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Feature

Stalin's Library: A Dictator and His Books

Geoffrey Roberts answers questions on his new book, published in February 2022 by Yale University Press

There are quite a few books about Stalin. What does *Stalin's Library* contribute to this vast literature?

Primarily, it's an intellectual portrait of Stalin through the prism of his personal library. It's about the books he collected and how he read them, about his life as a reader, and what this tells us about the workings of his mind and the impact of reading on his dictatorship.

Stalin was an intellectual. He was a man of ideas, as well as action and power. He loved reading, he loved ideas. He spent most of his life reading, writing and editing. He was an ideologue and a committed

communist but the foundation of his political beliefs and commitments was his intellectuality, his engagement with ideas.



Gorky (left) and Stalin. Gorky's copy of *Death and the Maiden* was inscribed by Stalin: "This piece is stronger than Goethe's Faust (love conquers death)." (SCRSS Photo Library)

To say that Stalin was a serious intellectual is not to deny that he presided over a highly authoritarian and repressive regime – a country run by a party dictatorship within which Stalin was the prime mover. But to understand why Stalin pursued policies that resulted in the deaths of millions of innocent people you have to appreciate the depth of his political beliefs, which was emotional, as well as rational. It was Stalin's emotional commitment to socialism and to Marxist ideas that drove and sustained his mass repressions, which he believed were necessary to defend the Soviet state against its internal and external enemies.

What was it that attracted you to this project?

The main attraction was the source – the surviving remnant of thousands of books from his personal library, including hundreds of texts that he marked.

Stalin lived most of his life publicly. He was a politically driven personality, someone whose inner mental life was shaped by his public persona and by the ideological universe he inhabited. Stalin's personality was constructed from the outside in, and was moulded and driven by the politics of a ruthless class war in defence of the revolution and the pursuit of the communist cause.

At the same time, Stalin lived in his own private mental world and his personal book collection gives us access to his innermost thinking.

Most of what we know about Stalin's private thinking comes from public actions and utterances, including his performances in interactions with his closest comrades. There is an element of performance about the way Stalin read, marked and wrote in his library's books, but mostly his reading and its traces were spontaneous and expressive of an intellectual immersed in a world of ideas. That is what makes Stalin's personal library a unique source.

When did Stalin start collecting books?

Stalin read a lot from an early age. He was a studious boy. As an underground revolutionary in Tsarist Russia he spent a lot of time in prison and in exile, where there was little else to do but read. Only after the revolution and Civil War did Stalin begin to accumulate a personal book collection. In the mid-1920s he employed a librarian, Shushanika Manuchar'yants, who had been Lenin's personal librarian. She helped transform Stalin's book collection into an identifiable personal library.

By the time Lenin died in 1924 there were about 9,000 volumes in his personal library.

Stalin's library contained some 25,000 texts when he died in 1953. The plan was to turn his main Moscow dacha – where most of the books were kept – into a Stalin Museum. But Khrushchev's 1956 denunciation put paid to that idea and Stalin's books were dispersed to other libraries. However, party archivists retained 5,500 texts that identifiably belonged to Stalin or contained what the Russians call his *pometki* (markings).

What books did Stalin collect and read?

Stalin was a Marxist and the books he preferred were those written by other Marxists, especially Lenin, his favourite author. He was interested in Marxist books on every imaginable subject – not just politics, economics and philosophy, but art, culture, literature, psychology and science.

Stalin's personal library was also a Soviet library – a collection of books published in the USSR and in Russian. Stalin studied a lot of foreign languages but the only language he knew really well, apart from Russian, was his native Georgian.

But they weren't all Marxist or Soviet books. History was Stalin's favourite subject and his favourite historian was a non-Marxist, Robert Wipper. Wipper wrote a book about Tsar Ivan the Terrible that had a profound effect on Stalin's view of Russian history. Stalin also liked how Wipper wrote history, in an interesting, narrative-based way. So much so that Stalin demanded that Soviet school history textbooks were written in the same way.

Stalin was highly interested in military affairs. His collection contained four books by the nineteenth-century tsarist military strategist Genrikh Leer, texts that he borrowed from the Defence Commissariat's library – and never returned. This was an old habit of Stalin's. When he left the seminary where he had been training to be a priest, he kept eighteen of its library's books. After his death, seventy-two books from the Lenin State Library were found in his collection.

Stalin was an internationalist, interested in the history of many different countries – China, Japan, India, Asia, Mexico, the United States, Britain, Ireland and Europe. Foreign visitors were often amazed by Stalin's knowledge of their countries, knowledge that came from his own reading, not from briefings by staff, although they did supply him with a steady stream of press cuttings and reports from TASS, the Soviet news agency.

Stalin had copies of translations of books by Winston Churchill, John Maynard Keynes and Adam Smith. He liked memoirs, and had a particular interest in those of Otto von Bismarck. Stalin's copy of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* is missing and some people think he must have read Machiavelli's *The Prince*. They may be right, but Stalin had no need to learn about the exercise of power from Machiavelli. He learnt about it from Lenin and, more surprisingly, Trotsky. During the early post-revolutionary years Trotsky was a favourite author of Stalin's.

Stalin also read a lot of fiction – poetry, plays and film scripts, as well as novels. Unfortunately, hardly any of his fiction books survived the Khrushchevite dispersal of his library. But we do know about Stalin's tastes in literature from other sources. He liked what he called 'Socialist Realist' books – realist literature that was true to life but also critiqued capitalism and furthered the socialist cause.

Like Lenin and Marx, Stalin was a lover of the classics of world literature, particularly those plays and novels with a radical edge that exposed the iniquities of ruling-class oppression and provided a window on the progressive direction of history. His favourite playwrights were Shakespeare, Chekhov and Gorky. He also had a soft spot for Bulgakov, a dissident Soviet author who wrote plays sympathetic to the Bolsheviks' enemies during the Russian Civil War. Stalin didn't mind these plays because Bulgakov also showed the Bolsheviks as winning.

Stalin's favourite poets were Goethe, Pushkin and Mayakovsky; novelists –

Dumas, Hugo, Dostoevsky and Gogol. He had a particular liking for the writings of the nineteenth-century Russian satirist Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin.

What do Stalin's *pometki* reveal about the Soviet dictator?

