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‘Comrade Doris’: Lessing’s correspondence with the Foreign Commission of the Board of Soviet Writers in the 1950s

From the cracked and humming screen of a hand-winding microfilm reader in suburban Moscow emerged slowly the names and correspondence of several British writers. Some of the names I had hoped to find, others were completely new to me, and one I knew well enough but had never dreamt of finding here. Doris Lessing’s signature struck like lightning from the reels of reports on the state of ‘progressive’ literature in the West.¹ Undisturbed for many years, the letters of Lessing in the ‘Archive of the Muses’, RGALI, form part of a rich exchange of correspondence between several English and Scottish writers and the Foreign Commission of the Soviet Writers’ Union at 52 Vorovsky Street, Moscow. Many of these letters are in English, although, as we shall see, a few of Lessing’s letters to the superstar Soviet writer, Boris Polevoy, which show her increasing disillusionment with the Soviet Union, appear to exist only in a contemporary Russian translation with no surviving originals.²

I was surprised to find Lessing in this archive mainly because I was looking for something else, but also because her relationship with the Soviet Union has been rationalised and perhaps even rendered down to a regrettable blip on the timeline of an illustrious career. This article attempts to assess that relationship as it was then, to whatever degree this is possible, by drawing on contemporary letters found in the archive and comparing them with her retrospective autobiographical writing and interviews. It does not attempt to examine her shifting political allegiances as witnessed in her fictional writing.³ It was in the Southern Rhodesian capital city of Salisbury—now Zimbabwean Harare—where she lived from 1937 to 1949 that Lessing enthusiastically engaged with the communist ideas spreading across Europe in defiance of the rising fascism on the continent.⁴

Her participation in the communist group made up of left-leaning colonials and European refugees taught her the language of communism, which she later felt facilitated her acceptance into the literary and leftist circles in which she moved on arrival in London in 1949.⁵ Although she had carried out several of the expected duties of a British communist writer more or less as soon as she arrived, for example leafleting for the ill-fated Sheffield Conference of 1950,⁶ she became a card-carrying member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) only in 1952.

It was not long, however, before she began to disentangle herself from the Party and its activities. This happened between 1956 and 1957. Lessing lived to become a vocal anticommunist, who would look back on her decision to join the Party as ‘probably the most neurotic act of my life’.⁷ The reasons for her disillusionment and departure from the Party were complex. Lessing’s own mercurial reflections serve to obscure as much as illuminate the experience of those years of occasionally zealous, if wavering, Soviet sympathies. The small exchange of letters kept in Moscow provides a contemporary and personal perspective, and one which contrasts a good deal with the critical consensus derived from her retrospective autobiographical writing and interviews on the subject. The letters also help to contextualise her autobiographical writing of that time, which reveals the personal struggle of a utopian socialist caught up in the impossible polarisation of the Cold War. In *Going Home* (1957), for example, written a year after she left the CPGB, we witness her disillusionment with the Soviet regime voiced in the same breath as her identification as a committed communist:

I believe that in a decade the Communist countries of the world will be freer, more democratic (in the political, as well as the economic sense of these words) than the Western World, which is rapidly becoming less free, less democratic. If I did not think this I would not remain a Communist. Too many people have been prepared to die for liberty and freedom in the last five hundred years for these words to become mere symbols of an outdated economic system.⁸

By 1986, however, Lessing had long abandoned her belief in the communist capacity for democracy. She saw communism now as ‘not only one of the bloodiest tyrannies ever, but also so inefficient that any type of régime, no matter how bad, is preferred to it’.⁹ That said, she also believed that the ‘ancient dream of justice for everybody’ out of which communism was born should not be rejected simply because communism had become ‘equated with barbarism, inefficiency and tyranny’.¹⁰ From the

historicising vantage point of the newly post-Soviet epoch, Lessing rationalised her former pro-Soviet stance by explaining that she had in the 1950s believed that:

the leadership of the Soviet Union had become corrupt but that waiting everywhere in the communist world were the good communists, keeping their counsel, and they would at the right time take power, and then communism would resume its march to the just society, the perfect society. There was just one little thing: I didn't realize Uncle Joe had murdered them all.¹¹

