

# **An American in His Native Land: John Cournos in Petrograd\***

**(Part 2 of the story started in JRAS 5.1)\*\***

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## **Introduction**

In August 1917, head of the British government's Anglo-Russian Commission in Petrograd, Sir Hugh Walpole (1884-1941) invited an American living in London, John Cournos (1881-1966), to join the Commission as an "assistant for journalistic work." As Rebecca Beasley writes, "Cournos's task in Petrograd would be, Walpole told him, 'to inform the Russians of English democratic institutions and English culture, the object, of course, being to bring friendliness between the two peoples'."<sup>1</sup> In one sense, the appointment of an American citizen to a British government propaganda operation was a curious choice. In another sense, the choice of Cournos was excellent, given his professional skill set, array of activities spanning cultural boundaries, and ability to inhabit simultaneously worlds potentially antagonistic.

The story of Cournos's sojourn in revolutionary Petrograd, from 14 October 1917 to late February/early March 1918, opens a window onto a broad arena of interconnected topics. It encompasses the complexities of war-time Allied relations, the internal politics of a nation at war both without and within, and the relations of literature and politics. This paper demonstrates how – in the person of John Cournos, a Russian-Jewish immigrant to the U. S. - politics and literature

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\*Saint Petersburg was founded as the Russian imperial capital on 27 May 1703 by Peter the Great. At the onset of WWI the name was changed to Petrograd. After the death of Lenin, the city was renamed Leningrad in his honor. The name reverted to St. Petersburg in June 1991.

\*\* I thank the following librarians for assistance in confirming certain details:  
Anna Arays. Library subject specialist for Russian and East European Studies and Slavic Languages and Literatures, Beinecke Library, Yale University.  
Kolter Campbell. McCormick Special Collections and Archives, Northwestern University.

Katya Rogatchevskaya. Lead Curator East European Collections, British Library.

1. Rebecca Beasley, *Russomania: Russian Culture and the Creation of British Modernism, 1881-1922* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2020), 377, 378. On the Anglo-Russian Commission, see Chapter 4.3 "The Russian Revolutions and the Anglo-Russian Commission," 374-97.

were intricately interwoven at that crucial time and place. Numerous histories exist detailing individual lives in Petrograd. Cournos's story touches on and combines political, literary and cultural history.

Born Ivan Grigorevich Korshun in Zhitomir, Ukraine, John Cournos immigrated to Philadelphia in 1891 at the age of 10, settling in the city's Jewish Quarter with his mother and siblings. He was withdrawn from school after the 8<sup>th</sup> grade by his stepfather, Bernard Cournos, to work in a textile mill outside the city. When the family returned to the city, Cournos drew on his experience selling newspapers on the street when in grammar school to get hired by the *Philadelphia Record*. He was essentially self-educated, taking advantage of the city's Free Library, then located at 1217-1221 Chestnut Street in Center City three blocks west of the *Record* building.

When he left for London in 1912, Cournos had already begun his life-long avocation of translating from the Russian, publishing with Lippincott's and with Brown Bros. He established himself as an art critic, shuttling between Philadelphia with its established art community anchored by the Pennsylvania Academy of Art and the avant-garde scene in New York City's Greenwich Village, and rose to the position of week-end arts editor at the *Record*. Though embraced by Ezra Pound and the Anglo-Americans in London, Cournos remained subject to the poverty and anti-Semitism that had defined his adolescence and early adulthood in the United States. He would scrape together a meagre livelihood in London as translator, journalist and critic.<sup>2</sup> These skills would be put to use in Petrograd.

### **Petrograd in War and Revolution.**

When interviewing Cournos for the position with the Anglo-Russian Commission, Hugh Walpole dutifully warned him of the deteriorating conditions in Petrograd. Both the war and the 1917 March/February revolution had placed the country and the city in difficult straits.<sup>3</sup> Summarizing the situation of the eve of revolution, Nicholas Riasanovsky writes:

To cite Golovin's figures, in the course of the war the Russian army mobilized 15,500,000 men and suffered greater casualties than did the armed forces of any other country involved in the titanic struggle: 1,650,000 killed, 3,850,000 wounded, and 2,410,000 taken prisoner. The destruction of property and other civilian losses and displacement escaped count. The Russian army tried to evacuate the population as it retreated, adding to the confusion and suffering. [. . .] [T]he Russian minister of war and many other high officials and generals failed

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2. See Marilyn Schwinn Smith, "John Cournos Among the Imagists: Prelude to Petrograd," *Journal of Russian American Studies* v. 5, no. 1 (May 2021): 24-47.

3. Significant historical events are assigned dual-dates—the Western date appearing before the Russian. Unglossed singular dates represent the Gregorian; Julian dates are glossed with (O. S.)—old style. After Russia adopted the Gregorian calendar—31 January 1918 was followed by 14 February 1918—all dates are Gregorian.

miserably in the test of war, Russian weapons turned out to be inferior to the enemies', Russian ammunition in short supply. Transportation was generally bogged down and on numerous occasions it broke down altogether. In addition to the army, the urban population suffered as a result of this, because it experienced serious difficulties obtaining food and fuel. Inflation ran rampant. Worst of all, the government refused to learn any lessons . . .<sup>4</sup>

The situation only deteriorated under the Provisional Government, established 12 March/27 February, 1917. Members of the Provisional Government belonged to several of the country's revolutionary parties: the Constitutional Democrats (Cadets) were the largest party in the original composition of the new government, with Pavel Miliukov named as minister of foreign affairs; Aleksandr Guchkov, leader of the Octobrist party (adherents of the 1905 October Manifesto establishing a constitutional monarchy), served as minister of war and navy; Aleksandr Kerensky, representing the most left-wing of the progressive parties (he had officially rejoined the Socialist Revolutionary Party--the SRs--in March), was minister of justice. Over the course of the spring and summer, the government underwent a series of changes. Backlash during the "April Days" over Miliukov's declaration of firm support for the Allied war aims, led to his, and then war minister Guchkov's, resignations. The majority of ministers were now socialists, Kerensky taking over the ministry of war and the navy. The government continued the war despite worsening conditions. In June (17 June/4 June), Kerensky and General Aleksis Brusilov initiated an offensive on the southeastern front. Despite the overall success of the campaign, the high number of casualties severely diminished both fighting ability and morale. Riasanovsky writes:

The general crisis and unrest in the country and, in particular, the privations and restlessness in the capital led to the so-called 'July days,' from the sixteenth to the eighteenth of July 1917 [16 July/3 July], when radical soldiers, sailors, and mobs, together with the Bolsheviks, tried to seize power in Petrograd. [. . .] On the twentieth of July [7 July] [prime minister] Prince Lvov resigned and Kerensky took over the position of prime minister.<sup>5</sup>

Walpole's biographer states that he had been recalled to London toward the end of June. "He was welcomed in London by John Buchan, Hubert Montgomery and others, given a room of his own at the Foreign Office, and treated there as an expert on Russia. [. . .] Hugh expected to return to Russia in August, but there arose 'complications at the F.O. . . . wires from Petrograd, every sort of trouble'."<sup>6</sup>

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4. Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Oxford UP, 1969), 505.

5. Riasanovsky, *History*, 509.

6. Rupert Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole: A Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1952), 162, 163. John Buchan, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Tweedsmuir (1875-1940) wrote for the British War Propaganda

The July days and the rise of Kerensky to Prime Minister would have greatly troubled the British Foreign Office - those “wires from Petrograd, every sort of trouble.” A man with Cournos’s credentials and capabilities – familiarity with British-Russian war cables through his work at Marconi House, linguistic fluency, literary and cultural affinities – was more important than ever.

### **The Allure of Petrograd**

Given Walpole’s warning about conditions in Petrograd and the increasing fluidity of the political situation in the capital city, why would Cournos choose to accept the position? When deciding to abandon his career in Philadelphia and move to London, it was with the aim of becoming a writer in the “English tradition,” and he had recently received a monetary subsidy from his friends Elena and Eugene Somoff to begin work on his first novel. An incentive, however, was the prospect of expanding his work as a translator from the Russian. The war had brought about a “Russian Boom,” creating a market for his translations. Residence in Petrograd would enable Cournos to meet with both authors he was already translating and those with whom he sought closer relations, notably, Anna Akhmatova (1889-1966), Petrograd’s leading woman poet.

There was also the matter of political sentiment. The March/February 1917 revolution had reinvigorated the hopes of an earlier generation of activists. Looking back, Cournos wrote in his *Autobiography*: “When the March revolution of 1917 took place and the Tsar was deposed, these political exiles in England took new heart [. . .] men who, in 1905 and thereabouts at the risk of their lives had fought to make Russia free.”<sup>7</sup> Insight into Cournos’s own politics may be gleaned from the advice given by his friend and fellow ex-pat, John Gould Fletcher in regard to joining the Commission. Fletcher wrote to Cournos on 16 August 1917: “[Y]ou will have to keep most of your revolutionary opinions to yourself.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Political Sentiments - The Philadelphia years**

During the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Cournos himself was engaged in a number of left-leaning groups in Philadelphia – a not uncommon response among eastern European immigrants to industrializing American cities. Cournos was among the seven founding members of a Socialist-Zionist group (Poale Zion), formed in Philadelphia 14 June 1904<sup>9</sup> and associated with other Zionist activities

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Bureau. By June 1916 he was drafting press communiques for the Intelligence Section. He was appointed Director of Information in 1917, and Director of Intelligence in 1918. Like Walpole, Buchan published novels during the war, including his two most famous, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) and *Greenmantle* (1916). Sir Charles Hubert Montgomery KCMG, KCVO, CB (1876-1942) had worked in the Foreign Office since 1900 and was appointed Assistant Secretary in 1919.

7. John Cournos, *Autobiography* (New York, NY: Putnam, 1935), 291-2.

8. Quoted in Beasley, *Russomania*, 378.

9. Maxwell Whiteman, "Zionism Comes to Philadelphia," *Early History of Zionism in America*, ed. Isidore S. Meyer (New York: American Jewish Historical Society, 1958), 191-218, 205. On the Poale Zion, see Moses Freeman, *Fuftzig yohr geschikhte fun iddischen leben in Filadelfia*, v. 2 (Phila, 1934) 91, 93. The original members were Hayim Feynman,

in city. “The Zionist movement under the leadership of Herzl was then in full swing, and I used to attend some of the meetings.”<sup>10</sup>

At this time, too, both in New York and Philadelphia, I used to see something of Naphtali Herz Imber [1856-1909], the Hebrew poet once rescued from a Turkish prison by the correspondent of the London *Times*, Laurence Oliphant, and caricatured by Zangwill in the figure of the poet in *The Children of the Ghetto*, which Imber never forgave. Imber wrote “Hatiqua,” the Hebrew song adopted by the Zionists as their national anthem. (Imber was particularly proud of his “pure Hebrew.”) I remember him, at a Zionist convention in Philadelphia, while the hundreds were singing his famous song, standing in the background, a lone figure with his Voltairean face framed within longish hair, mocked by some of the auditors.<sup>11</sup>

As a Russian, Yiddish and German speaker, Cournos was frequently assigned by his Philadelphia newspaper to cover foreign activists on fund raising tours. Notably, he was assigned in 1904 to interview Catherine Breshkovskaya before her public appearance.<sup>12</sup> In his *Autobiography*, Cournos writes:

It is true, the *Record* now and then brought me into contact with other worlds. There were not only the articles I wrote on art and artists, but also the occasional assignments I had to interview distinguished personages from the old world. [. . .] There was my assignment to interview the famous Katherine Breshkovskaya, “Mother of the Russian Revolution,” then recently escaped from Siberia and collecting money for the cause on her way back to zones of danger. I do not now remember what I said, nor

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Dr. Slonimsky (Cournos’s close friend), Yekhezkel Edelshteyn, Cournos, Michael & Meir Brown, Brick. I thank Raphael Halff for help with Yiddish text.

10. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 152. Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) founded the Zionist Organization at the first Zionist Congress, held in Basel Switzerland in 1897.

11. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 173.

12. Ekaterina Konstantinovna Breshko-Breshkovskaia (1844-1934) was founding member with Gershuni of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party (1901). Nicknamed “Babushka,” Grandmother of the Russian Revolution, Breshkovskaya spent many years in Siberian prisons, touring the United States in 1904 between prison terms. Invited back to Petrograd from exile in Siberia by the Provisional Government, she was welcomed by Kerensky, elected to the Pre-Parliament in October 1917 and appointed its chair. A supporter of the Kerensky government, she left Russia in 1918.

Cournos’s story on Breshkovskaia’s talk, “For Russian Freedom. Remarkable Enthusiasm at Meeting of Local Revolutionist. Woman Leader Arouses It. Mme. Breshkovskaya is Carried on the shoulders of Enthusiasts and Gives Kisses to Impromptu Speakers,” appeared in *The Philadelphia Record* (Nov. 28, 1904), 5. Quotes from the story include: “How the Socialist-Revolutionist party came into being was the subject of Mme. Breshkovskaya’s address, which was the last on the program. She spoke in Russian.” “She also denied that the present Minister of the Interior, Mirsky, was a man of liberal tendencies.”

what there was about me to attract her affection, but suddenly, without warning, she flung her arms about my neck and kissed me in the presence of a large gathering come to greet her.<sup>13</sup>

Referring again to his work at the *Record*, Cournos writes: “There was the embarrassing list of questions I had for Israel Zangwill, which seemed half to amuse him, while other reporters sat around wondering what to ask.”<sup>14</sup>

The important Philadelphia anarchist, Natasha Notkin, figured among his acquaintances.<sup>15</sup>

I remember I made the acquaintance of the well-known Anarchist, Natasha Notkin, a charming personality in many ways; and I used to visit her house because I was likely to meet interesting people there and hear interesting talk (It was there, by the way, I first met Emma Goldman, then a dynamic personality, sturdy as you make them, one would scarcely recognize these features in the respectable, bourgeois looking little old lady she is now.)<sup>16</sup>

Another passage in the *Autobiography* suggests a fair degree of socialist activity.