The *pometki* tell us what Stalin found interesting and important. They reveal that he could be a highly engaged and methodical reader. They show how important ideas were to him and the power of the feeling that he attached to some of them. We see how he devoured information and was happy to pick up ideas and formulations from whatever he was reading, including the writings of hated opponents.

Stalin's markings are mostly underlinings or lines in the margins. Twenty per cent of the *pometki* are verbal, mostly single words or phrases. His most common annotation is **NB** (in Latin script), the second most common is a derisive **xa-xa** (in Cyrillic script, i.e. ha-ha).

Sometimes Stalin engaged in a more extended one-way dialogue with what he was reading, and wrote sentences or paragraphs in the margins. These comments demonstrate how much Stalin cared about ideas and how committed he was to his Marxist faith. In the thousands upon thousands of marked pages in Stalin's library books there is not a single hint that Stalin had any doubts about Marxism and communism.

What does your book reveal about Stalin as a person?

That Stalin was a deeply flawed human being, but he wasn't a madman or a psychopath. Nor was he a megalomaniac. Politics for Stalin was about the exercise of power to achieve ideals. He was highly suspicious but not paranoid. All the bad stuff he did was motivated by his ideas and politics, not vengeance or bloodlust.

Stalin was a political personality constructed from the outside-in. It was his politics,

ideology and political life story that formed his personality and character. There was a depth to Stalin as a person but it wasn't a psychological depth, it was political and ideological. Stalin was a complex character but it was a complexity that was on the surface.

Stalin was ruthless, hard-hearted and unforgiving of betrayal. What made him like that was his biography, his personal experience and the situations he confronted – and how he interpreted that through the prism of his politics and ideology.

He loved his family but neglected them for politics. He didn't get on with his children: his sons because they weren't intellectuals and Bolsheviks like he was; his daughter Svetlana because she was too rebellious and he didn't like her choice of men.

Stalin could be coarse, rude, ill-tempered and insensitive. He could be stubborn and inflexible, and didn't like to admit mistakes. He was dogmatic and intolerant of ideas and views of which he didn't approve. He didn't suffer fools gladly and was unforgiving when people let him down.

On the other hand, he could be charming, caring, affectionate, sensitive to the needs of others and, on occasion, protective of people from purges and terror. He had a sharp sense of humour. He was a workaholic who didn't have any real friends but he did like to party with close comrades.

He was certainly egotistical and had a high opinion of himself as an intellectual, politician, statesman and military leader, but he resisted the extremes of his personality cult and often sought to tone it down. He saw the political utility of the cult – as a means to strengthen his own power and the security of the communist system – but worried that it went too far and undermined the authority of the party as an institution.

As an intellectual, Stalin's commitment to self-education was a life-long cause. "I'm seventy years old", he told his errant son Vasily, pointing to the books he was reading

on history, literature and military affairs. "Yet I go on learning just the same."

Geoffrey Roberts is Emeritus Professor of History at University College Cork and a Member of the Royal Irish Academy. 'Stalin's Library: A Dictator and His Books' was published by Yale University Press in February 2022. Professor Roberts is an internationally recognised expert on Stalin, Soviet foreign policy and the history of the Cold War. Other publications include 'Stalin's General: The Life of Georgy Zhukov', 'Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939–1953', and 'Churchill and Stalin: Comrades-in-Arms During the Second World War (co-authored with Martin Folly and Oleg Rzheshevsky).

SCRSS News

Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SCRSS

SCRSS AGM 2022

The Society's Annual General Meeting took place in person at the SCRSS centre on 21 May 2021. The Annual Report, Accounts and a revised set of Rules were discussed and approved. The new Rules apply with immediate effect and are available to view on the SCRSS website's About Us page. Four existing members of the Council were re-elected. All the AGM documents were emailed in advance of the AGM, but if you did not receive them, or would like a copy by post, please contact the Honorary Secretary.

Following the AGM, the Council met to appoint the Executive Committee (EC). The full list of the Society's President, Vice Presidents and Council Members is as follows. *President and Vice Presidents:* Professor Bill Bowring (President*); Dr Kate Hudson, Dr David Lane and Dr Rachel O'Higgins (Vice Presidents). *SCRSS Council:* Bethany Aylward, Christine Barnard, Kate Clark, Michael Costello,

Ralph Gibson (Honorary Secretary*), Jeremy Hicks, Andrew Jameson, Christine Lindey (Exhibitions Officer), Philip Matthews (Chair*), Jane Rosen, Charles Stewart (Vice Chair), Diana Turner, Jean Turner (Honorary Treasurer*), Len Weiss. Note: [*] indicates member of the EC. Mel Bach stood down from the Council earlier in 2022 but continues as Honorary Librarian.

Conflict in Ukraine

The Society issued a *Statement from the Trustees of the SCRSS* on Ukraine to members on 8 March 2022. The statement is currently published on the SCRSS website home page.

SCRSS Centenary

As you are hopefully aware, the Society will celebrate its centenary in 2024. In March 2022 the SCRSS Council agreed a number of specific projects to mark this remarkable anniversary: a **book** on the history of the Society, written by Jane Rosen, to be published in 2024; an **exhibition** dedicated to the Society's history, potentially incorporating the spaces throughout the building and covering the key areas of the Society's work – art, film, music, education, literature, language, theatre, science, and so on; a one-day **academic seminar** in late June 2024; a centenary **celebration** at the SCRSS in early July 2024 (close to the Society's foundation date of 9 July 1924). The *SCRSS Digest* Summer 2024 edition will also be devoted to the centenary.

Centre Openings

Thanks to volunteer support, the Library has continued to open on Tuesdays and the first Saturday of each month from the beginning of the year. If you would like to support the openings by becoming a volunteer guardian, do please get in touch. With additional help, we can spread the load among more members and thereby reduce the commitment each person has to make. Any members intending to travel to the centre

are advised to check the SCRSS website for the latest information. If there are specific collections you would like to view, it is always best to contact the Honorary Secretary in advance, by email. Members can borrow up to six books at a time from the Literature Collection and the Quick Loan Section (the latter contains books on a range of subjects, including some newly acquired books such as review copies). Our growing selection of de-acquired / second-hand books are available for sale too. Come and grab a bargain!

