

‘A foreigner’s apprehension of a country at its most critical time’: Hugh Walpole in Russia in World War 1.

Giannandrea Poesio and Alexis Weedon

Hugh Walpole travelled to the Eastern front as a volunteer for the Russian Red Cross.¹ He stopped in Petrograd before joining his Otriad on a tour of duty near Lviv in the Ukraine in May 1915. After six months he returned to the UK to raise support for a British initiative to counteract German propaganda and in 1916 he went back to found the Anglo-Russian Bureau in Petrograd. During this time he kept a journal and wrote two novels about his Russian experience. Looking back, he reflected, ‘they are not bad books because as records of a foreigner’s apprehension of a country at its most critical time, they are true.’² From 1912 to 1916 he listed books he read on the verso pages of his journal and on the recto he listed the plays and operas with location and performers. It is a detailed record of an eclectic reader and theatre-goer. Later he published fragments of autobiography where he described how he fleetingly met Lenin and his official report on the early months of the revolution contains his eye-witness account of the demonstrations and the shots fired at him on the office balcony. From these sources we can see how his time in Russia influenced his taste and how closely he intertwined his experience of the theatre with his recall of the war.

Walpole was a popular and prolific novelist who on average wrote a book a year for three decades. Being self-aware he described himself as a ‘sentimentalist’ who put feeling and emotion above all else as a source of knowledge, and an ‘optimist’ who found the idealism of the Russian revolution attractive. These qualities enabled him to be resilient through the trauma of war, yet his Russian war experience never left him. Clemence Dane, contemporary and friend of Walpole, wrote in her book *Tradition and Hugh Walpole* (1930) that the European war broke in two the life of the nation. The ‘four years were as a gulf fixed between two states of existence. Only the young could cross it’, ‘the war had obliterated, either directly or vicariously, the public for whom these writers had told tales [...] Just as it had obliterated the age of which they wrote’.³ Walpole in his thirties was one of the young who crossed this gulf with his readers.

After his tour ended in October 1915 Walpole returned to the UK to publish *The Dark Forest* and dedicated it to his friend Konstantine Somov, a Modernist painter and member of that group of friends who helped Diaghilev mastermind what eventually became the Ballets Russes. He and Somov frequented the famous nightclub called *The Bat*, and met Michael Lykiardopoulos, secretary of the Arts Theatre of Moscow and translator of the works into Russian of many leading English writers of the day. Guided by Somov, Walpole was thus able to socialise with some of the leading representatives of Russia’s new culture, such as Sologub, Glazunov, Scriabin.

This essay contrasts Walpole’s experience of war in his novels with the vibrant artistic society he got to know.

¹ This article is a revised and shortened version of an article first published as Giannandrea Poesio and Alexis Weedon "The Origins of the Broadbrow: Hugh Walpole and Russian Modernism in 1917." *Book History* 22 (2019), 280-302. © 2019 The Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing. Reprinted with permission of Johns Hopkins University Press.

² Hugh Walpole, "The Crystal Box: Fragments of Autobiography", *Bookman*, February 1923, p. 688.

³ Clemence Dane, *Tradition and Hugh Walpole* (London: Heinemann, 1930), 42.

Walpole and Russian Modernist theatre in Moscow

According to Anthony Cross, Walpole's fascination with Russia had started in 1912,⁴ while reading Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. Yet, in 1955, British dance historian and publisher Cyril Beaumont stated that: 'a then young Mr Walpole, the known writer, was among the guests excitedly shaking hands with all the Russian artists'.⁵ The party in question was one of the many thrown in 1911, during the first London season of Sergej Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*.

If the words of Beaumont are to be trusted, the encounter with leading figures of the now legendary company was to prove particularly significant for Walpole. Firstly, because it introduced him to that idea of often idealised Russian-ess that had intoxicated Western audiences since Diaghilev's first visit to Paris in 1909. Secondly, because the distinctively diaghilevian 'art for art's sake' canons that informed the *Ballets Russes*' choreography, designs, music, and librettos attuned Walpole to that Modernism he grew fond of, as it will be seen, in most artistic expressions during his stay in Russia. Thirdly, and finally, because that 'excited' networking is likely to have secured some useful connections and introductions to the land of the Firebird.