At a somewhat later period it was to be conveyed to me in a gossipy way that this or that woman admired me and ‘wanted to see more of me.’ I was a dunce, and the significance of these friendly hints rather escaped me, until one evening a female Socialist orator, who used to address crowds from a soap-box, invited me not merely, as Mae West would say to ‘come and see me sometime,’ but while I was waiting in the Philadelphia orchestra queue named a definite evening. She was somewhat over forty and had two attractive grown daughters, and she was like a dynamo and had the energy of a dozen. I called on her on the appointed evening in the late Autumn. We sat before the grate in which a log fire was flaming, and in the room was a large bed in which her two young children were asleep—Walt Whitman Crescenzo and Charlotte Corday Crescenzo. We sat by the fire and talked. First about Socialism and dreams of human social justice. [. . .] She is now a nice old lady high in the counsels of the Communist party.<sup>17</sup>

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13. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 173.

14. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 173. Cournos continued his acquaintance with Zangwill (1864-1926), a British Zionist and author of *Children of the Ghetto*, once he moved to England. Zangwill wrote recommendations to British publishers for Cournos’s novels.

15. Natasha Notkin (1870-1930?) emigrated from Russia at age 15, was a pharmacist, a leading figure among Philadelphia anarchists, and a friend of Emma Goldman. She appears in books by Paul Avrich: *The Russian Anarchists* and *An American Anarchist: The Life of Voltairine de Cleyre*.

16. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 152.

17. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 153.

Cournos took pride in his relation to Grigory Andreyevich Gershuni (1870-1908), founding member with Breshkovskaia of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party and founder of its Combat Organization (1902).

Come to think of it, there was that close blood-kinsman of mine, Gershuni (Gregory), famous as a member of the Terrorist Organization, — whom Savinkov called the leader of the party and brain and soul of terrorism — the organization later betrayed by Azev; and was he not in his own fashion a surgeon who thought by a bold operation he was cutting a canker out of society? He was a Hasid transformed into a Socialist-Revolutionary.<sup>18</sup>

### **Political Sentiments - The London years**

The move to London in 1912 brought Cournos into a decidedly different milieu. As an Imperial capital, London had on offer a broader array of dissonant voices than the socialists with whom Cournos comported in Philadelphia or the Russian political speakers whom he met as a journalist. In his *Autobiography*, he writes of London's Hyde Park and its orators:

This was delicious! And all of it was as good as a show, and better. There they were, all blowing off steam, all contented, all happy. The anarchy of the world was made manifest here. Its friendly tolerance, too, without which the elements composing this anarchy might have come into conflict.<sup>19</sup>

Hyde Park's, and by extension, London's "friendly tolerance" led to the presence in the city of a significantly greater number of Russian political exiles than in Philadelphia. Acquaintance with these exiles influenced Cournos's own politics. By the time of his appointment to the Anglo-Russian Commission, Cournos's personal sympathies were aligned more closely with those of his new acquaintances than with the Commission's. The Commission, like the British government it represented, was conservative. Its primary interest lay in keeping Russia engaged in the war. The rise of left-leaning politicians in the Provisional Government presented a severe public relations problem that the Commission was hard pressed to address. Despite his qualifications for work with the Commission, Cournos's political sympathies would have been problematic if known by the Commission.

Kerensky's rise over the course of the spring and summer, 1917, coincided with the rise of SRs in the government. Among Kerensky's appointments was

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18. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 46. Before his exposure as a double agent, Evno Fischelevich Azev/Evgenii Filippovich Azev (1869 – 24 April 1918) was a trusted leader among the Social Revolutionaries (SRs), working closely with Gershuni, Boris Savinkov and Petr Karpovich.

19. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 218.

Cournos's new friend, Eugene Somoff, who, together with his wife Elena, was contributing a pound per week so that he could continue work on his first novel.<sup>20</sup> Cournos may have met the Somoffs at Fanny Stepniak's home in Child's Hill, London, just west of Hampstead Heath.<sup>21</sup> Before moving to London, Fanny lived at Norton, Letchworth, in her cottage "Oblomovka," where she entertained Russian political exiles, possibly including Petr Kropotkin.<sup>22</sup> With its large Quaker community, Letchworth was a haven for passivists during the war. Its long-standing reputation for progressive politics made it both a magnet for exiles and a possible target of government surveillance. Located 38 miles from London's King's Cross Station, Letchworth was an easy train commute. After her move to Child's Hill, Russian political exiles in England gathered informally at Fanny's, where Cournos met several of the political exiles discussed below.

Of Somoff, Cournos wrote: "He was a Russian engineer who had come [to England] from Belgium, where he had lived as an exile for revolutionary activities in Tsarist Russia. [. . .] (During Kerensky's régime he was to become Governor of Archangel.)"<sup>23</sup> Somoff appears to have assumed the position in Archangel in July, while Kerensky was still minister of war and the navy.<sup>24</sup> Kerensky became Prime Minister only on 6 August/24 July. Somoff may have been involved with the SRs at the time of the 1905 Russian revolution, as was Kerensky, who was arrested 21 December 1905 under suspicion of belonging to the Combat Brigade. Kerensky remained in custody until June 1906.<sup>25</sup> The fact that Somoff's first wife, Evgeniia Zil'berberg, was sister of Leo Ivanovich Zil'berberg (1880-1907), an important

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20. Evgenii Ivanovich Somov (24 April 1881, Kiev – 1962, U. S.) married Elena [Helen] Konstantinovna Odinets (21 January 1888, St. Petersburg – 1969, U. S.) on 20 October 1915 in Brentford, just north of the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew. Their place of residence at that time was 48 Esmond Road, Bedford Park, located between Brentford and Kensington in London.

21. Fanny Markovna Stepniak (1855-1945) was widow of Sergei Stepniak-Kravchinsky (1851-1895), political assassin and author of *Underground Russia*.

22. Pat Simpson, "Prince Peter Kropotkin: Anarchism, Eugenics and the Utopian ideal of Letchworth Garden City." Conference paper (Utopia! Experiments in Perfection Conference: Spirella Ballroom, Letchworth Garden City, November 12, 2015), 6-7

23. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 288.

24. The Arkhangelsk Regional Scientific Library named after N. A. Dobrolyubov holds two documents issued by Somoff from September and November 1917 under СОМОВ, ЕВГЕНИЙ ИВАНОВИЧ (ИНЖЕНЕР, ГЛАВНОНАЧАЛЬСТВУЮЩИЙ АРХАНГЕЛЬСКОМ И БЕЛОМОРСКИМ ВОДНЫМ РАЙОНОМ (С ИЮЛЯ 1917 Г.) ; 1881–1962); Somoff's name appears under the heading ГУБЕРНСКИЕ ПРАВИТЕЛЬСТВЕННЫЕ КОМИССАРЫ (1917-1920) ГЕНЕРАЛ-ГУБЕРНАТОРЫ СЕВЕРНОЙ ОБЛАСТИ (1918-1920). <http://patriot-pomor.ru/shop/index.php?productID=352> (viewed 26.vii.20). I thank Elena Yushkova for supplying me with this information.

Benjamin Rhodes cites communications by American consul Felix Cole to the effect that Somoff was the Russian naval commander-in-chief in Archangel over the course of September 1917 into February 1918. See Benjamin D. Rhodes, "A Prophet in the Russian Wilderness: The Mission of Consul Felix Cole at Archangel, 1917-1919," *Review of Politics* v. 46, no. 3 (July 1984): 388-409, 407n13.

25. [russiapedia.rt.com](http://russiapedia.rt.com)



member of the SR Combat Organization, hanged for his activities, supports the supposition that Somoff was associated with the SRs. Somoff may have gone into exile around the time he separated from his wife, around 1905/1906. Evgeniia met Boris Savinkov soon after her separation from Somoff.<sup>26</sup>

Boris Viktorovich Savinkov (1879-1925) had joined the SRs in 1903. Unknowingly working with double agent Evno Azef, Savinkov headed the SR Combat Brigade (alternately known as the Combat Organization, Fighting Organization, Combat Unit) responsible for terrorist activities. He was convicted of assassinating Vyacheslav von Plehve and participating in the assassination of Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich. After returning to Russia from self-exile in April 1917, Savinkov was appointed deputy war minister by Kerensky in July and served through August.<sup>27</sup> Kerensky would likely have known Savinkov since at least 1905 in connection with SR activities.

As noted by William Conger, the leftward shift in the Provisional Government coincided with the return of émigrés to Russia.<sup>28</sup> Cournos met several of these returning émigrés in England. His striking notion, re Gershuni, of Hasidism transformed into SR terrorism may be an apt formula for the trajectory of many of the Russian political exiles whom Cournos met in London. Looking back on this period between the February and October revolutions, he writes:

While upon this subject of races (in the ethnic, not the sporting sense!) the Russian provided the real enigma of the time. I met numbers of them in London, mostly exiled revolutionaries. And a strange lot they were. Most of them had been in Russian prisons and in Siberia and, in the name of human freedom and happiness they burned with a fanatical fervor worthy of the early Christians. We too often use the word “idealism” too lightly: they were idealist in the only sense that the term meant anything: their idea, which possessed them completely, ran in their blood: they were ready and willing to die for it.<sup>29</sup>

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26. I thank Sergei Glebov for alerting me to the relationship between Evgeniia and Somoff.

Given the surnames of Somova, Savinkova, and Shirinskaia-Shikhmatova in the Hoover Institution's Register of Okhrana (the Tsarist Secret police) Records, Evgeniia is sometimes identified as Savinkov's second wife, other times as his mistress.

27. Cournos writes the following about British response to Savinkov's presence in the city: “The British officials and residents were talking of that man of daring and mystery, Boris Savinkov, as the probable “savior” of Russia. The same Savinkov, years later, was to die by suicide in a Bolshevik prison.” (*Autobiography*, 314)

28. William R. Conger, “The Root Mission.” MA thesis 1980. Univ. of Richmond, 65 (<https://scholarship.richmond.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2241&context=masters-theses>)

On the return of Russian exiles, see also Faith Hillis, *Utopia's Discontents: Russian Emigrés and the Quest for Freedom, 1830s-1930s* (New York: Oxford UP, 2021), 210-11.

29. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 291.

Cournos writes of a one curious instance:

[T]here was a small but sturdy Cossack by the name of Gorbunkov or Gorbunov—I forget which—whom I used to meet in the reading-room of the British Museum. This man was the strangest of all incongruities—a pacifist Cossack! Which, in those days at least, was the same as a cat that wouldn't eat mice. He was young too, with the frame of a bull-dog. [...] In any event, I had completely forgotten about him. The days to come were to hold a surprise for me, for when I got to Petrograd and walked on business into the Education Commissar's [Lunacharsky] office, who should greet me but this same Gorbunkov or Gorbunov—in the role of chief secretary to the commissar?<sup>30</sup>

Cournos devotes considerable space to another political exile:

Another face I remember is that of the famous Karpovitch, whom I met at Madame Stepniak's. Karpovitch, it will be remembered, had assassinated a Russian Minister, and had been used as a pawn by the infamous Azef, *agent-provocater*, who succeeded my blood-kinsman Gershuni as the head of the Terrorist Organization of the Socialist Revolutionary party. [...] He was tall, dark, robust, with a placid expressionless countenance which suggested a business-man rather than a Russian revolutionary. He was the one man I met who was disillusioned with revolution [...] He had been in London for years, and served as a professional masseur in some hospital.<sup>31</sup>

After expulsion from university for participation in the student movement, Petr Vladimirovich Karpovich (15 October 1874 – 13 April 1917) enrolled in Berlin University in 1899 and became involved with the Socialist Revolutionaries. He returned to St. Petersburg in 1901, where, reacting to the new policy of military conscription of students involved in protests, he shot Nikolai Pavlovich Bogolepov (9 December 1846 – 15 March 1901), Minister of Education, on 14 February. Bogolepov lingered for a month before dying of his wound. Karpovich was sentenced to 20 years penal labor. Escaping during one of his transfers in 1907, Karpovich returned to Europe to collaborate with Azef in the Combat Brigade. Karpovich made an unsuccessful attempt on the life of Tsar Nicholas in 1908. Disillusioned after Azef's exposure as a double agent, Karpovich had abandoned political activity and "retired to England," as Cournos put it.

Through another of his London acquaintances, Cournos met Errico Malatesta (1853-1932). Fanny Stepniak's husband, Kravchinsky had been a member of "The Circle of Tchaikovsky", a literary group advocating self-education among the peasantry. Kravchinsky was arrested in 1874, the same year that Nikolai

30. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 292-3.

31. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 291-92.

Tchaikovsky (1851-1926) left Russia. After escaping from prison, Kravchinsky joined Malatesta's rebellion in Italy. Of Malatesta, Cournos writes:

This thought [that human beings are greatest when the qualities of courage and love 'meet in these two finest human virtues'] arises from the memory of a face I met at this time, a face I shall never forget. It was the face of Malatesta, famous anarchist, exile in London from his land of Italy. Malatesta loved human beings, and he loved to see all human beings love all other human beings, and he had suffered for this love of his and this idea of his. I met him at Vera Tchaikovskaya's rooms, which were in the same house in which I lived [44 Mecklenburgh Square; 1915]. Vera Tchaikovskaya was a beautiful woman, the daughter of the Tchaikovsky who was a famous Russian revolutionary and who later became the President of the Northern Russian Republic before it yielded to Bolshevism; and Malatesta came to see her because of the friendship he felt for her father. Never before or since have I seen a face express such sadness, such inner torment. And, by the way, it was almost a perfect replica of the tortured face of Michelangelo, only infinitely more sad. [. . .] What was my sadness to his, which beheld the world he loved engaged fiercely in fratricide and falling about his ears?<sup>32</sup>

### To Petrograd

2 October 1917 John Cournos traveled with Hugh Walpole from St. Pancras station in London to embark at Aberdeen on the northeast coast of Scotland on the *Vulture*. The *Vulture* sailed by night with extreme vigilance, following the North Sea route traveled repeatedly by Walpole on his several journeys to and from Petrograd.<sup>33</sup> War limited the number of routes between London and Petrograd to virtually one. Travel across the continent was not an option. German U-boats in the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Finland enforcing the blockade against Allied commercial and naval ships ruled out that route. Scandinavia remained the most viable route, despite the necessity of first crossing the still dangerous North Sea. After suspending in April 1916 its policy of "sinking without warning", Germany had reinstated its unrestricted submarine warfare in February 1917, a resumption influencing the United States's decision to declare war on Germany, 6 April 1917.<sup>34</sup>

Robert Service notes the sinking of a ship carrying Russian émigrés returning home after the March/February revolution.<sup>35</sup> Regarding the ship noted by Service,

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32. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 283.