Library News

A reminder that links to the ever-growing online catalogue of books in the SCRSS Library are available on the SCRSS website, for example on the Library and Archive page at www.scrss.org.uk/library.htm. You can now dip in and get some idea of the range of books and other materials held by the Society. We estimate roughly 10 per cent of the books have been catalogued so far. In addition, there are pamphlets, posters, photographs, artefacts, stamps, coins, theatre programmes, periodicals and so on! Our unique collections began from the early days of the Society in the 1920s, and thanks to generous donations over the decades (from institutions in the USSR and from members) they have grown to fill every available space in the basement, first and second floors of the building! If you are interested in helping with cataloguing, or with the Library in general, contact the Honorary Secretary.

Membership

A membership renewal reminder should be enclosed with this issue of the *SCRSS Digest*, if your membership has already expired or will do so by the end of September – this is to save on postage. Please help on administration by responding as soon as possible. If you wish to set up an annual standing order to avoid such reminders, or to pay by bank transfer, simply email ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk to request the SCRSS bank details.

Keeping in Touch

There are a number of ways to keep up to date with events, Library openings, etc: via email (please make sure we have your current email address); the website (www.scrss.org.uk); Facebook and Twitter (search "SCRSS or SCRSS Library"). You can help the Society by forwarding information about events to friends and colleagues, as appropriate.

Next Events

Please visit the SCRSS website at www.scrss.org.uk for details of our library openings every Tuesday and on the first Saturday of the month, as well as up-to-date details of all other events.

Soviet War Memorial Trust News

Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SWMT

Holocaust Memorial Day, 2022

The Mayor of Southwark, civic dignitaries, representatives of CIS embassies, local political parties and other organisations gathered at the Soviet War Memorial to mark Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January 2022. Following the ceremony, a number of participants visited the new Holocaust Galleries in the nearby Imperial War Museum.

Victory Day, 2022

Due to the conflict in Ukraine, and licensing concerns over safety and security, the Trustees of the SWMT decided not to host a large-scale formal ceremony on 9 May 2022. Instead, throughout the day, Ambassadors from a number of CIS countries, representatives of a number of

organisations that are normally present on Victory Day, and many individuals and families, came to lay wreaths and flowers, and to pay their respects to all those commemorated by the Memorial. Flowers were laid on behalf of the SWMT and the SCRSS.

The Soviet War Memorial, dedicated to the 27 million Soviet men and women who lost their lives during the fight against Fascism in 1941–45, is located in the Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, Lambeth Road, Southwark, London SE1. The SCRSS is a founder member of the Soviet War Memorial Trust (SWMT). For more information, visit www.sovietwarmemorialtrust.com.

Feature

Nikolai Andronov and the Severe Style

By Christine Lindey

Nikolai Ivanovich Andronov had the good fortune to be born in 1929, young enough to grasp the gradual artistic freedoms brought in by the 1956 cultural thaw.

Yet he was educated in the rigid high-Stalinist style from the age of fourteen, first at the Moscow art secondary school from 1943 to 1948, then at the Repin Institute of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture from 1948 to 1952, and at the Surikov Moscow Art Institute from 1952 to 1954. He would soon be destined to welcome the stylistic opening up of the hitherto narrow interpretations of the method of Socialist Realism first advocated in 1934, whose interpretation had rigidified during the Zhdanov years.

Young artists such as he now excitedly discovered Western communist artists, including Pablo Picasso, Renato Guttuso, Fernand Léger and Diego Rivera, as well as early Soviet artists of the 1920s and early 1930s, such as Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin and

Alexander Deineka whose Socialist Realist works had embraced Modernism's expressive possibilities whilst retaining a firm commitment to accessible figuration. These were now exhibited and discussed in Soviet art magazines.



The Raftsmen, 1961, by Nikolai Andronov
(SCRSS Library)

Andronov's famous monumental painting is titled *The Raftsmen* in Soviet English-language publications for Western readers. This surprised me since one of the four figures who stands centre left is a decidedly resolute, active woman. Arms akimbo with legs apart, she brooks no argument as she expresses pride in the loggers' dangerous work. The Russian title is more accurately translated as the gender neutral 'The Loggers'.

Measuring 210 x 275 centimetres, the painting is on the grand scale of Soviet monumental art, with the figures reaching almost its entire height so that they are larger than life size. But the compressed spatial recession, cubist-expressionist simplifications of forms and the geometric composition, consisting of three broad longitudinal bands formed by the raft, the river and the overhead railway line, which are crossed by the four upright figures and the bridge's pillar, were bold, courageous challenges to the dominant Soviet aesthetic. As were the asymmetrical composition, visible brush strokes and vivid, sometimes unmixed, colours. Andronov may well have been influenced by the flat pattern-making of the textile artists and students at the

Moscow Textile Institute where he taught from 1956 to 1958.

In 1961 many artists and critics still clung to the 1940s and 1950s Zhdanovian interpretations of Socialist Realism. Technically proficient, it followed the nineteenth-century French Beaux-Arts principles of perspective and tonal organisation, and its figures were illusionistic but idealised in accord with the smiling stereotypes of contemporary Soviet mass media. A few young artists, including Andronov, rebelled against its insipid insincerity, timidity and literalness, terming it 'sweet Socialist Realism'. They reinvigorated Socialist Realism with works that reflected the complex realities of Soviet life and in styles which were of their own century.

Termed the 'Severe Style', their figures were neither idealised nor did they grin inanely. Andronov was one of its pioneers. To many Soviet eyes, unused to Modernist distortions and implications, their works were incomprehensible and / or outrageous. As late as 1978, a book by LS Zinger et al about Soviet portraiture referred to Andronov's series of genre self-portraits "as sometimes close to the grotesque".

Nevertheless, *The Raftsmen's* content conformed with Socialist Realist theory, it sought to inspire workers with partisan, optimistic portrayals of Soviet life in its revolutionary development. The figures may not grin inanely, but when do workers engaged in heavy physical work do this? The figures are portrayed as heroic: strong, skilled and united in their co-operative endeavour, they are making a positive contribution to building Soviet society.

Andronov was not alone in challenging Zhdanovian aesthetics. Viktor Yefimovich Popkov's *The Builders of Bratsk*, 1960–1, Mikhail Andreyevich Savitsky's *Bread*, 1962, and Tair Teimur-ogly Salakhov's *Portrait of the Composer Kara Karayev*, 1960, share similar outlooks, among others. They made courageous departures from the realist norm, the better to truthfully express feelings and ideas. In the early 1960s they

were a minority among Soviet artists and to most of the public their works would have appeared as outrageous travesties of their expectations of art.