Lessing and the *Inkomissiya*

To dismiss Lessing's early commitment to the international communist cause as youthful naivety risks misunderstanding and undervaluing her political convictions. But it also risks underestimating the energy of debate and spirit of solidarity among the community of opinionated and creative individuals who engaged, to various degrees and depths, with the activities of the CPGB and the Union of Soviet Writers. It was quite possible and even relatively common to feel utter despair in 'the Party' (i.e., the CPGB) while also maintaining strong personal and creative ties with other Soviet and non-Soviet communists abroad.¹² Communism's internationalism and irreverence for tradition was attractive to a great many artists, musicians and writers on the left. Lessing's later anticommunism has meant that she has been to some extent co-opted into the Cold War narrative which supports the inevitability of the capitalist status quo.¹³

After World War 2, the victorious but depleted Soviet Union sought to mend ties with the West. The Nazi-Soviet pact had been the final straw for many formerly pro-Soviet British intellectuals. Those who did not become disillusioned at this time were crucial for Soviet attempts to reestablish relations with the West at the height of the Cold War.¹⁴ Ludmilla Stern, whose provocative *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union 1920–1940* investigates the mechanism of how Western intellectuals were seduced and manipulated to believe in the 'Soviet myth', paints a picture of deceptive Soviet officials leading flattered Western authors by the nose. She shows how the Foreign Commission of the Board of the Union of Soviet Writers (*Inostrannaya Komissiya Praveniya Soyuzu Sovetskikh Pisateley*, or *Inkomissiya*) was forged from its various predecessor organisations and illuminates the darker recesses of Soviet cultural policy. The Foreign Commission's work in

winning the support of Western intellectuals reached down deeper than the Potempkinesque curation of Soviet achievements.¹⁵ However disingenuous, there was little that was superficial about the rapport built up between Western leftists and the Union of Soviet Writers.

One particularly uncomfortable assertion Stern makes is that the Western intellectuals were not as 'idealistic' and 'disinterested' as she feels is commonly perceived. 'Many sympathizers', she states, 'tended to publicize only the positive information while overlooking or suppressing the negative. Some simply lied.'¹⁶ In a letter to her Soviet friend – but not in her published writing – Lessing admits as much, as we shall see below. The selective reporting of Soviet achievements by Western communists and Soviet sympathisers was entirely deliberate. They refused to fuel an already raging inferno of anti-Soviet sentiment, which would surely derail social progress, towards the actual realisation of socialism. The virulent anticommunist sentiment in the West, stoked by the capitalist media, antagonised and radicalised even the more moderate left. Competing world views were thus hopelessly caricatured through obstinate polarisation.

The Foreign Commission was the organisation through which access was granted to the 'parallel literary universe' that was the Soviet Union.¹⁷ It was also the platform through which leftist Western intellectuals were encouraged to publicise the achievements of the Soviet Union and to report back on various cultural figures or events in their home countries. Founded in 1936 when Soviet relations with the West were at their best,¹⁸ the Foreign Commission acted along similar lines to its predecessor organisations MORP (International Association of Revolutionary Writers) and VOKS (All-Union Society for Cultural Relations). It handled foreign writers' translations and publications in the Soviet Union, sent Soviet materials to foreign writers and took care of their requests for assistance'.¹⁹ As Michael David-Fox explains, the 'day-to-day operations were run by its vice chairman, the capable VOKS and MORP veteran Mikhail Apletin.'²⁰ In the beginning, however, there were four writers at the top, Tretyakov, Koltsov, Dinamov and Apletin. Only Apletin survived the purges.

By the 1950s, Apletin was still in control, but he had been joined by the poet and war hero, Alexei Surkov (1899–1983) who was the editor of the Commission's journal, *International Literature*, and then the magazine *Ogonëk*, which in 1957 had a circulation of 850,000.²¹ The Foreign Commission's English interpreter was Oksana Krugerskaya. She was the main point of contact with the majority of British and Australian leftist writers from the 1940s to around 1971, at which time she left the Foreign Commission and seemed to vanish. Krugerskaya was

clearly someone who left an impression. Ewan MacColl and Jean Newlove dubbed her 'Miss Sputnik', because she 'whizz[ed] around Moscow sending signals to visiting literary types'.²² She formed close bonds with numerous writers, provided not-always-welcome critical feedback on their work and sometimes collaborated with them on translation projects.²³ Lessing referred to Krugerskaya as a 'beautiful Georgian girl' but also portrayed her as a 'Soviet nanny-shrew' when she witnessed her berating a seriously wounded drunk knocked over by their car.²⁴ Oksana was also less generously described by the Australian author Patrick White when he likened her to a 'big black velvet spider'.²⁵ Many writers found her obstructive, a Stalinist chaperone who prevented real discussion between authors. Naomi Mitchison was rude about her 'hideous' dresses, and Douglas Young delighted to catch her out mistranslating when Soviet reality shone a little too brightly through the facade.²⁶