In Moscow, the first of the two big cities he lived in, Walpole attended a variety of performances and entertainment venues. His journal list, among others, visits to the Bolshoi Theatre, in which the winds of modernism arrived only through a few, sporadic gusts, and the Moscow Arts Theatre, funded and directed by the two fathers of modern theatre, Vladimir Nemirovich Danchenko and Konstantin Stanislavsky.

What is not listed, however, is the cabaret *The Bat*, where it appears he spent many a happy evening. Nested in a basement near the Moscow Arts Theatre, *The Bat*, had been the first cabaret to open in Moscow in 1908, the brainchild of various artists belonging to both the *Ballets Russes* and the Arts Theatre circle: Stanislavsky, Nemirovich Danchenko, Diaghilev's designer Léon Bakst, the opera singer Feodor Chaliapin, playwright and political theorist Maxim Gorky, composer Sergej Rachmaninov, and one of Stanislavsky's most faithful disciples, Nikita Baliev, who was to undertake the directorship of such a culturally thriving venue. It was in its minute auditorium, sixty seats in total, that Walpole found himself exposed to the often feisty and thus, in his eyes, quintessentially Russian debates on art and art making as well as to well-devised performances.

These *revues* were clearly devised in line with the radical spirit promoted by the Arts Theatre. A few dance and song numbers, often of moral-challenging nature, framed the staging of short works by Pushkin, Gogol and Gorki among others. Despite being theme-less, the performances combined humour, music, and sheer fun with sections that focussed, more or less overtly, on the work of the actor, the work of the composer and the art of the designer in current Russian culture, by challenging or commenting satirically on whatever else went on the Moscow scene.

Baliev, moreover, delivered satirical monologues now and then, acting as a sort of enlightened *conférencier* or *MC* and also dabbled into choreography, subtly parodying the *Ballets Russes* with his soon to become world-famous 'living dolls' which were to be plagiarised in the UK by the famous/notorious *Cochrane Reviews* only ten years later. The few existing descriptions of *The Bat* indicate that the culturally thriving, free-thinking and even slightly bawdy venue was a sort of World War 1

⁴ Anthony Cross, "The Secret City: Hugh Walpole, Russia, and His Novel about Petrograd", *Journal of European Studies* 35(3): 315–37.

⁵ See Beaumont, C. *London and Diaghilev*, typewritten transcript of an address delivered at the Rudolf Steiner House, London, on 14 May 1955. Gift of the late and former Cecchetti Society Chair Diana Barker to the author.

equivalent of the pre World War 2 cabarets described by Christopher Isherwood in his *Berlin Stories*, which inspired both the musical and the film *Cabaret*. Not unlike the famous *Kit Kat* club, *The Bat* too intoxicated its patrons with a powerful concoction of satire, sex, catchy ditties and political subversion. And not unlike the *Kit Kat*, the Moscow cabaret too drowned the grim everyday reality in multiple outbursts of laughter, turkey trot and cancan.

It is unfortunate that Walpole, unlike Isherwood, did not leave behind a more colourfully detailed depiction of those evenings. There is no doubt that it was at *The Bat* that Walpole met Mikhail (Michael) Lykiardopoulos, the secretary of the Moscow Arts Theatre. Lyki, as he was called by those close to him, was well known in Russia both for his translations of innovative Western works and as the man who had facilitated the collaboration between Edward Gordon Craig and Konstantin Stanislavsky—the outcome of which would have been a disastrously staging of *Hamlet*.

‘Lyki’ was to become a close friend of Walpole and a precious guide in his quest for understanding and absorbing the essence of Russian culture. His loud frank manners, almost a-moral for the time, and, above all, his boisterous laugh,⁶ made him an unlikely friend, mentor and guide for the rather reserved Englishman. And yet, they got on famously.

Still, in spite of mingling with artists like Belaiev and Lyki, Walpole does not seem to have become a total convert to that Modernist creed his Russian fellows believed so firmly in. The detailed list of performances he left behind indicate that he preferred maintaining an open mind instead, perfectly in line with the stereotypical, E.M. Forster-like, Baedeker-armed portrayal of the Englishman abroad.

It should not surprise, therefore, that next to the records of his visits to the Moscow Arts Theatre in his diary there are also many records relating to the Korš Theatre, a venue famous for traditional and glitzy productions of foreign plays, intended for conservative audiences interested only in big stars in action. Nor it should surprise that, despite the choreographically subversive lesson of the Ballets Russes, he went to see old ballet classics such as the full-length *Swan Lake* (the first performance he saw in Moscow), *Sleeping Beauty*, *Giselle* and other titles from the now long forgotten repertoire of the Imperial ballet, such as Petipa’s *The Magic Mirror*, the old Romantic *The Little Humpback Horse* and that late nineteenth-century take on the eighteenth-century *La Fille Mal Gardée* that would have subsequently played such a key role in the history of twentieth-century English ballet.