Strangely, although *The Raftsmen* is reproduced in Western and Soviet books about Soviet art, other works by Andronov or more information about him are hard to come by. Short summaries about him in Soviet sources state that he was better known for his landscapes of the 1960s and 1970s, such as *Night in Soligalich* (no date given), and sharply analytical self-portraits. And that he collaborated with AV Vasnetsov on a monumental mosaic inside the newspaper *Izvestiya*'s new building in Moscow in 1977, which won the USSR State Prize in 1979. Yet he was an Honoured Artist of the RSFSR (1978), and exhibited *The Raftsmen* in several Moscow group exhibitions and even in Paris in 1967–8. His works deserve to be better known as powerful correctives to the still prevalent assumption that Soviet art of his era consisted merely of 'sweet Socialist Realism'.

Christine Lindey is an art historian with a special interest in Soviet and Socialist art. She has taught art history at Birkbeck College, University of London, and at the University of the Arts, London. Her latest book 'Art for All: British Socially Committed Art from the 1930s to the Cold War' (2018) is published by Artery Publications.

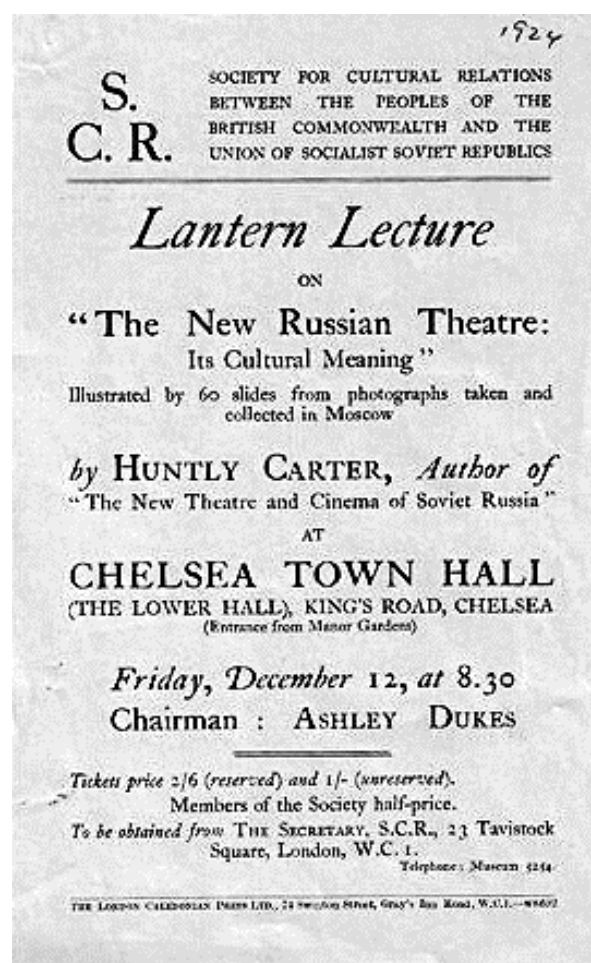
Feature

Huntly Carter and the 'New Spirit' in Soviet Theatre

By Jean Turner and Diana Turner

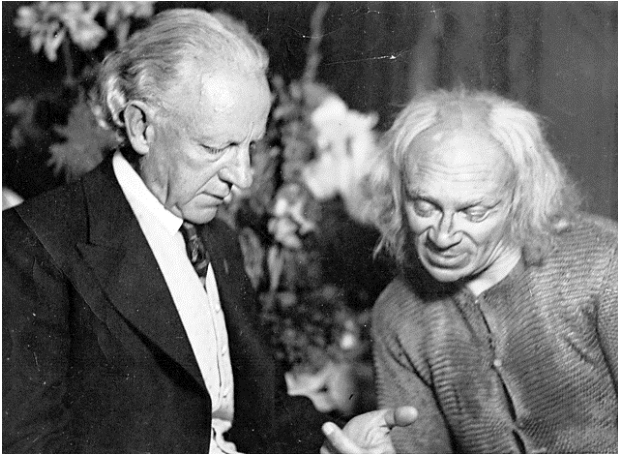
Huntly Carter was a British theatre critic, journalist and lecturer who travelled extensively in the USSR in the 1920s–30s. A passionate believer in the transformative role of theatre in society, he was struck by the 'new spirit' that developed in Russian

theatre after the October Revolution. He became strongly sympathetic to the Soviet project that had enabled such a cultural transformation. In the UK, Carter was an energetic advocate of the Soviet avant-garde theatre, presenting it as a template for a similar revolution in the British theatre. In her book *Russomania*, Rebecca Beasley states: "[I]t is Carter's career that one should study to witness the most committed, thoroughgoing attempt to educate British readers and audiences about the innovations of the Russian stage, and to connect its ideas to British modernism..."¹



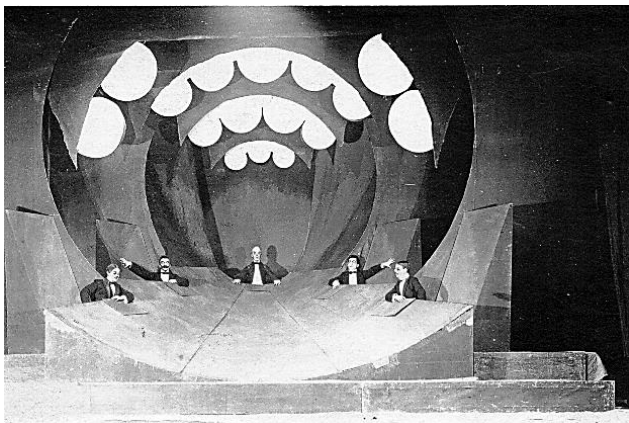
SCR flier for Carter's lantern lecture on *The New Russian Theatre*, organised by the Society on 12 December 1924 (SCRSS Archive)

Carter was a founding member of the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR – or SCR (the original name of our Society). The SCRSS Photo Library includes the Huntly Carter Collection, a photographic archive of the new Soviet theatre, collected by Carter and given to the SCR on his death.