AWPA Delegation, 1952

The Foreign Commission had rapport building and cultural exchange with foreign writers down to a fine art.²⁷ They kept in touch with Western writers predominantly by extensive letter writing, but after the war they also organised writers' trips to and from the Soviet Union. The first group of British writers since war broke out reached Moscow in 1952. The delegation was made up of six writers: a Liberty-frocked Scottish Labourite in Naomi Mitchison; a bow-tie-clad convert to communism in A.E. Coppard; a gigantic, kilt-wearing Scots poet, classicist, and former SNP leader in Douglas Young; an English novelist and ex-military man in Richard Mason; a prominent Leeds-based Marxist literary critic in Arnold Kettle; and, of course, Doris Lessing.²⁸

This motley band was formed under the auspices of the Authors' World Peace Appeal (AWPA). Even though it was cofounded in 1951 by Mitchison and the pacifist author of *The Joy of Sex* (1972) Alex Comfort (neither of whom were communists), it was quickly populated by known Soviet sympathisers and widely considered a front organisation and part of the Soviet cultural offensive. The Appeal's original aim was to warm up relations between the Soviet Union and the West through discussion and negotiation. It was conceived as a genuinely cross-party and international alliance promoting world peace; it seems clear enough from the heavy-handed intervention of the Foreign Commission that the Soviets saw it as a valuable propaganda opportunity. Even while Mitchison continued to advocate for the Appeal, the Labour Party blacklisted it in 1953.

The trip was intense, both physically and emotionally draining for all involved. Reflecting back on it in 1998, Lessing wrote that she had ‘seldom been so torn, astonished, disappointed, alert... *alive*, as during that trip, and my memories of it are among the most vivid I have’.²⁹ The delegates felt it inappropriate to tell their hosts about the overwhelmingly hostile popular feeling of the British towards communism. The Soviets, for their part, attempted to showcase the achievements of communism, while concealing the rest. What resulted therefore was a curious confluence of concealed expectations, hidden agendas and circumspect disclosures. For the delegates, a deep feeling of camaraderie helped them maintain relatively high levels of diplomacy. And this bond lingered for some time after the delegation returned.

Mitchison, Lessing and Coppard kept up their correspondence with the Foreign Commission over the next few years. On hearing reports of Stalin’s grave illness in March 1953, Lessing wrote, that ‘it is with a deep sense of personal loss that we receive this news, just as it is with you’.³⁰ Krugerskaya later replied: ‘The death of a man whose works and teachings are immortal is a challenge to the living to carry on in the path he charted’.³¹ In 1998, Lessing described her attitude to Stalin during the 1952 delegation as ‘by that time ... less than reverential’.³² Her short story ‘The Day that Stalin Died’, published in 1957, has the dispassionate atmosphere of Bruegel’s *Fall of Icarus* (1555), revealing a quiet personal indifference amid a crescendo of ideological aporia.³³ Condolences and encomia, however, flooded into the Foreign Commission following the death of Stalin. It is hard to imagine a more embarrassed genre of literature.

After the AWPAs trip, Lessing received her CPGB card. During the trip, she had for the most part played the part of bridging the divide between the more conservatively inclined delegates – namely the Scottish Labourite Mitchison, the Scottish Nationalist Young and the former intelligence officer in the 14th army Mason, and the Soviet writers, among whom we should perhaps number Coppard, who – following the first World Peace Congress (Wroclaw, 1948) – fell in love with communism, ‘as if, Lessing tells us, ‘he had been given a potion’.³⁴ Her go-between role continued when they returned home when the reports in the British press about the trip were not to the Foreign Commission’s liking.

