Chapter 2

Sylvia Townsend Warner's Queer Vanguardism

Largely neglected for many years, the past two decades have seen a resurgence of scholarly interest in Sylvia Townsend Warner from literary historians drawing on feminism and queer theory, yielding some groundbreaking readings of her work.[1] However, this recent scholarship has not taken account of her archive, instead largely relying on William Maxwell's and Claire Harman's heavily-edited published correspondence and diaries, volumes that systematically downplay Townsend Warner's commitment to and involvement in Communism.[2] For instance, the letter I cite in the Introduction remains unpublished in full, no doubt because of the clear, troubling allegiance to Communism it displays. In this 1937 letter to a prominent fellow Communist Townsend Warner calls for Stephen Spender to be ejected from the CPGB, and that they should "make it look like a purge."[3] Even though the term primarily denoted expulsion from the Party rather than execution as it is commonly taken to mean today, this is shocking language indeed; but a full consideration of Townsend Warner's life and work in the 1930s must surely take into account the extent of her commitment to Soviet Communism.

The first challenge faced by any attempt to re-evaluate Townsend Warner's politics in the 1930s is therefore archival. The problem is twofold: first, the extent to which published editions of Townsend Warner's letters and diaries paint a misleading picture of her life and work in this period, for very obviously anti-Communist reasons (Wendy Mulford's excellent critical biography is an exception to this tendency); and, second, the sheer scope and size of her archive at the Dorset County Museum. Accordingly, this chapter takes shape from the most salient letters and diary entries that have been excised from William Maxwell's and Claire Harman's published editions. Paying

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particular attention to those texts which bear, as Maxwell remarks, "the irritating tone of the newly converted," or, to put it more charitably, the boldest statements of Communist commitment, I reconstruct Townsend Warner's cultural politics in the 1930s from a series of redacted or excised documents of her political allegiances and affiliations.[4] I have paid particular attention to an extensive series of letters sent to two close friends and fellow CPGB members, Julius and Queenie Lipton, which barely feature at all in the published edition of the letters and which provide a particularly rich account of intimate, everyday political commitment.

Any reconsideration of Townsend Warner's cultural politics in the 1930s must involve a re-evaluation of the role of her partner Valentine Ackland. Ackland is usually seen as at best the lesser talent and something of a drain on Townsend Warner, and at worst a monstrous, talentless drunk who ruined her partner's emotional life. (At Townsend Warner's archive, one of the helpful and knowledgeable volunteers was bemused that I wanted to look at Ackland's papers at all, simply asking "but *why*?"). While Ackland's and Townsend Warner's published poetic collaboration (*Whether a Dove or a Seagull* [1933]) was admittedly unsuccessful, accounts that completely dismiss Ackland's role in their partnership are particularly mistaken when it comes to the two women's political activities. Whatever troubles their relationship would come to face, Ackland and Townsend's political, sexual, and romantic commitments functioned symbiotically in the 1930s. Equally active in the Communist movement, they worked together on local, national, and international campaigns, repeatedly and explicitly conceptualizing their relationship as a shared political engagement. Among many other publication venues, the couple were two of the most prolific contributors to the most prominent leftist periodical of the period, *Left Review*, to which Warner contributed eleven pieces, and Ackland nine.[5] In fact, Ackland's political journalism of the mid-1930s was at least as important in Communist circles as Townsend Warner's, as witnessed by the publication of her series of "Country Dealings" pieces in book form by Lawrence and Wishart in 1936, a volume that was praised extensively in the left-wing press.[6] Accordingly, I have paid equal attention to Ackland's and Townsend Warner's unpublished papers, regarding their political enterprise as a joint one throughout my reconstruction of their archive. This is not to say that the focus will be equally placed on

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Townsend Warner's and Ackland's published works, for Warner's novel of queer revolution *Summer Will Show* (1936) is the major focal point of this chapter.

While archival research is the foundation for my reading of *Summer Will Show*, a reconsideration of this text as vitally shaped by Communism is overdue on internal textual evidence alone. While a number of sophisticated readings of Townsend Warner's novel have recently emerged, none has taken serious account of the novel's specifically Communist themes, quite an omission given that this is a narrative set in Paris during the 1848 Revolution, featuring a character named Inglebrecht, and which closes as the protagonist reads from the *The Communist Manifesto*. Paying close attention to the novel's representation of revolutionary theory and praxis, I argue that its central queer partnership should be read through a prominent dynamic of the Bolshevik political imaginary, the dialectic of spontaneity and consciousness. This dialectic was Soviet Russia's reconfiguration of classical Marxism's interplay between determinism and voluntarism – tightly integrated with Lenin's concept of the vanguard, a reworking of classical Marxism for the revolutionary needs of a largely rural country. In *Summer Will Show* Townsend Warner picks up and transforms this dialectic through the novel's central lesbian figures' engagements with Communism; this political drive and utopian futurity is crucially formed through the sense of queer revolutionary partnership that Warner found with Ackland. In other words, I read *Summer Will Show* as the literary development of a politics vitally informed by the organizational culture of Communist activism as experienced by the lesbian couple. I call this articulation *queer vanguardism*.

In what follows I first briefly outline Lenin's concept of the vanguard, before offering a reading of Townsend Warner's and Ackland's unpublished papers. Their queer vanguardism, I argue, is an overlooked aspect not only of the two women's careers but also of the sexual politics of Communism more broadly, and the constitution of emergent forms of lesbian identity in interwar Britain. Next, the focus will shift to *Summer Will Show* as a paradigmatic text of queer vanguardism; pushing back against Heather Love's recent reading of the novel as characterized by affects of despair, I argue that the novel is at least as much concerned with radical possibility as it is with hopelessness and loss. In conclusion this chapter considers

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some of the ways in which the novel might be understood in relation to Lukácsian realism, contending that, as opposed to Isherwood's critique, Townsend Warner offers ways of thinking typicality as a mode of queer, non-reproductivist futurity.

Lenin in Dorset

Responding to the revolutionary needs of a largely unindustrialized country, one of Lenin's signal interventions in Marxist thought was to recast the voluntarist/determinist debate in specifically Russian terms. In classical Marxism, there is a dialectical tension between the necessary progression of history toward proletarian revolution, and the need to catalyze such revolution by conscious revolutionary agitation; between a determinist view of class struggle and a voluntarist conception of political activism. Picking up an existing dichotomy in Russian culture, Lenin recasts this tension as a dialectic between spontaneity and consciousness. These terms had circulated for some time as an opposition between European rationalism and Russian expressive creativity, and Lenin cannily reworked them to refer both to the voluntarist/determinist problematic and the dialectic of theory and praxis. For the Bolshevik political imaginary, "consciousness" comes to stand for the disciplined, theoretically-informed activities of dedicated revolutionaries, "*a party that is guided by an advanced theory*."[7] "Spontaneity" referred to the less tutored radicalism of the large Russian peasantry, poor on theory and revolutionary consciousness, but with a strong tendency toward powerful rebellion against the injustices of the existing order.[8] A distinct formation must guide this dialectic:

> the vanguard of the proletariat which is capable of assuming power and of *leading the whole people* to socialism, of directing and organizing the new order, of being the teacher, guide and leader of all the toiling and exploited in the task of building up their social life without the bourgeoisie and against the bourgeoisie.[9]

In this paradigmatic statement from *The State and Revolution* (1917), Lenin lays out the role of the vanguard as "teacher, guide and leader" of the people against the bourgeoisie, one of the most generative and most infamous concepts in modern political thought. For as

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is well known, vanguardism has gotten something of a bad name for its condescending attitude toward the peasantry in particular – in the language of contemporary queer theory, its metronormativity – and for its apparent rigidity and inapplicability outside of Russia. But it is worth pausing before condemning Lenin's formulation as inherently elitist or inflexible. Here Georg Lukács's *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of his Thought* (1924) is invaluable for two main reasons. First, Lukács points out that the criticism leveled against Lenin that his thought is inapplicable outside Russia was made earlier against Marx and Engels in a different form, i.e. that they generalized from British capitalism general laws that do not hold in other national and international contexts.[10] Whatever position one takes within Marxism even quite broadly considered, this criticism cannot be meaningfully sustained; we might immediately turn to Frantz Fanon's unorthodox yet unmistakably Marxist-Leninist theory of decolonial revolution in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), to take but one important example of the transnational reach of Marxism – to say nothing of the variegated praxes of decolonial revolt themselves or revolutionary movements in Europe, China, and beyond.[11]

Harder to dispel is the apparent elitism of Lenin's vanguard. As Katerina Clark points out, Lenin did place considerably more emphasis on consciousness than on spontaneity, and yet, as Clark also notes, he also asserted that spontaneity itself contains a form of "embryonic" consciousness.[12] Moreover, following Marx's famous declaration that "the educator must be educated," Lenin also argued that revolutionary thinkers must "not be afraid to learn from the great movements of the oppressed classes."[13] Lukács again elucidates the question with clarity: "In no sense is it the party's role to impose any kind of abstract, cleverly devised tactics on the masses. On the contrary, it must continuously *learn* from their struggle and their conduct of it."[14] In other words, the vanguard's role is not one of mere theoretical instruction, but rather organized preparation for the revolutionary moment that it necessarily cannot know precisely in advance. It is of course outside the scope of this present study to pursue any sort of detailed defense or evaluation of Lenin's thought, and I offer these remarks merely to correct the assumption that the vanguardist dialectic moves exclusively in one direction from the party to the masses.

