

Title Mary Poppins and the Soviet Pilgrimage: P. L. Travers's *Moscow Excursion* (1934)

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In the narrative of Australians abroad in the twentieth century, the journey to Soviet Russia occupies a particular place. Although never on the standard itinerary of international tourism, the ‘socialist sixth of the world’ in the decades between the world wars became an increasingly common destination for Western intellectuals drawn by the allure of a grandiose social experiment that seemed so much in contrast to the economic depression, social strife and political unrest overshadowing their lives at home. For most of those who travelled there—and certainly for Australians no less than others—the trip itself was an ideological gesture; for many it held the promise of a visit to the future.¹

For its part, the Soviet regime was not slow to recognize the role such travellers and their testimony might play in its own strategies to influence ‘progressive’ opinion in the capitalist world. State and Party policies regarding the invitation and reception of international visitors were implemented by a number of official agencies, but from 1925 most often by a specially-constituted All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (generally referred to by its Russian acronym VOKS²). Intourist, the state travel bureau, was established in 1929 to organize and market individual and group

¹ A cliché generally attributed to the US journalist Lincoln Steffens (Steffens 1931: 79).

² The most recent and comprehensive account in English of VOKS and its activities, and indeed of this aspect of Soviet cultural diplomacy in general (a subject far beyond the scope of this essay), is to be found in David-Fox (2012). Unlike earlier studies—for example, Margulies (1968) and Hollander (1981), this draws on previously inaccessible Russian archive materials.

tourist ‘packages.’ By the mid-1930s, the ‘ideological’ Grand Tour of Russia—sometimes glibly (though not always inappropriately) designated the ‘Soviet pilgrimage’—was well under way, its participants including as well as international luminaries of the Left—such as Theodor Dreiser (1927), Henri Barbusse (1928), George Bernard Shaw (1931), Sydney and Beatrice Webb (1932) and Romain Rolland (1935)—increasing numbers of less ‘committed’ intellectuals and professionals eager to see the New Russia at first hand. Between 1929 and 1939, according to recent calculations by Sheila Fitzpatrick (2008), some sixty-four individuals made the trip from Australia: trade-unionists, academics, schoolteachers, journalists, engineers, doctors, agronomists and economists, as well as a stockbroker, a psychiatrist, a psychologist, a clergyman, a lawyer and the writers Jean Devanny and Katharine Susannah Prichard.³

When she set out on her Soviet journey in 1932, Pamela Travers, née Helen Lyndon Goff, was not yet a well-known writer and no longer a resident of Australia. Born in Maryborough in 1899, brought up in Ipswich, Allora and Bowral, and educated in Sydney, she had left her native land in 1924 to create for herself a new career and a new identity in the great imperial metropolis that was London.⁴ She was to return only once, in 1963, for a visit of only three weeks. As an ‘Australian Abroad,’ therefore, she is to be reckoned less a traveller than an expatriate—one among many intellectuals, writers and artists who over several generations had constructed themselves, in Ros Pesman’s phrase, as ‘fugitives from the cultural desert’ (1996: 200) and made their home in the old country. Thanks to the *Mary Poppins* stories, Travers was more successful than most in her quest for self-reinvention; so much so that few if any of her readers and admirers knew of her Australian origins at all. It is therefore all the more ironic that she should begin her account of the trip by obliquely invoking her homeland: ‘going to Russia, it appears, is almost as hazardous and complicated a business as going to Australia must have been in the days of Captain Cook’ (Travers 1934a: 15). *Moscow Excursion*—published some months before *Mary Poppins* in 1934—is to all intents and purposes the work of a Briton of Anglo-Irish background abroad, written for a British readership for most of whom Australia remained a destination only slightly less alien and remote than the new Russia.

³ Fitzpatrick’s figures (2008: 27–30) do not include Comintern delegates or protégés. On Australian travellers to Russia, see also Pesman (1996, Chapter 7), and individual chapters in Fitzpatrick and Rasmussen (2008); on the visits of Prichard and Devanny, see McNair (2000) and (2002) respectively.

⁴ For Travers’s biography see Lawson (2010) and Saunders (2011).