Mitchison, in particular, wrote relatively freely about her experience in the Soviet Union. She stressed the Soviets’ peaceful intentions but balanced her largely positive account with doses of criticism of the Soviet Union itself. Apletin was disappointed:

Perhaps N[Naomi Mitchison] has given up trying and has turned her attention to her household affairs to avoid incurring the displeasure of the leaders of the organisation [Labour Party] she has been associated with for more than two decades?³⁵

Lessing responded by telling him off:

Naomi has been on the Left Wing of the Labour Party here for her whole life. Do we expect her suddenly to become a communist? I think not. And it is the aim of the Peace Movement, is it not, to gain the support of all kinds of people, who may never be communists. Naomi came to the Soviet Union full of prejudice, and convinced that the Soviet Union was one of the war-mongers. She came away profoundly convinced that the Soviet Union desires peace. Does it matter that she continues to disagree with some aspects of life in your country? For ever since she returned from your country, she has been writing articles and addressing meetings up and down the country here, saying that the Soviet Union desires peace. [...]

And you don't know Naomi if you can suggest she retires to housework. She is the most incredibly active person. [...]

Naomi has got several articles in the Press. She was successful where the rest of us failed, because her husband is in Parliament and she is too respectable to be suspected as a Communist – which is precisely why she is so valuable, Mr Aplatén [*sic*].

Lessing also defended the publishing attempts of Mason and Young. It was their noncommunist accounts that would override anything she or Kettle could get in print. When the group returned, they found out quickly that favorable reports from the USSR would get them nowhere. Mason complained that his friends now called him a communist simply for saying that people in the Soviet Union were well fed and did not live in fear of the police.³⁶ Lessing even states plainly that her literary agents told her that critical accounts would find placement easily and would make good money, but anything pro-Soviet would not be accepted. 'And the same occurred with the BBC.'³⁷

In the face of virulent anti-Soviet prejudice, the noncommunist moderates of the delegation unexpectedly became staunch advocates of the Soviet Union. In a letter to Apletin, Lessing expands on the transformatory effect that anti-Soviet dogma had on her more 'conservative' comrades. She reports that when Mason and Young were confronted by a professor in Amsterdam who came out with all the usual

anti-Soviet criticism, they both fought hard to defend the USSR. Mason later reflected that this sort of experience is ‘enough to turn anyone into a communist’, as Lessing told Apletin.³⁸ The fierce anti-Soviet bias Mason was greeted by in Cold War Western Europe was now shocking to him. A detail such as this is valuable, since – hidden under the cloak of apparent neutrality – dominant ideology often escapes notice and slides quietly into oblivion. But to advocate for communism in 1950s Britain required a studied fearlessness and had life-changing implications.

Leaving like an Englishman³⁹

Lessing told Francois-Olivier Rousseau in a collection of interviews first published in 1996 that Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin’s crimes on 25 February 1956, ‘Wasn’t enough. It was then that I really left the Party.’ She continues: ‘My political journey wasn’t at all unique, you know. England was full of Communists in the 40s and 50s, who experienced the same deceptions.’⁴⁰ Her correspondence, however, with Boris Polevoy (1908-1981), author of the smash hit *Story of a Real Man* and later Secretary of the Writers’ Union, complicates this assessment:

I myself left it [the Party] with many hundreds of others, who devoted years of their lives working hard for the Party [...] This did not happen because we could not accept the “revelations” of the show trials and torture in your country. Many of us knew the truth long before the 20th Congress. And not because we disagree with your politics in Hungary, this was just the climax of a long chain of bad events. We left the Party because we could not bear the cynicism and disdain shown towards us by the leadership.⁴¹

In addition to her sincere devotion to socialism, and her remarkable patience and confidence in challenging her Soviet correspondents, her letters show an enormous friendliness and warmth, which extended beyond the correspondence. The relationships between writers were real. At the end of 1954 or early 1955, Boris Polevoy spent time in London with Lessing and her son Peter, and henceforth referred to him in letters as ‘Peter the Great’. He presented Lessing’s son with his first pocketknife. There existed a deep trust and mutual respect, alongside the growing scepticism, disappointment and betrayal – and I think it is important to maintain this broad nexus of emotion when we tell our history.

