

Australia and New Zealand Slavists' Association
New Zealand Slavonic Journal

ARTEM SERGEEV TRANSLATED: THE IMAGE OF A RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONARY IN TOM KENEALLY'S "PEOPLE'S TRAIN"

Author(s): Kevin Windle

Source: *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (2011), pp. 29-43

Published by: [Australia and New Zealand Slavists' Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23622175>

Accessed: 12/02/2015 18:37

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Australia and New Zealand Slavists' Association and New Zealand Slavonic Journal are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Kevin Windle
(Australian National University)

**ARTEM SERGEEV TRANSLATED: THE IMAGE OF A
RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONARY IN TOM KENEALLY'S
*PEOPLE'S TRAIN***

One of the more unusual works of fiction to be presented to the Australian reading public in 2009 was a historical novel by Tom Keneally, entitled *The People's Train*, set largely in Brisbane and based on the life of one of its temporary Russian residents.¹ Keneally, known for his wide interests, had moved into new territory and conducted extensive research into the life and career of the well-known revolutionary Fedor Andreevich Sergeev, better known by the name Artem, his *klichka* or *nom de guerre*,² and the milieu in which he operated in the years 1911-1917, that is, the community of Russian exiles and immigrants which had formed in Queensland and its organisation, the Union of Russian Workers (URW) or Russian Association.

The People's Train is far from the first work to explore the life of Artem (1883-1921). In the USSR he attracted the interest of a numerous historians and writers, and figured in the memoirs of several contemporaries. He was a 'safe' topic, having died before Stalin took the reins, in an accident rather than a labour camp or execution cell. He thus remained in good odour, as did his relatives, throughout the Soviet period. Towns, villages, streets, squares, coal mines and mining institutes named after him kept their names until the collapse of the USSR and in some cases longer. His son Artem Fedorovich, born in March 1921, grew up in the bosom of Stalin's family, the playmate of his son Vasily, having been adopted by the future dictator after Artem's premature death in July. He went on to achieve high rank in the Soviet army, and died, still a convinced Stalinist, in 2009. Artem Senior, then, achieved enduring fame in the USSR. However, few if any of the numerous writings about him have been translated into English, and Keneally's is the first work of any length written in that language to treat the subject, and therefore the first to bring

¹ Tom Keneally, *The People's Train*, Sydney: Vintage Books, 2009, (hereafter *PT*).

² In Australia, he spelt his surname variously as Sergeeff or Sergaeff. As a forename he sometimes used Tom and sometimes Theodore. To avoid vexatious and barely relevant matters of transcription, he is referred to below as Artem unless context and potential ambiguity dictate otherwise.

Artem to public notice in the country where he spent a significant portion of his life.

In his 'Author's Note' and his acknowledgements,³ Keneally says that he came upon the story of Artem 'by accident', in an article published in 1985 by the historians Thomas Poole and Eric Fried, the first in English to feature Artem in Australia.⁴ That article, which includes a translation of Artem's description of Australia, first published in St Petersburg in September 1913, sparked his interest (he had not previously known of the prominence of Russians in Brisbane at that period), and led him to the large collection of documentary material in English and Russian assembled by Poole and Fried and held in the Fryer Library at the University of Queensland. The Poole-Fried collection is a rich store of material on the early Russian community in Australia, though its holdings on Artem are not extensive and, being primarily of unpublished documents and rare publications, do not include the biographies and novels published in the USSR. Other sources which Keneally singles out for special mention are Vladimir Nasedkin's *Fifteen Years a World Wanderer*, which exists in English translation, and V. I. Astakhova's edited collection, *Tovarishch Artem*, which does not.⁵

Since Keneally's subject, Artem, is not well known today, a brief résumé of the known facts of his short life is given here.⁶ Later I will enlarge on certain aspects of it, raised by Keneally's treatment in his novel. He was born in 1883 in the Kursk region of Central Russia, to peasant parents, and grew up Ekaterinoslav (now Dnepropetrovsk) in Ukraine. He received his education in Moscow, at the Moscow Higher Technical Institute, but was soon expelled for his political activities and in 1902 went to Paris. There he met Lenin, and from that point on devoted himself entirely to the cause of revolution in Russia. Active involvement in the

³ *PT*, p. 405.