Her decision to embark on so daunting a journey took her friends by surprise,⁵ splitting them (as she gleefully observed) into opposing camps on broadly political lines: ‘My forthcoming trip seems to be either the Chance of a Lifetime or a Piece of Utter Recklessness’ (18). Confounding the pro-Soviets and anti-Soviets alike, she claimed no other purpose but ‘pure enjoyment’; and while ‘in a world rocking madly between Fascism and Communism’ she professed to prefer the latter form of tyranny (10), she would not nail her colours to either mast. At once disqualifying herself as an ‘ideological’ tourist, she admits: ‘it is difficult for me to think or feel politically’ (18). From the start, therefore, just as she distances herself from the general run of ‘pilgrims’ organized into groups and delegations, chaperoned by official guides and interpreters, conducted around showcase institutions, primed with the statistics of Soviet progress and manipulated by the ‘techniques of hospitality’ (Hollander 1981: 120) deployed by VOKS and kindred agencies to impress and inspire them, so too her account sets itself apart from the standard pilgrimage narrative. As Sheila Fitzpatrick has argued in drawing attention to some of its more trenchant passages, it exemplifies the ‘cooler reactions’ of less committed travellers (2008: 19, 21) and in that sense is written *against* its genre. *Moscow Excursion*, however, is a less straightforward and more ambivalent record of the Soviet journey than this might suggest: on the one hand parodying the ‘truth about Russia’ book (Katharine Susannah Prichard’s *The Real Russia*, also published in 1934, is a prime example, albeit one unlikely to have been known to Travers); and on the other, in its blend of self-deprecation, humour, irony and whimsy illustrating the conflicting responses—hope, scepticism and disillusion—so often evoked by the encounter with Soviet reality.

Originally (if the Preface is to be credited) a sequence of letters ‘written... for a single recipient’ (Travers 1934a: 10), *Moscow Excursion* comprises seven brief chapters (a total of 121 pages), extracts from which were first published in *The New English Weekly* in 1933. It gets under way when the narrator, having purchased a place on a guided tour at the London office of Intourist (unaccompanied individual travel was not an option), sets sail for Leningrad, and it follows her on the beaten track of official tourism from Leningrad to Moscow and back to Leningrad (a projected river trip to Nizhnii Novgorod being cancelled at the last minute when, improbably, all the available vessels boats were

⁵ Although it seems likely that her decision was partly inspired by the example of her friend, the Irish writer Hubert Butler, who visited Russia in 1931.

reported to have broken down), ending with the return voyage to London some weeks later. Already the contrast with *The Real Russia* is striking: here the author (in reality for most of her stay travelling with a delegation of foreign literati under the aegis of the organizing committee of the Union of Soviet Writers) disingenuously represents herself as ‘taking my own wilful way’ independent of any ‘conducted tour’ or organized itinerary (Prichard 1934: 6–7). For Travers, there is no escaping the trammels of collectivised travel: the tour, the guide and the group. Among the latter, the majority is made up of what are facetiously termed the ‘woikers,’ apparently trade union delegates acting as mouthpieces for Soviet propaganda. The rest—equally ‘serious and solemn’ (19) intellectuals—are identified only by generic names in the manner of some of the characters in *Mary Poppins* (the Policeman, the Bird Woman, the Butcher): the First, Second and Third Professors, the Schoolteachers, the Business Man, the Poultry Farmer.

The narrator defines herself as the antithesis of her fellow-travellers: frivolous, flippant and ‘so definitely lacking in the right attitude’ (Travers 1934a: 20). The First Professor (‘FP’) in particular deprecates her refusal to take things seriously, and the Schoolteachers clearly disapprove of her sybaritic lifestyle (‘Yes, but what do you *do*?’) (20). Only the Business Man from Manchester, who looks forward to seeing ‘the Kremlin’s Tomb’ and frequently strays from the group in quest of functioning churches, seems a kindred soul. The rest are happy to follow the formidable guides who steer them round the usual tourist sites (St Isaac’s Cathedral, the Hermitage, the Smolny convent in Leningrad, St Basil’s, the Tretyakov Gallery, the Kremlin ramparts in Moscow⁶) and the standard venues of the Soviet tour: the obligatory child-care centre, a technical school, an electrification plant, the House of Culture, a boot factory, a palace of weddings, a courtroom, a sports stadium, an airport; at each port of call a Director waits to receive them with a well-rehearsed recital of facts and figures. It was precisely such parties of docile and credulous foreigners that Malcolm Muggeridge, then resident in Moscow, described as ‘one of the wonders of the age’ (1972: 244). From her perspective as a disaffected insider, Travers is no less sardonic:

Factories, crèches, prisons – doesn’t it sound to you the most lunatic kind of nightmare? Not one of us would put a foot inside such places in the West...and yet here we are, solemnly trooping about looking at boots, babies and criminals as though they were bits of the True Cross. (1934a: 66)

⁶ To Travers’s indignation, the Kremlin itself was closed for a meeting of the Congress of Soviets.

