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***A Great and Terrible World: The Pre-Prison Letters, 1908-1926* by Antonio Gramsci (edited and translated by Derek Boothman). London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd, 2014. 418pp., £25.00 (p/b), ISBN 9781907103964**

This volume is a collection of the early letters of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), the Italian Marxist political thinker and leader of the Italian Communist Party. Gramsci's prison diaries, written during his long incarceration under the Fascist regime in Italy, appeared in English translation in 1994 and have since then become a reference point for theorists and historians alike. However, his earlier correspondence, dating from 1908-1926, has not yet been translated. The new collection offers therefore a much-needed addition to the English bookshelf of Gramsci's works. During the two decades covered in this volume, Gramsci left his native rural Sardinia, discovered Marxism as a student at the University of Turin, and emerged on the national and international political scene as one of the key political leaders in Italy. As this volume reminds us, it is not sufficient to read the prison diaries to understand Gramsci's thought. His social and political ideas were shaped while engaging actively in politics in Sardinia, as a student in Turin, as a founding member of the Italian Communist Party and as its representative in Moscow, and finally in Rome. The collection includes two thirds of the known correspondence of Antonio Gramsci from his high school days up to his arrest, revealing his complex relations with his family, with his wife Juliya Schucht, with other revolutionary activists like Palmiro Togliatti and Amedeo Bordiga, and with members of the Comintern in Moscow including Leon Trotsky.

As the editor and translator Derek Boothman suggests in his insightful introduction, the selection of letters sheds light on the evolution and continuities in Gramsci's thought, tracing the early emergence through dialogue of key Gramscian themes like the nature of the superstructures of society, centralism and party politics, popular culture, passive revolution, hegemony and social alliances (pp.49-50). Boothman's introduction helps situate the letters in historical context, provides biographical details about Gramsci and his main interlocutors, and explains the conceptual meaning of the letters in the wider framework of his thought. The wide-ranging thematic scope of the letters – personal meditations, political commentary, policy plans for the Communist Party and theoretical reflections – offers a wealth of insights for scholars acquainted with Gramsci's later writings as well as for first time readers of his work. The English translation from the original Italian is accurately and meticulously executed, paying attention to the different linguistic registers deployed by Gramsci in different periods in his life. Thus, this selection of letters represents a welcome addition to the English language sources by Gramsci and about his work.

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