⁴ Tom Poole and Eric Fried, 'Artem: A Bolshevik in Brisbane', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 31/2, 1985, pp. 243-254.

⁵ Vladimir Nasedkin, *Fifteen Years a World Wanderer*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, no date [c. 1965]. This memoir first appeared as *Piatnadsat' let skitanii po zemnomu sharu*, Moscow: 1932, reprinted 1963; V. I. Astakhova et al (eds), *Tovarishch Artem: Vospominaniia o Fedore Andreeviche Sergeeve (Arteme)*, Khar'kov: Prapor, 1982.

⁶ More detail may be found in Kevin Windle, 'Brisbane Prison: Artem Sergeev describes Boggo Road', *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, Vol. 38 (2004), pp. 159-179. See also Eric Fried, 'Sergeyev, Fedor Andreyevich', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 11, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988; and Tom Poole and Eric Fried, 'Artem: A Bolshevik in Brisbane'.

troubles of 1905 led to periods of imprisonment in the years that followed, but in 1910 he escaped from internal exile in the region of Irkutsk and made his way eastward to Harbin, Shanghai and Japan. From there he took ship southward and reached Brisbane in June 1911. He remained in Queensland until 1917, when he returned to Russia as soon as possible on learning of the February revolution and the abdication of Nicholas II. The last four years of his life were spent in senior Party and government positions as the Soviet regime struggled to overcome internal opposition, establish itself firmly in power, and repair a dysfunctional economy. Soviet biographers stressed his role as a member of Lenin's Central Committee and his work to restore heavy industry. His life came to a tragic end in July 1921 when he was demonstrating to some foreign visitors one of the achievements of Soviet technology, a locomotive powered by an aero-engine, the 'people's train' of Keneally's novel. The train crashed at high speed, taking the lives of its inventor, of Artem and five others, visiting Communist leaders and trade-unionists from other countries. Some in the Bolshevik leadership spoke of sabotage; Dzerzhinsky and Stalin suspected Trotsky, and Artem Junior when he grew up was receptive to this belief.⁷ However, an enquiry found no irregularity, and serious Soviet historical writing on the subject has mostly favoured the view that the deaths resulted from an 'absurd accident',⁸ probably due to excessive speed.

Artem's impressions of Australia are well documented: his letters of 1911 to 1913 are preserved in Russian archives, and some were eventually published in book form in 1983. Numerous of his press articles have also been reprinted.⁹ In some Soviet accounts, his Bolshevik view of the country he had arrived in was established early and he allowed no sentiment to cloud it. The following summary, from a Ukrainian account by P. Zahors'ky, is typical:

Артем нещадно викриває справжню суть австралійської демократії, показує лицемірство буржуазії, яка на всіх перехрестях говорила про демократію, утискуючи трудящих. Він пише про австралійську конституцію, законодавство, про так

⁷ Artem Sergeev and Ekaterina Glushik, *Besedy o Staline*, Moscow: Forum, 2006, p. 74.

⁸ e.g. V. I. Astakhova, *Revoliutsionnaia deiatel'nost' Artema v 1917-1918 godakh*, Kharkov: Izd. khar'kovskogo universiteta, 1966, p. 176.

⁹ A. D. Pedosov et al. (eds), *Artem (F.A. Sergeev): Stat'i, rechi, pis'ma* Moscow: Politicheskaiia literatura, 1983. His letters after late 1913 appear to have been lost (see Pedosov p. 12).

звану робітничу партію, про переслідування соціалістів, про суд і тюрми.

Artem pitilessly exposes the true essence of Australian democracy, reveals the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie, who proclaimed democracy on every street corner while oppressing the workers. He writes about the Australian constitution, about its legislation, about the so-called Labor Party, about the persecution of socialists, and about trials and prison.¹⁰

While this is not untrue, it should be noted that his early letters from Queensland express a very different view. On 30 July 1911 he wrote:

Нигде в мире, я думаю, я не мог бы найти такой великолепной санатории для моих нервов и мускулов, как здесь. Что касается страны, в которую я попал, я могу сказать одно, это одна из лучших стран для рабочего. Пока здесь рабочий имеет все к его [*sic*] услугам. И если здесь рабочий не сумеет завоевать себе прочное положение, это будет его вина.