33. An alternate route, one taken by Walpole when he returned to Petrograd just before the March/February revolution, departed from Liverpool and sailed across the Arctic before a six-day train journey down to the city. Hart-Davis, *Horace Walpole*, 158-9. Cournos would take this northern route in when returning to England in 1918.

34. See also <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-u-boat-campaign-that-almost-broke-britain>

35. Robert Service, *Spies and Commissars. The Early Years of the Russian Revolution*

Cournos writes:

When the March revolution of 1917 took place and the Tsar was deposed, these political exiles in England took new heart, and Karpovitch [. . .]—indeed a whole shipload of them—set sail for the homeland, the land of promise. And—and—cruel irony—the pen falters at the thought—the vessel carrying all these fine people with all their fine hopes was struck by a German torpedo, and only the ripples on the water remained for a little to tell a modern tragic tale.<sup>36</sup>

After landing in Bergen, Walpole's company travelled by train via Christiania and Stockholm to the Russian border town of Torneå, which provided a rail link between Russia and its Western allies.<sup>37</sup> (It was from Torneå that Lenin, then Trotsky, travelled to Finland Station.) Walpoles's group proceeded on to Petrograd, arriving about three in the morning, 14 October. Walpole retired to Konstantin Somov's house and Cournos to the *Hôtel Angleterre*. About a week later he moved to a room at 27 Zagorodny Prospekt.

Cournos's first experience of the imperial city would not have been entirely unlike the thrill of his earliest days exploring London. The *Hôtel Angleterre*, situated at 24 Malaya Morskaya Street at the edge of St. Isaac's Square, overlooked the cathedral. Just further east along the river Neva was the headquarters of the Anglo-Russian Commission, on the Admiralty Embankment.<sup>38</sup> Continuing east along the Neva, just beyond the Winter Palace, was the British Embassy located at House No. 4 on the Palace Embankment by the Troitskii Bridge and the Field of Mars. But the architectural grandeur of the city was tempered by the dire conditions in Petrograd.

Cournos encountered unreliable power, long lines for basic provisions, bandits roaming the streets and breaking into private homes. Yet life was ameliorated by his status as a foreigner.

I was, of course, fortunate with my British Pounds, and was able to buy certain necessities such as bread and really excellent butter (which came from Tsarskoe Selo) at inflated prices, which were regarded by Russians as unspeakably excessive but which translated into English money were fairly reasonable.<sup>39</sup>

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(New York: Public Affairs, 2012), 14-17.

36. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 291.

37. Oslo was renamed Christiania in 1624, reverting back to Oslo in 1925. Torneå is the Swedish name for the Swedish-Finnish border town of Tornio in Lapland. Located at the top of the Gulf of Bothnia, Tornio became a Russian garrison town after Russia annexed current-day Finland in 1809 after the Swedish-Russian war of 1808-1809. Lenin granted Finland independence in December 1917.

38. This location of the Commission's headquarters is given by Walpole's biographer, Hart-Davis (156). Cournos gives 15 Fontanka as the address for the Anglo-Russian Commission.

39. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 307

The Commission was staffed primarily with literary men, in keeping with its propaganda mission.<sup>40</sup> But the distinction between propaganda and intelligence is understandably slight. Being out on the streets gathering information about public sentiment, while giving shape to such propaganda as he would write, would also have been integral to any intelligence duties. Cournos was not likely involved in espionage, but it was a slim step further along the continuum from propaganda to intelligence/information to espionage. At his first meeting with Walpole in London, Cournos was introduced to Commission member, Paul Dukes, who later became agent ST 25 of the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and the only Briton knighted for espionage.<sup>41</sup>

Notably, Cournos opens discussion of his work for the Commission with the following statement: “I do not suppose I ever admired any one more than my chief in Petrograd, Colonel Thornhill,” with the annotation: “Colonel Thornhill is mentioned in Lockhart’s *British Agent*.”<sup>42</sup> When arranging with the Foreign Office to appoint a Petrograd-based coordinator for the diverse propaganda activities, British Ambassador to Russia, Sir George Buchanan, had suggested both Cudbert Thornhill (1883-1952) and Hugh Walpole, which may explain Cournos’s designation of Thornhill as his chief. At the beginning of the war, Thornhill had been recruited by Mansfield Cumming into MI6. At the MI6 (SIS) station in Petrograd, Thornhill served as “military attaché in charge of the intelligence mission in Russia.”<sup>43</sup> Thornhill’s position in Petrograd enhances the supposition that Cournos was not altogether disengaged from intelligence activities.

Cournos continues:

For he was neither an artist nor a poet; he was primarily a man of action, a man who, I felt, could face danger calmly, whose presence could make me face danger with equal calm, who had character in the best English sense. [. . .] He was attached, I believe, to the British Embassy, and he

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40. See also, Beasley, *Russomania*, 379-81.

41. Dukes had returned to London in June 1917 to work at the Foreign Office, as had Walpole. He made a secret trip to Petrograd in December 1917. See entry for Dukes in Jonathan D. Smele, *Historical Dictionary of the Russian Civil Wars, 1916-1926*, viewed online. See also Sir Paul Dukes, K. B. E. *Red Dusk and the Morrow. Adventures and Investigations in Red Russia* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1922) and *The Story of “ST 25.” Adventure and Romance in the Secret Intelligence Service in Red Russia* (London: Cassell and Company LTD, 1938). John Buchan, Compton Mackenzie, and W. Somerset Maugham were also employed by SIS.

See also Service 224-5 and David Ayers, *Modernism, Internationalism and the Russian Revolution* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2018), 97, 173, 175, 188

42. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 303. Sir Robert Hamilton Bruce Lockhart, KCMG (1887-1970) had been British Vice Consul in Moscow, 1912-1915, Consul General, 1915-1917, and Unofficial Ambassador to the Bolsheviks, 1917-1918. The book Cournos refers to is *Memoirs of a British Agent* (London: Putnam, 1932). An introduction by Walpole appeared in the 1933 edition.

43. Beasley, *Russomania*, 379-80.

only rarely appeared at the offices of the Commission on the Fontanka, where a large staff worked, often it seemed to me to no purpose. [. . .] It was different if you broached an idea to Colonel Thornhill. If he liked it he simply said, ‘Go ahead and do it!’ It was then wholly up to you. Red tape was foreign to his nature; therefore it was a pleasure to work with him. And he told me to go ahead quite often.<sup>44</sup>

Only now does Cournos write:

“Quite apart from ideas I used to suggest [to Thornhill], I wrote articles which appeared in the Petrograd newspapers and periodicals. Sometimes they were purely journalistic, as for example, when German air raids were expected over Petrograd I wrote a *feuilleton* for the *Novya Vremya* [*sic* - *Novoe Vremya*, a popular, if conservative daily] to show how panicky the Londoners were during the Zeppelin visits.”<sup>45</sup>

Cournos’s experience of war-time London had prepared him in numerous ways for social conditions in Petrograd. Aside from food shortages (though considerably less severe) and Zeppelin raids, Cournos was familiar with the ongoing social lives of artists outside their regular, now closed, venues.

Cournos writes further, “And I wrote quite a number of critical articles: among others one on Whistler and Sargent for the popular weekly, *Niva*, and another on current tendencies in English art for the leading art monthly, *Apollon*. The clever Russian literary critic, Korney Chukovsky, was associated with me in this work.”<sup>46</sup> Given Chukovsky’s association with the Anglo-Russian Commission, Cournos’s move to Chukovsky’s building at 27 Zagorodnyi Prospekt settled him under Chukovsky’s mentorship. Chukovsky was an ideal mentor for Cournos and played a significant role in Cournos’s life in Petrograd. Born Nikolay Vasilyevich Korneychukov (1882-1969), Chukovsky contributed to several periodical publications, was a major literary critic and, later, children’s author. Well known for his translations of Walt Whitman, Chukovsky also translated Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Oscar Wilde, Rudyard Kipling, O. Henry into Russian.

Chukovsky had spent time in London as correspondent for an Odessan newspaper in 1903-04 and again in 1916 as a member of an official Russian delegation. During both visits to England, Chukovsky met with Zinaida Vengerova. Zinaida Afanas’evna Vengerova (1867-1941) was a professional literary figure, who traveled widely throughout western Europe, returning frequently to Russia.<sup>47</sup>

44. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 303-4.

45. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 304. Cournos describes the 8 September 1915 Zeppelin raid over London that he witnessed: *Autobiography*, 279-80. He gives a fictionalized account of the raid in chapter II, “‘The Devil Speaks German’,” of his *roman à clef*, *Miranda Masters* (New York: Knopf, 1926), 15-25.

46. *Ibid.*

47. On Vengerova, see also: Rachel Polonsky, *English Literature and the Russian Aesthetic Renaissance* (Cambridge, Eng.; New York: Cambridge UP, 1998), 26-7, 29; “Zinaida Vengerova and Her Unpublished Correspondence,” edited by Rosina Neginsky.

Often in London, Vengerova lived at 54 Bloomsbury Street in September 1914, across from the British Museum. Cournos may well have met her around this time in the museum's Reading Room, which he frequented. Or at one of the Russian émigré salons, such as that of Vengerova's friend Fanny Stepniak. Vengerova established the connection between Cournos and Fedor Sologub, initiating their correspondence, praising Cournos's translations and conveying texts between London and Petrograd.<sup>48</sup> Vengerova probably had supplied Cournos with a copy of Chukovsky's *From Chekhov's Days to Ours*, on which Cournos based much of his understanding of Sologub for his 1915 article in the *Fortnightly Review*.<sup>49</sup> It is not inconceivable that Cournos met Chukovsky through Vengerova during the 1916 visit.

The men's numerous life experiences in common would have undergirded a strong personal sympathy beyond their professional association. Born almost precisely a year apart, both men had been separated from their biological fathers at an early age; had been separated from formal education after primary school, though Chukovsky finished his education through correspondence courses; both were subject to social marginalization due to class, a marginalization from which they sought escape through journalism, to employ Anna Vaninskaya's formulation.<sup>50</sup>

Vaninskaya's summary accounts of Chukovsky's articles written from and about London for the *Odessa News*, taken together with Cournos's *Autobiography*, provide ample documentation for the men's shared sentiments.<sup>51</sup> Both men socialized with Russian émigrés based in London; in at least Cournos's case, often political émigrés. Both men were familiar with Whitechapel in London's East End, known for its poverty and overcrowding, and home to the majority

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*Revue des Etudes Slaves* v. 62, nos. 1-4 (1995); Rosina Neginsky, "Zinaida Vengerova." *Russian Women Writers* v. 2, ed. Christine D. Tomei (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1999); Charlotte Rosenthal, "Zinaida Vengerova: Modernism and Women's Liberation," *Irish Slavonic Studies* v. 8 (1987): 97-105.

48. See Marilyn Schwinn Smith and Elena Yushkova, "Dzhon Kurnos – perevodchik Fedora Sologuba na angliiskii iazyk: rol' Zinaidy Vengerovoi vo vzaimootnosheniakh dvukh literaturorov." Forthcoming, RUDN Journal of Studies in Literature and Journalism.

49. Chukovsky's *Ot Chekhova do nashikh dnei* was first published in 1908 (Sankt Peterburg: T-vo "Izdatel'skoe biuro"). A third corrected and expanded edition appeared in 1909 (Sankt Peterburg: M. O. Vol'f). John Cournos, "Feodor Sologub", *Fortnightly Review* v. 104 (Sept. 1, 1915): 480-90.

S. V. Fedotova describes *Ot Chekhova do nashikh dnei* as the young critic's debut book in "Liubopytnyi mali': pis'ma Z.N. Gippius i D.S. Merezhkovskogo k K.I. Chukovskomu (1907-1920)" *Literaturnyi fakt* 2021. № 2:31–81. <https://doi.org/10.22455/2541-8297-2021-20-31-81>

50. See Anna Vaninskaya, "Korney Chukovsky in Britain" *Translation and Literature* v. 20, no. 3:373-392. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/41306124>.

For discussion of Chukovsky's early reputation as journalist and critic, see Fedotova, "Liubopytnyi mali'," 32-50

51. Vaninskaya, "Korney Chukovsky," 377-380.

of Russian-Jewish immigrants.<sup>52</sup> Cournos and Chukovsky had experienced poverty in childhood and endured extreme financial stress during their time in London. Aspiring to a literary life, both men deplored the state of British cultural life among the bourgeoisie -- its focus on business and a general enthusiasm for mechanization.

In his article "Not Vodka," Cournos expressed outrage at C. E. Bechhofer's characterization of Russia when implying that Chekhov was not Russian because he was "not vodka," and made clear his own love for Chekhov precisely as Russian.<sup>53</sup> There is, in his article, a striking similarity to Chukovsky's reaction to Russia's representation in the British Museum. Vaninskaya writes:

A silver shot glass, Chukovsky was outraged to discover, was all that 'represented [his] homeland' in the British Museum. If a visitor wished to find out 'what went on in that big country which gave him Tolstoy and Dostoevsky', what were its cultural achievements, its 'manners and customs', there was nothing to point to but Russian 'drunkenness' ([Chukovsky,] S[obranie] S[ochinenii], XI, 455).