In 1934, the CPGB brought out *Lenin on Britain: A Compilation*.

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Featuring an introduction by the Party's general secretary Harry Pollitt (who was shortly to become closely acquainted with Townsend Warner and Ackland), this volume collected Lenin's writings on Britain from a variety of sources, including canonical texts such as *What is to be Done?* but also lesser-known sources such as Lenin's 1919 letter to Sylvia Pankhurst urging the formation of "a strong, seriously concentrated *organisation of the revolutionary vanguard*, which knows how to carry on by all possible means revolutionary work among the masses."[15] Pollitt's introduction pursues a polemic against Labour Party figures who assert that Lenin is not applicable in Britain, and exhorts every Communist to make a detailed study of the volume. It seems unlikely that avidly self-educating Communists such as Townsend Warner and Ackland failed to do so; but beyond their immersion in Lenin's thought as Party members, there is a further, counterintuitive reason why we should read them as vanguardists – their position in sleepy rural England.

Although Britain was the most "advanced" capitalist economy in the world, and had a strong trade union movement, it was famously lacking in revolutionary élan because of the reformism and self-protection of a powerful labor aristocracy created by its huge empire, particularly so in the case of England compared to the poorer Scotland and Wales. In *What is to be Done?* Lenin invokes England as the definitive example of how revolutionary class consciousness does not necessarily develop organically from capitalist development and the labor movements it calls forth; in many of the later texts collected in *Lenin on Britain* he inveighs against the compromises of the British labor movement.[16] Beset by reformists and opportunists, England was, as Pollitt repeatedly stressed, badly in need of a vanguard party. And within England, the heavily industrialized north and the radicalized East End of London were the major sites of highly-developed class consciousness compared to the south and west of the country. Rural Dorset, in other words, was one of the least auspicious sites for revolutionary action in Europe, which called for unconventional yet recognizably Leninist forms of activism. Dorset desperately needed revolutionary consciousness, and the two women set about the task with great energy and determination.

Townsend Warner was particularly drawn to Lenin, and had a marked respect for what she called the "serpentine" intellect as a virtue in the struggle. In an unpublished letter from 1935 she ponders

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the relationship between the workers' movement and such mental prowess:

> And though my mind must admire pure intellect, my flesh warns me against it. I would never call workers, revolutionary or otherwise, a dynasty of slow combustion, a cold-blooded crew. There is always something slightly luxurious about the snake, that icy brooding, those suave contours. The intellect is serpentine, and it always interests me to see in that portrait of Lenin which we have that the pose of his head is exactly like the snake's. Not the head itself, but the way it is carried. His great intellect put the dash of snake into him.[17]

This intricately dialectical passage unfurls Townsend Warner's commitment to Leninist political theory and praxis not only in its striking praise of Lenin himself, but through its densely-coded tropic structure, constantly turning in on itself in a distinctly Bolshevik dialectic. First, consciousness and its negation: Townsend Warner "admires pure intellect" even as she is warned against it by her embodiment, which leads to a disavowal of the proletariat as merely predetermined to build a revolution, as "a dynasty of slow combustion, a cold-blooded crew." Then this deterministic potential of the proletariat is sublated by Lenin's radical consciousness, and the cunning of revolutionary consciousness brings the workers to "combustion."

One of Townsend Warner's and Ackland's most striking attempts to catalyze rural workers was their establishment of a book-lending scheme. They lent left-wing books to local villagers which would contain slips for comments, and a spur for discussions; these books would then be circulated, and further lending and borrowing encouraged. It is worth stressing that the two women set up this scheme *before* the better-known Left Book Club was inaugurated later in 1936, so it should not be considered a derivative or imitative idea as might be assumed. In fact, when the LBC was founded some months later, Townsend Warner and Ackland were listed as founding members of its readers' and writers' group, and it is very possible that the women's Dorset activities influenced the LBC, especially as their idea was known to various figures in the CPGB.[18] Of course, Townsend Warner's and Ackland's scheme could never attain the reach of the LBC – but they were one step ahead of the Party and may even have played a vital intellectual role in the formation of the better-known organization.

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Discussing one text they circulated, John Sommerfield's *May Day* (1936), Townsend Warner underlined the importance of maintaining a firm political message:

> I don't mind at all it being sectarian, myself. For lending down here (and this is not a bad literary standard of criticism, after all, though it may sound rather parochial) a certain sectarian stiffening is all to the good. There will be a danger as long as workers are under capitalism that they will read for a change of thought, a relaxation and release from their conditions. We have found that very objective books, though they enjoy them, don't remain in the memory as much more than a circus. A sectarian novel like this may stay in the mind as a circus with a message, as a relevant circus.[19]

Here Townsend Warner's desire to shape the consciousness of the rural poor is clear, who must not read for "relaxation" and for whom merely "objective" literature is not sufficient. Wendy Mulford cites a truncated version of this passage in *This Narrow Place*, omitting the austere central sentence concerning the "danger" of relaxation, perhaps motivated by a desire to airbrush the extent of Townsend Warner's vanguardism.[20] There is again a counterintuitive, serpentine quality to Townsend Warner's political thinking here, for it might be expected that "relaxation" would be associated with the circus-like texts, and political engagement with "very objective" books, but Townsend Warner's prescriptions are rather more dialectical. Like Lukács in *The Historical Novel* (1937), she aims to mediate the objective, the sectarian, and the popular according the exigencies of Communist political development, a process by which all the constitutive terms are themselves necessarily reordered.

Another initiative Townsend Warner and Ackland worked on during this period was an attempt to organize the women of the village. Unfortunately, it did not meet with much success, hobbled by the machinations of a local woman – named, somewhat improbably perhaps, Blanche Rocket – who sowed discontent and jealousy. As Townsend Warner wrote in her diary in an entry excised from Harman's published edition: "while B.R., damn her, sets every married woman at each other's throat, not much hope for organizing the Chaldon Women's March on the Estate Office."[21] Rocket was infamous in the village for her disruption of marriages, and Townsend Warner's and Ackland's failure to organize the women

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of the village could be read as a moment in which the brittle sociality of the heterosexual couple form occludes both gender and class solidarity. This episode as a whole might lead one to underline the vital importance of queer vanguardism within a broad political field.

Grounded in local struggles, both Townsend Warner and Ackland increasingly came to be involved in Communist politics on a national level, traveling up to London to visit friends such as Julius and Queenie Lipton, and dropping in the offices of *Left Review* and the CPGB headquarters at King Street. They viewed these visits to London as vital to their involvement with the wider movement, the necessary counterpart to their rural activism, not only in the sense that they were able to meet with important figures such as Harry Pollitt and glean the latest news from Party headquarters, but also because their work in Dorset necessarily required contact with the (perhaps presumed) higher class consciousness of the town proletariat. As Townsend Warner wrote to the London worker Julius Lipton, "it is like bathing in a tonic for us to come up to London – and I only hope you realise how much of the tonic is seeing you, and getting a good sniff at the work you are doing."[22]

The two women's engagement with Communism was also catalyzed from the start by international politics.[23] As Townsend Warner repeatedly recalled, it was the Reichstag Fire Trial and its Communist hero, Georgi Dimitrov, that had been the most important catalyst for these internationalist commitments: "whatever one might feel about Communism, whatever holes one might pick in the arguments of its adherents, Dimitrov's resolution and pugnacity and fighting cunning were fact, not theory."[24] Dimitrov was the Bulgarian Communist wrongly accused of the Reichstag arson in 1933, and whose defiant speech at the trial won him great respect on the left during the 1930s, becoming head of the Communist International after his release from Nazi custody, and spearheading the adoption of the Popular Front policy. Dimitrov was celebrated in Communist writing and culture across Europe during the period, from German artist John Heartfield's famous photomontage *Dimitroff!* to Ralph Fox's recommendation that British writers should look to Dimitrov's trial as a master-plot for writing socialist realist novels.[25] What is also telling here is Townsend Warner's use of "cunning": an attribute that might not initially appear be associated with heroic moments of speaking truth to power such as Dimitrov's trial, but a cardinal virtue of the

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vanguardist fighter, and as we have seen one Townsend Warner attributed to Lenin himself.