I don't think I could find such a splendid sanatorium for my nerves and muscles anywhere in the world. As for the country I have landed in, there's one thing I can say: it's among the best of countries for the working man. Here a worker has everything available for him, and if he isn't able to win a solid position for himself he will have only himself to blame.¹¹

In the town of Warwick, where he was employed on railway construction, he expressed surprise that there was not a single policeman to be found, and that,

Ни разу не слышал о каком-либо преступлении, воровстве, убийстве, грабеже и т. п. Наши палатки никем не сторожатся: в них деньги, ценные вещи, - все что угодно. У фермеров – скот, имущество, нигде никто не сторожит.

¹⁰ P. Zahors'ky, *Revoliutsiyna diyal'nist' Artema*, Kiev: Derzhavne vydavnytstvo politychnoi literatury URSR, 1957, p. 46.

¹¹ Pedosov, p. 83.

I have not once heard of any crime—no thefts, no murders, no robberies etc. Our tents are completely unguarded, although they contain money, valuables, anything you care to name. The farmers have stock and property, but nowhere does anybody guard anything.¹²

On 7 August 1911 he wrote:

Удивительно хорошая, спокойная страна Австралия. В ней чувствуешь себя уверенно. Просторная, богатая, свободная. ... Рабочий чувствует себя спокойно, уверенно, фермер тоже, хотя и тот и другой сильно эксплуатируются один промышленным, а другой торговым и банковым капиталом. Но им остается еще слишком много сравнительно с потребностями и, конечно, сравнительно с европейским рабочим. К тому же здесь нет кричащей, безумной роскоши командующих классов.

Australia is an astonishingly good and peaceful country. Here one feels oneself confident. It is spacious, wealthy and free ... A worker can feel at peace and confident. So can a farmer, although both are much exploited, the former by industrial capital, the latter by that of trade and banking. But in relation to their needs, and of course compared to European workers, there is much left over for them. Moreover there is none of that blatant, insane indulgence among the ruling classes.¹³

This is of interest, as it demonstrates that Artem's more sceptical views, those emphasised by Soviet writers, took shape in the course of time, and that his Marxist thinking did not predetermine his attitude entirely. It is true, however, that within a short space of time his view had changed, and his descriptive articles from late 1913, including one on Brisbane prison, show that his ideological background has gained the upper hand.¹⁴

¹² I. N. Moshinskii (Iuz. Konarskii), *Artem: Biografiia Fedora Andreevicha Sergeeva*, Moscow: TsK SG SSSR, 1928, pp. 96-97.

¹³ Pedosov, p. 87.

¹⁴ Artem (F. Sergeev), *Schastliivaia strana: avstraliiskie ocherki*, Moscow: VTsPS, 1926, pp. 56-71; in English in Windle, 'Brisbane Prison'.

As noted above, Artem became a popular subject for Soviet writers and historians. According to Astakhova, writing in 1966, there were already ‘over 160 newspaper and journal articles’ about him, ‘over 20 biographical articles’, not to speak of ‘more than 270 memoirs of old Bolsheviks and veterans of the international workers’ movement’ who gave some space to him. The number is now larger; only a few of the more substantial works are referred to below. These include collections of documents and essays entirely devoted to Artem, a biography in the series *Zhizn’ zamechatel’nykh liudei* (Lives of Remarkable People) by Boris Mogilevsky, some historical novels, and some ‘lives’ which combine fiction and non-fiction, such as *Nash Artem* by Boris Mogilevsky and Vadim Prokof’ev. The wider setting, Queensland during the period of World War I and after, and its radical Russian community, was also explored by Soviet writers: the Brisbane Red Flag Riots of March 1919 (after Artem’s departure) figure in a small number of works centred around Alexander Mikhailovich Zuzenko, the leader of the Red Flag demonstration, deported to Russia in 1919. Here writers and researchers needed to exercise some caution because Zuzenko fell victim to the great purge of 1937-38, and was therefore unmentionable until his posthumous rehabilitation twenty years later.¹⁵ The Soviet historical studies featuring Artem could hardly escape the hagiographical tradition in which they were produced, and the literary works, on the whole, are of modest literary quality at best. Unlike Zuzenko, Artem did not have a Paustovsky or an Aleksei Tolstoi to tell any part of his story. One thoroughly Soviet adventure novel about ‘Chibisov’ (Zuzenko), by Iurii Klimenchenko, also features Artem as his senior Bolshevik mentor.¹⁶ Inevitably, in most of these works Artem receives a somewhat stereotypical portrayal, as a *plamennyi revoliutsioner* and *soratnik Il’icha*, a Bolshevik to his bootstraps, with little to distinguish him from others cast in the same

