



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister

The attachments to

this are fascinating
and worth reading in
full when you have
time: Mr. & Mrs

Gorbachev through
their interpreters' eyes.

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SUMMARY OF MISS HORNER'S MINUTE ON MRS GORBACHEVA

1. Mrs Gorbacheva's interest in much of what she saw and heard was genuine, and more than skin-deep. Though she had clearly set herself to please, her repeated request to sample things specifically British, whether cultural or culinary, was more than just a desire to ingratiate herself. For example, on several occasions she asked one of her entourage to note down for her the name of an artist or writer, so that she could follow them up later. On each gallery or museum visit, she made a point of asking what Russian, or even Soviet art was represented in the collection. The answer, on the whole was 'little if any', and this made her increasingly convinced that our knowledge of and access to the culture of her homeland was pitifully deficient. Her own knowledge of British writers was wide, from Shakespeare to Iris Murdoch.

2. It was clear that Mrs Gorbacheva was accustomed to having her wishes and changes of mind catered for without question. As the week went on, she in effect took charge of the programme and, increasingly, made the decisions about where she wished, and did not wish to go. She evidently enjoyed making several impromptu forays into shops, particularly on the hunt for some jewellery (see para 7 below), and relished the informality of this sort of activity. On the other hand, there were some kinds of informality to which she was plainly not accustomed, or had forgotten existed. The faintly stunned expression on her face, as several late and heavily-built theatregoers climbed over her to reach their seats for "Cats", was memorable.

3. Mrs Gorbacheva appeared to grow markedly more relaxed about the presence of photographers as the week went on. Early in the week she declared that she had 'decided to pay no attention to them', and on the same day rather crossly refused a request by the Daily Mail to interview her. And

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yet, two days later, at Stratford-upon-Avon, she posed contentedly in the front garden of Anne Hathaway's cottage.

4. Only once or twice Mrs Gorbacheva ventured onto political ground. During the journey home from the theatre, the illuminated facade of Harrods was pointed out to her, and the subject of terrorist bombings was raised, I think by Mrs Popova. Mrs Gorbacheva opined that such a threat could never be contained merely by increasing police patrols, and remarked on the way we "permitted" terrorism to exist. "Our democracy is not like that".

5. Lenin was mentioned only once in my hearing, in connection with the Gorbachevs' visit to the British Museum and Clerkenwell. She extolled his talents as a thinker, a linguist (the story was told of how he had learned English from listening to soap-box orators at Hyde Park Corner) and as a fighter for the people. Once she had said her piece and had it acknowledged, she seemed to prefer to steer well away from political waters. We discussed poetry, and T S Eliot, of whom she had not heard, in particular. Her own preference among the prominent Soviet modern poets, was for Rozhdestvensky: his "profound philosophy" moved her. She had seen the Voznesensky rock opera Juno and Avos and was interested to hear that it had been televised here. She freely admitted that it was not a genre she was used to, or felt she understood, but she had obviously taken some interest in the Voznesensky piece, perhaps encouraged by her daughter (who, she said, would envy her her newly acquired record of "Cats").

6. One of the high points of the visit for Mrs Gorbacheva herself was the visit to Stratford, and the Shakespeare Theatre in particular. We were given coffee on arrival, and she plied the theatre administrators with questions about their productions, and previous tours in Moscow. Of the productions of Richard III she had seen at home, she preferred the Rustaveli company's version to that of Mkhat.

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At the end of this conversation, she virtually invited the RSC to return to the USSR for a new tour, and said that she for one would attend each and every production they brought with them. There was no mistaking her enthusiasm for the idea.

7. It seemed to me that many of the outfits she wore were either imported or very good copies of Western clothes. Her shoes and boots (I did not see her wear any pair twice over) looked Italian; they were certainly of very high quality. She clearly enjoys dressing well, and looked as though such elegance had been an integral part of her way of life for a long time.

8. She spent parts of two afternoons hunting for a pair of jewelled drop earrings, and several detours were made en route to other engagements in search of something of the right quality. She made clear she was not interested in gold-plated or rolled gold settings. The final choice was made at Mappin and Webbs in the Cromwell Road, where she found a pair set with rubies and diamonds. I heard her tell her interpreter she was prepared to go "up to £1,000". In the end £750 was spent, after deducting VAT and discount.

It was striking not so much as an example of unusual extravagance, but because it revealed Mrs Gorbacheva herself as someone accustomed to living life on that level. She knew the quality she wanted, and the prices that went with it. She could scarcely have been unconscious of the questions her appearance would raise among avid Western observers, but in herself was unembarrassed (in contrast to the nervous twitchings of the Embassy over the press). I think this was due less to naivete than to her wish to give a good account of herself and her country to the West.

9. I was left, after four days, with a clear feeling that Mrs Gorbacheva was fully in command of herself and her position in life. She is a strong and quite volatile personality in her own right. At times during the visit she

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would retreat behind the facade of the grande dame, and could be distinctly magisterial if something displeased her. It was quite noticeable that she tended to treat Mrs Popova with scant respect. At other times, she was relaxed and would chat and joke happily. Given the competing demands on her attention, she was considerate towards her entourage.

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