Vaninskaya continues:

Chekhov was a particularly sore point [. . .] Chekhov, Chukovsky concluded, was utterly inaccessible to the 'primitive' Englishman (447), who would 'demand his money back' if he were made to sit through *The Cherry Orchard* (509). [. . .] An English translation of *The Black Monk* did exist, but was apparently too dreadful for words; while a translation of *Ward No. 6* by a friend of Chukovsky's was turned down by Fisher Unwin because the author was unknown to the public.<sup>54</sup>

Vaninskaya summarizes Chukovsky's 1903-1904 response to British appreciation for Russian literature as follows: "The only place in London where Russian literature was properly appreciated was the Russian reading room in Whitechapel, frequented exclusively by Russian Jews."<sup>55</sup>

### **Publishing in Petrograd - American Propaganda and *Niva***

On 11 November 1917 (O. S.), the most widely circulating magazine in Russia, *Niva*, published a special issue (no. 45) reflecting American efforts to influence Russian attitudes towards both the war and the United States. Aside from

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52. Whitechapel figures in numerous accounts of London by Russian journalists. See Anna Vaninskaya, "Under Russian Eyes: Foreign Correspondents in Edwardian Britain," *Times Literary Supplement* (28 November 2014): 17-19. See also Robert Henderson, "'For the Cause of Education.' A history of the Free Russian Library in Whitechapel, 1898-1917," *Russia in Britain, 1880-1940: From Melodrama to Modernism*, ed. Rebecca Beasley and Philip Ross Bullock (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 71-86.

53. John Cournos, "Not Vodka," *Egoist* v. 3, no. 9 (Sept. 1916): 134.

54. Vaninskaya, "Korney Chukovsky," 379.

55. Vaninskaya "Korney Chukovsky," 380.



numerous political and commercial differences, England and the U. S. concurred on a number of significant matters during the Great War: keeping Russia in the war to divert German forces from the Western Front; a belief that Germany exercised outside political and commercial influence within Russia, a belief fostered by the influence of the German-born Empress over her husband, the Russian Tsar; a belief that Germany was fomenting revolt within Russia to the end of driving Russia out of the war, reflected in the effectiveness of German propaganda; the belief that the Germans were assisting the return of revolutionaries to Russia.<sup>56</sup> Like the British, the Americans were much concerned that a positive image of the U. S. be widely propagated in Russia. The Anglo-Russian Commission had been the British response.

After the United States declared war on Germany, the appointment of a special mission to Russia was recommended to President Wilson. On April 24, Elihu Root (1845-1937), former Secretary of War, Secretary of State and United States Senator from New York, accepted a position as Special Ambassador to Russia, heading what was known as the Root Mission.<sup>57</sup> Unlike the literary staffing of the Anglo-Russian Commission, the Root Mission was staffed with representatives from numerous fields and was intended both to establish good relations with the Provisional Government and to investigate Russia's need for aid. Traveling west via Vladivostok, the Root Mission arrived in Petrograd on 13 June 1917. Despite Root's repeated cables urging a major publicity campaign, he left the city on 12 July before any action was taken.

Separately, on 13 April 1917, seven days after Congress declared war on Germany, a Committee on Public Information (CPI) was established by executive order, chaired by George Creel (1876-1953), a journalist who had recommended it to the President. The Committee was primarily charged with engaging the American public in support of the war, but soon expanded to include foreign offices. The President sent Edgar Grant Sisson (1875-1948) to Petrograd on 27 October with instructions to begin a publicity campaign. Only with Sisson's arrival in Petrograd on 25/12 November, weeks after the Bolshevik coup, did publicity become active. Creel writes:

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56. On these issues, see: David R. Francis, *Russia from the American Embassy. April 1916 – November, 1918* (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1921) *passim*, esp. pp. 37-39, 97, 113. (Reprints: New York: Arno Press, 1970; Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2019, edited and annotated by Vladimir N. Voskov); George Creel, *How We Advertised America* (New York: Harper, 1920) on the "Committee on Public Information"; David H. Mould, "Images of Revolution: An American Photographer in Petrograd, 1917," *Journal of Russian American Studies* v. 1, no. 1 (May 2017): 46-61; Conger, "The Root mission."

For accounts of German assistance in returning revolutionaries to Russia, see also *Germany and Revolution in Russia 1915-1918: Documents from the Archives of the German Foreign Ministry*, ed Z. A. B. Zeman (London; New York: Oxford UP, 1958).

57. See Conger, "The Root Mission." For a Soviet assessment of the Mission, see A. E.Ioffe, "Missiia Ruta v Rossii v 1917 godu"// Kiev: Library of Ukraine (ELIBRARY.COM.UA). Updated: 18.03.2016. URL: <https://elibrary.com.ua/m/articles/view/МИССИЯ-РУТА-В-РОССИИ-В-1917-ГОДУ> (date of access: 09.03.2021).

The temporary nature of the Root mission, and the erratic activities of various “volunteer groups,” brought home to us the imperative need of a continuous educational campaign under a central control, and Mr. Sisson, detached from his duties as associate chairman, was sent to Russia with full authority to work out a complete Committee organization.<sup>58</sup>

With the assistance of publicist Arthur Bullard, who had extensive background in Russian affairs, having been active during the 1905 revolution and participating in the Root Mission,<sup>59</sup> Sisson undertook a vigorous campaign to persuade both Russians and German troops on Russian territory of America’s support for the success of Provisional Government and of the war effort. Among his efforts was the translation of President Wilson’s speeches into German and Hungarian to be dropped among invading troops.<sup>60</sup> The special issue of *Niva*, though published prior to Sisson’s arrival, reflected American publicity efforts and bears the hallmarks of work produced by Creel’s CPI. The most striking example of CPI’s influence on the *Niva* special issue is a piece cataloguing Germany’s sins, titled “Vrag vsego mira. Pochemu Amerika voiuet s Germaniei?” (“Enemy of the Entire World. Why is America at War with Germany?”) (p. 686), described as a speech by Minister Lane.<sup>61</sup> Lane frequently gave speeches for the CPI. One of his more popular and widely distributed speeches was titled “Why We Are Fighting Germany” and was produced as a pamphlet by the CPI. The *Niva* piece may have been a precis of the speech.<sup>62</sup> The title of Creel’s book on the CPI, *How We Advertised America*, suggests a particularly American take on the matter of propaganda.

The *Niva* issue is illustrated with 10 posters, 7 of them U. S. enlistment posters. One poster, captioned “Bratanie soiuznikov: Amerika privetstvuet Rossiui” (“Brotherhood of allies: America hails Russia”), is entirely in Russian. The poster reads: “Tovarishi-Demokraty. Ivan I Diadia Sem” (“Comrades – Democrats. Ivan and Uncle Sam”) and depicts the two shaking hands aboard a ship with the Statue of Liberty and the NYC skyline in the background, with the word Svoboda (Liberty) arcing over the statue. Freedom and liberty are key words in all propaganda pieces produced by the Americans for the Russian audience. In addition to the posters are three portraits: a full-page portrait of President Wilson (p. 678); a portrait of Ambassador to Russia, David R. Francis, centered in his remarks (p. 679); a quarter-page portrait of General Pershing, seated in his field tent (p. 682).

The *Niva* issue was apparently initiated by Ambassador Francis, whose full-

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58. Creel, *How We Advertised*, 374.

59. Conger, “The Root mission,” 39.

60. See Creel, *How We Advertised*, 288.

61. Franklin K. Lane (1864-1921) was U. S. Minister of the Interior from 1913 into 1920. A strong supporter for America’s entrance into the war, Lane was appointed to the Council of National Defense in 1916. His support for formation of the Railroads War Board likely dovetailed with The Root Mission’s intense focus on aid to Russia’s rail transportation.

62. See *The United States in the First World War: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Anne Cipriano Venzon (New York: Garland, 1995), 327.

page message addressed to the Editor of *Niva* surrounds his portrait. The date of Francis's message, "Petrograd, 4-go Oktiabria 1917" documents the pre-coup genesis of the issue. In addition to assurances of America's fellow-feeling and desire to work "side-by-side" with the newly emancipated peoples of Russia, Francis introduces messages from Elihu Root and Samuel Gompers, founder and president of the American Federation of Labor and member of the Root Mission, which follow on page 680.

The articles are written by either Russians or Americans; the English-language pieces possibly translated into Russian by Kornei Chukovsky. The issue opens with an essay by the novelist A. I. Kuprin, "Zveznyi flag" ("The Starry Flag") and a poem titled "Amerika" by Aleksandr Roslavlev (pp. 675-77). Aleksandr Ivanovich Kuprin (1870-1938) moved to St. Petersburg in 1901 after army service. Response to his 1905 novel, *The Duel*, dealing with the conditions of army life, was predictably polarized – embraced by those critical of the autocracy and reviled by traditionalists. Grouped among the realist authors – Gorky, Andreev, Tolstoi – Kuprin's unstable political inclinations led to his briefly assuming editorship of the SR newspaper, Free Russia (Svobodnaia Rossiia) in May 1917. In an interesting component of "The Starry Flag," Kuprin draws on Chekhov's prediction that Siberia will separate from Russia and become a United States analogous to North America's United States and cites Dostoevsky's belief that Siberia represents the true essence of Russia. Siberia features in other articles as well. A story by "Tan," "Rossiia i Amerika" (pp. 680-84), cites the novelty of the U. S. as a melting pot, when comparing the expansive geographies of the two countries (and implicitly, their diverse populations) based on his travel the previous winter from Vladivostok to Petrograd. The following article by Mrs. M. Farwell, titled "Amerika i Rossiia" (p. 685), reprises the history of the American revolution, while remarking on the similarities of the countries' diverse populations.<sup>63</sup>

The article titled "O. Genri" ("O. Henry") (pp. 686-87), subtitled "A study of contemporary American literature," is notable for its introductory remarks on Chukovsky, who may well have facilitated the contribution. The author is listed as Professor Emeri, presumably Rufus Emory Holloway (1885-1977) of Adelphi College in Brooklyn, a prominent Whitman scholar. The article begins:

When I first became acquainted with the writer K. I. Chukovsky, our conversation immediately turned to Walt Whitman, and in confirmation of one of my own thoughts, I ventured an opinion of O. Henry. To my great pleasure and, I confess, to not inconsiderable surprise, I learned that Chukovsky turned out to be a passionate fan of O. Henry and was preparing to translate his short stories into Russian, much as he had already translated the poems of another American, Whitman. (p. 686)

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63. For an interesting variant of the "The United States of Siberia" trope, see Il'ia Vinitskii, "Pesn' 'Soedinennii Shtaty Rossii' v politicheskom voobrazhenii russko-amerikanskogo avantiurista," *Journal of Russian American Studies* v. 4, no. 2 (October 2020): 92-135.

Cournos's article is titled "Amerikanskie Khudozhniki. Uistler' i Sardzhen't'" ("American artists. Whistler and Sargent"). That the painters are American is much to the point, as the special issue of *Niva* was devoted to the United States as an ally of Russia in the war. Chukovsky was doubtless responsible for the inclusion of Cournos's article on James McNeil Whistler and John Sargent. He was closely associated with *Niva*, whose editorial offices were located at 22 Malaya Morskaya Street adjacent to the *Hôtel Angleterre*, and a regular contributor since 1906.<sup>64</sup> Unlike any of the other articles, Cournos's is tagged as written expressly for *Niva* and his name appears in Roman script, again, unlike the names of the other non-Russian authors. Further, Cournos is identified as a British critic, thus appearing to be a non-American contributor, when, in fact, he was an American. This may have been in deference to Cournos's belonging to a British delegation. Cournos's citizenship had been problematic when applying for a visa to travel to Russia with Britain's Anglo-Russian Commission.<sup>65</sup>

Cournos's article reprises moments from his writing on the two expat American painters, drawing on his experience as an art critic in Philadelphia and London. Referring back to his early exposure to young art students at the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts, he mentions Whistler twice in his *Autobiography*: "I had been for some time developing two correlated passions: the love of the English language and the desire to go to London. The latter desire was further encouraged by [Baruch M.] Feldman, who had made a journey to England on a cattle ship in order to see the Whistler Memorial Exhibition [22 February-15 April 1905] and had remained there over a year . . ." From the perspective of 1935, he comments: "Today painters speak in hushed tones of El Greco and Cézanne; in those days the 'moderns' swore allegiance to Velasquez and Whistler."<sup>66</sup> The choice of Whistler as subject for a Russian audience may have been influenced by Whistler's own love for St. Petersburg, where as a child he had been enrolled in the Imperial Academy of Arts.

Once in London, Cournos had continued to rely on art criticism for income. At the suggestion of Ernest Rhys, he began a book on American painting that was accepted for publication by J. M. Dent & Sons. The war intervened and the book was never published. Ezra Pound, who had known several of Cournos's artist friends in Philadelphia, went through the manuscript, commenting favorably. "And Ezra thought well enough of my chapter on Sargent to show it to Mr. Yeats, who liked it a great deal."<sup>67</sup> This chapter was the basis of his article published in the art journal, *Forum*, which opens by starkly contrasting Whistler and Sargent, giving preference to the former.<sup>68</sup>

Cournos's treatment of Sargent in the *Niva* essay reflects an evolution in his judgement. The passage quoted above, devoted to "those days," concludes that it

64. Fedotova, "Liubopytnyi mali," 36.

65. See Cournos, *Autobiography*, 301-02.

66. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 183, 157.

67. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 247.

