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PASTERNAK AND THE DILEMMA OF LITERARY POLICY

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## INTRODUCTION

The death of Pasternak, at a time when his best-known work remains unpublished in his own country, recalls the dilemma in which Khrushchev finds himself in the field of literature. The fact that Pasternak died at his home, instead of in a labor camp as might have been the case only ten years ago, cannot obscure the continuing lack of artistic freedom symbolized by the fate of "Dr. Zhivago."

The present Khrushchev policy is to attempt to persuade, rather than force, his writers to maintain the framework of socialist realism, even if this means a more tolerant attitude on the part of literary critics than the neo-Zhdanovites in the USSR think advisable. Yet in the case of "Dr Zhivago," perhaps because its merits were first recognized abroad, Khrushchev's attitude has been as obstinate in continuing to prevent publication as the worst of the dogmatists could have hoped.

When Pasternak was expelled from the Union of Soviet Writers in October 1958, the resolution claimed that his work was "incompatible with the name of a Soviet writer, directed against the traditions of Russian literature, against the people, against peace and socialism." But in fact there are not more than half a dozen pages in the 700 of the book to which the literary censors could take exception, and consequently it seems certain that the real reason for the blinkered official attitude is the apolitical nature of the work as a whole.

The realistic treatment by Pasternak of the early years of the revolution, for instance, forms a considerable contrast with the official propaganda on the period, which suggests only heroism and self-sacrifice. It must have been of some such discrepancy that Khrushchev was thinking when at the Central Committee plenary session last June he exclaimed:

"We have individuals among the writers who ask what sort of guidance is the Party guidance of literature? We reply, you there, don't you recognize the Party's guidance? But what is it? It is the will of millions, the will of millions of minds, the collective wisdom of millions. But one writer sits in his dacha somewhere, once in a while produces some puny work, and hopes that it will be recognized as an expression of the spirit of the people of our time, of the entire people. Isn't this a real cult of one's own personality which, as you see, is unwilling to put up with the guidance of a Party which expresses the will of millions...Such a fellow wants to put himself above the Party, above the people."

In other words, Khrushchev saw Pasternak as an individualist who refused to accept the First Secretary's instructions on what to write ("contemporaneity") and how to write



it ("socialist realism"). The exceedingly narrow limits of the "thaw," after its initial warmth had ebbed away, have seldom been more clearly revealed. Moreover Khrushchev's words put an end to the somewhat naive speculation which had been circulating in the West, crediting Khrushchev with a liberal desire to rehabilitate the writer, or to have "Dr. Zhivago" published in a limited edition.

Khrushchev and the Party remain more interested in ideological propaganda in a literary wrapping than in literature which would pass any objective critical test. Therefore the tension between them and the liberal intellectuals within the USSR will inevitably continue. These writers, like Pasternak in the recent past, together with Ehrenburg<sup>1</sup>, Yevtushenko and the others today who attempt to make the Soviet literary climate less stifling and oppressive, are not likely to affect the Party's policies in the near future. But, despite this tragic thinning of their ranks, they are maintaining the long drawn-out fight for greater artistic freedom.

A fortnight before Pasternak died, the editor of Oktyabr, Fyedor Panferov, published his personal reply to the neo-Zhdanovites in Soviet literature. Writing in Literary Gazette<sup>2</sup>, he told of the pressures to which he is subjected by the literary bureaucrats of the old school:

"We editors of Oktyabr are sometimes asked by those who are quick to criticize, and even by some naive leaders of the Union of Writers:

'What are you doing? You print novels by Bubenkov, Sholokhov, Konovalov, but beside them you also print Paustovsky, Kazakov and Yevtushenko. That is not consolidation, but lack of principle, all-embracing Christian forgiveness (vseyeproscheniye). What is your program?'"

And Panferov's reply is firm as well as comprehensive.

"On the question of consolidation, I answer: our program is to help all kinds of writers to work together with the party and the people; do not turn the writers into a regiment of soldiers all dressed in uniform, but call on them to work for the life of today and tomorrow, and let everyone use his own voice, provided only that it is to the advantage of the Soviet people and all honest people throughout the world -- here lies the true meaning of real consolidation."

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<sup>1</sup> For Ehrenburg's personal attitude to the Pasternak case, see p. 108 below.

<sup>2</sup> 14 May 1960.

Panferov, like Ehrenburg, is therefore probably one of the many intellectuals who believe that "Dr. Zhivago" should have been published in the USSR. It is to the Party's eternal discredit that seven years after Stalin's death, the official attitude to Pasternak should still be essentially the bigotry shown by Semichastny<sup>3</sup> rather than even the carefully muted liberalism of Panferov.

r.r.g.

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<sup>3</sup> The ex-Komsomol official who once called Pasternak a pig.

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N.B. For the documents of the Pasternak case, see Background Information, 25 Nov. 1958, "Novy Mir 1956 and 1958, The Cases of Polnyak and Pasternak."



## ART vs. IDEOLOGY

### THE DILEMMA OF SOVIET LITERARY POLICY

In order to gain the sympathies and support of Soviet writers the Soviet regime has continued its policy of moderation and restraint in the affairs of literature, which has been particularly noticeable since the Third Writers' Congress last May. It is clear from recent events that literary criticism is expected to be carried out in a "comradely fashion" and is intended to be a responsible tool for instruction rather than a punishment for past errors. The Party demands both esthetic value and ideological conformity of Soviet writers; consequently those who defend mediocre works solely for ideological considerations have been criticized in the name of the Party and of Khrushchev personally.

