saw the VOKS treatment not as the practice of deceit, but of enablement). Citrine's book nevertheless explored effectively a 'country ruthlessly and haphazardly driven toward an uncertain destiny by unscrupulous, harsh and dogmatic dictatorship'.⁴³ The review implies both that Citrine's sincerity was accepted, and that clear-sighted views could be achieved. Anatole Baikalov (who grew up in the 'gold mining districts of Siberia') reviewed Burr's *In Bolshevik Siberia*, praising Burr's statement that "he had no axe to grind" and finding the work best as 'an account of personal experiences' rather than an attempt 'to judge things which he does not know or understand'.⁴⁴

Gareth Jones's articles and writings on the Soviet Union culminated in his reporting of the famine in Ukraine, and as such he was the target of much criticism from writers like Walter Duranty, who produced a limited rebuff to Jones's reports in concert with Konstantin Oumansky of the foreign press office of the NKID.⁴⁵ Jones's work was taken as an expressly political review of Soviet life, colouring him (and Malcolm Muggeridge, who also reported on the famine around the same time as Jones) with accusations of bias and prejudice. He objected strongly and took aim at those he saw ignoring Soviet crimes because of their own bias and prejudice. In a speech at the Royal Institute for International Affairs in March 1933, he said:

May I say as a Liberal in this regard how disgusted I am by liberal opinion in this country. The attitude of the Liberal press has been cowardly and hypocritical. [...] There is no excuse, for the *Manchester Guardian* has had an excellent correspondent in Moscow. I hold that that paper has betrayed the reliance which liberal people in the world have placed in it. The *News Chronicle* is not much better. It has had an admirable source of information, but it has remained cowardly in its attitude of tolerating any kind of tyranny in Russia, while getting violent about any form of oppression in Germany or Italy. Typical of liberal opinion

⁴³ Michael T. Florinsky, 'Walter Citrine's Diary of Six Weeks in Russia', *The New York Times*, 30 May 1939, 68.

⁴⁴ Anatole Baikalov, 'In Bolshevik Siberia', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 10:1 (January 1931), 723.

⁴⁵ Walter Duranty, 'Russians hungry but not starving', *New York Times* 31 March 1933, 13a–b.

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is the letter to the *Manchester Guardian* of March 2nd. I read a translation of it in the *Izvestia* when I was in Moscow and it appeared farcical to me. Viewed from Moscow it was a mixture of hypocrisy, of gullibility and of such a crass ignorance of the situation that its signatories should be ashamed of venturing to express an opinion about something about which they know so little. I can add here that after Stalin Bernard Shaw is the most hated man in Russia among those who can read newspapers.⁴⁶

The letter he referred to had been signed by Shaw, D. N. Pritt, Somerville Hastings, and Margaret Cole amongst others.⁴⁷ The role of the famine in the discourse continued to be important. In July 1933 Martin Lawrence published a short book, *From Peasant to Collective Farmer*, with the front-cover declaration that it refuted the “famine” lies – that is, the news first broken by Jones and Muggeridge. Despite claiming to have been written partially on the basis of trips to various parts of the Soviet Union, it was based almost entirely on translated (not by the authors) interviews by foreigners with delegates to the First Congress of Collective Farm shock workers, Moscow, February 1933. This was, therefore, an account of a meeting of the two aspects, external and internal, of cultural diplomacy: far from the experiences not only of Jones, but of many considered in this thesis. Jones’s experiences, and by extension those of the peasants he interviewed, were to be ignored from this perspective: the sincerity of the Soviet state mattered more than that of the people whose experiences were related by a journalist considered compromised by his political views.

Whilst an initial glance suggests reviewers tended to favour the political insights possible in these works (in instances such as Jones’s reporting of famine, the political obliterated all other concerns), and that more impressionistic texts were dismissed as

⁴⁶ Gareth Jones, C1–1.