Kicking over the traces whenever she can, she flouts the accepted conventions of the Soviet guided tour: the crèche, for example, so often a highlight for Western admirers of the Soviet achievement, is for her a disappointment; ‘it was not a very clean crèche, and I couldn’t help wondering if the overalls were to protect the babies from us or us from the babies’ (59). Her enthusiasm for a Moscow prison (‘the happiest place I have yet seen in Russia’) is prompted not by the usual sympathy with the regenerative aims of the socialist penal system but by an idiosyncratic delight in seeing the inmates ‘simply doing nothing’ (65). While the others shuffle reverently around Lenin’s rooms at the Smolny Institute, she senses only emptiness and chilliness and gives herself up to ‘wild surmise’ about the young noblewomen in satins and high heels who wandered these same corridors in the reign of Catherine the Great: ‘I am glad to think the walls remember something a little irrational’ (34). On occasion, she withdraws from the tour altogether:

We continue to move in a body like some faint cooling sun through strange Zodiacal signs—The House of Culture, the House of the Workers, the House of Sports, the House of Prostitutes—to the last I resolutely refused to go. The guide did all she could to persuade me and couldn’t believe I wasn’t in the least interested. (79)

The institution in question was in all likelihood the Prophylactorium for Reformed Prostitutes, another showcase of Soviet social engineering that failed to impress Doris Hayball, another Australian abroad, a few years later (1939: 84–85).⁷

There were other reasons for Travers’s increasingly frequent truancy, for unlike her travelling companions, she had Russian contacts⁸: T in Leningrad, who presses illegal roubles into her hand, Z ‘the Russian anti-Communist from Cambridge,’ a young poet, a blue-eyed member of the Cheka⁹ with an interest in English literature, M the Party member, A the secretary to a Writers’ Club, V a young girl ‘ecstatic’ to be involved in the Soviet experiment and a (nameless) young film-maker from Birmingham ‘who has gone so Bolshie that even the Bolshies think him rather too much on the Red side’ (Travers 1934a: 73). Although she claims these are ‘fictitious initials’ assigned to

⁷ Hayball’s impressions of her tour and their similarity to Travers’s are discussed by Fitzpatrick (2008: 19–21).

⁸ In some cases these may have been acquaintances of P. D. Ouspensky (Uspenskii), largely resident in London from the early 1920s, a friend of Travers’s mentor Alfred Orage and like him a close associate of the Russianized Georgian mystic George Gurdjieff (Giurdzhiev).

⁹ The Cheka (‘Special Committee’), redesignated the GPU (*Gosudarstvennoye politicheskoye upravlenie*) in 1922 and OGPU (*Obyedinyonnoye gosudarstvennoye politicheskoye upravleniye*) in 1923, was reconstituted as the NKVD (*Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del*) in July 1934.

‘synthesized personages, it seems clear that her exposure to Russia went far beyond the mediated conversations,’ with the ‘ordinary Russians’ produced by Soviet officialdom to meet visiting foreigners. Thanks to such friends she strays from the prescribed itinerary to visit a cemetery and a film studio, glimpses life as it is lived in a communal flat with no running water, and finds refuge from her ‘very modern, very ugly, very new’ Leningrad hotel (25) in a real apartment with a real fireplace and comfortable armchairs, a smiling maid and (even more welcome) wine in a bottle and white bread (38). In such company she is introduced too to the sinister underside of Soviet life in the mid-thirties: the poet who writes verse that cannot be published because it is not propaganda undergoes a transformation in the company of the man from the Cheka: ‘I care only to write propaganda poems for the Soviet World State’ (39). And for the tourist who really does take her ‘own wilful way’ there is always the possibility of contact with actual ‘ordinary Russians,’ like the returned émigrée clinging to her ‘fanatical’ faith in the ultimate victory of socialism (42), or the driver on the Intourist coach who ‘unexpectedly turned into a human being’ and shared with her his bottle of home-made vodka (103).