Queer vanguardism

To step back a moment from 1930s Communism, this apparently aggressively paratactic phrase is immediately legible when we turn to certain strains of canonical queer theory. At its most ambitious, queer theory has always been vanguardist in the broad sense of the term, as an epistemology and ontology of culture that seeks to fundamentally reorder governing assumptions about the human through the white heat of its intellectual interventions. To take perhaps the most famous instance of this tendency, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's opening to *The Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) is one of the boldest statements of this project, with its stated aim of redefining the history of twentieth-century western culture.[26] In a different way, gay and lesbian history has celebrated the figure of the pioneer who forges new forms of intimate life within a repressive climate and thus inspires other to do the same; as I hope has already become clear, I aim to situate Isherwood, Townsend Warner, and Ackland within both these tendencies.

There is a further sense in which certain queer theorists operate as vanguardists, a tendency that can be read in a more specifically Leninist sense, as a particular strategic relation between intellectuals and the proletariat, here restaged as a polemical engagement between the queer theorist and the yet-to-be-conscious LGBTQI masses. Michael Warner, for instance, is frank about his belief in false consciousness, and *The Trouble With Normal* (1999) can be read profitably alongside Lenin's *What is to be Done?*[27] Both texts are biting attacks on the reformist right wings of their respective movements; Lenin and Warner are similarly concerned with the clarification of modes of communication of (queer/revolutionary) consciousness from the theorist to the massed (gay and lesbian/worker and peasant) subjects, while also acknowledging the existence of spontaneously radical subjectivity. To take another canonical moment: the dialectic of spontaneity and consciousness is also ironically explored in the closing passages of "Sex in Public," where Warner and Lauren Berlant wryly ponder their appropriate response "as good academ-

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ics" to the scene of queer erotics they have just witnessed (Berlant, it should be added, has made contemporary theory's most trenchant formulation of false consciousness in *Cruel Optimism* [2011]).[28] In "Sex in Public" Lenin's precept that the vanguardist theorist must learn from the masses rather than merely impose preordained theory is in particular evidence. As Berlant and Warner witness the erotic vomiting and ponder its meaning they are following the fundamental tenet that radical embodied praxis is intricately intertwined with revolutionary theory.

José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* (2009) further develops this dialectic. From the start of his study, Muñoz pays tribute to the example of queer performers, to which his intellectual response is a respectful reframing and re-presentation in the name of a utopian politics drawn in part from the Marxism of Ernst Bloch. He argues that a queer hermeneutic must necessarily be "humble":

> Such a hermeneutic would then be *epistemologically and ontologically humble* in that it would not claim the epistemological certitude of a queerness that we simply "know" but, instead, strain to activate the no-longer-conscious and to extend a glance toward that which is forward-dawning, anticipatory illuminations of a not-yet-conscious.[29]

Here there might appear to be a complete rejection of vanguardism as commonly understood. But we might also read this passage as a radical reformulation of the vanguard intellectual that in its humility goes beyond Lenin's and Lukács's insistence that the vanguard must teach and learn from the masses – for Muñoz the theorist never "simply knows," from whatever source – and yet retains a fundamental similarity in the concept of "activation." The no-longer-conscious and the yet-to-be-conscious must be articulated and thus an unpredictable queerness to come activated. The queer theorist helps make history, but in circumstances not of their own making, of which they are necessarily incompletely aware, and yet which others may have forgotten completely. And indeed Muñoz's main object in *Cruising Utopia* is gay culture around the time of Stonewall, that great moment of queer spontaneity, to which much queer theory may be said to have a re-vivifying theoretical relation of re-presentation. Indeed, one might profitably return to classic texts of gay liberation and radical feminism to see a marked vanguardism at work, the

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manifestos of a Wittman or a Solanas having more than their fair share of vanguardist élan.[30]

Muñoz's humble vanguardism might sound a stretch. But he does have another more thoroughly vanguardist figure in mind: the queer performer. Muñoz notes the prevalence of a certain macho, usually white body in mainstream gay culture, and argues that the black transgendered performer Aviance "figuratively and literally rises above this pervasive bodily mode."[31] The key term here is "above." Muñoz further elaborates:

> When he is on that stage, he performs gestures that few others can perform. His gestures are not allowed in the strict codes of masculinity followed by the habitués of most commercial queer dance spaces [. . .] As an icon, a beacon above the dance floor Aviance uses gestures that permit the dancers to see and experience the feelings they do not permit themselves to let in. He and the gestures he performs are beacons that the throng is not allowed to feel.[32]

Here a taboo embodied consciousness is imparted to the "throng" of proto-radical subjects whose interpellation by a dominant homonormative culture has prevented the expression of their collective, not-yet subversive identity. While this club scene sounds rather far from reading *Capital* in night school or leafleting on the factory floor, it is worth pointing out that interwar British Communist culture was deeply invested in bodily style – in dress, deportment, attitudes toward leisure, and choice of sexual partner, as the novels of Isherwood's friend Edward Upward document at length, and as has been explored in a number of other national contexts, particularly Weimar Germany.[33] Nevertheless, any easy mapping of proletarian consciousness onto queers or indeed any other group is necessarily a futile endeavor. But here I am concerned with strategy, not identification, with the ways that queer and Communist counterpublics and cells seek to communicate between exceptional agents of radical change and the proto-subjects of a utopian world to come. Queer vanguardism names the ways in which these strategies can illuminate one another and sometimes operate in creative syncretism to forge new, distinctive cultural forms.

An intriguing letter from Townsend Warner to Ackland exemplifies these overlaid forms of radical subjectivity. Describing a meeting

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with the Communist scholar and expert on Spain, Stanley Robinson, Townsend Warner enthuses about her new friend:

> His voice is like embattled mice, small and shrill, I daresay it could be loud and shrill. He looks as though you could knock him down with a feather, and obviously has the most fiery and passionate temper. And he is the velvetiest pansy I have met in years. We instantly coagulated, and had a lovely time, partly buttering each other, partly finding how simultaneously we felt about anarchists, partly deploring the vagaries of poor dear Stephen.[34]

Here Warner and Robinson instantly bond, as Communists and as queers, Warner's "coagula[tion]" with the scholar framed in terms of a personal description simultaneously stressing non-normative gender performance, "shrill as mice," and political toughness, "fiery and dedicated," indicating a valorization of queerness not so much as a cross to bear as a Communist, but rather as a positive attribute in the struggle, a particular modality of the commitment needed in a dedicated activist. This passage indicates the ways in which queer Communists' self-understanding was not necessarily informed by a tortured push-pull of Party normativity and queer self-expression, but rather could work on a symbiotic level, as the tessellation of different modes of counterpublic association and vanguardist consciousness. "Stephen" here is Spender, whom as we have seen Warner had called to be removed from the Party "like a purge" in a letter to Edgell Rickword the previous month, and his casual inclusion in the conversation reveals the way in which queer writers were embedded in different locations in the Popular Front, Warner here disparaging the "vagaries" of Spender's poster-boy affiliation within the movement in comparison with hers and Robinson's more dedicated political positions.[35]

As we have seen, Townsend Warner's and Ackland's local activism was triangulated with the national Party center in London, and broader international affiliations; as Gay Wachman has pertinently observed, "for Warner and Ackland in the thirties, their political writing, local and international activism, and 'deviant' sexuality were inextricably intertwined."[36] But it was undoubtedly the local that was their starting point – in more ways than one. As Wachman points out, the two women came together "following an evening of village activism."[37] This was in October 1930, several years before

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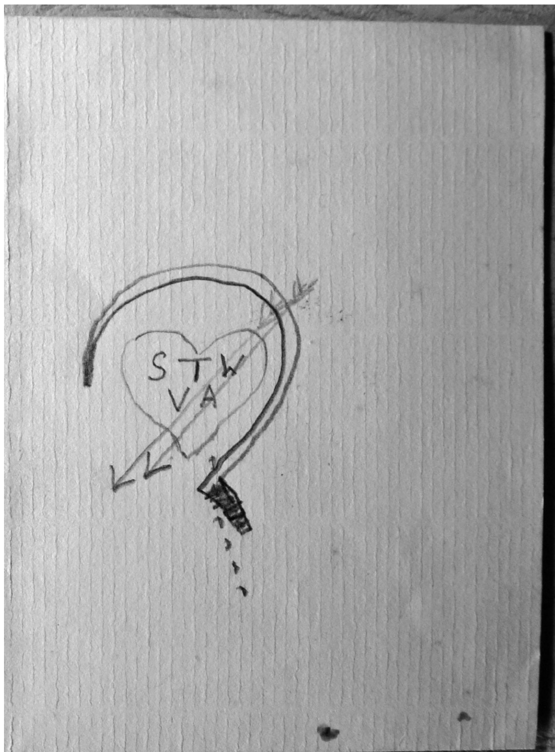
they became CPGB members; the two women had gone to interrogate a local woman suspected of abusing her foster child. Townsend Warner recalls Ackland taking a loaded pistol to the confrontation, and that she "shook her stick like a squire" at the child's abuser. Townsend Warner was clearly impressed with Ackland's assured performance of iconoclastic female masculinity, and her description of Ackland's ire in her diaries is framed in terms of sexual attraction: "righteous indignation is a beautiful thing, and lying exhausted on the rug I watched it flame in her with severe geometrical frames."[38] Later that night, the two women became lovers, the politicized tone of their relationship having clearly been set by that initial encounter. This can be seen in a series of love poems sent between the pair in 1936–8, as the convention of the anniversary functioned as an annual reminder of how their personal relationship was imbricated with political struggle and commitment to Communism. The following image comes at the end of the series.