⁴⁷ George Bernard Shaw *et al*, *Manchester Guardian*, 2 March 1933, 18. The signatories, having visited the Soviet Union at various points that year, noted their ‘desire to record that we saw nowhere evidence of such economic slavery, privation, unemployment and cynical despair of betterment as are accepted as inevitable and ignored by the press as having “no news value” in our own countries. Everywhere we saw hopeful and enthusiastic working-class, self-respecting free up to the limits imposed on them by nature and a terrible inheritance from tyranny and incompetence of their former rulers, developing public works, increasing health services, extending education, achieving the economic independence of woman and the security of the child and in spite of many grievous difficulties and mistakes which or social experiments involve a first (and which they have never concealed nor denied) setting an example of industry and conduct which would greatly enrich us if our systems supplied our workers with any incentive to follow it.’

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being lightweight and not particularly insightful, there are also signs some of these works were considered in greater length than others. There are some works that I have been unable to find reviews for, and still others that receive barely a mention in the press – there is indeed a continued sense of there being too many works saying too many of the same things. Yet it is clear the notions of truth and sincerity could be relevant to the reviewer, and there is a sense of appetite (e.g., from Mary Stocks; A. G. Macdonnell) for more stories from the Soviet world via the pen of a talented writer like Elizabeth Delafield, on subjects distinct from the overly familiar lists of Soviet achievements and failures. Yet this thesis has shown how much more there was, and still is, to find, when considering not the pre-amble of these texts and their conclusions alone. When considering these texts as a whole, yet also particularly examining the middle of the accounts, where the encounters and explorations occurred and were least circumscribed by the framing and shaping that the discourse of travel (and wider discourses, of world crisis, the rise of the dictators, and so on) placed over this lived experience. This too is where the ‘smallness’ of this history becomes the most significant, away from the grand narratives of human progress and revolution, or the sweeping assessments of the Soviet future. Here is found lived experience and relationships that confirm, confound, and complicate the ideas and frameworks evident in the before/after of introductions and epilogues, the subsequent review articles and the absorption of yet another travel account – and the attendant dissolution of particular experience into longer-term memory and preconceived explanations for views – into the wider discourse.

Conclusion

This thesis has considered the issue of sincerity as it permeates the texts produced by British travel writers based on their travel around the Soviet Union in the 1930s. It has explored the discourse of travel and travellers' reflections and refractions of myriad complex ideas. It has shown that the travel accounts of these travellers contain far more material and meaning than has previously been explored and added more to the history of foreign travel to the Soviet Union via the examination of these texts as cultural artefacts in their own right – which in turn tells us more about British culture at the time. It has shown how sincerity is as worthy as authenticity of a scholar's attention, and it has added to the growing understandings of the sheer complexity of, and meanings found within Soviet life by examining foreigner-Soviet interaction, starting the process of illuminating a curiously under-examined area.

THE HISTORY OF FOREIGN TRAVEL TO THE SOVIET UNION IN THE 1930S

These accounts offer us much that is significant. First, how a discourse of travel shaped and framed British expectations of experience in the Soviet Union. This adds complexity, such as when we consider how pro- and anti-Soviet feelings, generated before, during and after a trip, were not necessarily comprehensively determinate in shaping how a writer considered and conducted their travel. Second, how the experiences of the travellers fell outside the expectations shaped by the discourse of travel, and so reveal the marshalling of facts and experiences and impressions by travellers as they sought to repackage them for their audience, to fit experience into the discursive mold's shape. The tension between discourse and experience is key in terms of the reception of these works at the time and ever since: the expectation of 'hidden transcripts' and the contours of the travellers' imagined geography are shown to be drastically different to the reality they experienced. Third, that claims of sincerity were central to the discussion about the Soviet Union in Britain, and thus so too the countering of claims of insincerity. Even as some (Ethel Mannin; Robert Byron) sought to produce travel accounts in the sense of seeking the romantically authentic, such as Mannin's 'Golden Journey to Samarkand', these travel accounts were fundamentally

concerned with sincerity, even as authenticity was still significant – these two concepts remain inextricably intertwined.¹

These accounts were often built on dichotomies and in the over-simplification of ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’, there is an essentialism at work: ‘Russia’ was reduced, even in the most sincerely reflective accounts (Delafield, for example) to a series of places and peoples onto which travellers could project their understandings and values. This thesis has explored these dichotomies to simultaneously understand the discourse of travel and reveal how and where these were inadequate in explaining the Soviet world. Thus, what is seen here is ultimately numerous divergences between the ‘official’ and the ‘unofficial’ and shows how travellers thought themselves capable, via an understanding of these divergences, of understanding the ‘real’ Russia as contrasted to the Soviet world of the authorities, the ‘official’. This occurred even as they missed or ignored aspects of Soviet culture that were products of longer-term Russian cultural/historical trends and could occur in vastly different ways; indeed, all of these dichotomies echo those in Russian culture itself. Nevertheless, these accounts simultaneously contain – be this accompanied by subtle perceptiveness or not – numerous accounts and meanings that explode overly-simple dichotomies.