Assigned (or appropriating) as a tourist the role of ‘the outcast, the irreverent one’ (Travers 1934a: 70), Travers writes against the conventions and clichés of the genre her account seems to parody. Neither the prison nor the crèche nor the boot factory strike her as the ‘model’ institutions celebrated in other narratives (66); the two-year-olds in the crèche are not the usual happy healthy toddlers, but ‘very small old men,’ ‘grave and sombre’ (59); the inevitable collective farm turns out to be ‘a small dilapidated village green’ (101), and even *Swan Lake* is a disappointment, a production so antiquated as ‘to make one think one is still living under the Tsarist régime’ (106). She is unconstrained by the tactful reticence that so often glosses over the more negative aspects of Russian reality: the food queues in which crowds stand ‘quietly and greyly,’ on their faces ‘a steady, sealed look, as though they were under an anaesthetic’ (42); the meat coupons, worthless since there is no meat to be had outside the Torgsin (foreign currency) shops (84); ‘the drabness, the universal grey, the complete sameness of the people’ (30); the street urchins clamouring for sweets and chocolate, the absence of bathplugs and hot water in the hotel, the rotten eggs served at breakfast, the appalling food that is ‘a king’s feast compared with the fare of the average Russian’ (51), the fact that her movements are watched, her mail intercepted and her attempts to telephone friends frustrated by the

security police. Most radically of all, she rejects the convention that books about Russia should pretend to give ‘the Whole Truth’ (10), and indeed the entire notion that the ‘Real Russia’ is to be found in the factories, crèches, museums and power stations of the official tour at all: ‘properly to see Russia one must not be a tourist. One must know the language, move about alone and dispense with the questionable blessing of State guides’; otherwise there is no need for the traveller to spend more money ‘than will buy a ticket to Tunbridge Wells or Brighton’ (8–9).

At the same time, however, although she does not know the language (and, unlike Katharine Susannah Prichard, never claims to), and although it is almost impossible to go about alone, Travers is engaged in her own search for the ‘Real Russia’ concealed by the appearance of mass uniformity and the ‘resolute materialism’ of the Soviet state (72); occasionally, indeed, she seems to have found it. Lenin’s mausoleum, for example, repels her with its ‘statue of poor flesh preserved against its own will and against all law,’ but she is moved by the reverent silence of the crowd waiting to do homage and the gentle solicitude of the guard who helps her down the dark stairs (72). A performance of *Hamlet*, where ‘a magical current’ flows between actors and audience, so that ‘spectators become participants, and every person in the theatre is acting a specific part in the play’ helps explain the popular appeal of the great ‘Bolshevik pageant’ (93). At the ballet too she shares in the audience’s delight and feels ‘entirely at one with the Russians, probably because the theatre is the only place where they become a collection of liberated human beings instead of functioning as members of groups, cells and soviets’ (106). In the same way she feels affinity with the inmates of the gaol, each set free by an ‘individual ‘individual anti-social act’ and cleansed ‘from the mass in him’(65); and enjoys her moment of camaraderie with the suddenly humanised bus-driver.

For Travers, then, the Whole Truth about Russia is more than the notion of a society transformed by collectivist mentality, socialist ideology and materialist philosophy which sustains the First Professor, her particular sparring partner, and the other ‘serious’ members of the group. Conceding the importance of the Soviet experiment, she cannot look on it, as they do, ‘untrammelled by any sense of proportion’:

It seems to me horribly imperfect, horribly old-fashioned, horribly bourgeois ... and at the moment more like Tom Brown’s Schooldays or a Church Lads’ Brigade than an ideal State. If I regard this

as ideal I must exclude everything else, and if I exclude how can I be a communist in any ultimate sense, a communist in the true meaning of the word? A part is not enough for me, I want all. (88)