¹⁵ See Kevin Windle, ‘Aleksandr Zuzenko i avstraliiskaia tema v sovetskoi literature’, *Studia Rossica Posnaniensia* (Poznan), XXXII, 2005, pp. 11-20; Windle, ‘Konstantin Paustovskii, the “Communard Captain”, and William Morris Hughes. An Australian motif in an early work of Soviet literature’, *Slavonica*, Vol. 14, No. 2, September 2008, pp. 108-118; Windle, *Undesirable: Captain Zuzenko and the Workers of Australia and the World*, Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, [in press].

¹⁶ Iurii Klimenchenko, *Zhizn’ i prikliucheniia Long Aleka*, Leningrad, Lenizdat, 1975. In depicting Zuzenko in Australia, Klimenchenko drew heavily on Soviet archive collections on Artem and Artem’s own *Schastlivaia strana*, with the result that episodes from the career of Artem and descriptions which he set down become part of the biography of Zuzenko.

mould.¹⁷ An attempt at a more nuanced Artem can only be welcomed. Keneally's book is not only the first to treat Artem in English, it is also the first to attempt the human story outside the rigid ideological framework in which all Soviet writers and historians were obliged to operate.

Keneally's design takes the form of a novel in two volumes, of which we so far have only the first, ending in November 1917. The second, covering the last three and a half years of Artem's life, from the October revolution to the crash of the *aerovagon* in July 1921, has yet to take shape,¹⁸ other projects having taken precedence in the author's busy literary schedule. Keneally refers briefly to subsequent events (post-1917) in his 'Author's Note', which he concludes by saying, 'if a handful of people have enjoyed this story, I might continue it with the adventures of Artem, Tasha Abrasova, Suvarov and Paddy Dykes through the Civil War to the tormented Russia beyond, in which Sergeiv [*sic*] perished'.¹⁹ Only when the second volume appears and carries the work to its logical conclusion will the title, *The People's Train*, take on its full meaning.

The volume now in print under this title is itself in two distinct and clearly separated parts, with different settings and different narrators. The story is told in the first person, in Part I by Artem himself (here renamed Artem Samsurov), and in Part II by an Australian journalist of socialist sympathies, Paddy Dykes, who accompanies Artem on his return to Russia. Part I is set in Queensland, almost entirely in Brisbane, with excursions into earlier times in Russia, in the form of the protagonist's reminiscences. Part II is set in Russia and Ukraine, mostly Petrograd and Kharkov.

Keneally's story has a firm basis in known fact; his investigations have provided him with his key events and participants. At the same time, he retains his right to artistic licence, and to use and develop his characters and situations as he sees fit. As he put it in an interview, the novelist, unlike the historian or biographer, is in the happy position of being able to tell 'deliberate lies'.²⁰ The framework of his fiction is recognizably real and true to historical fact in what concerns the larger events; the characters,

¹⁷ Astakhova's study (1966) surveys the preceding literature on Artem, noting that some works are 'superficial' and prone to 'factual errors and distortions', while others are 'tendentious', and yet others suffer from 'a degree of idealisation'. V. I. Astakhova, *Revoliutsionnaia deiatel'nost' Artema*, pp. 3-5, 8-9.

¹⁸ *As* of January 2012.

¹⁹ *PT*, 406.

²⁰ Interview with Margaret Throsby, ABC Classic FM, 10.8.2009.

major and minor, necessarily depart in some degree, along with much of the detail. Samsurov's ideological position accords with that of the historical Artem, as do his views on Australia and its workers, once he felt that he had got to know them. Some of the more memorable generalisations found in Artem's letters from Brisbane may not have come to Keneally's notice:

Рабочие невероятно отстали (The workers are improbably backward);²¹

Англичане скучный народ, оттого они так зверски пьют. (The English are a dull people. That's why they drink so ferociously);²²

[English workers are] тупой, мещанский народ с деревянными головами (obtuse, small-minded people with wooden heads).²³

Keneally's protagonist does not dismiss the local working class in quite these terms, although at an early stage the narrator, Artem, points out the difference between the workers of Russia, determined to bring down the imperial regime, and those of Brisbane, who ask for nothing more than better pay and conditions.