Valentine Ackland, Pencil Drawing (1938?), STW: H(R)/5/12

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In this image the sickle encircles the two women's initials, starkly symbolizing a shared identity as queer Communist lovers. Several poems return to this sense of commitment, and the ways in which their love had not closed them off from the wider claims of political witness, "faced with confused alarms of struggle and fight [. . .] since then learning not to close ears, shut eyes, and not to fear more than we love."[39] It is this register of political struggle that is the crucial missing piece in debates around Townsend Warner's and Ackland's relationship to Communism as lesbians. First of all, Janet Montefiore's assertion that "the notion of lesbians finding a happy home in the Communist Party is distinctly naïve" is complicated by the archival record: for all Soviet Communism's mounting heteronormativity during the mid-1930s, Warner and Ackland were – remarkably, to contemporary ears – accepted as a couple by the CPGB, traveling together to headquarters, and on the writers' delegation to Spain in 1937. Warner and Ackland made no secret of their relationship with friends from the CPGB, inviting figures such as Julius Lipton, Edgell Rickword, and Tom Winteringham down to stay in their cottage in Dorset, where sleeping arrangements were tight.[40]

Nevertheless, Townsend Warner and Ackland never developed a wide public presence as "out" lesbians; Warner's later desire for their love letters that she carefully collected and annotated only to be published after her death being an obvious example of this. But the exigencies of the closet are far from exhaustively helpful in understanding these two women's sexual politics in the 1930s, not least because scholars have increasingly argued that the existence of a broad public awareness of a specifically lesbian identity in interwar Britain is rather doubtful, even after the famous trial of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928.[41] There might rather appear to be a sense of what Terry Castle famously called the Queen Victoria principle of erasure at work here, and there seems to be no direct evidence that their relationship itself was positively valorized by leading CPGB members. However, Dan Healey has pointed out that in 1929 some Soviet experts had argued for official legal recognition of marriages involving female husbands, implying a positive attitude toward certain forms of female homosexuality for some medical and legal professionals in the Soviet Union.[42] It is of course hard to gauge to what extent such an ethos may have penetrated to the CPGB

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leadership or the rank and file of British Communism. Maroula Jannou's measured verdict on Townsend Warner's place in the CPGB might seem to make the most sense: that they were "recognized as a couple" and "judged, if they were judged at all, on the usefulness of the work they did in public and not for their sexuality."[43] Given the CPGB's emphasis on organizational results as a cardinal virtue and the respect Ackland and Townsend Warner received from many Party members, this reading is initially attractive.

However, in its bifurcation of private and public, Jannou's judgment assumes that the two women's sexuality was in some sense anterior to their commitment to radical politics, a given property of their subjectivity rather than a series of acts and performances indivisible from their political commitments and activities. It is also necessary to push back against this evaluation both in terms of the chronology of the two women's relationship, and the emergence of certain forms of gender and sexual dissidence in Britain in the period more broadly, to which the case of Soviet Russia makes a telling counterpoint. The Soviet experts' discussion of cross-identifying marriage coincided with the central constitutive moment for a certain type of queer identity in Britain that emerged with the prosecution of *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928 and was further shaped by the case of Valerie Barker, who had lived as the military officer Colonel Victor Barker, married a woman Elfrieda Haward, and was brought to trial upon discovery in 1929.[44] Barker's passing and subsequent trial have been viewed as the transition between a broadly appreciative public gaze upon heroic female masculinity in World War I that was then rendered increasingly problematic in peacetime Britain. Emerging from civil war in 1923, Soviet Russia is again a salient point of comparison. Healey notes that "Women who served in military formations and were known to be lesbian or were regarded as 'masculinized' (inclined to dress in a mannish fashion or indeed to assume a male identity) were viewed with an intriguing degree of indulgence during the 1920s."[45] In both Soviet Russia and Britain, the assumption of traditionally male roles by women in times of crisis was praised as a valuable contribution, with the radical ethos of Soviet Communism continuing this valorization further into the 1920s.

There is a very tightly chronologically integrated transnational history here, further shaped by the publication of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* in 1930, containing a famously progressive entry on

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homosexuality, in which the psychiatrist Mark Ia. Sereiskii trenchantly argued for tolerance and acceptance, albeit in the pathologizing sexological language of the time – a landmark intervention explicitly influenced by Magnus Hirschfeld's research and activism, in turn motivating his alliance with Communism in the early 1930s (as we have seen in Chapter 1, Isherwood also arrived in Berlin and became acquainted with Hirschfeld in 1929–30).[46] While acknowledging that fascism had a certain appeal for some cross-identifying women, Jack Halberstam has influentially stressed that female masculinities are not always overwhelmingly conservative assumptions of male privilege but "also ways for women to pioneer forms of masculinity that change the meaning of modern gender and sexual identity."[47] Ackland's defiant gender performance and Townsend Warner's queer Leninism are vital pioneering forms, which reorder sexual identity through their thoroughgoing engagement with Soviet Communism.

Some of the complex maneuverings involved in Ackland's gender-dissident Communism can be seen in the following unpublished letter to Julius Lipton. Ackland and Warner invited Lipton and his wife Queenie to stay with them in Dorset, and Ackland's letter gives a brief sketch of Ackland's life since arriving in Dorset, warning Lipton that her appearance is somewhat unconventional:

> I had little cash, and no experience of living on little. So I first of all found a practical way of saving on clothes (which I did not then know could be an inexpensive item -) and I bought a pair of corduroy trousers for ten bob, which I have still – They never wear out, you know. Then I found that flannels cost little, in comparison with the skirts I had before. So from that day to this, whenever I am in the country proper, I always wear these clothes. It makes a difference, too – I feel freer and – most important – as I made the change when I was miserable, and was determined to alter my misery to something better and less squalid I feel liberated by the change in apparel. But it is, I know, a curious difference that they make. So I warn you beforehand![48]

In this passage there is a distinct movement from what might initially be read as the excuses of the closet to a more celebratory mode, as Ackland states that she "feel[s] liberated" by this change in dress. What is striking about this movement is that it must be read back through the initial "excuse" which claims economic necessity for the declassed Ackland. The letter continues:

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> Now, of course, so many women wear trousers that it doesn't look odd any longer. But then I suppose it did. But no one down here minded, except one or two old labourers and their wives. The younger people all became friendly to me because, I think, it made me unlike the people who so much oppress them (as you'll find when you talk to them), the "County" grandees, and the clergy and their wives.

To borrow another of Halberstam's astute formulations, here the "sartorial semiotic" of Ackland's female masculinity turns out to be an intersectional asset in her Communist organizing, as it brackets (while not entirely erasing) her bourgeois class origins in dealing with the younger members of the rural poor, enabling her to become friendly with important targets for her organizing: she is "unlike the people who so much oppress them" in more ways than one.[49] In his study of Lenin, Lukács urged that the vanguardist fighter not only must have great "clarity of consciousness" but also an "equal ability to merge themselves totally in the lives of the struggling and suffering masses."[50] Clearly Ackland isn't merging as such with the rural poor, but her self-presentation is absolutely intertwined with her Communist activism in a reordering rather than rejection of Lukács's politics of everyday life.

To deploy Muñoz's supple term, the best way to describe Ackland's gender and class performance might be disidentification – as can be seen from pictures of her from the time, her preferred mode of dress veered between poacher and country squire, with the occasional foray into upper-class male evening dress ("Valentine had spent a queer night in a white tie and a tailcoat, falling in love with a young woman called Dorothea," Townsend Warner recorded in 1935, in yet another passage excised from published editions of her diaries, perhaps depicting a reading of *Middlemarch*).[51] This performance of rural authority and its subversion allowed her to shape a complex embodied critique of country injustice, as a shape-shifting insider-outsider to the rural ruling classes. Ackland's 1930s diaries, written in a punchy, telegraphic style, are a particularly rich source for this positioning:

> Shot 3 rabbits.
> Communists had good gains in French municipal elections. [. . .]
> Shot 4 rabbits – one shot each and at a good 50 yards off – clean through the head.