Carter (left) with Solomon Mikhoels, actor and artistic director of the Moscow State Jewish Theatre, 1935 (SCRSS Huntly Carter Collection)

Carter was born some time in the 1860s. His early life is obscure but he turned to journalism, lecturing and travel around 1909. Carter's interest in avant-garde Russian theatre pre-dates the Revolution: his 1913 book *The New Spirit in Drama and Art* includes a chapter on Moscow, alongside twelve other European cities, all visited in 1911. However, during the 1920s–30s he travelled regularly to the USSR, meeting the leading theatre directors, actors and designers of the day, attending the annual theatre festivals, and collecting photographic and documentary material. Beasley's best guess is that he visited at least seven times after 1911.² His financial sponsor for these visits was Joseph King, a British politician sympathetic to the USSR.



Proletkult production of Valerian Pletnev's *Lena*, 1921 (SCRSS Huntly Carter Collection)

Carter's correspondence, held in the Huntly Carter Papers archive at the University of Notre Dame in the USA³, shows that he was

constantly exchanging letters with Soviet theatre practitioners, individual theatres and cultural institutions. He also amassed a huge collection of theatrical ephemera, alongside photographs. This all became the source material for Carter's prolific output as a writer and lecturer. His articles appeared in a range of periodicals, while he also gave regular illustrated lectures. The SCR's second event, following its foundation in July 1924, was a lantern lecture by Carter on *The New Russian Theatre: Its Cultural Meaning*, held at Chelsea Town Hall on 12 December 1924.⁴



Proletkult production of Ostrovsky's *Enough Stupidity in Every Wise Man*, recreated as a revue by playwright Sergei Tretyakov and designed by Sergei Eisenstein, 1920s (SCRSS Huntly Carter Collection)

Carter's travels to Soviet Russia in the 1920s resulted in two key books: *The New Theatre and Cinema of Soviet Russia* (Chapman & Dodd Ltd, 1924) and *The New Spirit in the Russian Theatre* (Brentano's Ltd, 1929). The SCRSS Library has copies of both. Shortly after the October Revolution all theatres were nationalised and brought under the direction of the People's Commissar for Education, Anatoly Lunacharsky. A policy of 'proletarianisation'

was introduced, together with the establishment of new theatres. Carter's books provide an exciting sense of the revolutionary spirit of that time, when every form of new and experimental theatre was springing up.



Meyerhold Theatre production of Soukhovo-Kobylin's *The Death of Tarelkin*, designed by Varvara Stepanova, 1922 (SCRSS Huntly Carter Collection)

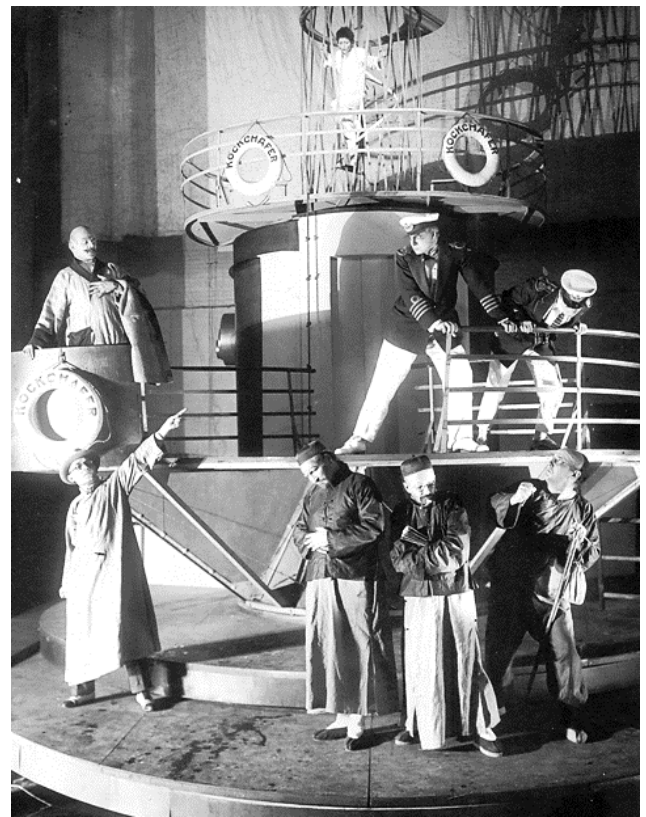
They record his meetings with actors, directors and designers, some of whom would later become victims of the purges. Carter met what he called the 'Theatrical Trinity of the Revolution' – Vsevolod Meyerhold, Lunacharsky and Konstantin Stanislavsky – and he gives a fascinating insight into their work and personalities.



Meyerhold Theatre production of Vladimir Mayakovsky's *The Bed Bug*, 1929 (SCRSS Huntly Carter Collection)

Carter revered Meyerhold for his revolutionary approach to theatre and described him as "the most daring, influential and original of the Russian theatre directors". As a Communist, Meyerhold believed that the actor should

understand his place in the class struggle, while the spectator should also be roused to action. Of Lunacharsky, Carter wrote: "The aristocratic head, with its strong contour, lofty brow, restless but attractive eyes... were just the things one looked for in a cultural minister. Added to them was a touch of the labour leader – a general air of being one of a class on behalf of whose culture he was fighting." In contrast, Carter felt that Stanislavsky was clinging to an outmoded form of theatre, with stage sets reminiscent of a furniture showroom: "To me he looked very much like an anachronism, if I may use the term without offence."



Meyerhold Theatre production of Sergei Tretyakov's *Roar, China!*, 1929 (SCRSS Huntly Carter Collection)

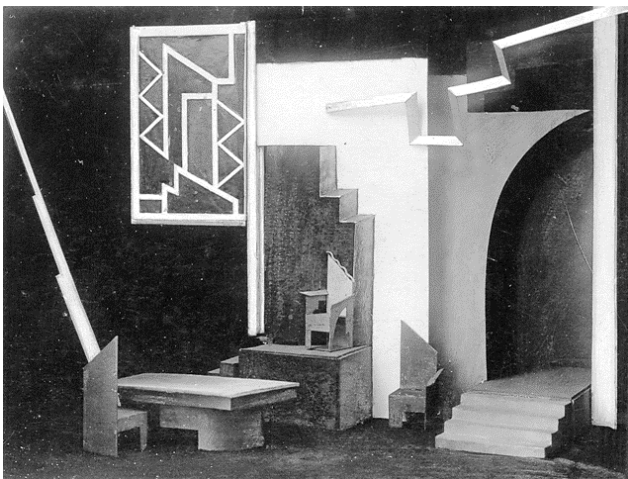
Carter also describes in detail the theatrical productions he saw, and defines different stages and approaches in the development of the new Soviet theatre from 1917 to 1928. He divides the Soviet theatre into three 'political' groups: Left, Centre and Right. The *Left* fully supported the Revolution, was uncompromising in its rejection of the old order and sought to create a radical theatre for the working class. It was dominated by Meyerhold and included the Proletkult, workers', peasants'

and students' clubs, open-air, mass and street theatres.