68. John Cournos, "John S. Sargent," *Forum* v. 54 (1915): 232-6.

was then “rank heresy to praise Sargent.”<sup>69</sup> Now, Cournos appreciates several of Sargent’s portraits, notably those of Joseph Pulitzer and Asher Wertheimer; the latter he judges to excel for its modernity. The eventual positive evaluation of Sargent devolves on the painter’s contemporary work, his murals for the Boston Public Library and the large collection of water-colors in the Brooklyn Museum. Cournos valorizes Sargent for what he might produce in the future, having left behind what Cournos labels his “promiscuous portraiture,” or what the young students of 1905 found objectionable. The article in *Niva* again contrasts the two painters, but even-handedly praises them both. Such even-handed praise for sharply contrasted figures echoes in Chukovsky’s 1920 essay, “Akhmatova and Mayakovsky.”<sup>70</sup>

### **Publishing in Petrograd - H. D., Anna Akhmatova, and *Apollon***

The December 1917 and final issue of *Apollon* contained a translation of Cournos’s “The Death of Futurism” (“Smert’ Futurizma”). First published in the January 1917 issue of the *Egoist*,<sup>71</sup> “The Death of Futurism” can be related to Cournos’s close relationship during the war years with the poet, H. D. (1886-1961). H. D.’s influence on Cournos’s verse during these years is demonstrated in the poem he was to compose and address to Akhmatova during his time in Petrograd.<sup>72</sup> H. D.’s husband, Richard Aldington (1892-1962), had edited the *Egoist*’s literary section since 1913, which published a number of Cournos’s articles and translations. H. D. took over his editorial responsibilities in 1916-1917 when he was on active war duty, positioning her to place “The Death of Futurism” in the *Egoist*.

Akhmatova’s relationship with *Apollon* was not altogether dissimilar to H. D.’s with the *Egoist*. *Apollon* (1909-1917) had been co-founded by Akhmatova’s husband, Nikolai Gumilev, and its editor, Sergei Makovsky. Nikolai Stepanovich Gumilev (1886-1921), poet, critic and military officer, was executed by the Cheka in August 1921; Sergei Leonidovich Makovsky (1877-1962), poet, art critic and historian, left Russia after the Bolshevik coup. Makovsky’s living quarters were both gathering place for the Acmeists and office for *Apollon*. Originally focused on the arts and Russian Symbolism, *Apollon* published “Manifestos of Acmeism” in January 1913.

As the Imagists published in the *Egoist*, the Acmeists published in *Apollon*.

69. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 157.

70. Kornei Chukovsky, “Akhmatova i Mayakovsky,” *Dom iskusstv*, v. 1 (1920): 23-42. Reprinted in *Voprosy literatury* v. 51 (1988): 177-205. Translated by John Pearson in *Major Soviet Writers: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Edward J. Brown (London: Oxford UP, 1973).

71. John Cournos, “The Death of Futurism,” *Egoist* v. 4, no. 1 (Jan. 1917): 6-7. “Smert’ Futurizma,” *Apollon* nos. 8-10 (Oct-Dec. 1917): 30-3. For the actual printing date of this issue of *Apollon* – the middle of 1918, see Evgenii Evgenievich Stepanov, *Letopis’ zhizni Nikolaia Gumileva na fone ego polnogo epistoliarnogo naslediiia (1886-1921): v trekh tomakh* (Moscow: Azbukovnik, 2019-2021), Tom 2, 390n123. I thank Sergei Zenkevich for directing me to Stepanov’s work.

72. See Smith, “John Cournos Among the Imagists,” 24-27.

Akhmatova was naturally on friendly terms with the poets of this group and maintained especially close relations with the journal through Mikhail Lozinsky. Mikhail Leonidovich Lozinsky (1886-1955), translator and poet, was Makovsky's secretary and a long-standing friend of Gumilev. He edited the journal of the Poets' Guild (Tsekh Poetov), *Hyperborean* (1912-1914), which had been founded by Gumilev and Sergei Mitrofanovich Gorodetsky (1884-1967) in 1912. Six original members of the Poets' Guild, including Akhmatova, coalesced as the Acmeists. Akhmatova's first book of verse, *Večer (Evening)*, was published under the imprint of the Poets' Guild in 1912. Lozinsky published Akhmatova's second and third books of verse, *Chetki (Rosary)* and *Belaia Staia (White Flock)* under the imprint of Giperborei in 1913 and 1917 respectively. Akhmatova's relationship with Lozinsky supports the supposition that she was in a position to facilitate the publication of Cournos's "Death" ("Smert") in *Apollon*.<sup>73</sup>

Cournos's and H. D.'s thoughts about the war and about art coincide in "The Death of Futurism," thoughts which may have appealed to Akhmatova's own sentiments regarding contemporary art and its relationship to the war. While the article addresses an art movement, Futurism, it is discussed specifically in reference to the war. H. D. and Cournos shared comparable sensibilities regarding the connection between the Great War and contemporary art. The sympathy between H. D. and Cournos is discernible along the fault line between modern classicism (exemplified by T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot) and H. D.'s romantic Hellenism as analyzed by Eileen Gregory. Gregory's formulation of Eliot's "*via negativa*"—"a denial of all untoward imaginative, emotional, spiritual stimulation"—and H. D.'s embrace of romantic qualities—"the territory of dream (erotic, fragmentary, associational), of the child, of mystery, illusion, beauty" -- contains all the terms of Cournos and H. D.'s affinity and their mutual antipathy to Eliot.<sup>74</sup>

"The Death of Futurism" and a roughly contemporaneous essay by H. D. link modernist movements with the Great War, as both H. D. and Cournos rail against the machine and against a mechanistic aesthetic.<sup>75</sup> In her posthumously published,

73. In a letter to Gumilev in Paris dated 28/15 August 1917, Akhmatova writes that she has sent his poems to Lozinsky, who would place them in *Apollon*. Jacob J. Bickerman Collection on Nikolai Gumilev. Series 1. Sub-Series 2. Amherst Center for Russian Culture. Amherst College. The two poems that Gumilev had included in a letter to his mother, which Akhmatova forwarded to Lozinsky, "Stokgol'm" and "Priroda," did not appear in *Apollon*, but were first published in Gumilev's collection, *Koster*, June 1918. See Stepanov, *Letopis' zhizni Nikolaia Gumileva*, Tom 2, 390n123. Lozinsky left a substantial archive, which serves as a major source for information on *Apollon* and its contributors. A sample appears in "Iz pisem k Mikhailu Lozinskomu," *Anna Akhmatova: Desiatye gody*, ed. Roman Davidovich Timenchik and K. M. Polianov (Moscow: MPI, 1989).

74. Eileen Gregory, *H. D. and Hellenism* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1997), 18, 22.

75. In light of Cournos's antipathy to both Futurism and Vorticism (Cournos was later to publish "Death of Vorticism." *The Little Review* (June 1919) v. 6, no. 2:46-8), together with his dismay at the sinking on the ship of émigrés, there is a certain irony to the possibility that the ship on which Cournos and Walpole sailed may have been protected by a "Dazzle ship." The British employed Edward Alexander Wadsworth, Vorticist artist and

review article of W. B. Yeats's 1914 *Responsibilities and other poems*, H. D. condemns her generation, whose "cubes and angles seem a sort of incantation, a symbol for the forces that brought on this world calamity."<sup>76</sup> Cournots framed the issue somewhat differently: "The fact is, the artists, like the rest of the world, had hardly realized that the true exponents of modern art were the men on the German General Staff, holding periodical meetings at Potsdam, or some other 'dam'."<sup>77</sup> Gregory uses H. D.'s "Responsibilities" article to introduce the gendered modernist assault against romanticism (romantics denigrated as "effeminate") that effectively marginalized H. D.<sup>78</sup> Cournots calls out such gender coding, referring to "all those 'brother' arts, whose masculomaniac spokesmen spoke glibly in their green-red-and-yellow-becushioned boudoirs of 'the glory of war' and 'contempt for women,' of the necessity of 'draughts,' 'blasts,' and 'blizzards,' of 'maximum energy' and 'dispersed energy,' etc. etc." More explicitly, he continues: "Some day a book may be written to show how closely war is allied with sex. For the Futuristic juxtaposition of the glorification of war and 'contempt for women' is no mere accident. This contempt does not imply indifference, but the worst form men's obsession with sex can take, that is rape!"<sup>79</sup>

Another aspect of that fault line on which H. D. and Cournots found themselves on the same side was their mutual understanding of the relation of art to life. The occasion of Cournots's essay was an exhibition of C. R. W. Nevinson's war paintings at the Leicester galleries, of which he says: "it is generally agreed, the best pictorial protest against war that has yet been shown." Lauding Nevinson's painting, Cournots nevertheless writes:

And this protest is effective precisely because the artist has expressed it in unfuturistic terms. [. . .] After all, whether these paintings are a protest against war or not matters little, they are by their method a protest against Futurism. By his return to representation the artist proclaims in them a confession of Futurism's failure, and incidentally his own success as an artist. And as no art is distinct from its method—indeed the method is always the art—so the Futuristic theory falls with the structure. Peace to its ashes.

He takes exception to Nevinson's remarks in the exhibit catalogue, interpreting them as follows: "It is that this is a scientific age, and that art must therefore adopt a scientific formula. To say this is to imply that art is always the result of environment, whereas the opposite is nearer the truth: great art is nearly always

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friend of Wyndham Lewis, to supervise the camouflaging of over 2,000 ships during the war. Employing ideas derived from Vorticist and Cubist design, battle ships were painted with black and white stripes of various widths at varying angles to disrupt the U-boats' ability to pinpoint the direction and speed of travel. For images of the ships, see <https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/dazzle-ships>

76. H. D., "Responsibilities," *Agenda* v. 25 (1988): 51-53; H. D. Special Issue. 53.

77. Cournots, "Death," 6.

78. Gregory, *H. D. and Hellenism*, 12.

79. Cournots, "Death," 6, 7.

a reaction from environment. Only little artists are content to wallow in the mud of reality.” Cournos’s position: “The plausible theory set forth in this essay is that art is not life, that art is greater than life, that art—the world of the imagination created by the artist’s will—projects itself into life, the world of reality, to which it gives colour and in which it inspires a spirit of emulation.”<sup>80</sup>

Coincidentally, in June 1917, five months after the publication of “Death” critiquing Nevinson and three months before Cournos traveled to Petrograd, Akhmatova’s husband, Gumilev, visited London. Gumilev and Cournos met. Cournos had already been in communication with Akhmatova regarding his desire to become her authorized translator. Gumilev did not so advise his wife.<sup>81</sup> Gumilev also met with numerous British writers and artists. Through Boris Anrep (1883-1969), a Russian-born mosaicist active in Britain and intimate of Akhmatova, Gumilev met with Nevinson on more congenial terms than he did with Cournos.<sup>82</sup>

To confirm his own assessment that a prime mover of modernist complicity in the war was the *mésalliance* of life and art, Cournos concludes “The Death of Futurism” with recently published remarks by the pre-eminent Russian Futurist, Vladimir Mayakovsky. He quotes Mayakovsky to the effect that, as a result of futurism having fulfilled its “idea” in the war, it had “died as a particular group, but it has poured itself out in every one in a flood. To-day all are Futurists. The people is Futurist.”<sup>83</sup> In her review article on Yeats’s book, H. D. points to the same question: who wags the dog’s tail, art or life? She continues her assessment of her own generation, sounding much like Mayakovsky, that what WAS, no longer IS the enemy, because “it has merged into the struggle with its own lauded guns and aeroplanes, it has become a part of the struggle and is no longer a self-

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80. Cournos, “Death,” 6. While Cournos revised several of his aesthetic judgments over time, his understanding of the relationship among life, art, and science persisted. See, for example, his essay “Introduction. What is a Short Story?” *A World of Great Stories*, ed. Hiram Haydn and John Cournos (New York: Avenel Books, 1947), 3-17.

81. See Smith, “John Cournos Among the Imagists,” 42-43.

82. Quoting from Gumilev’s notebook, Evgenii Stepanov writes:

“Evidently, he met with C.R.W. Nevinson, English futurist painter, subsequently an official war artist: “C.R.W. Nevinson/4 Downside Crescent/Belsize Park Tube Station/Tel. Hamp. 2258.” Another note in his notebook indicates that Nevinson recommended that he meet in Paris with his friend, the Italian artist Gino Severini: “Mons Gino Severini/6 Rue Sophie Germain/xiv part./C.R.W. Nevinson/atelier: 51 Boulevard Saint Jacques/(atelier 17).” “Очевидно, что он встречался с К.Р.В. Невинсоном, английским художником-футуристом, впоследствии -- официальным военным художником: <<C.R.W. Nevinson/4 Downside Crescent/Belsize Park Tube Station/Tel. Hamp. 2258>> Другая пометка в записной книжке указывает, что Невинсон рекомендовал ему встретиться в Париже с его другом, итальянским художником Джино Северини: <<Mons Gino Severini/6 Rue Sophie Germain/xiv part./C.R.W. Nevinson/atelier: 51 Boulevard Saint Jacques/(atelier 17)>>. Stepanov, *Letopis’*, 335. Pages 320-488 in Stepanov cover Gumilev’s time in London, even citing Cournos’s “Death” in reference to Nevinson, 336n55.

83. Cournos, “Death,” 7. Cournos quotes from Vladimir Mayakovsky’s short “manifesto” – “Kaplia degtia,” published in 1915 by Osip Brik in a short, 15-page miscellany, *Vzial: Baraban Futuristov (Seized: The Drum of the Futurists)* (Petrograd: Tip. Z. Sokolinskago, 1915).



willed agent.” H. D.’s “self-willed agent” resonates with Cournos’s “imagination created by the artist’s will.” H. D. continued: “The guns they praised, the beauty of machines they loved, are no more as a god set apart for worship by a devil over whom neither they nor we have any more control.” H. D.’s “no more a god set apart” resonates with Mayakovsky’s “The people is Futurist.”