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Did 2 ½ hours gardening.
Did 5 of the *Left Review* poets.[52]

This remarkable parataxis juxtaposes delight in her shooting skills with international news and writing assignments for Communist publications, again showing how Ackland perceived her gender performance and political work as intertwined. There's a sense of target practice going on in her insistent return to the rabbits, a training in readiness for violent revolution that is simultaneously a gender-dissident praxis when undertaken by a woman; book reviewing is placed alongside such concerns in an attempt to integrate theory and practice paradigmatic of 1930s Communist thought and political organization. Here Ackland's disciplined approach (note the quantification of every activity) suggests that to assert that Townsend Warner and Ackland navigated their queer Communism with serene ease would indeed be misplaced – not for the reasons Montefiore implies, but rather because it would go against the grain of the Communist ethos of continual struggle to which they both adhered.

It is clearly very easy to disparage Townsend Warner and Ackland's commitment to the Soviet Union, as can be seen in Patrick Wright's sneering account of them as "sisters in militancy" gazing at the "reflected light of a glorious Soviet future."[53] More subtly – but I would argue, equally mistakenly – one might see their intertwined commitments as an unfortunate by-product of the energies of queer life, to be acknowledged as part of a variegated history unassimilable to a progressivist narrative of gay and lesbian history yet ultimately to be understood as a political dead end.[54] But here is neither failure nor loss, for as with Isherwood's articulation of the queer potential of the First Five-Year Plan, it is in no small part the most implacably Soviet aspects of Townsend Warner's and Ackland's cultural politics that open up a capacious sense of queer futurity, the non-reproductivist model of intimate struggle that lies at the heart of *Summer Will Show*.

Revolution retriangulated

More than any other British novel of the 1930s, *Summer Will Show* insistently intertwines queer desire and revolutionary politics. The novel features Sophia, a Tory heiress who leaves her country seat

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upon the death of her children to seek out her errant husband, Frederick, who is living in Paris with his mistress, a Jewish storyteller named Minna. When Sophia arrives, however, she falls in love with Minna as the February Revolution of 1848 breaks out in the city. Both women become involved in the revolution, Minna as a romantic revolutionary, whose words inspire the bohemians and revolutionaries constantly congregating at her apartment. But it is Sophia who begins to work for the Communists, whose chief theorist, Inglebrecht, is attracted by her strong-willed practicality and clear-minded thinking. The novel draws to a close as the revolutionaries are defeated in the fighting of the unsuccessful June rebellion. Both women fight on the barricades; Minna is killed in picaresque fashion by an illegitimate relation of Sophia's from the Caribbean, who Sophia kills in turn. The novel's final page pictures Sophia starting to read one of the pamphlets she had been distributing for the Communists, which turns out to be *The Communist Manifesto*.

Simultaneously and inescapably a novel of queer desire and Marxist revolution, *Summer Will Show* poses in acute fashion what might appear to be the central question of 1930s queer Communism: how can a such a supposedly rigidly normative scheme of political action and theory be reconciled with or accommodated to a set of practices, desires, and experiences so necessarily antinormative? Perhaps in response to this dilemma, critical readings of the novel have generally emerged in "extremely polarized terms," as Heather Love has pointed out.[55] Either the novel is read as concerned with "class politics," as Claire Harman would have it, or it with lesbian fantasy, as Terry Castle has argued.[56] However, Love's recent reading in *Feeling Backward* (2009) has broken new ground in an attempt to think revolutionary Marxism through queer experience in the novel. Deploying Walter Benjamin's and Raymond Williams's "tragic" reworkings of Marxism, and focusing on the novel's affects of despair, Love argues that "despair in the novel appears as a kind of resource: as much as hope, it is necessary to make change happen."[57] This allows Love to construct an intriguing synthesis, between the historical "impossibility" of both queer desire and revolution itself: "revolutionary consciousness in *Summer Will Show* is imagined as a desire for an impossible redemption – a total transformation of society that cannot and yet must take place."[58] Love directly opposes

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this sense of the "impossible objects" of queer desire and revolution to a "forward-looking, scientific Marxism," contending that the novel's orientation toward the past, rather than the future, and its incessant focus on despair rather than hope or utopia puts *Summer Will Show* completely at odds with the progressivist history of such a politics.

Love's is one of the most sophisticated interpretations of *Summer Will Show*, and offers a subtle model for understanding how the novel imbricates queer desire and revolutionary action. However, her exclusive focus on "dark affects," moments of despair, and on the novel's backward-looking moments seem rather strange in a novel so insistently structured around the dynamics of a specifically Communist revolutionary ethos. Crucial to Love's argument is the claim that "Minna's idiosyncratic revolutionary desires and regrets," explicitly opposed to Inglebrecht's "scientific socialism," are the novel's privileged model of politics and desire; on this reading, Sophia's path through the novel, from mistress of a country estate to Communist revolutionary, is exclusively scripted by her increasing identification with Minna, rather than Inglebrecht.[59] I want to propose a very different reading of the relationship between these three characters, one that reconstructs the novel's vanguardist élan, expressed through the distinctively Bolshevik dialectic of spontaneity and consciousness in Townsend Warner's letters. Driven by this dialectic, *Summer Will Show* constructs a sophisticated triangulation between Minna, Sophia, and Inglebrecht, a group dynamic that is fundamental not only to the novel's Communist élan, but also to its model of non-reproductivist futurity.

As the term triangulations suggests, it is worthwhile to recount Castle's classic reading of the novel. According to Castle, *Summer Will Show* is a paradigmatic lesbian novel because it overturns the male homosocial triangle diagnosed by Sedgwick and puts in its place a new configuration, in which female bonding (Minna–Sophia) is transformed into lesbian desire, and the male point of the triangle (Frederick) drops away.[60] Castle's interpretation is convincing, but incomplete: she fails to notice that a new, intimately politicized triangulation emerges at precisely the point at which Frederick is most surely ejected from the two women's erotic lives. Indeed, almost at the very moment of their erotic consummation, Inglebrecht is hovering in the background, the notes for *The Communist Manifesto* in

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hand: a completely desexualized and thus vitally important figure for Sophia's queer development.

Following a conversation between the two women during which sexual tension is clearly building, they experience "a flush of pleasure, a triumphant cry" capped by Minna licking an oyster shell.[61] This moment is preceded by an encounter with her husband when he cuts Sophia off from her money and she strikes him around the face. Clearly, as Castle argues, this is a moment of de-triangulation in which the male falls away – particularly as it is a sign of supposed sexual complicity from Frederick that causes Sophia's reaction, "a boon-companion's grin" that calls forth her punch (216). And yet, between the encounter with Frederick and Sophia's and Minna's consummation, Inglebrecht appears, having been by the sick Minna's bedside while Sophia was away confronting Frederick. Indeed, Sophia's most pressing thought following her encounter with Frederick was that she wished to see her new Communist acquaintance:

> Stronger than rage, astonishment, contempt, the pleasurable sense that at last she had slapped Frederick's face, the less pleasurable surmise that his slap back would be longer-lasting; stronger even than the desire to see Minna was her feeling that of all things, of all people, she most at this moment wished to see Inglebrecht, and the sturdy assurance that she would find in him everything that she expected. If she had gone up the stairs in the rue de la Carabine on her knees, she could not have ascended with a more zealotical faith that there would be healing at the top; and when he opened the door to her, enquiring politely if her errands had gone well she replied with enthusiasm, "Perfectly. My husband – it was he I went to see – has just threatened to cut me off with a penny." (218)

This long sentence moves through a series of intertwined affective moments – Sophia's new-found physical dominance of her husband, his "longer-lasting" financially brutal response, her desire to see Minna, but above all to see Inglebrecht, with whom she now zealously identifies – before finishing with a wry, succinct statement of the economic power of patriarchal control. The passage continues:

> "A lock-out," said Inglebrecht. "Very natural. It is a symptom of capitalistic anxiety. I suppose he has always been afraid of you."
> She nodded, and her lips curved in a grin of satisfaction. (218)

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Here Sophia comes to stand, with grim certitude, for the proletariat itself, locked out of the means of production by Frederick's capitalist anxiety at her increasingly manifest power, an identification that subtly indicates the ways in which the growth of capitalism complicates and then supersedes a fully patriarchal sexual economy. Such an identity might seem to place her merely as the object of Inglebrecht's Marxist analysis, yet another fixing of the female subject by the male gaze. But Sophia not only grins in satisfaction, but has her own uses for Inglebrecht: "He is everything, she thought, that I expected, everything that I desired; grim and flat, positive without any flavor, a man like plain cold water" (219). Here Inglebrecht appears as a desexualized masculine subject, a socially refreshing and politically invigorating substance for Sophia's transformation. This depiction of Inglebrecht clearly echoes Lenin's famous exchange with Clara Zetkin on the subject of Soviet sexual revolution. During this conversation, Lenin railed against the supposedly glib way in which young people were conducting their sexual lives – apparently sex was seen as akin to merely drinking a glass of water, and Lenin castigated this attitude for its misreading of Marx and Engels on sexuality and for its frivolousness.[62] Lenin's comments have generally been seen to signal the foundering of Soviet sexual radicalism, but here Townsend Warner slyly repurposes them to foreground lesbian desire as opposed to heterosexual union.