In the aftermath of the brutal suppression of the nationwide uprising in Hungary in October and November 1956, Polevoy and Lessing exchanged detailed and heated correspondence.⁴² The letters cited here are translations of Krugerskaya's translations of Lessing's currently lost original.⁴³ In January 1957 Lessing writes:

You insist that if it were not for your [i.e., Soviet] intervention, fascism would have reigned in Hungary. There is plenty of evidence coming from journalists who could not possibly be called reactionary that contradicts this point of view. Let me tell you about one such journalist. This man is one of the most brilliant journalists in England, who quit a very good job in the *Times*, a man who fought alongside the partisans in Italy and Tito in Yugoslavia. When he came back from war, he refused well paid posts from the papers, of which he disapproved, and preferred to earn his living working for the *New Statesman* and other low-paying progressive publications.

He was called a "capitalist spy" during [László] Rajk's trial, one of your unfair trials in Hungary. He firmly stood up for you and your country during the first cold war period, and believe me, speaking publicly in your defense was not easy then. He was fired from the *New Statesman* because of his support for communist China, before the *New Statesman* itself took this line, he continued to stand up for you despite his being considered as 'capitalist spy' by the fools in the Party, who preferred to insult people instead of thinking for themselves.

This man went to Hungary and when he came back, he for the first time publicly criticised your politics. Do you indeed want me to believe that such people, and I know many equally honest journalists of the 'capitalist press', that all these people are bribed and lost their bravery or sold out?⁴⁴

Her arguments were perhaps wasted on Polevoy in his professional capacity, but we may never know their true impact. The journalist about whom she speaks is Basil Davidson (1914–2010), who after distinguished war service in MI6, became a journalist and turned his attention in the 1950s from the too-hot topic of communism in Europe to the only marginally cooler subject of African history. Their correspondence, however, continued. Polevoy held the line as assiduously as Lessing attempted to drawn him from it. Their clash over Hungary severely tested their friendship, leading Polevoy ultimately to question her allegiance.

My dear Boris Polevoy! Of course we are on the same side. How could it be otherwise? But in spite of this, spiritually I am with Wolfgang Harich [*sentenced to 10 years for counterrevolutionary conspiracy*], who is now in jail in Germany. And I do not see a contradiction in this.⁴⁵

Although Lessing acknowledges that the CPGB was shattered in 1957 with its leadership totally discredited, she still saw hope for a communist future in the events surrounding Polish Oktober and ‘Gomułka’s thaw’.⁴⁶ She writes:

There are hundreds of thousands of communists and socialists who lost their faith, and they are now starting to regain their faith in communism because the Polish are not cynical and they trust ordinary people to see the facts.⁴⁷

In Polish communism she would soon find herself yet again disappointed. Such evidence, however, of open-eyed, mature and critical engagement with events of global socialism, and attractions to glimmers of hope for a communist future as late as March 1957, shows a more complex and prolonged disillusionment than has previously been documented. ‘There was an era,’ wrote Lessing to Polevoy, ‘When we, and it seems to me rightly, only praised you, and kept to ourselves all the bad that we might have known about your country, precisely because our statements would have been used to “fuel the cold war.”’⁴⁸ But, for Lessing, this era had now passed. She accused the Soviets of not keeping up with ideological developments in the West. As soon as the USSR had the hydrogen bomb, she thought, they could no longer play the victim and demand unquestioning support from Western comrades. ‘It was right to always praise you, when you were weak and vulnerable. But now the world has changed. No one believes the communists and “fellow travelers” when it comes to international affairs because we have lied for so long. Believe me, people are far more likely to listen to me in the future, when I talk about the Soviet Union, precisely because I signed the public protest against your politics in Hungary’.⁴⁹

Polevoy disagrees with Lessing in her assessment that the USSR only wants friends who agree with them and picture their country as a paradise ‘peopled by beings in snow-white raiment nourishing on nectar and ambrosia and strumming on harps. [...] No, our country is more like a huge construction site and we are the builders.’⁵⁰ He argues forcefully that the Soviet response saved Hungary from a return to fascism. Lessing cannot accept this as justification.