Russian writers have displayed a pronounced tendency to develop Artem's comments on the absence of 'culture' in Queensland. He did indeed note in early letters that most of the population had no interest in the theatre, music, literature and art, and that Warwick had nothing in it but shops, taverns, brothels and sporting clubs.²⁴ In *Nash Artem* this description, minus the brothels, is applied to Brisbane, with some additional information concerning the Australian capacity for beer:

Взрослый австралиец выпивает в день не менее двух литров пива, от мужчин не очень отстают и женщины. Правда, пиво здесь отменнейшее. (An adult Australian drinks at least two litres of beer a day, and the women can almost keep up with the men. True, the beer here is excellent.)²⁵

²¹ Pedosov, p. 94.

²² Pedosov, p. 95.

²³ Pedosov, p. 103.

²⁴ Pedosov, p. 87.

²⁵ Boris Mogilevsky and Vadim Prokof'ev, *Nash Artem*, Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1980, p. 202.

Keneally's Artem is more restrained, commenting only on 'the great Australian torpor' and noting the popularity of cricket and horse races.²⁶

Keneally tells his story with verve and populates it with credible characters. His Samsurov combines a fundamental decency with determination, conviction, and vision. He is aware of the excesses into which Bolshevism so easily falls, as shown in the gruesome scene with which Part II concludes, during the storming of the Winter Palace. To what extent that decency corresponds to the reality is open to question, but it is certainly true that Artem's letters and other writings do not contradict the impression conveyed of Samsurov. It is difficult, however, to set aside entirely D. H. Lawrence's view of fictionalised reality, set forth—curiously—in a novel: 'the novel, like gossip, can also excite spurious sympathies ... The novel can glorify the most corrupt feelings, so long as they are *conventionally* [Lawrence's Italics] "pure".'²⁷ It is fair to wonder whether Keneally becomes excessively enamoured of his hero.

Part I is presented as 'a translation of the second Russian edition' of Samsurov's *My Exile and Wanderings*. It therefore falls within the well-known tradition of the pseudo-translation, though influenced, it seems, by the memoirs of the real Artem's comrade, Nasedkin, the aforementioned *Fifteen Years a World Wanderer*.

The dominant motif of the early chapters of Part I is the Brisbane general strike of 1912 and the role in it of the tramways. This event brought the Russian community to the fore, and Keneally allocates much space to the strike and Artem's part in it. The chief opponent, and the villain at this stage, is Joseph Freeman Bender, the American director of the tramway system, who nurtures a deep loathing for the trade union movement and for socialists of every stripe. To this extent the novelist relies on well-documented historical events, and Bender does duty for Joseph Stillman Badger, also an American, whose views he shared. 'Black Friday' or 'Baton Friday', when a specially recruited force of vigilantes was unleashed upon the strikers and demonstrators, came some six months after Artem's arrival in Queensland. He had, however, had time to make his presence felt and exert influence in the (pre-existing) Russian Association. He took some pride in the role of Russian workers in this industrial

²⁶ *PT*, 7, 11.

²⁷ The novel is *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960, 104-05.

confrontation, in which they compelled the respect of Australian trade-unionists. Keneally makes this event a pivotal episode, in that it establishes Artem in the Brisbane community, Russian and socialist, and gives him a public profile.

Soon after the general strike, Artem is involved in Brisbane's 'fight for free speech'. He and Grisha Suvarov are among those who defy the ban on public meetings on Sundays by attending an unsanctioned meeting. They are duly arrested and sentenced to two months in Boggo Road jail for their offence. The narrator is thus able to draw some comparisons between the penal systems of Russia and Australia, as his real-life prototype did in an article sent from Brisbane and published in Petersburg in 1914 and often cited by Russian historians. That article, which contained much detail and local colour, was probably based on the experience of his comrades rather than his own.²⁸ The records of the Queensland Police for the period in question list other socialists and Russians arrested and sentenced in the 'free speech fight', but not Artem.²⁹