Minna had been asleep during Inglebrecht and Sophia's conversation; she soon wakes, and Inglebrecht reads the two women a long passage from the pamphlet he has been writing. There is no direct quote from Marx or Engels in the passage, but it clearly draws on denunciations of romantic revolutionaries from across their writings.[63] Inglebrecht mischievously tells Minna that she is his model for this type, "*penetrated with artistic and historical feeling*" but unable to become disciplined revolutionaries (220; emphasis in original). Inglebrecht's discourse negates and yet preserves Minna's earlier storytelling that held so many romantics captivated earlier in the narrative, and it also parodies an earlier charity concert where Sophia met Frederick; in a further turn, it is then echoed in Sophia's later performance of English hymns as she and Minna scrabble for sources of income. An accomplished musicologist before she became a full-time writer, Townsend Warner's lifelong engagement with music centrally shapes major episodes and themes in the narrative. In

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addition to Engels and Brecht, it is worth considering another likely source for Inglebrecht's name here, the French conductor and friend of Debussy, Désiré-Émile Inghelbrecht (1880–1965). Inghelbrecht was a major figure on the French music scene in the period, and in 1934 he became the conductor of a new prestigious radio orchestra, which was to become the *Orchestre national de France*. Inglebrecht the Communist is compared to "a recording angel" (219), surely significant given Inghelbrecht's prominence as a radio conductor.

The metaphor of the conductor has clear Leninist overtones, as a figure who brings the collective to a shared rhythm by directing a script of their actions that is necessarily informed by their performance. More broadly, Inglebrecht's resonance with music – Sophia also compares her sensation when listening to him and Minna to "what I have seen painted sometimes on the faces of people listening to Beethoven" (219) – indicates the importance of not overstating the dry, cold aspects of revolutionary theory in Townsend Warner's political thought and literary praxis. It would be far too simplistic a reading to suggest that Minna simply represents embodied passion, and Inglebrecht detached reason (to say nothing of this position as a reifying anti-intellectual cliché). Inglebrecht is indeed desexualized, but he is not disembodied, his paradoxically fragile yet resilient physicality stressed throughout, reminding Sophia "of an animal" wrapped in a shawl to protect him from a permanent chill he contracted from one of his many periods of imprisonment, yet pursuing his aims "swiftly and circumspectly [. . .] true to his own laws" (222). The shawl usually associated with women, his affective labor in caring for Minna, his animality, and yet his traditionally masculine intent political purpose and self-contained certainty mark Inglebrecht as a distinctive subject of revolutionary modernity, "true to his own laws and oblivious of all else" (222). Yet Inglebrecht is not without humor, even in moments of heavily instrumental political discourse. As he entreats Sophia to fight Frederick for her money in order to donate it to the Communists, he improbably winks: "it seems unbelievable that such an eye could wink. Wink, however, it did" (222). Sophia is, however, not in the least offended and promises to "write to her man of business tomorrow" (222). This wink, entirely devoid of sexual flirtation, negates Frederick's "boon companion's grin" (222); a transposition of masculine complicity into political community, it signals the emergence of a new affective triangle.

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Inglebrecht must himself drop away, at least for a while. After he leaves, Minna declares that she "appreciates" Inglebrecht, and would be ready to mend her romantic-revolutionary ways at his request (223). Yet she also declares that all the time he was with her, her thoughts were mainly of Sophia's return. Sophia then reveals how Frederick has "cut off [her] supplies," and the two women ponder their future, in perhaps the most famous exchange in the novel:

> "You will stay? You must, if only to gall him."
> "I don't think that much of a reason."
> "But you will stay?"
> "I will stay if you wish it."
> It seemed to her that the words fell cold and glum as ice-pellets. Only beneath the crust of thought did her being assent as by right to that flush of pleasure, that triumphant cry.
> "But of course," said Minna a few hours later, thoughtfully licking the last oyster shell, "we must be practical." (224)

Here sexual consummation is drawn from a rejection of the masculine side of the triangle – a thought initially "cold and glum" that is negated by the "right" of lesbian desire. The juxtaposition of erotic imagery with Minna's desire for "practicality" is, as the following lines make clear, heavily ironic, as the sybaritic Minna is anything but practical: "this remark she had already made repeatedly, speaking with the excitement of an adventurous mind contemplating a new and hazardous experience" (224). However, this sense of practicality carries several further valences, organized around the concept of commitment. It signals the cementing of the pair's consummation, the constitution of Minna and Sophia as a couple. But even as the couple form emerges, such commitment is broadened through a complete identification of Minna with revolutionary politics itself: "and though you may think you have chosen me, Sophia, or chosen happiness, it is the Revolution you have chosen" (227). Here the "practicality" of the emergent lesbian couple-form is co-constitutive with radical political praxis and a totalizing identification with revolution.

In the following scenes in the novel, Sophia continuously encounters Minna as a figure of seductive (at times problematically exoticized) difference, both in her espousal of revolutionary ideals and her infuriating impracticality, set against the Englishwoman's residual

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Tory politics and clear-minded prudence. Very quickly, however, Sophia undergoes a series of transformations and within a matter of weeks "the prudence of her class had shriveled" (236); and yet this declassing is coupled with a frustration at the inept nature of the hapless would-be revolutionaries with whom she now finds herself. "They are like – the thought jumped up, exact and clinching – they are like people sickening for a fever; excited, restless, listless, blown this way and that like windlestraws in the gusts that stir before a thunder-storm" (232). Such annoyance at the febrility of the romantic revolutionaries already contains the germ of Communist praxis, and is immediately followed by a reconsideration of Minna and Inglebrecht:

> Minna, God knows, was idle; but she was completely without arrogance, and her idleness was coupled with such energy that it seemed like the flourish of a vitality too rich to be contained in any doing, a stream too impetuous to turn any mill-wheel [. . .] The one wholly untainted was Inglebrecht. Whatever the sickness, there was no taint of it on him, whatever happened he, resolute, discreet, self-contained, alert, would trot like some secret busy badger along his own path. (232–3)

We can read this passage as an articulation of the dialectic of spontaneity and consciousness: Sophia praises Minna's spontaneous revolutionary energy alongside Inglebrecht's qualities, "resolute, discreet, self-contained, alert," with Sophia as the site of their synthesis. In line with Lenin's tendency toward the consciousness side of the dialectic, it is the latter set of characteristics that make Sophia an ideal worker for the Communists, for whom she begins to transport scrap metal to be made into bullets. The Communists' armory is hidden beneath a laundry, and Sophia is chosen because, as an Englishwoman and a lady, she would attract little attention. Her English "eccentricity" would account for her taking her washing to the laundry rather than have a servant deliver it, while her class position would add to the respectability of the front; as the proprietress remarks, "one can see from a glance that you would not be connected with anything – with anything unusual" (277).

Musing on this covert work, Sophia notes that prudence has reasserted itself with her new tasks, indeed that she has come to view order and regularity "with an almost mystical admiration." She continues:

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> And yet, though it was destruction she served, it was a purposed destruction, something foreseen and deliberated; and here, if she could only get herself into the well-scrubbed fortress of the Alpine Laundry, become one of those Communists instead of an eccentric Englishwoman carrying a laundry-basket, might be a safety for the mind. (282)

Here is Sophia's transformation into an agent of Communism, "serving" something "foreseen and deliberated," an orderly form of destruction of which she now approves. She also wishes for a tighter integration with Communist praxis and everyday life, to be more than a merely instrumentalized "eccentric Englishwoman." In fact, as Inglebrecht had observed on their very first meeting (203), Sophia is supremely suited to a serious role in the Communist movement, which she soon comes to realize, pondering that "more and more clearly during those summer evenings, shone out her air of technique, of being a professional amongst amateurs" (284).