The correspondence in the archive is not complete, but the letters that do survive stand as evidence for far greater levels of political discussion and open exchange of views (however carefully managed on the Soviet side) than are commonly assumed. Just at the moment when Lessing distanced herself from the CPGB, she held out hope for a socialist future. If we are not careful, this dream (however fleeting) and the crucial role of the Soviet Union in it is obliterated by the weight of dominant capitalist ideology and reductive hindsight. Lessing at this moment in her life saw herself on the same side as Polevoy, 'how could it be otherwise?'⁵¹ even if she ultimately disagreed with his views and his country's politics:

Please believe that the devotion to socialism of people like me (and there are hundreds of thousands of us) is very sincere, and even if we are full of determination to never be silent about the things you are doing which we disapprove of, that does not mean we do not admire you and what you have done for socialism.⁵²

Notes

- 1 Many thanks are due to Goryaeva Tatyana Mikhailovna, Director of RGALI, The Russian State Archive of Literature and Arts, for granting access to the archival materials discussed, The Leverhulme Trust for funding my research project, 'Brave New Classics', <http://bravenewclassics.info> (2016–2019), and Dr Anna Trostnikova for her patient assistance in helping me interpret the Russian letters.
- 2 It is probable that Polevoy's letters to Lessing were also translated by Krugerskaya into English and therefore to some degree censored. All quotations from Lessing's letters are in English, where it is a translation from the Russian, and will be noted. Apletin's letters appear to be written by him in English.
- 3 For an account of *The Golden Notebook* as a 'socialist *bildungsroman*', see Kohlmann (2015).
- 4 Doris Lessing, *Walking in the Shade* (London: Flamingo, 1998), 22; E. Maslen, 'Lessing [née Tayler], Doris May (1919–2013), writer', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [ODNB] (Oxford: OUP, 2017, November 27).
- 5 Doris Lessing, *Walking in the Shade* (London: Flamingo, 1998), 22. Among the European refugees numbered her second husband, the German Jewish Gottfried Anton Nicholas Lessing (1914–1979); ODNB.
- 6 Doris Lessing, *Walking in the Shade* (London: Flamingo, 1998), 46. The Sheffield Conference was relocated to Warsaw because the British Government refused visas to a large swathe of the delegates; see Andrew Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda 1945–53* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004).196–199.
- 7 Doris Lessing, *Walking in the Shade* (London: Flamingo, 1998), 52.

- 8 Doris Lessing, *Going Home* (London: Harper Collins, 1957, 2009 ed.), 116.
- 9 Doris Lessing, *Prisons we choose to live inside* (London: Flamingo, 1986/1994), 76.
- 10 *ibid.*, 76.
- 11 Doris Lessing, *Walking in the Shade* (London: Flamingo, 1998), 54.
- 12 One salient example of this is the Australia-born communist poet and polymath Jack Lindsay (1900–89), who had a fractious relationship with the CPGB, whilst remaining a consistent friend and correspondent with the Foreign Commission of Soviet Writers, and of course many Soviet writers from both sides of the Iron Curtain into the 1960s and beyond. Lindsay and Lessing were friends, but she would later dismiss him as a Communist hard-liner, ‘perhaps the purest example of a good writer done in by the Party’, Doris Lessing, *Walking in the Shade* (London: Flamingo, 1998), 83. For more on Jack Lindsay, visit the website created by Anne Cranny-Francis at <https://jacklindsayproject.com>.
- 13 See Matthew Taunton, *Red Britain: The Russian Revolution in Mid-Century Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 3 on the same phenomenon with regard to Arthur Koestler and George Orwell.
- 14 For an excellent discussion of the influence of the Russian Revolution on British culture, see Matthew Taunton, *Red Britain: The Russian Revolution in Mid-Century Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), with full bibliography.
- 15 Ludmilla Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union, 1920–40: From Red Square to the Left Bank* (New York: Routledge, 2007) and Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the great experiment: cultural diplomacy and western visitors to Soviet Union, 1921–1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), esp. 43–60.
- 16 Ludmilla Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union, 1920–40: From Red Square to the Left Bank* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 4–5.
- 17 John Connor, ‘Anglo-Soviet Literary Relations in the Long 1930s’, in Benjamin Kohlmann and Matthew Taunton (eds), *A History of 1930s British Literature* (Cambridge: CUP), 318.
- 18 Ludmilla Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union, 1920–40: From Red Square to the Left Bank* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 175.
- 19 Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the great experiment: cultural diplomacy and western visitors to Soviet Union, 1921–1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 306.
- 20 *ibid.*, 306.
- 21 Ludmilla B. Turkevich, ‘Soviet Literary Periodicals’. *Books Abroad*. 32 (4): Autumn 1958, 371.
- 22 Ewan MacColl to Oksana Krugerskaya, 5 November 1957; RGALI 631.26.832.
- 23 One example of this was Jack Lindsay’s translated selection of *Russian Poetry 1917–1955*, which bears the dedication: ‘To Oksana Krugerskaia [sic] without whose help I should never have completed this collection’. Jack Lindsay, *Russian Poetry 1917–1955* (London: The Bodley Head, 1957), v.
- 24 Doris Lessing, *Walking in the Shade* (London: Flamingo, 1998), 67 and 78.
- 25 Geoffrey Dutton, *Out in the open: an autobiography* (University of Queensland Press, 1994), 328.