Keneally introduces a love interest in the form of a female lawyer, Hope Mockridge, married to Edgar Mockridge, King's Council and dipsomaniac. Women lawyers at the time were few and far between. This one is based loosely on one of those few in Melbourne, though at times resident in Sydney: Christian Jollie Smith. As Keneally has said in interviews, he brings her to Brisbane so that she and Artem can have an affair.³⁰ Christian Jollie Smith was for some time close to the Scottish socialist who would later (1920) become one of the founders of the Communist Party of Australia and go on to spend a considerable time in Moscow in the employment of the Comintern, Bill Earsman. Keneally's Scotsman, Buchan, though averse to reading the classics of socialism and communism and generally mistrustful of intellectuals, has plans for a labour college; here the similarities to Earsman are inescapable. In the novel, Hope Mockridge drops Artem in favour of Buchan while Artem is serving his prison sentence.

²⁸ *Prosveshchenie*, No. 3, 1914; reprinted in Artem, *Schastlivaia strana*. See Windle, 'Brisbane Prison'. Keneally did not have access to this article when working on his novel.

²⁹ A press report shows 'Theodore Sergaev' appearing as a witness in the trial of James Quinton. *Brisbane Courier*, 4.12.1913.

³⁰ Interview with Peter Mares, Radio National, 28.9.2009.

The real Artem is known to have formed a liaison with, and perhaps married, an Australian woman named Minnie, of whom little is known. He lived with her and her child at Cooper's Plains, south of Brisbane,³¹ and wrote to her after his return to Russia,³² but soon married Elizaveta L'vovna Repel'skaia, who became the mother of Artem Fedorovich. The novelist's purposes are better suited by a member of Brisbane's radical community and a lawyer, who can discuss world politics with him and share his interest in revolution in Russia, and social justice, if not revolution, in Australia. Mockridge is also supportive when Artem sets about producing, editing and printing the Russian newspaper *Ekho Avstralii* in an upper room of the Stepanov home in South Brisbane. That same room provides a secluded setting in which the pair can be alone together.

A notable character among Keneally's Brisbane Russians is Rybakov,³³ an engineer and inventor whose planned monorail train captures the interest of urban planners. Rybakov stands for the young inventor Valerian Abakovsky, who, unlike Rybakov, did not live in Australia, but later designed and built the ill-fated *aerovagon* —not a monorail; it ran on standard-gauge Russian railway lines. According to Artem Junior, in 1921 Abakovsky was in charge of the Cheka garages in Briansk, and worked on his locomotive in their well-equipped engineering workshops.³⁴ As a character in the novel, Rybakov has an important function in what might be termed reifying the metaphor of the train.

The story of Suvarov, who also has an important role, derives directly from that of Nasedkin. Like Artem, Nasedkin knew Kharkov well, had been exiled to Siberia in the repressions following the rebellion of 1905, and in company with Artem took the fugitive's route from Siberia through Manchuria and Japan to Queensland. In 1921 he returned to Soviet Russia by way of Chile, Colombia, France and Bulgaria, and eventually published his memoirs. Much of this material is utilised in *The People's Train*. Both Suvarov and Rybakov make the return journey and are seen again in Part II, in revolutionary Petrograd, with Artem. Keneally places Suvarov in the Putilov works, where the Bolsheviks enjoyed much support.

³¹ Nasedkin writes of Artem having a wife named 'Minna' (*Fifteen Years ...*, p. 46), who also appears as 'Mina' in R. F. Polonskii's semi-fictional *Tol'ko by khvatilo zhizn'*, Izd. Politicheskoi literatury, Moscow, 1981, pp. 95-96.

³² NAA: MP95/1/0 WOB 2, Barcode 12120057. 'Tom' in 'Russia' to Minnie Sergaef, Written 18 Dec 1917.

³³ In the first edition, consistently spelled 'Rybukov'; corrected in the second edition.

³⁴ Video interview with Artem Fedorovich Sergeev, conducted in 1990 by Eric Fried, to whom I am grateful for generously providing a copy.