While Sophia, Minna, and Inglebrecht make up an eccentric cell, a Communist social unit encompassing queer partnership and non-reproductive futurity, *Summer Will Show* also features an abject figure of revolutionary exclusion. We meet Sophia's illegitimate biracial nephew Caspar early on in the narrative, when he comes to visit her in England, livening up her country life with his exoticized presence before he is sent to boarding school, having angered the village with his physical perfection in something of a cliché of biraciality. Much to Sophia's irritation, Caspar later appears in Minna's apartment in Paris; again he is sent away, apparently to boarding school. But instead it turns out that Frederick enlisted the unwanted youth in the Gardes Mobile, the counter-revolutionary force deployed against the revolutionaries in the June Days uprising which spelled the victory of reaction.

Caspar is the paradigmatic figure of the racialized, feminized lumpenproletarian in Marx's and Engels's writings. As the illegitimate son of a plantation owner, he is a remainder of the old class order, part of the "dregs, refuse, and scum of all classes" as Marx condemns the lumpenproletariat; feckless and buffeted by circumstances beyond his control, he is manipulated into becoming a foot soldier of the forces of reaction.[64] Indeed, Caspar's role in the Gardes Mobile fixes him at the most intense site of Marx's development of

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the concept of the lumpenproletariat, in his account of Bonaparte's coup of 1851 in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852) – an analysis of the aftermath of the very events depicted in the novel. Marx argues that Bonaparte was crucially supported by a rag-tag army of misfits and outcasts. In a famous, curiously lyrical passage he lists a series of types who make up the lumpenproletarian rabble:

> From the aristocracy there were bankrupted roués of doubtful means and dubious provenance, from the bourgeoisie there were degenerate wastrels on the take, vagabonds, demobbed soldiers, discharged convicts, runaway galley slaves, swindlers and cheats, thugs, pickpockets, conjurers, card-sharps, pimps, brothel keepers, porters, day-labourers, organ grinders, scrap dealers, knife grinders, tinkers and beggars, in short, the whole amorphous, jumbled mass of flotsam and jetsam that the French term bohemian.[65]

Marx's racializing polemic ends with a telling identification between the lumpenproletarian and the unconventional artist, an association that was gathering force in mid-nineteenth-century France through the life and work of Georges Sand (another pioneer of forms of female masculinity), and today perhaps best known from Bizet's *Carmen* (1876).[66] In *Summer Will Show*, Sophia remarks to herself that Minna "is an artist, what they call a Bohemian. And I, in this strange holiday from my natural self, am being a Bohemian too, she thought with pride" (132); later on, Minna mock-chastises herself for "hauling you [Sophia] down into this shabby Bohemia," to which Sophia briskly replies "I have never been so happy in my life and you know it" (263). Throughout the narrative, Minna's stable of romantic revolutionaries and artists are figured as paradigmatic bohemians, an ethnically diverse group of drifters and artists living an unconventional politics of everyday life whose radical élan must be sublated by orderly revolution.

Caspar functions as an abject remainder to this formation, a rejected body whose exclusion pharmakologically resolves the problem of the heterogeneous revolutionary collective. He is thus a site of overdetermination, as the novel's tragic denouement prominently figures. As Sophia stands on a crumbling barricade overrun by Gardes Mobile troops, she muses, "Caspar is one of these," and then, "with the certainty of a bad dream, there, when she looked up, was Caspar's profile outlined against the smoky dusk" (310). There

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follows a scene of double recognition and violent reaction: first, "she saw Caspar recognize her [Sophia], and for an instant his face wore a look of sheepish devotion"; then Minna greets Caspar with her "inveterately hospitable" voice (310). Caspar responds by stabbing Minna with the words "'Drab!' [. . .] 'Jewess! This is the end of you,'" and Sophia shoots Caspar in the mouth "as though she would have struck that mouth with her hand" (311). Radical unity between the Jewish bohemian and the lumpenproletarian colonial subject is brutally occluded, and the circuit of reaction completed by Sophia – although a queer Communist in volition, finally drawn into committing an act of imperial murder.[67]

Chapter 1 examined Isherwood's negotiation of the lumpenproletariat, arguing that *The Berlin Stories* offer a radical vision of lumpen revolutionary agency in the figure of the queer sex worker, while *Journey to a War* forecloses this capacious collective through an Orientalist gaze on the Chinese "coolie." *Summer Will Show* encompasses these two movements – outwards, encompassing the abjectly excluded lumpen, then inwards, away from the racialized subject as holding revolutionary potential. It is beyond the scope of this book to evaluate the broader contours of the British left's attitude toward the lumpenproletariat in any detail, an endeavor that would necessarily involve a complex decolonial history. The point for this present study is that the queer reception and transformation of key debates within the Marxist intellectual canon can provide radical new departures for both queer studies and Marxist theory. Both Isherwood and Townsend Warner offer complex, troubled articulations of the figure of the lumpenproletarian within the revolutionary body that resist a static opposition of condemnation or embrace that has often characterized the figure in political theory.

Following the deaths of Minna, Caspar, and Inglebrecht, Sophia falls into a catatonic depression. She struggles through this, however, and the final pages of the novel see her reading the opening of *The Communist Manifesto*, one of the pamphlets she had been distributing for Inglebrecht in another task she performed for the Communist cause. This moment articulates a classic trope of mid-century leftist fiction: the glimmer of hope in the moment of defeat, as seen in novels such as (to name but a few), Edward Upward's *Journey to the Border* (1938), Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939), Anna Seghers's *The Seventh Cross* (1945), Alexander Fadeyev's *The Young*

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Guard (1946), or indeed Townsend Warner's own *After the Death of Don Juan* (1938). Strikingly, however, as opposed to how these moments usually operate, hope lies in theory; rather than the grim determination on the face of a condemned man, we have Sophia, "reading, obdurately attentive and by degrees absorbed" (329). In other words, a Communist counterpublic has begun to materialize through a text that is at once repellent to some observers and yet awaiting an eager readership; the novel itself, in the characteristic feedback loop of the counterpublic, mediates this process as another such text. Put another way, the close of the novel articulates in no uncertain terms that revolution requires a tightly integrated conception of theory and praxis. Inglebrecht and Minna are both killed, but Sophia is seated with the foundational text of Marxism at the novel's close – she is finally figured as a site of sublation, and as such necessarily full of potentiality.

I hope it is clear that by this reading I do not mean to suggest that *Summer Will Show* offers a straightforwardly progressive or utopian narrative (it is rather dialectical and serpentine), nor to claim that despair or regret are absent from the affective register of the text, but rather to reconstruct the novel's pull in the opposite direction. Considering Townsend Warner's and Ackland's positioning in the Dorset backwaters, Love's conception of "impossibility" does have a further sense of traction; yet the response called forth by this situation is more bracingly future-oriented than despairing. Moreover, while Love is surely right to claim that the ending of *Summer Will Show* "suggest[s] that one's relation to a collectivity might be based on the model of erotic love," what is missing from her account is how erotic love could emerge from a shared relation to radical collectivity.[68]

Queer typicality

Chapter 1 argued that Isherwood's *Berlin Stories* offers a critique of Lukács on two different levels. By revalorizing instrumentalization through an engagement with Tretiakov, Isherwood refuses the residual Kantianism in Lukács's ban on objectification in *History and Class Consciousness*, thus refusing property ownership and legitimizing queer erotic practice. At the same time, Isherwood's

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playful depiction of Arthur Norris empties out realist typicality, subverting the sleek dialectical reflection of history through character that Lukács suggests in his writings of the 1930s. With Townsend Warner, however, clearly something rather different is going on. Indeed, it is very tempting to read her historical novels as paradigmatically Lukácsian – a designation that might be applied not only to her 1930s texts *Summer Will Show* and *After the Death of Don Juan* (1938), but also, and perhaps more accurately, to two other novels she would go on to write in the coming years, *The Corner That Held Them* (1948) and *The Flint Anchor* (1954). *The Corner That Held Them*, for instance, depicts a convent during the years between the Black Death and the Peasants' Revolt, carefully drawing out historical change through a set of characters with a semi-peripheral relationship to major historical events, as Lukács famously urged in *The Historical Novel*. Although I have found no direct reference to Lukács in Townsend Warner's unpublished and published correspondence or diaries, her archive does contain a copy of *International Literature* from 1939; not the same issue in which the first English translations of *The Historical Novel* appeared, but very close to it.[69] Moreover, there were discussions about whether *Summer Will Show* might be translated and serialized in the Russian-language edition of *International Literature* – this appears not to have transpired, but it does indicate that Townsend Warner was in contact with the publication, and might reasonably be assumed to have read it.[70] It seems very likely that from the late 1930s onwards Townsend Warner became acquainted with at least the main contours of Lukács's major literary-critical positions – which is not to maintain that novels such as *The Corner That Held Them* are derivative, but rather that they perhaps bear some trace of influence.