Moscow State Jewish Theatre production of *200,000*, 1923 (SCRSS Huntly Carter Collection)

The *Centre* also rejected the old order, but saw theatre as an instrument of cultural education, and preferred continuity and gradual change. It was dominated by Lunacharsky and included the state academic theatres in Moscow and Petrograd under his control, and state-subsidised progressive theatres such as the Kamerny (under Alexander Tairov) and the Moscow State Jewish Theatre (under Alexis Granovsky).



Moscow State Jewish Theatre production of Gutzkow's *Uriel Acosta*, set design by Nathan Altman, 1922 (SCRSS Huntly Carter Collection)

The *Right* was dominated by Stanislavsky of the Moscow Art Theatre, and included the old bourgeois theatres and cabarets that revived under the New Economic Policy (NEP).

Carter later revisited this analysis. In an article⁵ published in 1938, he described a new three-step development from 1917 to 1937.



Kamerny Theatre production of Treadwell's *Machinal*, directed by Alexander Tairov and designed by Vadim Ryndin, 1933 (SCRSS Huntly Carter Collection)

The first period 1917–22 he now defined as the *Left Bloc*, when the theatre was nationalised and democratised. The second period 1922–28 he defined as the *Right Bloc* and threw in all the theatres previously designated as Centre or Right, including, paradoxically, Meyerhold. This was the time of NEP when intellectuals fell back on “worn-out theatrical systems”, rather than “the creation of a new system capable of conferring theatrical power on millions of citizens”. The third period 1928–37 he defined as the *Stalin United Russia Bloc* under the first two Five-Year Plans. Alongside the drive for industrialisation and collectivisation, the Government adopted a new cultural policy that encompassed all the arts and ushered in Socialist Realism. In the theatre, Carter welcomed this as the return of the radical Left Bloc. However, it spelled the defeat of the Right Bloc, whose directors had to admit their “sins” and recognise “the soviet purposefulness of the theatre”.

In 1938, four years before his death, Carter summarised his view of the Soviet theatre as follows: "First-hand enquiry has shown [me] that the Russian theatre has changed from the bottom, not the top, that the natural expression which springs from the folk (now called the people) is the medium by which it is being recreated and restored wholly to its rightful owners, the people, that the policy of the Government, and the people's real dramatic and aesthetic power and energy have given it a true democratic form and function. In short, that the change has been from an aristocratic theatre for the privileged few to a democratic theatre for the entire community of 170,000,000."⁶ Carter retained an unwavering faith in the USSR, the country that had enabled such a radical transformation of the theatre.



Kamerny Theatre production of Leonid Pervomaisky's *The Unknown Soldiers*, designed by Vadim Ryndin, 1932 (SCRSS Huntly Carter Collection)

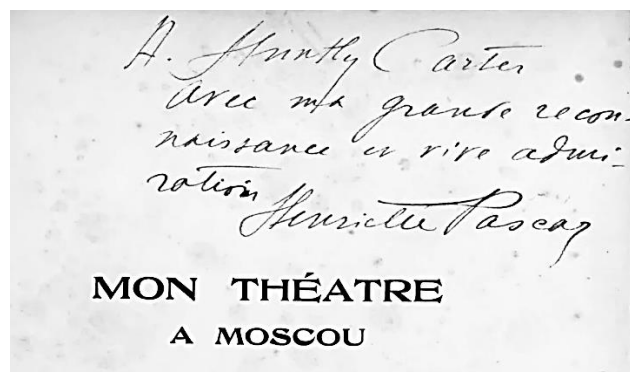
Carter died on 29 March 1942. His death was reported in that year's SCR's Annual Report: "Mr Huntly Carter, one of the Society's oldest members, and an authority on the Soviet theatre, died during the year. His executor, Joseph King, added to his previous kindnesses by giving the Society Mr Carter's valuable collection of material on this subject."⁷ This bequest forms the Huntly Carter Collection in the SCRSS Photo Library and consists of around 360 artefacts. Just over 300 of them are theatre related: theatrical production stills (the majority), photo-portraits of leading figures in the Soviet theatre (some autographed), and snapshots of Carter with Soviet actors

and directors, many taken during his visit to the Moscow Theatre Festival in 1935.



Carter (left, facing the camera on the opposite side of the table) at the Moscow Theatre Festival farewell banquet, 1935 (SCRSS Huntly Carter Collection)

The production stills cover a wide range of theatres in Moscow and Leningrad, including the Alexandrinsky, Bolshoi, Kamerny, Maly, Mariinsky, Meyerhold, Moscow Arts, Moscow Revolutionary, Moscow State Jewish, Proletkult, State Children's and Trade Union theatres.



Dedication to Carter by Henriette Pascaz, Director of the State Children's Theatre, on the title page of her book *Mon Théâtre à Moscou*, 1935 (SCRSS Archive)

Two thirds of the stills are from the 1920s, the rest from the 1930s. They include many well-known productions, among others Meyerhold's *The Magnificent Cuckold* (1922), *The Mandate* (1925) and *The Bed Bug* (1929); Tairov's *Machinal* and *Optimistic Tragedy* (1933) for the Kamerny Theatre; Granovsky's *Uriel Acosta* and *The Witch* (1922) for the Moscow State Jewish Theatre; Sergei Eisenstein's *Enough Stupidity in Every Wise Man* (1923) and Valerian Pletnev's *Lena* (1921), both for the

Proletkult Theatre. The collection also contains about sixty non-theatre items, mainly snapshots by Carter of street scenes and new architecture in Soviet Russia.