Sincerity as a term deserves attention from scholars: authenticity often takes precedence in the studies of the history of travel, for instance, and yet sincerity, particularly as it relates to written and spoken communication, is essential and clearly present, even when not explicitly observed by writers. It is the question of ‘who is *telling* the truth?’, and the reception and performance of sincerity, that is meaningful here – even as implicit questions like ‘who best *embodies* truth?’ are of course relevant. The prejudices and preconceptions of the observer plays a role in their assessing of both sincerity and authenticity, and the former is so significant to this history that it deserves, and has thus received, more attention than authenticity – although any study that did not consider the latter would of course be severely weakened. What mattered was not exploring and describing the authentic life of Russian, Ukrainian, Siberian, Uzbek, Kazak people. What mattered most was what these lives could tell the traveller and their reader about the Soviet world, what essential political and moral truths they

¹ Mannin, *South to Samarkand*, 15.

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revealed, and shows how the contested nature of that world demanded the testing of sincerity, of traveller and Soviet individual alike – even as this was ultimately aimed at finding the ‘truth’ of the ‘authentic’ Soviet reality. Sincerity demands our attention just as much as authenticity, particularly in a contemporary world fraught with questions of trust, truth-telling and suspicions of deceit.

Indeed, this thesis has also explored how travellers read sincerity in Soviet society, and thus some of the meanings they took from their encounters with Soviet people. Readings of Soviet sincerity could hinge on expressions of suffering, or on negotiation of the presence/absence of the ‘official’ (and attendant silences and outbursts), on the questioning of foreigners by Soviet individuals (indeed, the familiar nature of the questions indicated to some travellers the power of Soviet discourse in shaping the perceptions of these individuals). The pressures of Soviet power are never far away from the domestic encounters and relationships between traveller and Soviet, but nor are they so oppressive as to preclude them or are the dominating factor of all engagement (that said, there is a noticeable preponderance of encounters in the first five years of the 1930s over the latter five: whilst encounters are clearly evident in 1936, they are much less so in 1937, 1938 and 1939). Yet these encounters also reveal the attitudes of Soviet people to foreigners. It helps reveal their own engagement with the Soviet system – the usable self and the issue of ‘public and private’ are never far from each other. It can be concluded that the complex reality of life in the Soviet Union repeatedly failed to conform to expectations shaped by this discourse of travel.

THE ROLE OF FOREIGN TRAVELLERS IN THE LIVES OF SOVIET INDIVIDUALS

Indeed, the reactions of Soviet individuals were broader than the discourse of travel could allow. This thesis has asked where travellers fit into an ‘us’ and ‘them’ binary from the perspective of Soviet individuals. Walter Citrine’s relationship with his guide Karchan, and consideration of encounters between other travellers and Soviets that illuminated the Soviet usable self, showed a great deal. Via broad categories, such as subterfuge, state discipline, interviews and the juxtaposition of ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ individuals, it explored the range and variability of encounters that in a broad sense

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included the 'official'. What it revealed is far more complex than that simple term can hope to bear.