Original member of the Moscow Hylea group, Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovsky (July 1893 – April 1930) (poet, artist, playwright, and actor), was well known among Petrograd’s poets, having first read on 17 November 1912 at the city’s Stray Dog cabaret (Brodiachaia Sobaka), a prominent venue for both the Acmeists and Futurists. His presence in Cournos’s *Apollon* article may have added a touch of local appeal, much as mention of Whistler’s birth in St. Petersburg at the opening of the *Niva* article. Mayakovsky moved to Petrograd in 1915, the year his manifesto quoted by Cournos was published. Cournos may well have taken the title of his own article from Mayakovsky’s manifesto, in which “death” was the principal topos. Cournos occasioned his article on Nevinson’s exhibition; Mayakovsky occasioned his manifesto on the current day focus in the press on death.

This year is a year of deaths: almost every day the newspapers sob loudly in grief about somebody who has passed away before his time. Every day, with syrupy weeping the brevier wails over the huge number of names slaughtered by Mars. How noble and monastically severe today’s newspapers look. They are dressed in the black mourning garb of the obituaries, with the crystal-like tear of a necrology in their glittering eyes.

Mayakovsky’s intent in his manifesto was not merely to satirize bourgeois hypocrisy over the war dead, but to respond to their delight over the purported death of Futurism.

That’s why it has been particularly upsetting to see these same newspapers, usually ennobled by grief, note with indecent merriment one death that involved me very closely. When the critics, harnessed in tandem, carried along the dirty road—the road of the printed word—the coffin of Futurism, the newspapers trumpeted for weeks: “ho, ho, ho! serves it right! take it away! finally!”<sup>84</sup>

Thence to the statements quoted by Cournos: Futurism has “died as a particular group, but it has poured itself out in every one in a flood. To-day all are Futurists. The people is Futurist.” While there is a certain irony to the use Cournos put Mayakovsky’s words, two things are clear—Cournos had remarkably fast access to a relatively obscure document and respected Mayakovsky as a poet,

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84. Vladimir Mayakovsky, “A Drop of Tar” (“Kaplja degtia”), *Russian Futurism Through Its Manifestoes, 1912-1928*, translated and edited by Anna Lawton and Henry Eagle (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988), 100-102, 100.

as did Akhmatova.<sup>85</sup>

Cournos and H. D.'s disavowal of Futurism, when it was "art," when it conjured the as-yet-unrealized, lay in Futurism's grounding in materialism, its love for the machine, which they viewed as contributing to the war. Such was never Akhmatova's focus. She would align with Cournos and H. D., however, in respect to rejection, rather than glorification, of war. Akhmatova biographer, Roberta Reeder writes:

Many of the poems [in the 1917 collection, *White Flock*] are about the war. They reveal a new consciousness of Akhmatova's place in the world. No longer is she voice of women crying out in pain at personal suffering, or asking God why the world is often so cruel. She is speaking now for her country and her people [. . .] Akhmatova did not glorify war. Her patriotism took the form of compassion for those facing death fighting for their land, rather than a rhetorical celebration of heroism.<sup>86</sup>

Akhmatova would align with Cournos and H. D. as well in terms of a near religious insistence on art reaching toward spirituality, rather than subjugation to mere materiality. She did not employ their strident antagonism toward geometry. Yet her grounding in the natural world implied a sympathy for their anti-technology sensibility.

### **Petrograd acquaintances**

Aside from his official journalism work or pursuits approved by Colonel Thornhill, Cournos was expanding his circle of acquaintances in the art world. The cabaret life of Petrograd continued during the war, though diminished after the March/February revolution. Artists continued to frequent their favored, pre-war cafés, much as in London. The preeminent, pre-war cabaret, the Stray Dog, had been closed by the censors in March 1915; a new venue opened in April 1916, The Comedian's Halt (Prival komediantov), which remained open after the Bolshevik coup until 1919.<sup>87</sup> Cournos surely attended whatever gatherings

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85. Akhmatova had first met Mayakovsky at the Stray Dog, subsequently encountering him on a number of occasions. While unenthusiastic of his post-revolution work, Akhmatova genuinely liked his early poetry. In 1940, on the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mayakovsky's death, Akhmatova read a specially composed poem, "Mayakovsky in 1913," acknowledging the impact of his early verse: "What you destroyed—was destroyed,/A verdict beat in every word." See Roberta Reeder, *Anna Akhmatova: Poet and Prophet*. Revised edition. (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 2006), 97-98, 317. The text of the poem appears on pp. 316-17.

86. Reeder, *Anna Akhmatova*, 136. See also M. M. Kralin, "'Khorovoe nachalo' v knige Akhmatovoi 'Belaia staia,'" *Russkaia literature* v. 3 (1989): 97-108.

87. On the Stray Dog, see Reeder, *Anna Akhmatova*, 94-100 and *passim*, and Lisa Appignanesi's section titled "Russia: Revolutionary Art" in *The Cabaret*. Revised and expanded edition (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), 95-104. Appignanesi highlights Akhmatova's presence at the cabaret, quoting from several of her poems in relation to the Stray Dog. On the Comedian's Halt, see [https://www.krugosvet.ru/enc/kultura\\_i\\_](https://www.krugosvet.ru/enc/kultura_i_)

of artists and writers as were still functioning during his stay. An aside in his *Autobiography* suggests time spent among artists:

And how is it to be explained, this curious natural attraction that sex has for the imagination? Is it necessarily an attribute of a so-called filthy mind? I scarcely think so. Rembrandt, we now know, made numerous etchings of men and women in the act of copulation; and when I was in Petrograd in 1917 I happened to hear a great deal about the collection of his own drawings made by that exquisite artist Somoff and shown only to unsqueamish friends.<sup>88</sup>

“[T]hat exquisite artist Somoff” was none other than Walpole’s lover and Eugene Somoff’s cousin, Konstantin Somov.

Describing preparations to leave Petrograd, Cournos offers further evidence of encounters with Petrograd’s literati:

I was told that I could take along with me only hand luggage. So I packed a large trunk with things I could not take with me; a dress suit and a great many books, including many autographed copies: it was too bad to have to leave these behind. I gave the trunk in charge of Korney Chukovsky and asked him to deliver it for safekeeping to the British Embassy. I fear I shall never see that trunk again.<sup>89</sup>

Chukovsky was instrumental in personally introducing Cournos to Petrograd’s literary figures: “He was a very amusing fellow who knew all of literary Petrograd, and I met a number of celebrities through him.” Chukovsky was, indeed, an amusing fellow, well connected within Petrograd’s literary world. He was certainly a major, if not adequately acknowledged, force in arranging Cournos’s literary and journalistic undertakings. In his *Autobiography* Cournos names only Feodor Sologub in respect to Chukovsky.<sup>90</sup> Chukovsky was acquainted with Sologub’s close friend, literary critic Vengerova, who had facilitated Cournos’s correspondence with Sologub beginning in 1915. Chukovsky was also acquainted with the another “celebrity” named by Cournos, Aleksei Remizov, whom Cournos had met in Petrograd by 26 November (O. S.). On that date Remizov wrote a letter of introduction for Cournos to his friend, ethnographer and bibliophile, Ivan Aleksandrovich Riazanovskii of Kostroma, drawing a map directing him to Riazanovskii’s home.<sup>91</sup> Though there is no evidence that Chukovsky introduced

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obrazovanie/teatr\_i\_kino/PRIVAL\_KOMEDIANTOV.html

88. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 25.

89. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 316.

90. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 304-05.

91. Remizov, Aleksei Mikhailovich. Houghton Library, Harvard University. MS 65 (4). See also Edward Manouelian, “From Pis'ma to Pis'mena: Ideological and Journalistic Contexts of Remizov's Documentary Project,” *The Russian Review* v. 55, no. 1 (Jan. 1996): 1-20

Cournos to Mayakovsky, the two were well acquainted. Mayakovsky had spent May 1914 in the fabled village of Kuokkala, summer home to Chukovsky from 1906 to 1916. Known today as Repino in honor of the painter, Ilya Repin, the village is located 19 miles north of St. Petersburg on the Karelian Isthmus and the Gulf of Finland. Mayakovsky often visited Chukovsky during his stay in Kuokkala. Chukovsky had known Akhmatova since 1912. It is not known where or how Cournos met Akhmatova, whether through Chukovsky or at a cabaret. Or on his own initiative, since he had her address when he arrived in the city.

### **Cournos and Akhmatova**

During the war years, Akhmatova was peripatetic. She traveled to the Black Sea region for health reasons and visited her mother in Kiev. Her primary residences were: her in-laws house in the Tsar's Village (Tsarskoe Selo), where she had spent much of her adolescence and had first met her future husband Nikolai Gumilev in 1903; at the Gumilev country home in Slepnevo (south of Petrograd and west of Moscow); and in Petrograd, where she often stayed with her childhood friend, Valeriia Sreznevskiaia at Botkinskaia ulitsa No. 9 in the Vyborg district across the Neva via the Liteiny bridge just beyond Finland Station. Botkinskaia ulitsa No. 9 appears in Cournos's address book. Akhmatova was living with the Sreznevskys at the time of the March/February revolution and returned to them in September 1917 after a stay at Slepnevo, remaining with them until autumn 1918. The November 1917 dating of Cournos's poem addressed to Akhmatova suggests that he had met the poet not long after his mid-October arrival in Petrograd.<sup>92</sup>

During Cournos's time in Petrograd, Akhmatova's public presence included the publication of her 1915 poem, "Prayer," on November 26 (O. S.) in the newspaper *Pravo Naroda* (*The Right of the People*) and two public readings. It was read on November 28 at an event organized by the Union of Russian writers and again in January 1918. Roberta Reeder contextualizes the publication and readings of this 1915 poem with contemporaneous events surrounding elections for the Constituent Assembly. Reeder writes:

Soon after the disbanding of the Constituent Assembly, on January 22, 1918, at a fundraiser for the Red Cross, Akhmatova read her poems, Arthur Lourie played the piano, and Sudeikina danced. The meeting, which was entitled "Oh, Russia," became like a protest against the disbanding of the Constituent Assembly in the wake of the punishment of leading political figures. [. . .] The meeting ended with Akhmatova reading "Your spirit is clouded with arrogance" (dated January 1, 1917).<sup>93</sup>

Zinaida Gippius (1869-1945), who together with her husband Dmitry Merezhkovsky (1889-1941) was a major figure among the Russian Symbolists, also read at the January event. Her "black notebook" entry for January 22, providing a different date and name for the event, reads:

92. See Smith, "John Cournos Among the Imagists," 25n2.

93. Reeder, *Anna Akhmatova*, 151.

Yesterday I saw Akhmatova at the “Morning of Russia” benefitting the political Red Cross. I am not in the least “afraid” and am not ashamed to read from the stage, no matter what, poetry or prose; before 800 feeling the same as before two (maybe it comes from myopia) - however, I hate these readings and have long since been declining them. Here, we had to, after all, it’s our Red Cross. And I read to them - all the most “obscene”! We also read Merezhkovsky, Sologub ... There were so many people that they could not all be accommodated. A respectable collection.<sup>94</sup>

Notes to the publication of Gippius’s notebook indicate that the event took place at the Tenishev Academy, located just beyond Nevskii Prospect at 33-35 Mokhovaia Ulitsa -- in the heart of the city. Among the readings are listed: “Gippius (“Now”), A. A. Akhmatova (“Prayer”, “Your spirit is darkened by arrogance ...”, “You are an apostate: for the green island ...”), F. Sologub (“Hymns to the Motherland”), as well as performances by D. S. Merezhkovsky and D. V. Filosofov.”

On the evening of ‘Morning of Russia’, - Akhmatova recalled, - I was invited and the three of them (Merezhkovskys and Filosofov. - TP). I was disgraced there: I read the first stanza of “Apostate,” and forgot the second. In the artistic studio, of course, I remembered everything. I left and did not read ... In those days I had troubles, I felt bad ... Zinaida Nikolaevna in a red wig, her face as if enameled, in a Parisian dress ... They insistently invited me to join them, but I demurred, because they were evil ...<sup>95</sup>

Cournos may well have attended the first reading and surely the second. In 2012, two framed Russian Red Cross postcards hung in Cournos’s granddaughter’s dining area. The postcards were likely purchased at the “Oh, Russia” (or “Morning of Russia”) fund raiser. Cournos may also have attended a third reading.

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94. 22 января, понедельник

Вчера я видела Ахматову на «Утре России» в пользу политического Красного Креста. Я нисколько не «боюсь» и не стесняюсь читать с эстрады, все равно что, стихи или прозу; перед 800 чувствуя себя так же, как перед двумя (м. б., это происходит от близорукости) — однако терпеть не могу этих чтений и давно от них отказываюсь. Тут, однако, пришлось, ведь это наш же Красный Крест. Уж и почитала же я им — все самое «нецензурное»!

Читали еще Мережковский, Сологуб... Народу столько, что не вмещалось. Собрали довольноно. <https://gippius.com/doc/memory/chjornye-tetradi.html> (p. 382)

95. «На вечер "Утра России", — вспоминала Ахматова, — была приглашена я и они трое (Мережковские и Философов. — *Т. II*). Я там оскандалилась: прочитала первую строфу «Отступника», а вторую забыла. В артистической, конечно, все вспомнила. Ушла и не стала читать. У меня в те дни были неприятности, мне было плохо... Зинаида Николаевна в рыжем парике, лицо будто эмалированное, в парижском платье... Они меня очень зазывали к себе, но я уклонилась, потому что они были злые...» (цит. по: *Ахматова А. А. Собр. соч. Т. 1. М., 1998. С. 561*). Ibid.

Akhmatova read at the Comedians' Halt in January 1918. Stepanov writes:

On 26 January/8 February, for the first time after a long break, took place in Petrograd at the literary-artistic café, "The Comedians' Halt." A. Akhmatova, G. Adamovich, M. Zenkevich, R. Ivnev, G. Ivanov, M. Kuzmin, O. Mandel'shtam, V. Piast and others appeared. Announced in the program, "T. P. Karsavina, O. A. Glebova-Sudeikina [. . .] will read verse by N. Gumilev, M. Tsvetaeva. . ."96

### Departure from Petrograd

Conditions had continued to deteriorate after the Bolshevik coup and Cournos "had discovered [he was] a bourgeois'."97 On the morning of 5 January (O. S.), from his office newly moved to the Furshtadskaya, Cournos had witnessed "Red machine-gunners fire into the peaceful demonstrators marching to the hall of the Constituent Assembly." He took to spending his days wandering from café to café in search of both food and companionship. In these venues, he witnessed both the deprivations and dangers daily faced by the city's inhabitants.