What is surprising, though, is the way Walpole’s diaries highlight a lack of interest in the more radical advancements of theatre making of the time. It is possible that his friendship with champions of a more moderate Modernism informed his choices, leading him to draw the line with those things that were too radical. Or it is just possible that such a discerning attitude was part of his own nature, which made him prefer trendy stuff whether it be the moderate Modernism mentioned above, or the sheer fun and pleasure of that bourgeois drama he kept attending in both Moscow and Petrograd. Indeed, many of his own fictional characters seem to come more from the Russian bourgeois than the radical theatre.

The Dark Forest and Walpole’s depiction of war in Galicia

Alongside his visits to the theatre he read contemporary English writers, the symbolist

⁶ Konstantin Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1924).

Francis Brett Young, Joseph Conrad (for his own book on the author), and others such as W. Somerset Maugham, Violet Hunt and May Sinclair to keep up with the literary taste in England. He did also read Dostoevsky for his insight into the Russian character but his writing draws from a British literary tradition rather than a Russian one. Only in the development of his own symbolism does he show the influence of the Russian literature of Pushkin and his new acquaintances in Moscow and Petrograd.

Yet there is no doubt that his experience of front line came as a shock after the social whirl of the two cities. After much waiting he was sent out to join his Otraid travelling by train to Galicia. In a letter to his literary agent J.B. Pinker on 1 July 1915 Walpole describes his new reality:

It is evening. We've just ridden into a village, taken over the school. It is a very nice tidy pretty little school. There is an unfinished sum still on the blackboard and the children's exercise-books about. A little old woman of about seventy with white hair and two tiny little children is eaten up with livor and shakes all over. I am sitting on a school-desk writing this to you by filthy candle because in half-an-hour the man goes who takes the letters. I am trying to explain to the old lady that nothing will happen to her things, although as a fact in another two hours this room will be full of wounded, blood, Iodine, bandages and curses. I was at the Position last night with the Wagons and a week ago I was recovering from Dysentery in the Regimental Hospital (or its equivalent) so you see things are lively.[...] Whether I come out of this alive or not out of this very uncertain. Had some near squeaks these last weeks.⁷

The first of his war novels was *The Dark Forest* and it captured his impressions in the field. The title is a phrase taken from a Russian proverb: 'The heart of man is a dark forest because of the wolves there are in it' and it captures fear in wartime. Written in between his shifts of work, and he described where he wrote it:

Standing beside some carts in the Galician lane, my knees trembling with terror, the wounded moving restlessly on their straw, the afternoon light like the green shadow of a dried up conservatory, I found a pencil and, steadying my shaking body against the cart, I wrote PART II. CHAPTER 1.⁸

The dark forest became a symbol for the disorientation of the soldiers, at a loss after the battle and lost, dead and decaying, in the woods. The story is that of two Englishmen who were volunteers for the Red Cross. One, Durwood, is an observer, too lame to enlist, the other a younger man, Trenchard is in love with a Russian girl Marie he had met in Petrograd and who accompanies them as a nurse. Awkward and naive, he loses her to Semyonov the most fully drawn Russian character. Marie gets shot and Trenchard and Semyonov become victims of the war. Durwood whose viewpoint we follow in the novel is also ill and leaves his Otriad to recover his health believing his friends dead.

Disillusion is integral to the heavy symbolism of the Forest, which grows more sinister and disruptive, through the book. Ennui or a fake disillusion in Walpole's two novels as in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* had led some—Walpole's surgeon Semyonov and Tolstoy's Prince André—into the war. But the shock of war give way to disillusion: 'I should kill my idealism, laugh at the belief in god, lose faith in everyone and everything' says Walpole's character.⁹ The boredom and tension in the novel finds

⁷ Hugh Walpole to James Brand Pinker, 1 July 1915, Berg Coll m.b. Walpole, H. Correspondence Hugh Walpole to Lewis Saul Benjamin, 13 February 1919, The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

⁸ Hugh Walpole, "The Crystal Box: Fragments of Autobiography", *Bookman*, February 1923, 688.