The usable self is visible via the travellers, and these encounters help us consider to some extent how the traveller fit into the Soviet individuals' use of that self. Some individuals withheld from foreigners: they avoided them, they thought them possible spies, and they avoided discussing certain topics. Others revealed, such as Norah Rowan-Hamilton's porter, the tools they needed for their usable self – that is, a usable story from the travellers, to tell his superiors so that it satisfied them and absolved him of responsibility. Some Soviet people changed their tune in the face of the official (e.g., in the presence of a guide, a member of the communist party, a president of a farm), speaking one way, and then another when that presence was removed. Others still spoke up stridently in the presence of such individuals. Travellers could problematise the usable self for Soviet individuals, by acting as an unwelcome axis of inquiry or possible threat, and they could also act as outlets for information: travellers were given information about the Soviet world by its inhabitants, often in complaints. Soviet people could also learn about the outside world (and even other parts of the Union) from travellers. The encounters between travellers and Soviet people could also show just how complex the public/private distinction that British subjects brought with them to the Soviet Union was: travellers engaged with both the public and private, but also the personal, as per Oleg Kharkordin. Ideology and social pressure pervaded Soviet society, and by examining encounters through these twin lenses of the usable self, and the notion of private and personal lives from Kharkordin, this work has shown both how travellers could show us much of interest in the Soviet world that we might struggle to see otherwise, and how narrowing discourses could and can still be about the complex moral lives of the Other. If we recall Spivak's critique of displacement when seeking the subaltern we can see how the discourse of travel shaped expectations a certain way, so that travellers sought the 'truth' in one particular area of Soviet life (seeking the 'hidden transcripts'), yet the reality was different. Even so, the travel account contains much that confounds and complicates this. Again, these subjects were not subaltern in the strictest sense, but the question of interpretive violence in history and in subsequent understandings of that Other can be better understood via considering these experiences.

Conclusion

All of this combines to suggest that travellers were not necessarily seen as either 'us' or 'them', but rather that they inhabited positions on an axis that reached between these two poles, often closer to 'us' than 'them'. This is in stark contrast to Soviet state propaganda about foreign threats, and the discourse of travel's warnings about the difficulty or dangers of interaction with Soviet people. Travellers were not part of 'trust groups' perhaps, but rarely were they recorded as being seen as either 'them' or as threats that might provoke the wrath of 'them'. Once we disentangle ourselves from the discourse of travel and the expectations of travellers, we see Soviet individuals engaging with foreigners across a range of locations, times, topics, and emotional connections, from fear to friendship. In summary, this adds to the complexity of life under Stalinism: it was riven with power dynamics, fear and paranoia, but it also had space for temporary, yet meaningful, bonds between people from vastly different worlds.

RE-CONSIDERING THE SOURCES

An important part of this revealing of complexity is that the travel accounts show themselves to be far more than simply the production of naïve political innocents or those with an axe to grind against this or that foe. True, many of the accounts consulted but not included in this thesis do bear all the hallmarks of this, and indeed, so too do some of the texts included, even those used extensively. But to reduce these works to political screeds above all else is to reduce the meanings contained within the sentences, in the metaphors and phrasings used, and the encounters so described. It suggests that with the judicious and careful use of texts via the methods of cultural history – that is, considering discourse, imagined geographies, cultural hinterlands and the close reading of texts – there is a rich, complex set of meanings about both British and Soviet culture revealed in these texts.

This study suggests these works should be considered as valuable, to go alongside the archival sources that have rightly been the foundation of much work on foreigner-Soviet interaction during Stalinism to date. Without these archival-based works, particularly those of Michael David-Fox, Ludmilla Stern, and Sheila Fitzpatrick, and Russian-language works like that of Orlov and Popov, we miss far too much from the picture. Yet the works focused on the travellers previously have now been built on

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further, by treating these texts as cultural artefacts in themselves. The range of experiences and encounters are so diverse and so multi-faceted that they can only open doors to future enquiry, rather than close them off. This thesis has sought to treat these works very differently to how they have been treated previously and has shown how productive that can be.

FINAL THOUGHT: SINCERITY, 'SMALLNESS', AND THE SELF

I contend that here is a prelude to the 'smallness' so important to Michael Young's post-war efforts to develop British sociology, and from texts definitively 'amateur' in comparison to the output of the social sciences both pre- and post-war. These travel accounts often concentrated upon the 'smallness' of human interaction, of face-to-face discussion and questions and answers, of the village rather than the urban sprawl (or the *dvor*, or kitchen or bedroom, rather than Red Square and Tsarskoe Selo), of the peasant and worker over the laws and proclamations of state. In a discourse strongly influenced by grand ideas of socialist progress, geo-political rivalries, fears of war, economic ruin, revolution and the remaking of humankind, it was the sincerity of the individual – British, but also, in glimpses, Soviet – as they tried to grapple with the interaction of 'bigness' and 'smallness' that suffused these travel accounts and becomes the most telling and compelling aspect of them. Indeed, the often general, even vague conclusions that travellers reached, and the way most reviewers considered them primarily on these conclusions and the 'novelty' of their insights (or lack thereof), elides the core of the texts, as explored in this thesis. The 'smallness' of history is found there: people's hopes and fears, joys and tragedies, their successes and failures and the ongoing search for stability and meaning.