On the Anglo-Australian side, the spirit of the Pankhursts, a kind of generalised spirit rather than any particular member of that family, pervades much of Part I, personified in the form of Amelia Pethick, an elderly and ailing suffragette with links to Emmeline Pankhurst. Emmeline and Sylvia Pankhurst are mentioned by Amelia Pethick. She herself has ideological and personal similarities to Sylvia and her sister, Adela Pankhurst Walsh, who emigrated to Australia. Adela was married to the Irish-Australian sailor and socialist Tom Walsh, and like him was renowned for her activism in this period. A determined anti-conscription campaigner, fighter for women's rights and contributor to *The Communist*, she may have known Artem during his time in Australia. Her sister Sylvia certainly met him when she attended the Second Comintern Congress in July-August 1920. Later, in 1922, Adela and her husband provided assistance to Zuzenko during his Comintern mission. Amelia Pethick and Hope Mockridge are close friends who share an anti-establishment political outlook. Artem is friendly with Pethick, and after Mockridge's departure it falls to him to care for her in her last illness. The political affinities with the Pankhurst family are brought out clearly.

Most of these characters are portrayed with much sympathy. Naturally, there are less attractive personalities, besides Bender and Edgar Mockridge, mostly among the opponents of the socialist cause. Notable among them is 'Menschkin', based on the mercurial figure of Anatoly Mendrin, on whom Australian archive sources provide ample material. He was well known to the URW and widely disliked, owing to well-founded rumours that he had been a paid agent of the Tsarist police and was pursuing a similar career in Brisbane. In May 1914 he advised the Queensland Police that the organisers of the URW had an 'exclusively criminal past'.³⁵ At first the police paid scant heed to his information, but he proved useful later, in 1917-19, and did receive payment for his information when the authorities took greater interest in the activities of the Russians. Deeply hostile to the URW, which, he claimed, was 'little more than a German weapon',³⁶ Mendrin denounced Artem's newspapers as disloyal, and provided English translations to prove his point. He operated an import-export business and maintained close relations with Alexander Abaza, the imperial Russian consul, who himself did all he could to combat the influence of the radicals. In the novel, Keneally makes Mendrin a plausible enemy of the Brisbane socialists, and the motive force for an

³⁵ Queensland State Archives (QSA): General correspondence, Police, Russians; ID 317879, A/45329; RSI 13214/1/1883, 16865. Mendrin.

³⁶ QSA: A/45329; RSI 13214/1/1883. 16865.

important part of the plot. His role is firmly in keeping with the known accounts, though events are given a different twist: while spying on Russians of the URW at a picnic outside Brisbane, he is confronted by a group of the latter. When cornered he produces a pistol and threatens them but in the end shoots himself, after wounding Suvarov.³⁷ Artem and a number of other URW members then find themselves arrested and framed by the police for his supposed murder. (They are eventually acquitted).

The source for the material on Mendrin-Menschkin, his character, his service as an informant, and his clashes with his fellow-countrymen (the murder is an added narrative thread), appears to be the files of the Queensland Police, held in the Queensland State Archives.³⁸

Another prime source moves into the foreground when Keneally makes direct use of Artem's article of 1913 describing Australian life from a socialist viewpoint (translated with commentary by Poole and Fried).³⁹ The pages in question, as rendered in *The People's Train*, faithfully reflect the real Artem's view at this time, when his initial enthusiasm had cooled: 'the Lucky Country' (*schastlivaia strana*) is a misnomer; the class struggle has not disappeared; only the rich have rights; Australian democracy is bogus; the Australian Labor Party is more interested in maintaining racial purity than in transforming society; the Aboriginal is the 'yid' of Australia. Most of this is present in some form in Artem's first article in *Prosveshchenie* (October 1913), but the Poole-Fried translation of it has undergone extensive creative rewriting to match the novelist's purpose.

In Part II there is a change in narrative voice and perspective, as well as a change of scene. Whereas Part I showed Australia through the eyes of a Russian, Part II shows Russia through the eyes of the Australian, Paddy Dykes. With Artem he crosses Siberia and travels to Kharkov, then moves with him between Kharkov, Ekaterinoslav and Petrograd. In ideology, they are close, although Dykes shifts between observer status and a role as a participant. Artem's connections and his close involvement in the revolutionary movement provide a useful narrative device by which the reader can be on the spot, with Dykes the journalist, as momentous events unfold, and be granted access to key personalities. As a sympathetic observer, Dykes, who writes for various socialist newspapers, appears as a

³⁷ *PT*, pp. 149-53.

³⁸ QSA: ID 317879, A/45329; RSI 13214/1/1883, 16865. Duplicates of some of these files may be found in the Poole-Fried Collection, UQFL.