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96. А 26 января/8 февраля в Петрограде, впервые после длительного перерыва, состоялся <<Вечер петербургских поэтов>> в литературно-художественном кафе <<Привал комедиантов>>. На вечере выступали А. Ахматова, Г. Адамович, М. Зенкевич, Р. Ивнев, Г. Иванов, М. Кузмин, О. Мандельштам, В. Пяст, и др. Как сказано в программе, <<Т.П. Карсавина, О.А. Глебова-Судейкина <...> прочтут стихи Н. Гумилева, М. Цветаевой...>>. Stepanov, *Letopis'*, Том 2, 504. Stepanov cites: Привал комедиантов-1988. С. 143. Новые ведомости. Вечерняя газета. 1918. No.7. 25 января.

Though Mikhail Zenkevich had returned to Saratov from Petrograd in December 1917, the inclusion of his name among the advertised participants tempts one to speculate on the possibility that Cournos met Zenkevich, perhaps at another reading, or possibly through Zenkevich's friend and fellow Acmeist, Akhmatova. In early 1915, Cournos's friend Zinaida Vengerova had published an article based on her interview with Ezra Pound (an interview facilitated by Cournos), in the first issue of the almanach, *Strelets*. (See Julia Trubikhina, "Imagists Rejected: 'Vengerova, Pound and A Few Do's and Don'ts of Russian Imagism.'" "Appendix: Zinaida Vengerova 'English Futurists' (1915): Translation." *Paideuma. A Journal Devoted to Ezra Pound Scholarship* v. 27, nos. 2&3: 129-51.

A consequence of the article was the introduction of Richard Aldington, H. D.'s husband and Cournos's close friend, into Russian literary consciousness. Mikhail Urnov opens his essay on Aldington's popularity in Russia as follows:

Richard Aldington's yesterday in my country embraces a long historical period: from 1915 to 1985. [. . .] It was in 1932 that the first Russian edition of Aldington's novel *Death of a Hero* appeared from the State Fiction Publishing House [. . .] As for me, I discovered Aldington for myself a year before that date. [. . .] The person who drew my attention to Richard Aldington was Mikhail Zenkevich, poet and translator, a friend of Nikolaj Gumilev and Anna Akhmatova, the famous leaders of the Acmeist literary movement, and their brother in poetry. (Mikhail Urnov, "A Note on Richard Aldington. Yesterday and Today in Russia," *Richard Aldington: Reappraisals*. Ed. by Charles Doyle (Victoria, B.C., CA: Uof Victoria, 1990), 81-85, 81.) [English Literary Studies Monograph Series n. 49]

Had Cournos met Zenkevich in 1917, he may have spoken about his close friend, inspiring Zenkevich's interest in Aldington.

97. Beasley, *Russomania*, 386. Beasley cites a letter to Fletcher dated 1 January 1918.

It was a city of nightmare, of foreboding, of sinister phantoms. [. . . F]or the damp mists used to enter your room and choke you, and you had nightmares, and you had begun to understand that the demons who sit on people's chests at night and try to throttle them—those you have read about in Russian fiction—are no figures of speech, but an accursed reality.<sup>98</sup>

Not long after “An Evening of Petersburg Poets,” Cournos began to consider a return to England. Bolshevik censorship and closures of newspapers rendered untenable his official work as a journalist. In retrospect, Cournos creates a humorous story, citing the travails of a “Menshevik” paper to characterize conditions under which journalists were operating. Bearing the same name as the Red Cross Fundraiser recalled by Akhmatova and Gippius – *Morning of Russia (Utro Rossii)*, the paper's name altered each time it was closed: from *Morning of Russia* to *Noon of Russia* to *Afternoon of Russia* to *Evening of Russia* to *Midnight of Russia* to *Dead of Night of Russia*, after which the paper “gave up the ghost.”<sup>99</sup> Such a paper actually existed. Based in Moscow, *Utro Rossii* (1907-1918) was a daily paper associated with the liberal wing of Moscow industrialists. When shut down in April 1918 (after Cournos had left the country), its name was changed to *Dawn of Russia (Zaria Rossii)*; the paper was shut down finally at the end of July 1918.<sup>100</sup>

By early 1918, virtually all Allied diplomatic services were contemplating removal. For health reasons, British Ambassador to Russia, Sir George Buchanan, had already left the city 26 December 1917. On the morning of 27 February, a train carrying the Americans departed for Vologda, where they remained onboard for a week before securing accommodations. American Ambassador David Francis wrote that few other national embassies accepted his suggestion to transfer to Vologda, choosing rather to depart the country entirely via Finland and the Scandinavian route by which many had arrived. Together with six other governments, the British negotiated with the Bolsheviks in Helsingfors for passage through civil-war Finland.<sup>101</sup> Early March 1918 the trains encountered the front line at Vilppula, just north of the Finnish city of Tampere. The British train was mistaken and met with fire. After negotiation, the train carrying British embassy personnel got through. The others were forced to return to Russia.<sup>102</sup>

98. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 311-15. See Chapter XLV, “Volcano of Human Wrath” (309-15) for Cournos's account of Petrograd during his stay.

99. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 313.

100. James D. White, “Moscow, Petersburg and the Russian Industrialists. In reply to Ruth Amende Roosa,” *Soviet Studies* v. 24, no. 3 (January 1973):414-20, 417. See also the ru.wikipedia entry for Утро\_России\_(газета), which lists the paper's political orientation as “konstitutsionnaia demokratiia.”

101. David Rowland Francis, *Russia from the American Embassy*, chapter XVII “Vologda – The Diplomatic Capital” (New York: Arno Press, 1970 [c1921]), 234-260, 235-6.

102. Tuomas Tepora and Aapo Roselius chose to open their edited book, *Finnish*

Cournos had decided to depart Petrograd on his own, rather than wait for the British Embassy special train. He boarded a train to Murmansk (Murman) from the Nikolayevsky station on the opposite side of town from the Finland station, expecting to board a ship already in harbor. The journey to Murmansk was slowed by weather and fight. Once the train arrived, the battleship *Glory* was indeed in harbor, but not serviceable. The passengers remained on board the train for approximately four weeks awaiting the arrival of another ship, the British naval ship *Huntsend*, to carry them to England. Rather than the land route through Scandinavia then across the North Sea, the route from Murmansk was entirely at sea. From the Kola Peninsula, the *Huntsend* sailed the Barents Sea above Scandinavia, then down the Norwegian Sea to the North Sea – a route vulnerable to U-boats. Cournos’s note, that the ship was “properly camouflaged,” evokes the Vorticist designs he might otherwise have disparaged. After 8 days at sea, the *Huntsend* arrived at Newcastle on 29 March. (Had Cournos waited to take the embassy train, he would have arrived in England a week earlier.) The *Huntsend*’s passengers were immediately entrained, arriving in London that evening.<sup>103</sup>

Once Cournos settled on the train to Murmansk, he had mere hours to finalize his affairs. From Murmansk he wrote to his Petrograd acquaintances to explain his sudden disappearance. Evidence of two such communications exist. In a letter to Akhmatova dated 7 March, Cournos wrote to apologize for not visiting her as promised before his departure, explaining the circumstances and mentioning his regret at what he had been forced to leave behind. He regrets, as well, that he was not able to collect from her the letter to Gumilev that she had intended to give to him, but promises to contact Gumilev once he arrives in London.<sup>104</sup> In a post

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*Civil War 1918: History, Memory, Legacy* with the British encounter with Finnish troops. “Introduction” (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014), 1. They cite as their source Juho Kotakallio, “Brittilähetystön rintamalinjojen ylitys vuonna 1918” *Tammerkoski*. No. 4 (2008): 10-12.

103. Cournos, *Autobiography*, Chapters XLVI and XLVII “North of the Arctic Circle,” 316-324, “Homeward Bound,” 325-31.

104. Мурман, март 7, 1918

Милая Анна Андреевна —

Простите мне, что не мог притти к вам, как я вам обещал. Но я не виноват в этом, так как мне дали всего девять часов уехать от Петрограда. Я даже оставил многих вещей, которых я хотел взять с собой. Во всяком случае я жалею самого себя в том, что я вас не мог видеть перед моим отъездом. Я тоже очень сожалею, что при таких обстоятельствах не мог взять с собою письмо, которое вы хотели дать мне. Я напишу вашему мужу, когда я приеду в Лондон, и надеюсь написать вам, если это будет возможно. Желаю вам, что вы сами желаете себе. Надеюсь, что опять увижу вас, и при более благополучных обстоятельствах. Пожалуйста, не забудьте меня.

John Cournos

Мой адрес в Лондоне:

c/o Forcing [sic] Office, Whitehall, S.W., London или: 44 Mecklenburg Square, London, W.S.I.

This letter appears in Roman Timenchik’s discussion of Akhmatova’s poem “Ostav’ svoi krai glukhi i greshnyi” (“Оставь свой край глухой и грешный”), published 18 April 1918. R. D. Timenchik, “Anna Akhmatova. Trinadtsat’ strochek iz kommentariiev” (63-71), *de visu. istoriko-literaturnyi i bibliograficheskii zhurnal* 5/6’94, 65-66. <https://imwerden>.



card to Cournos dated 11 April, Sologub acknowledges receipt of Cournos's letter sent from Murmansk. In his note, Sologub comments on the difficult conditions in Petrograd and expresses his desire to go at least for a while to England or America.<sup>105</sup>

### Return to England

The experience of Petrograd fundamentally altered Cournos's relationship with Russian literature and culture. Before leaving for Petrograd, he was warned not to share his revolutionary opinions. Not long after the coup, he discovered himself to be a bourgeois. To parse the term "bourgeois" as used by Cournos, he discovered in himself not an anti-revolutionary sentiment, but a reinforcement of his anti-machine sentiment. His experience of the Bolshevik coup triggered his most humane sentiments, sentiments aligned with the idealism of the revolutionaries he had encountered in London, and strengthened his antipathy to materialist dogmas and practices.

Upon returning to London, Cournos set about reconstituting the life he had left behind when leaving for Petrograd, a life of translation, journalism, art criticism and literature, now informed by the experience of Petrograd. He retained his connection with Walpole, who had Cournos installed in the Ministry of Information, where it was his "task to keep informed of the Russian situation as it developed by reading the Russian papers and such documents as came [his] way."<sup>106</sup> He also contributed to periodicals based on knowledge he had acquired in Petrograd and through connections he had made there.<sup>107</sup> One notable instance is his "dream fantasy" – "A Londoner's Dream on Returning from Petrograd" – published first by *Nineteenth Century and After* 85: 383-94 (February 1919), then reprinted, also in 1919, as "London Under the Bolsheviks: A Londoner's Dream on Returning from Petrograd" by the Russian Liberation Committee as number four of its pamphlet series. On the Committee's executive board were Harold Whitmore Williams (1876-1928), whose brother had accompanied Walpole and Cournos on the journey out to Petrograd, and Williams's wife Ariadna Tyrkova-Williams (1869-1962).<sup>108</sup> Cournos would have known them

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105. "... уехать хоть бы на время в Англию или Америку. . ." Harvard University, Houghton, Russian MS 61 (4).

106. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 328.

107. John Cournos, 'Cultural Propaganda in Its Russian Aspect', *The New Europe* v. 7, no. 89 (27 June 1918), 251-5; "Proletarian Culture: (I) The Theory," *The New Europe* v. 13, no. 159 (30 Oct. 1919): 61-4, in which Cournos translates directly from an article by Poliansky from a November 1918 issue of *Proletarskaya Kultura* 5 (see Ayers, *Modernism*, 188n56); "Proletarian Culture: (II) Bolševik Poetry," *The New Europe* v. 13, no. 160 (6 Nov. 1919): 110-16; "Proletarian Culture: (III) The Bolševik Theatre," *The New Europe* v. 13, no. 161 (13 Nov. 1919): 151-4; "Proletarian Culture: (IV) 'A Factory of Literature'," *The New Europe* v. 13, no. 162 (20 Nov. 1919): 183-7. On *The New Europe* and Cournos's contributions, see Ayers, *Modernism*, 55-64, 172-5

108. Journalist and linguist, Williams first worked in Russia for the *Manchester Guardian* in 1905. By 1914 he wrote for the *Daily Chronicle*, meeting Walpole when the

from his time in Petrograd.

Witnessing the human misery of Petrograd may have influenced Cournos's decision to work for the newly established Save the Children Fund (SCF). During 1920, Cournos was engaged as field investigator in Central Europe for the SCF. From Vienna, Budapest, and Czecho-Slovakia, he sent reports quoted liberally in the organization's publication, "The Record."<sup>109</sup> Under the aegis of the SCF, an exhibit of children's art appeared 18 November 1920 through 2 December 1921 in the Exhibition Gallery of the British Institute of Industrial Art in Knightsbridge, London. A review of the exhibition in *International Studio* designated the designs and drawings contributed by children aged 10 to 14 from classes at the Vienna Municipal School of Arts and Crafts run by Franz Cižek as the best part of the exhibition. The review quotes at length Cournos, who was well acquainted with Cižek from his time spent in Vienna working for the SCF.<sup>110</sup> All the while, Cournos was writing his three volume, autobiographical *roman à clef*: *The Mask* (1919), *The Wall* (1921), and *Babel* (1922). In the 1920s and 1930s, he contributed articles on Russia to *The Criterion* under the editorship of T. S. Eliot.<sup>111</sup>

The span of Cournos's career as a translator, from his 1908 translation of Leonid Andreev's *Silence* to the publication in 1959 of Andrei Bely's *St. Petersburg*,<sup>112</sup> ran the gamut of individual short stories, volumes of collected

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latter arrived in Russia in September. Widely considered an expert on Russia, Williams was a confidant of British Ambassador to Russia, Sir George Buchanan, and in 1916 assisted Walpole in setting up the Russian Propaganda Bureau in Petrograd, precursor to the Anglo-Russian Commission. Tyrkova-Williams, member of the Constitutional Democrat party (the Cadets), was active in Russian politics. On the Williamses and on the Russian Liberation Committee, see also Charlotte Alston: *Russia's Greatest Enemy?: Harold Williams and the Russian Revolutions* (London; New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007); "The Work of the Russian Liberation Committee in London, 1919-1924" *Slavonica* v. 14, no.1: 6-17; "News of the Struggle: The Russian Political Press in London, 1853-1921," *The Foreign Political Press in Nineteenth-Century London: Politics from a Distance*, ed. Constance Bantman and Ana Cláudia Suriani da Silva (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 155-74.