At the last, I circle back to the words of Hannah Freed-Thall, and her description of close reading as:

less a specific strategy than an ethical relation [my emphasis]: it names a willingness to suspend what Roland Barthes calls the 'will to possess' (*le vouloir-*

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saisir’) in order to recognise the indeterminacy and variability of the world around us.²

Many of these travellers sought, without expressing it, ‘smallness’ as part of their performance of sincerity, as part of their search for truth: the peasant, the worker, the experience of everyday life (and, yes, the ‘bigness’ of the State, of History, too). For some this was part of an effort to capture the world as they framed it: Jones with his fiercely held convictions and bold *reportage*, Griffith and Chesterton with their finding the promise of the Soviet project, Lyall and Conolly with their frustrations at Soviet deceit, or Citrine with his desire to understand the practical working relations of Soviet life. Yet others, like Charles Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, Bosworth Goldman, Herbert Marchant, Norah Rowan-Hamilton, and especially Elizabeth Delafield, give one a sense rather of not finding ‘truth’ in the sense of Jones or Citrine, but rather the truth of the ‘indeterminacy and variability’ of the world, and thus the experience that lay beyond the discourse of travel’s limits. Both kinds of truth are of great significance to this thesis. In my search for meaning in these texts, I too have pursued a ‘smallness’ in close reading, in focusing on the encounters between travellers and Soviets and the subjects the travellers included in their writing. I have employed this ‘specific strategy’ in an attempt to reach that ‘ethical relation’.

This thesis, via this close reading of texts previously unexamined in this way, has evinced a disjuncture between discourse and experience as they were simultaneously contained in the travel account; it helps illuminate Mark Bevir’s differentiation between traditions and agency.³ It can also do the same for the historiography, in showing the value of the works as compared to their prior treatment. It also serves as a reminder for us when considering broader, subtler discourses about ‘Russia’ and the Soviet Union – and indeed, ‘the Other’ wherever we encounter it. The complexity of Soviet life was well-noted and well-established in the discourse of travel itself: recall Norah Rowan-Hamilton’s melodramatic confusion at ‘Looking-Glass World’, or the sober, sincere but also bemused relating of contrary statistics by Walter Citrine, and the oft-noted swirl of news and contrary information surrounding the Soviet world.⁴ These

² Hannah Freed-Thall, ‘Thinking Small: Ecologies of Close Reading’, 228.

³ Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, 197–200.

⁴ Rowan-Hamilton, *Under the Red Star*, 316; Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, 89–93.

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travellers provide us, distinct from their stated views, sympathies and personal objectives, the sincere recording of history as it was witnessed, discursive and experiential alike – in this picture even mistakes, bias and prejudice are valuable, for they too are shaped and formed in their particular ways by the forces of history.

Indeed, this sincerity shows us again the simple fact of the ever-present, ever-challenging complexity in history. It helps us recall that fact and reminds us of our duty to accept it and face it, to root our studies – of objects and subjects foreign or domestic, contemporary or historical – as part of an attempt to see the world as it truly is. That is, to see both discourse and reality at the same time – to seek totality – accounting all the while for their endlessly tricky interplay. It is an endlessly subtle venture that enables this ethical relation to history. This is all part of the effort to help us to be free, to quote Iris Murdoch, ‘from fantasy’: reductive visions of life that distort the world before us – be those the dreams of the ego, or the intoxicating abstracts of materialist dialectics, *sonderwegs* and manifest destinies. It is by examining the fantastic and the real as they intermingle and stand in for one another across discourse and experience that we can begin to draw the two apart and treat each with the attention they both deserve and demand: it is this totality that must be our subject. Here is the meeting of the scholarly with other fundamental aspects of human endeavour. We ask questions about the travellers, the Soviet people they encountered, and their shared and distinct experiences, to better understand the past. Yet in reaching for an ethical relation with the totality of this history, we do so also with our present. We can consider the praxis and ethical significance of the study of history for ourselves as curious, complex and contingent – that is, historical – subjects in our own right: exploring who we are, how we live, and how we explain ourselves.⁵

⁵ Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge, 2001), 97.