⁹ Hugh Walpole, *The Dark Forest* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1916, Project Gutenberg epub book #19614), 207.

a release in laughter: 'At the most serious crises we would, like Gayeff in "The Cherry Orchard," suddenly break into stupid bursts of laughter, quite aimless but with a great deal of sincerity.'¹⁰ Yet this laughter had a sinister side, it was also aimed at the weaker and is scornful. The robust Semyonov laughs scornfully at Trenchard's social ineptitude. Walpole himself was clumsy and myopic, and in his novels the bitter but strong laugh at those with social, mental or physical deformity. Laughter is strained, scornful, unruly indicating superiority, separation, lack of compassion in these novels. It is aimed at the Englishman's inability to understand the Russian, the doctor's disconnection from the humanity which passes under his blade, the socially dysfunctional veteran who provokes his family to murder him because he cannot take his own life.

In the novel they commandeered Polish country houses and halls as makeshift hospitals, carrying out first-line medical care before shipping the soldiers back up the line away from the front. These triage locations became for Durward the narrator a site of distorted reality as events passed 'like the shadowed film of a cinematograph'.¹¹ The tension of waiting is broken by the influx of wounded. In one instance Durward worked in a local town hall which had on the stage at the back of the room the tattered remains of a backcloth:

I could see that it was a picture of a gay scene in an impossibly highly coloured town—high marble stairs down which flower-girls with swollen legs came tripping into a market-place filled with soldiers and their lovers—"Carmen" perhaps. It seemed absurd enough there in the uncertain candlelight with the wounded groaning and crying in front of it. There was already in the air that familiar smell of blood and iodine, the familiar cries of: "Oh, *Sestritza*—Oh, *Sestritza*!" the familiar patient faces of the soldiers, sitting up, waiting for their turn, the familiar sharp voice of the sanitar: "What Division? What regiment? bullet or shrapnel?"¹²

This description is drawn from Walpole's first hand observation and his novels are littered with references to what he had seen and done as his journal entries show. Only six months before he went on his tour of duty had been at the Moscow opera and he returned to see Carmen in Petrograd in October. For Walpole the destruction of such sites of entertainment and pleasure was painful.

Walpole in Petrograd and the world of art

Walpole's second mentor in Russia was the acclaimed painter Konstantin Somov. A former member of the *Pickwickians of the Neva*, namely the circle of students (Somov, Alexander Benois, Léon Bakst, Walter Nouvel, Dimitri Filosofov and Sergej Diaghilev) whose ideas were to be key in the creation of innovative magazines such as *Mir Isskusstva* (The World of Art) and the *Ballets Russes*. Somov had not followed Diaghilev, whom he had painted, to the West, finding artistic fortune in his own country.

Shy and introvert, Somov, in Petrograd, was everything Lyki was not. It is thanks to Diaghilev's ballerina Tamara Karsavina, that we know the two lived together in a nice apartment not far from the fashionable Moika canal. More European than Moscow, and more liberal too, Petrograd too had a thriving cabaret culture—among the

¹⁰ Hugh Walpole, *The Dark Forest*, 355.

¹¹ Hugh Walpole, *The Dark Forest*, 159.

¹² Hugh Walpole, *The Dark Forest*, 165.

most famous places for artists was *The Wandering Dog*. The rather grim portrayal of Petrograd's theatre life in wartime painted by now obsolete and inaccurate Western historical accounts is somewhat disproved by Walpole's listings.

Somov's guidance must have crowned Walpole's appreciation of Russia's new artistic trends. In Petrograd, former disciple of Stanislavsky and theatre reformer Vsevolod Meyerhold had taken, amidst the horror of his fellow reformers and the horror of the traditionalists, the artistic directorship of the Alexandrinsky Theatre—still to date the ultimate fortress and temple of Russian drama. His radical approach to staging plays and dramas, an approach that overtook and subverted Stanislavsky's modernism, must have had a great impact on Walpole, given that there are numerous records of his attending performances directed by Meyerhold.

Interestingly ballet, Walpole's new passion, only features twice in the list for 1915. One performance is that *Fille Mal Gardée* danced by the famous ballerina Tamara Karsavina and Mikhail Fokine, the choreographer who, thanks to his involvement with the *Ballets Russes*, had contributed so much to the birth of early twentieth-century modern ballet. As reported by many dance history books, World War 1 had almost disbanded the *Ballets Russes*. The two artists, therefore, had returned to their home town to perform, while Diaghilev himself did his best to re-form the company and make it tour.