109. "The Record of the SAVE THE CHILDREN FUND," ed. by Edward Fuller, October 1, 1920-September 1, 1921.

110. *International Studio* v. 72 (November 1920 – February 1921): 191-194. *International Studio* (New York/London: John Lane) was a joint production with the British journal, *The Studio*. Cournos had previously published an article on Robert Henri, George B. Luks and George W. Bellows, "The Painters of the New York School." *The International Studio* v. 56, no. 224 (Oct. 1915): 239-46. He also published "Jacob Epstein: Artist-Philosopher," *International Studio* v. 70, no. 282 (Aug. 1920): 173-8.

111. See Olga Ushakova, "Russia and Russian Culture in *The Criterion*," *A People Passing Rude: British Responses to Russian Culture*, ed. Anthony Cross, (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2012): 231-240; Olga Ushakova, "Zhurnal 'Criterion' o Russkoi Revoliutsii I Kommuniste," *Literatura dvukh Amerik* (2017), no. 3: 335-362; David Ayers, "John Cournos and the Politics of Russian Literature in *The Criterion*," *Modernism/modernity* v. 18, no. 2, (April 2011): 355-369.

112. *Silence* by Andreev. Phila.: Brown Bros., 1908; *St. Petersburg*. By Andrei Belyi. New York: Grove Press, 1959.

short stories and at least 13 books. From the perspective of beginning and end points, Cournos remained devoted to Silver Age modernists. the lasting legacy of his experience of revolutionary Petrograd--the vehemence and longevity of Cournos's recognition of his "bourgeois" sentiment—is signaled in passages from his 1935 *Autobiography* and his 1963 final book of poetry.

Particularly do I remember a news vendor on a Nevsky corner. He was tall, lean, middle-aged. He wore a black morning coat and striped trousers; it was quite clear he had seen better days; he was probably a husband and a father; perhaps a businessman or a lawyer; he looked so helpless, so forlorn, above all, so incongruous: pathos personified, a symbol of a vanishing world. . . .He seemed to shiver, to shrink. And your glance measured him from the apathy in his eyes to the spats on his feet. Those spats! They were the final touch. And, glimpsing them, you smiled, couldn't help but smile; for you realized that, in a sense, they were the stamp of the old, the vanishing world, and that whatever else of this world might be retained, spats would be no more! To this day I can vividly recall the wretched figure in the morning coat and striped trousers and, as in a photo out of focus, these spats project rather large and prominent enough to have a comical aspect. . . .Yet no laughing matter is this, but in its own fashion a full-fledged tragedy.<sup>113</sup>

Cournos recalls this scene in a poem, "The Man With the Spats," published in 1963.<sup>114</sup> This late poem harks back to Cournos's writings upon his return to London: "London Under the Bolsheviks: A Londoner's Dream on Returning from Petrograd," his articles on Russia in *The Criterion*,<sup>115</sup> and his series of articles in *The New Europe*.

There is also an interesting congruence among the *Autobiography*, "The Man With the Spats," and Cournos's translation of Bely's *St. Petersburg*. Chapter XLV, "Volcano of Human Wrath," of the *Autobiography* is imbued with Bely's novel. Cournos had long been a champion of the novel, praising *St. Petersburg* and its author in the 20s and 30s.<sup>116</sup> He first read the novel during WWI and completed its

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113. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 306.

114 John Cournos, "The Man With The Spats (*Petrograd, November, 1917*) A Memory," *With Hey, Ho . . . and the Man With The Spats* (New York: Astra Books, 1963), 72-122, 75. In this late iteration of the scene, Cournos repeats the story about the name changes in the newspaper, *Utro Rossii*, insisting that it is not a fantasy and that he had donated copies of the paper to the archives of Yale University Library. a comprehensive search for the newspaper in both Yale's and other depositories' collections was conducted and no copies were located.

115. See especially Ushakova, "Zhurnal 'Criterion' o Russkoi Revoliutsii i Kommunizme."

116. "And, of course, there is Andrey Bely, whose recent three-volume novel was a considerable event, though Bely has never surpassed or even equaled that prodigious earlier work of his called 'Petersburg,' which is one of the great books of our epoch." "Foreword" (x-xi) *Short Stories Out of Soviet Russia* (New York: Dutton, 1929; London: Dent, 1929,

translation by 1932. The manuscripts were twice lost by the publisher.<sup>117</sup> “Volcano of Human Wrath” opens and closes under the influence of *St. Petersburg*.

Peter, though he did not know it, had opened a window to let Bolshevism in. There occurred in the depths of the Russian soul a fierce impact of the half-Mongol and the European, which was ultimately to resolve itself into an historic impact between Ghenghis Khan and Karl Marx, once remote from each other and divisible, and now, after various mysterious character-transmuting processes of history, in the final impact and explosion become one. Karl Marx had thus taken possession of the conquering soul of Ghenghis Khan, and now together, as one, they had formed themselves into a new conqueror, leading new hordes intense with new effort to conquer the world for social revolution.<sup>118</sup>

Thus, Cournos analyzes the appropriateness of the revolution taking place in Russia, especially in Petrograd. The conjunction of Ghenghis Khan and Karl Marx recalls Bely’s anxiety over the “yellow peril.” The chapter closes with the eerie vision quoted above of the demons “you read about in Russian fiction.” The

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1932). In 1935, Cournos concluded his “Russian Chronicle” with a paean to Bely, writing: “If he had written nothing but *Petersburg* his fame would be assured. There is something in the comparison which has been made between this work and Joyce’s *Ulysses*, though Biely owes nothing to Joyce; actually, *Petersburg* made its appearance before *Ulysses*.” He begins a brief comparison of the novels’ commonalities before summarizing the plot and strengths of Bely’s novel. *The Criterion* v. 14, no. 55 (January 1935): 290–91.

An account of discussions among editors at Grove Press and the 1960 British publisher of *St. Petersburg*, Weidenfield and Nicolson, includes letters from Cournos further expressing his admiration and understanding of the novel. See Roger Keys, “‘An Extremist in All Things’ – George Adamovich on Andrei Biely: A Late Unpublished Article,” *Paraboly: Studies in Russian Modernist Literature and Culture. In Honor of John E. Malmstad*, ed. Nikolay Bogomolov and others (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), 269–85.

117. The first part of his *roman à clef*, *The Mask* (London: Methuen, 1919; New York: Doran, 1919) was dedicated to Elena Konstantinovna Somoff, whom he credits with giving him a copy of the novel. Introducing his translation of *St. Petersburg*, Cournos writes: “The translator owes a great debt to Eugene Somoff and his wife Elena Konstantinovna for first introducing him to Biely, and in particular for presenting him early during the First World War with a copy of the first Russian edition.” (New York: Grove Press, 1959), xviii.

The bibliography accompanying publication of one of his own short story concludes: “There are half a score of translations from the Russian by J. Cournos, among them “Petersburg”, by Anrey (*sic*) Biely, Coward-McCann, N. Y. 1932.” “Bibliography” (90) in *Americans Abroad: An Anthology*; Cournos again cites the forthcoming publication, this time for 1933: “Bibliography” (171) in *Authors: Today and Yesterday*.

For Cournos’s 1960 recollection of the lost manuscripts, see Keys, “‘An Extremist in All Things’,” 269.

118. Cournos, *Autobiography*, 309.

atmosphere is entirely consonant with the surreal occurrences in *St. Petersburg*. Ghenghis Khan and Karl Marx reappear in “The Man With the Spats,” here in a part verse, part prose dream sequence reminiscent of “A Londoner’s Dream on Returning from Petrograd.” This late dream sequence finds the Khan and Marx conversing at the base of the Bronze Horseman, the famous statue dedicated to Peter the Great. Together, the Mongol horseman and the German theorist confabulate how their individual talents, when working jointly, can achieve their respective objectives. Especially resonant with Bely is Marx’s line: “I dipped my pen/Into the same ink-bottle [as did Shakespeare]/And pulled out a time bomb/Whose moment to explode/Is nigh . . .”<sup>119</sup>

### Coda

A significant intention governing Cournos’s decision to go to Petrograd was his desire to meet Akhmatova and become her authorized translator. He had been translating her poetry since approximately 1914. In Petrograd, he did befriend the Russian poet and composed a beautiful verse to her, which appears in her visitor’s album. Cournos’s sole published translation of Akhmatova, “The Call,” was taken from her 1917 collection, *White Flock (Belaia Staia)* and appeared at the end of Cournos’s first book of verse, *In Exile*, in 1923.<sup>120</sup>

The translation takes notable linguistic liberties with the original poem. Compare the Russian with Cournos’s translation.

Зачем притворяешься ты  
То ветром, то камнем, то птицей?  
Зачем улыбаешься ты  
Мне с неба внезапной зарницей?

Не мучь меня больше, не тронь!  
Пусти меня к вещим заботам. . .  
Шатается пьяный огонь  
По высохшим серым болотам.

И Муза в дырявом платке

119. Cournos, “The Man With the Spats,” 110-121, 119.

120. John Cournos, “The Call (*After Akhmatova.*)” *In Exile* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1923), 64.

Writing to Gumilev from Slepnevo, Akhmatova announces that her own book of poems would come out the next week. (Jacob J. Bickerman Collection on Nikolai Gumilev. op cit). E. E. Stepanov approximates the date of this letter to around 2 (O. S.)/15 (N. S.) 1917, concluding that *White Flock* was printed late July or early August 1917. Stepanov quotes an 11 August letter from Akhmatova to Lozinsky, congratulating and thanking him for bringing *White Flock* into existence. Stepanov, *Letopis’*, Tom 2, 386nn107&108. However, annotating Gumilev’s letter to Lozinsky from London on 25-26 1917 in which Gumilev requests that the “korrektura” of *White Flock* be sent to Bechhofer, Stepanov writes: “Kniga Akhmatovoi “Belaia staia” vyshla v svet pod nabliudeniem Lozinskogo v oktjabre 1917 goda (Pg.: Giperborei).” Stepanov, *Letopis’*, Tom 2, 324n6.

Протяжно поет и уныло.  
 В жестокой и юной тоске  
 Ее чудотворная сила.<sup>121</sup>  
 (Слепнево 1915)

THE CALL

(*After Akhmatova.*)

WHY do you come masked  
 As the wind, as a stone, as a bird?  
 Why do you smile at me from the sky  
 In the dawn's flashing light?

Torture me no more,  
 Do not touch me;  
 Leave me to eloquent cares . . .  
 A drunken flame reels  
 On the dry grey bogs;  
 The Muse in torn shawl  
 Croons a sorrowful tune;  
 Her young, cruel grief  
 Leads down tortuous ways,  
 Toward lyric valleys,  
 Where enchantment dwells.<sup>122</sup>

More interesting than the linguistic liberties taken by Cournos is the change in structure and format. Three stanzas are reduced to two. This second stanza is then indented. Three other verse translations from the Russian appear in Cournos's collection. Only this poem takes such liberties, rendering both prosodically and visually the shift in tone of the original. It may be that Cournos wished to evoke his own poem addressed to Akhmatova, when translating one of hers.

O lily,  
 Frail white flower,  
 A joy to behold!

The hurricane blows,  
 Felling huge trees,  
 The beech and the oak,  
 And the tall sycamore.

O lily sweet,  
 Dear and frail,

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121. Anna Akhmatova, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*. Tom 1 (Moscow: Ellis Lak, 1998), 241.

122. Cournos, "The Call." *In Exile* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1923), 64.

Will you still stand  
When the winds cease to blow?  
Will you still hold high  
Your fair proud head?  
Will you look with pity  
On the beech and the oak  
And the tall sycamore  
That lie stretched on the ground  
When the winds cease to blow?  
(*To A.A.* – November 1917)<sup>123</sup>

### About the author

**Marilyn Schwinn Smith**, an independent researcher affiliated with Amherst College, has presented and published internationally across a varied range of subjects. She has written on the city of Holyoke's community farm, Nuestras Raices and on the Northampton Silk Project. Among English-language writers, she has dealt with memoirist Anne Morrow Lindbergh, photo-journalist Ruth Gruber, novelist Virginia Woolf, classical scholar and Russophile Jane Ellen Harrison, and poet H. D. The Russian-language authors about whom she has published include Aleksei Remizov and Marina Tsvetaeva. The career of John Cournos is the current focus of her work.

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123. First published: M. B. Meilakh, "Al'bom Anny Akhmatovy. 1910—nachala 1930-kh godov," *Pamiatniki kul'tury. Novye otkrytiia. Ezhegodnik 1991*. (Moscow: Nauka, 1997), 46. I gratefully acknowledge Boris Dralyuk for locating this publication on my behalf. Roman Timenchik dates the poem to November 1917. "Zapisnye knizhki' Anny Akhmatovoi," *Etkindovskie chteniia: sbornik statei*, v 2-3. (St. Petersburg: Evropeiskii universitet v Sankt-Peterburge, 2006), 238. Timenchik's entry for Cournos includes several little noted documents (238-42).