The case of *Summer Will Show* is perhaps more intriguing. Townsend Warner had conceived of the character of Sophia some fifteen years before the novel was published, as she famously wrote in a note to the novel:

> It must have been in 1920 or 21 [. . .] that I said to a young man called Robert Firebrace that I had invented a person: an early Victorian young lady of means with a secret passion for pugilism; she attended prize-fights dressed as a man and kept a punching-ball under lock and key in her dressing-room. He asked what she looked like and I replied

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> without hesitation: "Smooth fair hair, tall, reserved, very ladylike. She's called Sophia Willoughby.[71]

Townsend Warner's invention of Sophia clearly anticipates the full-forced blow dealt to her husband in *Summer Will Show*, as well as her physical description; the possibility of Sophia actually becoming a pugilist is raised by Minna in the novel, but not followed through (225). The original Sophia's sexual object choice does not appear to be a concern as such in the above description, and was perhaps only articulated when Townsend Warner came to start writing the novel in 1932–3. This depiction delights in the starkly dichotomous: on the one hand, a thoroughgoing antinormativity – the prize fights, the cross-dressing, the punching ball – on the other hand, the most respectable and elegant of upper-class "very ladylike" appearances. This interaction of surfaces and passions foreshadows Sophia's transformation in *Summer Will Show*, particularly her role as a respectable-looking courier whose upper-class exterior would be above suspicion, a ruse expressive of the usefulness of her bourgeois mental furniture for orderly Communist organization.

In its depiction of this highly original historical creation, the most salient aspect of this passage is the way in which Townsend Warner is already at play with typicality. Sophia is simultaneously a typical representation of her class and gender at a specific moment in history – "*early* Victorian" and "ladylike" – and yet she heralds forms of female masculinity that were to become increasingly prominent in the interwar period, almost 100 years later. It is worth recalling Engels's much-cited definition of typicality as expressed in his letter to Margaret Harkness from 1888, a key text for Lukácsian realism first widely available in England through *International Literature* in 1933, not least because it was around this time that Townsend Warner began to formulate the narrative of *Summer Will Show* and commence her engagement with Communism. Engels famously argued that "realism implies, to my mind, besides depiction of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances," before going on to praise "old Balzac" who, despite his monarchism, clearly foresaw the ascendency of the "men of the future" in the rising bourgeoisie.[72]

Like Isherwood and Edward Upward, Townsend Warner was wary of "taking Balzac and decanting new content into it," as can be seen

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from later on in the note to *Summer Will Show* where she archly observes that in writing the novel she "tried to avoid the French novelists."[73] Yet it's hard not to see Sophia as a reconfiguration of Balzac's "men of the future," a typical character whose narrative journey is proleptic of future developments in social and political history. Sophia's Toryism, moreover, might profitably be read alongside Balzac's monarchism, transposed from writer to character, then transmogrified in her movement toward Communism, a transformation that tropes Marx's, Engels's, and Lukács's repurposing of politically conservative forms of nineteenth-century realism for radical ends. Her "eccentricity" – indeed her queerness – might, however, appear to pose a problem here, for surely such central aspects of Sophia's character, and indeed the novel as a whole, militate against typicality in the full sense of the term? Indeed, in his polemic against decadence, "Healthy Art or Sick Art," Lukács fulminated against "decadence" in obviously heteronormative terms, as an "abnormality" and "deformity" as opposed to the social health of realism.[74]

It is worth pausing, however, before designating Lukácsian realism as characterized at root by normativity in its strong sense. In "The Intellectual Physiognomy of Literary Characters," first published in English by *International Literature* in August 1936, Lukács argues at length against the naturalist concept of everyday reality, which leads him to a critique of the concept of the "average" in Zola:

> It is tacitly assumed as a matter of course that "life" is average everyday life, which is actually simpler than the world of Stendhal or of Balzac [. . .] Thus the illusion can very easily arise that the average is just as much an objective "element" of social reality as say, the elements of chemistry.[75]

This is a crucial passage, for Lukács in no uncertain terms rejects the idea of the "average" as a literary optic onto social reality, thereby sharply distinguishing realist typicality from the governing epistemology of the norm. This naturalist error is presented as complementary to the excesses of modernism:

> Endeavors to portray the "exceptional" man, the eccentric man, even the "superman," that have arisen in the apparently violent struggle against naturalism remain within the magic circle of style that begins with the naturalist movement. The eccentric individual, "isolated"

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> from everyday reality, and the average man are two complementary poles in literature and in life.[76]

The "eccentric" appears as the other side of the coin to the "average man," polarities that skip the mediations of typicality and fall into similarly constituted forms of error. Returning to Balzac's letter, the problem here is that neither modernist eccentricity nor the naturalist "average man" can produce the "men of the future," in that they both fail to articulate and anticipate the narrative of history. Indeed, such "men of the future" are for Lukács "exceptional," if not eccentric – and in fact sometimes women. Later on in the essay, Lukács takes the classic example of Maxim Gorky's *Mother*, a novel which depicts the growth to class consciousness of an elderly woman and her son; the titular woman, he argues, "is expressly portrayed as an exceptional case [. . .] this very exceptional element makes Nilovna's road so profoundly typical."[77]

The significance of this moment in Lukács for the possibility of queer typicality in *Summer Will Show* and beyond cannot be underestimated, for there is no reason to presume that the fundamental structure of typicality cannot work in terms of queer history – Halberstam's reminder that types are not necessarily the same as stereotypes is worth bearing in mind here (to say nothing of what one might observe in everyday life).[78] Not average nor necessarily eccentric, but *exceptionally typical*, figuring the development of future social forms: this structure might well be applied to the protagonists of a number of canonical novels in gay and lesbian literary history, whether or not the style of the text is recognizably realist. This genealogy might include the following: Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912); André Gide's *Corydon* (1924); John Henry Mackay's *The Hustler* (1926); Forster's *Maurice* (1970; composed 1912/32), Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928); John Rechy's *City of Night* (1963); Isherwood's *A Single Man* (1964); Andrew Holleran's *Dancer from the Dance* (1978); Edmund White's trilogy beginning *A Boy's Own Story* (1982/1988/1997); Abdellah Taïa's *Salvation Army* (2007); and Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* (2010). Such a largely Anglo-American, mainly white list is necessarily marked by a great number of omissions. But the point is that these particular canonical authors present a variety of typical experiences in widely divergent styles, which become an important terrain upon which a major line of gay

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and lesbian literary history emerges – imbued with creative energy, and yet also undeniably marked by racialized exclusion. Moreover, the validity of this schema for non-Anglophone or Germanophone queer literature is beyond my competency, and may or may not prove fruitful ground for scholars better versed in diverse languages.

Nevertheless, it is worth underlining that typicality opens up a vision of non-reproductivist social change that has no need to resort to heterosexual procreation in order to figure and embody the future. It might perhaps be objected that this is rather too broad a generic category; indeed, that historically and socially informed literary production as such comes under the rubric of Lukácsian typicality on this reading – but that would be to erase the distinctive forms of queer literary production, always reaching beyond themselves toward new, open-ended configurations of the social simultaneously as they constitute a series of identity types. As Muñoz has argued, queerness is at once "not yet here" and yet insistently present in utopian performance, and, likewise, queer literary history must always be concerned with constructing the people of the future as it writes the history of its present. Part of Townsend Warner's significance lies in the extent to which she was situated very close, politically and historically, to the canonical Anglophone elaboration of the concept of typicality, and through its method *Summer Will Show* sets out quite explicitly to explore its historical possibilities for a queerness to come.

In differing ways, both Townsend Warner and Isherwood demonstrate the importance of Soviet Marxism as a vital, transformative site in the queer literary history of the 1930s. Typicality, vanguardism, proletarian objectivism: however imbricated with reproductive heterosexuality these concepts may have been in the dominant leftist imaginary, they are no more necessarily heteronormative (indeed perhaps less so at points) than the various forms of western modernist literary practice – collage, indeterminacy, experiment, and so on – often thought of as holding radically queer potential. This is not to offer a final polemic against the ideology of modernism à la Lukács, but rather to contend that Soviet Marxism, that supposedly most sexually conservative and aesthetically reactionary body of thought and culture, offered vital resources for queer writing that have resonances to this day. The literary and cultural history of the Popular Front, however, reveals a less hopeful genealogy of the left's sexual

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politics. Responding to the supposed sexual aberrance of fascism, Popular Front literary producers insistently shaped a cultural field through which liberal humanism, nationalism, and heterosexual reproduction became mutually constitutive of the idealized sexual subject, even as more and more queer writers and artists were drawn into antifascist movements. It is to this juncture of cruel optimism that Chapter 3 will now turn.

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