The other ballet performance Walpole attended at the Mariinsky Theatre was a double bill comprising of two of Fokine's early and very successful works, that *Pavillon d'Armide* and that *Cleopatra* that had caused so much furore when presented by Diaghilev as part of his 1909 *Saison Russe*. In wartime, the once ever and overactive Imperial Russian Ballet had indeed slowed down, especially since the first dancers' strike recorded in history had shattered its well-ordered ranks. According to Karsavina's vivid record of those days:

The theatres all through the war followed an unhalting course[...] the usual plan of giving a number of new productions in each season remained unaltered, though, of course, economy suggested some devices. For mere revivals, costumes and scenery would be brought out of the thrifty past.¹³

In several parts of Petrograd social gatherings, though not as glittering as they once were, still took place now and then. And, in line with a well-established Russian salon tradition, so did cultural circles and particularly foreign ones. It is at one of the many parties organised by the French ambassador, known familiarly as Paleologue, that Walpole met and became friends with Karsavina who was later to come to Britain. Coquettish and garrulous, Karsavina must have laughed at Walpole's stereotypically English unflappability. In an anecdote which could easily have been from a page of *Secret City*, the ballerina recalled this first meeting:

My acquaintance with Hugh Walpole, rapidly to grow into friendship, now began. He was working in Russia in the interest of allied propaganda. We could not at first converse much together; he had little Russian or French, and I absolutely no English. I felt at once a very real sympathy for him. He was interested in Russian life and character, not as a study of the exotic and freakish, but from a genuine love and understanding of my country. [...] Hughie was an attractive, lovable figure, with his attempts at joining the conversation. With our Russian love for Dickens, we named him Pickwick, and the parallel was even closer through an episode I remember well. During a walk to

¹³ Tamara Karsavina, *Theatre Street* (London: Heinemann, 1930), 313.

Alexandre Benois' flat, Hughie fell no less than fourteen times on the snow and thin ice, always continuing his talk without comment at the point reached before the fall.¹⁴

The Secret City and Walpole's Anglo-Russian Bureau

The Secret City Walpole's second novel describes his time running the British office of propaganda in Petrograd and the lead up to the revolution. His novel must be read against this need to defend against the German propaganda of Cossack atrocities and demonstrate the good behaviour of the Russian military. Keith Neilson¹⁵ relates how Ambassador George Buchanan said a journalist was necessary to counteract Russian discontent with the perceived inactivity of the Allies on the Western front. German troop movements to the Eastern front were forcing a Russian retreat in Poland with heavy casualties. So Walpole was sent back with a remit to establish an Anglo-Russian Bureau. He gathered a group of newspaper correspondents including Arthur Ransome and Harold Williams, a fluent Russian speaker who followed the Russian press feeding them pro-allied stories, gathering information and ensuring Moscow journalists were invited to the UK to view British War efforts. He also set up a small office in Moscow under Bruce Lockhart which had good relations with Moscow's cultural life. They gave banquets and wrote stories for the wide circulation Russian trench newspapers and took round propaganda films to the Russian troops.

The Secret City continues the story from *The Dark Forest* after a gap in time. It is a vivid description of life in Petrograd, its river, roads and canals providing a background for the drama of Russian families and bread queues, and the forces competing for power—from the police to the Cossack soldiers. Walpole uses the frozen river Neva as the personification of the seething spirit of the Russian people referring to Alexandre Benois's illustration of Pushkin's poem. He introduces a character The Rat, who befriends Durward in his poor lodging, alternately begging, caring and threatening the Englishman. Walpole later wrote that The Rat was the only portrait in the two novels.¹⁶ Durward, recovered from his illness is now narrating the affairs of a Russian family with two love triangles: Markovitch, an inventor and Vera his wife who falls in love with Lawrence, an English sportsman, and their young charge Nina who runs away with the violent Boris, but eventually falls for Bohun the English and lodger. Into this family the disruptive force of Semyonov returns denigrating Markovitch's inventions and exposing him to ridicule. The story comes to a climax as the people take to the streets, revolutionary soldiers do a house-to-house search for a policeman whom Vera and Nina have hidden, and Markovitch unleashes his fury on the crowd below his window.