³⁹ *PT*, pp. 119 ff. Tom Poole and Eric Fried, 'Artem'.

kind of Australian John Reed, though without the benefit of a knowledge of Russian. The real John Reed is also introduced in person: Dykes meets him by chance in the Smolny Institute.

Part II features many of the leaders of the revolution, including Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, Dzerzhinsky and Antonov-Ovseenko. Most of these make only brief cameo appearances, succinctly and distinctively characterised. In Petrograd Dykes has lodgings for a time in the home of the Alliluev family, where he briefly encounters Koba (Stalin). The two do not take to each other. Of Koba, Artem says to Dykes that he is a rogue, 'a likeable fellow in his way, but ... unreliable with women. A typical Georgian. What do you say in Brisbane? *A bullshit artist.*'⁴⁰ Dykes is invited to accompany Artem on an excursion into the country near Sestroretsk, where Lenin is in hiding before proceeding to Finland in the 'July days'. Dykes is not privy to their discussions, or made to feel welcome, but the visit provides material for an article which appears 'in all the socialist papers from Australia to London to New York to Chicago. The world could see what a tyrant Kerensky was to chase good men into the wilds of Russia and Finland.'⁴¹ Dykes visits the Smolny with Artem and witnesses Bolshevik meetings in their headquarters as momentum builds for the seizure of power from the Provisional Government. In the closing scenes, he is present with Artem and Suvarov at the capture of the Winter Palace.

The moral dilemmas raised by revolutionary action are brought into sharp relief in the 'Russian' chapters, nowhere more so than in the culminating scene at the Winter Palace. Dykes's sensibilities and sympathies have been tested before by scenes of appalling brutality perpetrated by the side he supports. Here he unexpectedly finds himself a participant, swinging his rifle butt at Slatkin, the Bolshevik rapist and killer, and proceeds to examine the latent ambivalence in his feelings. He finds himself outraged at the idea that Slatkin will be hailed as a 'Hero of the Winter Palace' for his participation in the moment of triumph, in spite of his behaviour,⁴² and dissatisfied with what he feels to be less than whole-hearted condemnation by Artem of that behaviour. Donald Rayfield has reminded us that 'the boundary between expropriation and robbery, execution and murder, betrayal and tactical manoeuvre is fuzzy, and most

⁴⁰ *PT*, p. 317.

⁴¹ *PT*, p. 327.

⁴² *PT*, p. 403.

revolutionaries confuse or overstep it'.⁴³ Keneally's heroes, unlike the uncomplicated Artems of Soviet novels and histories, are acutely aware of the fuzziness.

As Paddy Dykes ponders the contradictions and struggles to overcome his revulsion, Artem says to him, 'We can have a revolution. But it will take time to overthrow the squalor of the human soul.'⁴⁴ It is here that some reflection on the human condition and the need for moral regeneration is seen to occupy a place in Artem's thoughts—something that is not prominent in the extant writings of the real Artem. Has Keneally, then, succumbed to the temptations which D. H. Lawrence warned against and excited 'spurious sympathies'? Perhaps he has, but he has also made of Artem a more rounded and interesting character than that shown in the Soviet biographies and novels.

We know that historical fiction is very much a personal view of history and historical figures. A close correspondence with known historical facts, certainly in the detail, is not to be expected. Keneally sets out to bring Artem to life through fiction, in both his Australian environment and in revolutionary Russia, and this he achieves. Minor blemishes include some anachronisms of language (English), some visible unfamiliarity with Russian realia, and some jarringly strange 'Russian' names: Podnaksikov, Budeskin, Suvarov and Samsurov himself. (Some of the names, not including these four, were amended in a second edition in 2010). In the main, however, Keneally has laid down a plausible plot, generated the required momentum, and deftly limned in a broadly sympathetic hero, in the company of other memorable characters. He has also reminded us of the role played by the Russian community in a troubled period of the history of Queensland, now a century in the past and largely forgotten. The sequel, covering the last period of Artem's life in revolutionary Russia and his work with Lenin, Stalin and other key figures of the period, may be more difficult to write, given the nature and language of the source material, but Keneally has so far shown himself more than a match for the challenge.

⁴³ Donald Rayfield, *Stalin and His Hangmen*, London: Viking, 2004, p. 47.

⁴⁴ *PT*, p. 403.