What is unclear is how Huntly Carter's Soviet theatre archive became split between the SCR / SCRSS and the University of Notre Dame. The SCRSS collection is predominantly photographs. Notre Dame has Carter's correspondence, research material and theatrical ephemera, but it includes some snapshots and seven sets of Kamerny Theatre production stills from the 1920s that do not appear to overlap with ours. A name mentioned in both archives is Carter's patron (and executor) Joseph King. King died in 1943, one year after Carter. The SCR's Annual Report for that year noted his death, referring to him as an "old and valued supporter of the Society".⁸ If King had intended the SCR to receive more of Carter's Soviet theatre material (for example, the entire collection of photographs), it is possible that its transfer had not been completed at the time of his death and became part of his own estate.

The SCRSS's Huntly Carter collection is fully digitised, but not yet catalogued online. The Society is currently reviewing our existing caption list against the artefacts and seeking to fill any gaps. In due course we intend to make this available on the SCRSS's online library catalogue.

Footnotes

1 Beasley R, *Russomania: Russian Culture and the Creation of British Modernism, 1881–1922*, Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 229. For Huntly Carter coverage, see pp. 228–238 of 'Interchapter 2: "The New Spirit" in Theatre'.

2 Ibid., p. 230. Rebecca Beasley estimates the dates as 1920, 1922, 1923, 1926, 1934, 1935 and 1936.

3 Huntly Carter Papers (Collection Identifier: MSE/MN 5000), Hesburgh Libraries, The University of Notre Dame Rare Books & Special Collections, URL: <https://archivesspace.library.nd.edu/repositories/3/resources/1399>

4 *First Annual Report of SCR 1924–25*, p. 6, SCRSS Archive

5 Carter H, 'The Contemporary Russian Theatre, 1917–1937' in *The Contemporary Review*, Vol. 154, 1938, pp. 205–211

6 Ibid., p. 205

7 *Annual Report of SCR 1941–42*, p. 3, SCRSS Archive

8 *Annual Report of SCR 1942–43*, p. 4, SCRSS Archive

This article is based on a talk about the Huntly Carter Collection given to the SCRSS by Jean Turner, then SCRSS Honorary Secretary, in 2005, with additional new research in the SCRSS Archive by Diana Turner.

Book Reviews

Sergei Tretyakov: A Revolutionary Writer in Stalin's Russia

By Robert Leach (Glagoslav Publications, 2021, ISBN: 978-1-914337-17-8, Pbk, 282pp, €19.99; ISBN: 9781914337192, e-book, £6.19)

Robert Leach's biography asserts the revolutionary socialist Soviet writer, dramatist and polymath Sergei Tretyakov (1892–1937) as a major artist in extraordinary times. Helped by Tretyakov's daughter's memoirs, the author's experience as a theatre director and extensive knowledge of Tretyakov's works, Leach portrays Tretyakov as a thoughtful and passionate pioneer of socialism as the cultural and social development of humanity.

Born in Russian Imperial Latvia to a Russian father and German mother, Tretyakov is a creative and talented artist from youth. Entering the gymnasium during the 1905 Revolution, Tretyakov's idyllic childhood incorporates the development of soviets and peasants' and workers' uprisings against the German nobility and tsarist state throughout Latvia.

Moving to 'Silver Age' Moscow in 1913, Tretyakov writes Futurist poetry, composes

with Alexander Vertinsky, and supports the Socialist-Revolutionaries. The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution puts Tretyakov into contact with literary Bolsheviks in Vladivostok. As the Civil War transforms into a war against Japanese occupation, Tretyakov's patriotic verses transform into Bolshevik verses for communist internationalism.

Tretyakov's return to Moscow's avant-garde during the period of the New Economic Policy embraces meetings with Lunacharsky, membership of Proletkult's Central Committee, *LEF's* editorial board and the VKhUTEMAS. This Moscow is theatre-obsessed, re-enacting revolutionary tribunals, reinterpreting nineteenth-century classics and staging the latest avant-garde plays, sponsored by and in dialogue with, but enjoying considerable ideological decentralisation from, its ruling Communist Party. Through his development of Meyerhold's 'biomechanics' and 'de-psychologisation', and reinterpretation of Martinet's *La Nuit* (as *Zemlya dybom*, 1923, dedicated to Trotsky), Tretyakov's theatrical career explodes. Combining farce, satire and tragedy, involving live animals, motor vehicles and audience participation, one performance inspires a speech from Trotsky. Another play meets an armed stage invader. Tretyakov develops 'Expressive Acting' (incorporating acrobatics, athletics and boxing) with Eisenstein, who produces Tretyakov's *Gas Masks* (1924), about a gas factory explosion, in a putrefying real gasworks. An 1868 play by Ostrovsky is reimaged as anti-fascist, incorporating acrobatics and short film. As photography and cinema develop, Tretyakov excels within these media, writing critically-acclaimed scripts for Chiaureli, Kalatozov and Ivens.

A period teaching in China results in Tretyakov's internationally-performed play *Roar, China!* (1926), several prose works, including *Chzhungo* (1927) and the 'bio-interview' of a Chinese communist, *Den Shikhua* (1930), and the dream – with Eisenstein – of producing a 'China' film trilogy. A period volunteering at the 'Communist Lighthouse' *kolkhoz* in

Stavropol and investigating collectivisation in Tuva produces *The Challenge: Collective Farm Sketches, To Tannu-Tuva* (1930–31) and *A Month in the Country: Operative Essays* (1931). He writes a book of portraits of Soviet artistic refugees from Nazism and translates Brecht into Russian. When Paul Robeson visits, he stays with the Tretyakovs. Tretyakov's last work, *A Country at the Crossroads* (1937), concerns Czechoslovakia.

Leach's portrayal of the monolithic adoption of Socialist Realism under Stalin is familiar but interesting for its depiction of Tretyakov's constructive theoretical appreciation of it, as he tries to develop a dialectical materialist artistic praxis, inviting Benjamin's praise and Lukács's condemnation. A series of unfortunate events, however, including the prohibition of Tretyakov's provocative play about class, family, gender, reproductive and sexual politics, *I Want a Baby* (1926), Mayakovsky's suicide in 1930, and the repression of intellectuals in the Great Purges (1936–38), seem to culminate in Tretyakov's gradual breakdown and final tragic arrest in 1937, accused of spying for Japan.