His biographer Rupert Hart-Davis says the Anglo-Russian bureau was ineffective,¹⁷ but Neilson suggests the inclusion of intelligence within the propaganda office was a success. In *The Secret City* Walpole describes his office as 'a very nice airy place, clean and smart, with coloured advertisements by Shepperson and others on the walls, pictures of Hampstead and St. Albans and Kew Gardens that looked strangely

¹⁴ Tamara Karsavina, *Theatre Street*, 319.

¹⁵ Keith Neilson, "'Joy Rides'?: British Intelligence and Propaganda in Russia, 1914–1917", *Historical Journal* 24.4 (December 1981): 885–906.

¹⁶ Berg Coll m.b. Walpole, H. Correspondence Hugh Walpole to Lewis Saul Benjamin, 13 February 1919, The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

¹⁷ Rupert Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole* (London: Macmillan, 1952).

satisfactory and homely to me, and rather touching and innocent',¹⁸ while his character bitterly complains of the futility of the work: if they 'had plastered the whole vast country from Archangel to Vladivostock with pamphlets, orators, and photographs it would not have altered, in the slightest degree, after events.'¹⁹ In fact Walpole organised an outfit which accommodated his propaganda efforts, alongside British intelligence gathering, and the work of the embassy. It was a difficult combination of government departments servicing the requirements of Wellington House and the War Office and the Foreign office. This success—and the mode of organisation was a model for others in other countries—lead him on his return to become part of the Ministry of Information.

After his day job, Walpole went out to the entertainments with Somov. They watched the wrestling and bareback riding. His observations are drawn into his novel where Durwood comments: 'I adore a circus; and when I can find one with the right sawdust smell, the right clown, and the right enthusiasm, I am happy.' Durwood watches the theatre audience which is full of 'beautiful women in jewellery and powder, and young officers, and fat merchants in priceless Shubas' while at the cinema he observes 'Soldiers, sailors, peasants, women, and children crowded together upon the narrow benches'.²⁰ He sees that the performers are drawn from the poor and dispossessed seeking to earn a living from vaudeville entertainment and for whom such shows are momentary refuges from the daily bread queues. Walpole witnessed the unrest for himself and put it into both the narrative in his book and his official report to the British government on the October revolution.

This is the point to end on: in Walpole's two novels as in his life we can see the intermixture of his experiences of the theatre and of war. The heightened emotions of both and the experience of a foreign culture stayed with him though out his life. For Walpole's hero, as a member of theatre audience, the auditorium served as a place for the re-enactment of war trauma. In 1917 a long anticipated staging of Mikhail Lermontov's play 'The Masquerade' was performed and Walpole captures it in this book. It becomes a fusion of the senses combining the theatre of war, the operating theatre and the staged performance in his mind:

As I watched I remember that I forgot the bad acting (the hero was quite atrocious), forgot the lapses of taste in the colour and arrangement of the play, forgot the artifices and elaborate originalities and false sincerities; there were, I have no doubt, many things in it all that were bad and meretricious—I was dreaming. I saw, against my will and outside my own agency, mingled with the gold screens, the purple curtains, the fantasies and extravagances of the costumes, the sudden flashes of unexpected colour through light or dress or backcloth—pictures from those Galician days that had been, until Semyonov's return, as I fancied, forgotten. [...] There was that terrific crash as of the smashing of a world of china, the fierce crackle of the machine-guns, and then the boom of the cannon from under our very feet[...] the garden was filled with revellers, laughing, dancing, singing, the air was filled again with the air of gold paint, the tenor's voice rose higher and higher, the golden screens closed—the act was ended.²¹

In his official report on the Russian revolution Walpole recalls this play and relates how the theatre's 'richness and extravagance that went oddly in company with a distressed

¹⁸ Hugh Walpole, *The Secret City* (New York, George H. Doran, 1919, Project Gutenberg epub ebook #12349) 373-4.

¹⁹ Hugh Walpole, *The Secret City*, 373.

²⁰ Hugh Walpole, *The Secret City*, 246, 105.

²¹ Hugh Walpole, *The Secret City*, 293.

and impoverished Russia'.²² Under threat for his life, Walpole left Russia as the Bolshevik's seized power in the autumn of 1917.

Acknowledgements: Thanks to funding from the AHRC 'Cross-media co-operation in Britain in 1920s and 1930s' (AR 112216).

Dedicated to the memory of Dr Giannandrea Poesio, this work is testament to his scholarship in Russian ballet and the arts. The article was completed for publication by Alexis Weedon following the authors' collaboration on the research for this paper.

²² Rupert Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*. 453