Appendix – The Travellers

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Boorman, Henry Roy Pratt (?–?) – Editor-Proprietor of the *Kent Messenger* from 1928 until the late 20th century, and at one point President of the Newspaper Society, and Mayor of Maidstone.

Brown, John (?–?) – Trade Unionist from South Shields who published several works in the interwar period focused on social conditions. Studied at Durham and Ruskin College, Oxford.

Byron, Robert (1905–1941) – Travel writer, art critic and historian. Published numerous works of travel and art, including *The Road to Oxiana*, on the Persian region and Central Asia. Died when his ship was torpedoed *en route* to South Africa. Visited the USSR in 1933.

Chesterton, Ada (1869–1962) – journalist and campaigner. She wrote works on urban poverty in Britain and created Cecil Houses (now Central & Cecil Housing Trust), for women with no address. Visited the USSR in 1930 and 1934.

Citrine, Sir Walter Maclennan (1887–1983) – General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress between 1926 and 1946. Visited the Soviet Union in 1925 and 1935 (with further visits in 1943, 1945 and 1956).

Conolly, Violet (1899–1988) – Irish economist and later one of the first ‘Sovietologists’; visited the USSR in the 1920s and 1936. Worked under Toynbee at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, and after the Second World War headed the Soviet (Russian) section of the Research Department at the British Foreign Office.

Delafield, (Edmée) Elizabeth (1890–1943) – Novelist, best known for *Diary of a Provincial Lady* (1930), an autobiographical novel based on her life in Devon. Prolific in the inter-war period, she died aged only 53.

Fleming, Peter (1907–1971) – Writer and traveller, first found success with *Brazilian Adventure* in 1933, noted for its irreverence. Travelled extensively in China in the same decade. Worked in intelligence in the Second World War, and post-war focused on his literary career, particularly in history.

Goldman, Bosworth (?–?) – Wrote and lectured on Soviet Siberia and Central Asia throughout the 1930s and was active as a writer at least beyond the 1950s. Led an expedition of vans powered by charcoal from London to Afghanistan in 1933, producing a film of the journey.

Grierson, John (1909–1977) – Avid flier, undertaking solo flights over Greenland and from London to Ottawa in the interwar period. Later a Wing Commander in the Royal Air Force and a test pilot for jet aircraft. Flew over eight thousand miles from Britain to Samarkand in 1932.

Appendix

Griffith, Hubert (1896–1953) – playwright, critic, journalist, Griffith visited the Soviet Union numerous times in the 1930s and 1940s.

Jones, Gareth Vaughn (1905–35) – Welsh journalist, took French and German at Aberystwyth and Cambridge; learned Russian in Riga. From 1930 was foreign affairs advisor to Lloyd George, visiting Germany every year of the decade following 1924; visited the Soviet Union in 1930, 1931 and 1933. Murdered after being kidnapped in Chahar, China, 1935.

Lyall, Archibald (1904–1964) – travel writer and barrister, later joined the Special Operations Executive. Possibly something of a *flâneur*, although he wrote extensively on modern languages and even anthropological topics.

Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, Charles Frederick Arthur (1907–1933) – Lieutenant of the Black Watch and graduate of Trinity College Cambridge, Charles died aged only 26.

Mannin, Ethel (1900–1984) – A successful – and prolific – novelist and travel writer, Mannin leaned towards anarchism after her 1936 visit to the Soviet Union gave her a distaste for communism.

Marchant, Sir Herbert Stanley (1906–1990) – Assistant master at Harrow pre-Second World War, Marchant worked for the Foreign Office during the conflict and then became a Consul General. Was later British Ambassador to Cuba during the 1962 Missile Crisis. Knighted 1963.

Martin, Kingsley (1897–1969) – Journalist and editor. Martin initially lectured at LSE before joining the *Manchester Guardian* in 1927; became first editor of the *New Statesman and Nation* in 1931. Stepped down as editor in 1960.

Rowan-Hamilton, Norah (?–1945) – Travel writer, perhaps most noted for her 1915 *Through Wonderful India and Beyond*.

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