- 26 Doris Lessing, *Walking in the Shade* (London: Flamingo, 1998), 69–70.
- 27 Ludmilla Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union, 1920–40: From Red Square to the Left Bank* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 190–192.
- 28 Doris Lessing, *Walking in the Shade* (London: Flamingo, 1998), 58–79 for a colourful account of the trip and description of the UK delegates.
- 29 Doris Lessing, *Walking in the Shade* (London: Flamingo, 1998), 61.
- 30 Doris Lessing to Oksana Krugerskaya, 5 March 1953: RGALI 631.26.730.
- 31 Oksana Krugerskaya to Doris Lessing, n.d. April 1953: RGALI 631.26.730.
- 32 Doris Lessing, *Walking in the Shade* (London: Flamingo, 1998), 76.
- 33 Doris Lessing, 'The day that Stalin died', *The New Reasoner*, No. 2, Thompson, E. P. and Saville, J. eds, Autumn, 1957, pp. 30–39.
- 34 Doris Lessing, *Walking in the Shade* (London: Flamingo, 1998), 58.
- 35 Mikhail Apletin to Doris Lessing, 25 Feb 1953: RGALI 631.26.730.
- 36 Reported in letter from Doris Lessing to Mikhail Apletin, 3 August 1952: RGALI 631.26.706.
- 37 Doris Lessing to Mikhail Apletin 3 August 1952: RGALI 631.26.706.
- 38 Doris Lessing to Mikhail Apletin 3 August 1952: RGALI 631.26.706.
- 39 In Russia 'to leave like an Englishman' is to leave without saying goodbye.
- 40 Doris Lessing and Earl, G. Ingersoll, ed. *Putting questions differently: interviews with Doris Lessing, 1964–1994* (London: Flamingo, 1996), 152.
- 41 Doris Lessing to Boris Polevoy (21.01.1957); RGALI: 631.26.830. N.b. Translated from Russian translation into English.
- 42 For a brief introduction to the political events surrounding the Hungarian uprising see, e.g., Berman 2019 322–324. For a full account of the event and its legacy, see Paul Lendvai, *One Day That Shook the Communist World: The 1956 Hungarian Uprising and Its Legacy*. Translated by Ann Major (Princeton University Press, 2008).
- 43 RGALI: 631.26.830. N.b. It may be that the original exists in RGALI, but it did not reveal itself to me during my visits during September 2017.
- 44 Doris Lessing to Boris Polevoy (21.01.1957); RGALI: 631.26.830. N.b. Translated from Russian translation into English.
- 45 Doris Lessing to Boris Polevoy (16.03.1957); RGALI: 631.26.830. N.b. Translated from Russian translation into English.
- 46 On Gomułka's thaw see Berman 2019 358–359.
- 47 Doris Lessing to Boris Polevoy (21.01.1957); RGALI: 631.26.830. N.b. Translated from Russian translation into English.
- 48 Doris Lessing to Boris Polevoy (21 January 1957); RGALI: 631.26.830.
- 49 Doris Lessing to Boris Polevoy (21.01.1957); RGALI: 631.26.830.
- 50 Boris Polevoy to Doris Lessing (n.d. but can safely assume it is Jan or Feb, 1957); RGALI: 631.26.830.
- 51 Doris Lessing to Boris Polevoy (16.03.1957); RGALI: 631.26.830. N.b. Translated from Russian translation into English.
- 52 Doris Lessing to Boris Polevoy (21.01.1957); RGALI: 631.26.830.