Leach's work is strongest when analysing Tretyakov's texts and describing the wider artistic, cultural and social contexts within which Tretyakov operated. Although occasionally chronologically disorienting, Leach's thematic digressions and anecdotes are well illustrated and researched. The text's overall effect is atmospheric, compelling and informative. Leach's useful translations of extracts from Tretyakov's works make us want to read more. Fortunately, we already have Robert Leach's translations with Stephen Holland of Tretyakov's plays (*I Want a Baby and Other Plays*, Glagoslav, 2019), but it remains a gross injustice that so many of Tretyakov's works remain out of print. Leach's biography is a welcome addition to the literature of neglected Soviet artists and the revolutionary potential of socialist art.

Andrew George

Eurasia Without Borders: The Dream of a Leftist Literary Commons 1919–1943
By Katerina Clark (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021, ISBN: 9780674261105, Hbk, 448pp, £39.95)

This volume provides an exciting discussion of efforts to find literary languages to serve all revolutionary movements – launched, pursued, amended and developed by the Communist International (Comintern) from 1919 onwards.

Its insights are founded on a wealth of research into the work of scholars' groups, associations and movements in the countries and languages across all of Eurasia. It tackles efforts to overcome the domination of writings of colonialists and Eurocentric interpretations of empires across the world, going much deeper than the stabs of defining Eurocentrism taken in the 1960s and 1990s among social scientists who took the works of Franz Fanon and Edward Said as their starting point.

Professor Clark's volume is distinguished from many other literary-sociological works for showing the huge political breadth of novelists, poets, playwrights, film makers and essayists who were drawn into the Comintern and its offshoots' venture, which lasted up until the Second World War. She also hints at a legacy that some readers will find still extant. The participants in this massive literary endeavour might be called field workers – in the sense of their being more than observers and commentators on events, but actual participants in driving forward the events they wrote about in order to promote enthusiasm for mass revolutionary and national liberation struggles.

The names of the greats mingle with secondary authors – from those somewhat known to those more widely acclaimed, taking in others largely or wholly lost to today's public eye. The many centres around which writers aggregated in this grand scheme spread right across Soviet Russia, Afghanistan, India, Turkey, Japan, Korea, Britain and China. The volume thoroughly covers their ups and downs within the international revolutionary

movement. The dynamics of history are shown through the millions of participants involved in politics, literature and class struggles. The works of Vladimir Mayakovsky, WH Auden, Nazim Hikmet, Ralph Fox, André Malraux and Joseph Conrad are integrated into the tale. Conferences promoted by the literary centres of the Comintern were also organised across Eurasia, from China to Paris. They drew in wider and wider adherents to the struggles for socialism, promoting discussion and debate on finding the 'correct' literary styles.

It was believed possible and essential to identify areas and states that, despite their different histories, were all founded on class struggles. These had the potential for providing feeders into the creation of a world socialist and progressive literature.

The process demanded rejection of the dominant Western, colonialist-based Eurocentrism that placed Greco-Roman-Sanskrit roots at the top of a hierarchically arranged pyramid of world cultures. Examples to challenge this hierarchy are given from Afghanistan, India, the Dravidians, China, Korea, Japan and other areas, and are fully discussed.

Mick Costello

The Soviet Passport
By Albert Baiburin (translated by Stephen Dalziel, Polity Press, 2021, ISBN: 978-1-5095-4318-2, Hbk, 451pp, £35.00, Foreword by Catriona Kelly, endnotes, bibliographies, subject & name index, col & b/w illustrations)

This substantial volume is half-book, half-encyclopaedia. The author is a professor of anthropology at the European University in St Petersburg and his book is an absolute mine of information for the study of Soviet-Russian society. In his substantial introduction the author puts forward his view as an anthropologist that, in Russia, a passport validates a person's existence as an appropriate and trustworthy person. This explains why the award of a Soviet passport to a young person at age 14 (previously 16)

was treated with such ceremony, and the removal of the passport from prisoners was considered part of the punishment. Hidden behind this was an obsession with bureaucratic control and manipulation, and behind that – a system of hidden official law.

The work is divided into three parts. Part One, 'History of the Soviet Passport System', describes how the *pashport* of Peter the Great's era evolved over time. It includes a compact history of how 'travel papers' evolved into a modern-style (but internal) passport in Imperial Russia, whose most sophisticated version appeared in 1906. I strongly recommend this chapter (pages 23–43) as it contains much information that not many people will know. Traditionally, Russians had *two* first names: a baptismal name and a secular name (which was more important). Surnames only became obligatory in 1888, but ten years later only a quarter of the population had one. The new (internal) passports contained a lot more information than modern British passports and were intended for men (although information about wives and children was requested).

Chapter Two ('Fifteen Passport-less Years') starts at the point where Lenin, in London in 1903, passionately attacked the tsarist passport in the name of class equality. In 1917, a period of chaos Russia had never known before, internal passports were abolished. The reaction was that many organisations started to issue their own certificates for 'working elements'. Later a system of 'employment books' (*trudovye knizhki*) was set up as a substitute, but initially these were issued only to 'non-working elements'. The thought behind this was that non-working people needed to be kept under surveillance, whereas the proletariat could be trusted. Part One continues this level of detailed narrative for a total of four chapters. It ends at the transition from the Soviet to the Russian state, with the abolition of the *propiska* ('residence permit') and the removal of the point about ethnic origin. The fine detail about the development of this legislation is absorbing and revealing, and it is useful to have a coherent narrative.

In Part Two, 'The Passport as a Bureaucratic Device', Baiburin examines the passport template, and problems around the issue of the document. There is also a chapter on the *propiska*.

In Part Three, 'What the Passport Was in Practice', we get the truth. Getting a passport; and life with – and without – the passport. Here the actual practical problems experienced by people over the years are re-told in detail, taken from documents and memoirs, in a section 130 pages long. As usual, the apparent severity of the system is subverted by practically minded Russians bending the rules out of kindness, for convenience, or out of sheer indifference. There are also accounts of the displays of petty tyranny that occurred from time to time.

Unfortunately, space does not allow a longer review, but this book will be available on loan from the SCRSS Loan Library not long after the publication of the SCRSS *Digest*.

Andrew Jameson

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