‘Apolitical’ in the sense that, in Sheila Fitzpatrick’s words, she is neither a fellow traveller ‘nor a dyed-in-the-wool opponent of Soviet communism’ (Fitzpatrick 2008: 21), the author of *Moscow Excursion* nevertheless writes from a position of ideological idealism which arguably reflects her interest in Gurdjieff and his Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man.¹⁰ In Soviet communism she sees not some transcendent ‘belief in the individual and the enlarging of human capacities’ but a doctrine of mechanization (11); and in the new Russia she sees not a humanizing classless society but ‘pre-eminently the bourgeois, class-ridden State’ in which the Workers are privileged to the exclusion of all others (41–42). Her most mordant strictures are reserved for the ‘Soviet Principles’ that have transformed ‘Russia Reborn’ into merely ‘a new and more vigorous form of bourgeois bureaucracy’ (8–9): rationalism, materialism, conformity, collectivism, statism and the socialist work ethic. Lenin’s rooms at Smolny exude an ‘inhuman intensity’ and ‘raw rationalism’ suggestive of a man ‘consumed by mind’ (33–34); the empty husk of his body preserved in the Mausoleum exemplifies the materialism of the State that has made it ‘a thing for tourists to gape at and peasants to pray to’ (72). The infants in the crèche sup their gruel under a portrait of the Child Lenin and a red banner that proclaims ‘Play is not just fun. It is the preparation for toil’ (59)—an early object lesson in the fact that, whereas ‘to the Western mind warmth and food is [*sic*] a compensation for work, ... here work makes up for the lack of these’ (43). Work is exalted into an ‘old-fashioned’ ‘doctrine of denial’ by which the state ensures the self-sacrifice of its citizens in the name of ‘the time that is to come’; ‘they worship employment, and we, surely, are moving on to enjoyment. If not, what *are* we living for?’ (42). Only in the prison and in the cemetery is it possible to ‘do nothing’ (40; 65). Even tourists succumb to stultifying effects of relentlessly mechanical routine:

We are infected with the need, obvious in all the Russians one sees, of living only with part of ourselves, of storing up precious energy and enduring, enduring, enduring. The machine is getting us, we are falling into place, cogs in the great wheel. We move from fortress to palace, from palace to factory with nightmare regularity. The great human clock goes ticking evenly, but nobody seems to know if it is telling the right time. (30)

¹⁰ Introduced to the Gurdjieff ‘System’ by Orage, Travers continued to study it after his death in 1934, and in 1936 (through Orage’s widow) she met Gurdjieff himself.

From this workaday world of monotony and regimentation, however, Travers can take refuge in the alternative Russia revealed to her by imagination, fantasy and magic; rather as the Banks children escape from the everyday and the commonplace into the realm of the absurd and the impossible made accessible with the advent of Mary Poppins. The ghostly young ladies gambolling through the corridors at Smolny (Travers 1934a:34) are one flight of fancy; the six little boys who might have been one little boy repeated several times ('a recurring decimal on legs') are another (104). The three dozen lemons she brings with her from London have miraculous properties, freeing the successful literary bureaucrat A from his 'Communist mould,' 'his face suddenly softened and mobile and joyous' (117), and casting a spell over the obstructive hall-porter as 'warmth, friendliness, life' flows over Russians and tourists alike (119). Her long-cherished romantic notion of riding in a droshky is realised one night when she (improbably) whisks the First Professor off in search of Genghiz Khan (86); although their quarry eludes them and the Professor takes the opportunity to continue her political instruction. Did the young defendant in a court case really beat up his neighbour because he played the flute badly? (68). Did the Third Professor really threaten to climb on to the roof of the bus and sing 'Land of Hope and Glory'? (70). Did the Collective Farm really pride itself on an annual crop of thirty-three cabbages, two thousand lettuces and seven carrots? (102). As a reviewer in the *Christchurch Sun* had noted already in 1926, few writers can equal P. L. Travers 'in the realm of whimsical fantasy' (quoted in Lawson 2010: 90).

It is not only in whimsy, however, that the author of *Moscow Excursion* looks for some key to the riddles and enigmas of the Real Russia. As though turning the underlying conceit of the Soviet Pilgrimage against itself, she repeatedly invokes the imagery and mythology of Christianity as a commentary on the materialist mysteries of Bolshevism. The travellers are devotés of 'the Russian cult' (19; 66), worshippers before pieces of the True Cross (66); Lenin's rooms at Smolny are the Soviet Bethlehem (32), while crowds flock to 'the Kremlin's tomb' to worship a 'dead but living god' (72) and the image of him as a child, 'a nimbus of curls' shining round his head, smiles down like the Christ-child on the inmates of the day-nursery (59). The 'liquidating of churches' is 'obviously one of the first articles of the Soviet faith' (57), although aggressive atheism is merely a mask for the new secular religion:

The Soviet is not concerned with atheism, but with throwing over one god to deify another—Man, perhaps, with the ultimate ideal Paradise, here and now, Heaven on earth, the symbol Lenin, and the choir of angels the Communist Party. There is no race more natively religious than the Russian—they have merely turned their faith in another direction. (37)

An icon of St George and the Dragon in St Basil's Cathedral proves on closer inspection to depict the apotheosis of Lenin and his followers 'Stalin, Kalinin, Molotov, etc.' rescuing the proletariat from the monster of Capitalism (60). Like the early Christians, the New Russia preaches a doctrine of righteous self-denial (43), its avatar Lenin, like Jesus, proclaiming 'the doctrine of Work the Only Good' and 'declaring himself for a Paradise Here and Now.' But Lenin did not live long enough; his teaching has been eclipsed by a 'renegade doctrine,' 'the "new" religion' that promises instead of a future Heaven 'a future Superstate' (116). The tone is ironic, but the philosophical challenge to the Soviet state's 'rationalization' of Lenin's idealism is none the less serious; for 'rationalization, carried to its logical conclusion, can mean nothing but death' (10–11).

As the preface to *Moscow Excursion* warns us, anyone who looks here for 'a serious exposition of the Soviet State is doomed to disappointment' (Travers 1934a: 10). It describes food queues and shortages and offers a glimpse of Stalin—or at least of 'a dark Asiatic face huddled in one corner' of a Rolls Royce (81)—but says nothing of the forced collectivization of agriculture and its direr consequences (the famine, repression and civil unrest which most probably were the reason for the cancellation of the trip to Nizhnii Novgorod) nor of the ruthless politics of Stalinism. Its author denounces the activities of the secret police, yet seems unaware of the danger for her Russian friends of her persistent attempts to telephone them. Yet its self-conscious superficiality and studied naivety are perhaps deceptive, and distinguish it from the ingenuousness (or often disingenuousness) of more 'serious' Soviet pilgrimage narratives. Quirky, 'admittedly entirely personal and prejudiced' (10) as they might be, her despatches are not without their moments of prescience: on the eve of the Great Purge, for example, she reflects on the nature of the 'Bolshevik pageant' and the 'conditioning' of its participants:

Oh, it's clever, it's diabolically clever. Lenin discovered that bears dance naturally and Stalin knew well how to put rings in their noses and lead them through the streets. But somewhere, behind all the cunning exploitation, is there not the bear's own desire to be so led? Haven't the people themselves chosen the tyranny that flatters their deepest instincts and relieves them of the necessity of thinking for themselves? (93)

Such a question serves further to remind us how far the persona habitually affected by Travers's traveller—part innocent abroad, part *enfant terrible*, superficially flippant yet more serious than she cares to appear—differs from the earnest narrators of more routine testimonies to the Soviet pilgrimage: conscientious delegates and fact-finders, expert witnesses, self-righteous 'progressives.' It is in fact an essential element of the self-deprecating irony that is the dominant narrative mode of *Moscow Excursion*, setting it apart and hinting at the richer textures and ambiguities that distinguish the best travel writing. Its heroine, by her own admission 'lamentably idealistic and humanitarian' (Travers 1934a: 10), remains in two minds about the new Russia; unlike the First Professor, she cannot embrace the accomplished fact of Soviet power as the communist ideal; but only because it is a partial solution, a fragment of some 'eternal pattern' (12) that is yet to emerge: 'a part is not enough for me, I want all' (88). Central to this subtext of ambiguity, and indeed to the humour that is its expression, is the second person in the narrative, the 'single recipient' of the original letters, never identified but adumbrated in the text as a keenly-missed, understanding and supportive male presence growing a beard as he awaits the traveller's return (87), presumably to 'the bright fields of Ireland' (109). The reader might naturally assume that this is the 'H. L. G.' to whom the volume is dedicated, even if (given the absence of any apparent prototype in the author's life at this time) it is another case of 'fictitious initials' designating a 'synthesised personage.' In fact, however, these are the actual initials of the author herself. Here indeed is a whimsical touch worthy of an author so adept at reinventing herself in her life and work. Is *Moscow Excursion* at one level a narrative of self-discovery, the record of a quest for something more than the 'real' Russia? Is the author dedicating the book, as Valerie Lawson puts it, to 'her real self' (Lawson 2010: 117)? Is 'P. L. T' in fact 'H. L. G.,' or Pamela Travers still Lyndon Goff—an Australian abroad in search of a world beyond?

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