The works of several formerly criticized poets have appeared, and a new novel by Dudintsev may be published next year. Khrushchev has publicly praised the writer Mikhail Sholokhov and has evidently resolved a dispute between the writer and Party critics over the publication of his novel. But despite these moderating trends, there has been no recent evidence that the Party has opened up a new era of freedom for Soviet literature. The Party still maintains the sole right to criticize socialist society.

Differences of opinion in ranks of Soviet writers continue to be evident, as do differences between the two main literary newspapers. Ilya Ehrenburg remains in the forefront of those who espouse the freedom of creativity, but his ideas are challenged in the name of "socialist realism." Several collections of poems published in the past few months suggest that, at least in the genre of poetry, Party esthetic restrictions may have been eased.

Events in the past few months indicate that the Soviet regime is continuing its moderate policy in the sphere of literature. The Soviet leaders have always faced the dual problem of encouraging writers and other artists to produce good cultural works while at the same time insuring the ideological content of these works. At the present time, it seems clear that the regime is soft-pedaling ideological conformity in favor of winning the creative support of Soviet men of letters.

#### Removing the Sting of Criticism

An important aspect of this policy of moderation has been the attempt to remove the sting from literary criticism, to make it a tool of instruction instead of a weapon of retribution for past errors. At the Third Writers' Congress in May of this year, Khrushchev made it clear that literary criticism was necessary for the further development of good literature but counseled that it be carried out in a "comradely" fashion. Since Khrushchev's

speech steps have been taken to prevent literary criticism from being used in a manner which might antagonize and discourage Soviet writers in their support of the regime.

The editor of Literaturnaya Gazeta, S. S. Smirnov, in the August 8 issue of that literary newspaper discussed this new attitude toward literary criticism. He first attacked those unsavory aspects of literary criticism which he felt were the result of the "cult of personality" -- the standardization of literary appraisals and the transformation of the critics' opinions into sentences from which there was no "court of appeal." He declared that the situation is vastly different now. When writers today are nervous about criticism directed at their works or when editors consider criticism as a "signal to deal violently with a book," these, Smirnov indicated, are only "vestiges of the past literary life." He was obviously arguing for a new conciliatory attitude on the part of writers, editors, and critics.

In the same article Smirnov appealed for less direct Party interference in the affairs of literature. While he did not dispute the principle of Party guidance in literature, he claimed that it consisted "not in having Party organs direct the work of writers, in prompting them as to what and how to write, but in the fact that we Soviet writers in all our work are consciously guided by the ideas of communism." Consequently, he said, the Party must carry out "constant ideological-educational work" among writers as the basis of its guidance.

It is significant that this appeal for moderation in literary criticism and for less Party interference was voiced by Smirnov in his capacity as Literaturnaya Gazeta's editor. During the early months of this year the entire editorial board of this newspaper was replaced, Smirnov taking the chief position from V. Kochetov, arch-defender of conformist literature. At the Third Writers' Congress Smirnov promised that his paper, which had in the past treated writers with undue harshness, would mend its ways and practice toleration.

These efforts to moderate literary criticism have resulted in at least one rebuttal of a long-standing attack on a literary work. The September 5 Literaturnaya Gazeta printed an account of an interview with Valentin Ovechkin, the author of "Against the Wind," a play which received harsh treatment from the critics after its publication in the March 1958 Novyi Mir. The interviewer remarked that though this play had its defects as well as its merits, some of it had been incorrectly evaluated by the critics when it first appeared. He singled out a Literaturnaya Gazeta article by Dorofeev for its "unjustly harsh criticism." The latter critique, which appeared on May 7, 1958, had attacked Ovechkin, among other things,



for basing his play on "every sort of disorder in our Soviet communist life." Thus this severe denunciation of Ovechkin, which stood unchallenged for a year and a half, has now been met with criticism. It is clear that under the present Party policy literary critics will be as accountable for their words as the creative writers are for theirs.

During the past year and a half Alexander Tvardovsky, editor in chief of Novyi Mir, has written two humorous poems ridiculing certain aspects of Soviet literary controls and criticism. In a verse entitled "To My Critics," which appeared in the July 1958 Novyi Mir, Tvardovsky made fun of critics who instruct writers so that they "can sing without hearing and seeing," and then years later ask them, "Where have you been all this time?" At the time of its publication this poem aroused objections because of its "scornful and unjust attitude" toward literary critics. In the March 1959 edition of Novyi Mir Tvardovsky satirized editors who read works from right to left in search of hidden meanings. Both these poems received praise in an August edition of Sovetskaya Rossiya. It is perhaps an indication of the present atmosphere that these two jibes at literary criticism and controls, one of which evoked a negative response in the past, now have been openly praised in the press.

#### Stress on Quality and Ideology

When Khrushchev spoke out at the Third Writers' Congress against those literary works that "cause your eyelids to droop," he made it clear that the Party expected literature with both a high artistic quality and a firm ideological basis. Khrushchev, like many in the Soviet literary world, does not acknowledge any conflict between artistic perfection and ideological conformity. However, in the past two months several writers have alluded to such a conflict and have expressed different views as to its resolution. The dominant Party policy at the present time, nonetheless, seems to be to promote high-quality literature without diminishing ideological demands.

In an August 16 Literatura i Zhizn interview article, Ilya Ehrenburg once again identified himself as one of those who feel that ideological conformity does interfere with the achievement of artistic quality. He claimed that the destruction of literature lay not in "the passion of the writers" but rather in a neglect of the "truth of life." He suggested that many contemporary works are weak because their authors do not know what to write even if they know how to write.

Ehrenburg proceeded to attack some of the most common ingredients of "socialist realistic" literature. He

counseled creative writers to leave the description of productive processes to engineers and technicians, not to feel impelled to describe great events or important eras, and not to attempt to instruct the reader. He said the only area in which the writer was especially competent was in the "secrets of the human heart," and this was the only proper domain of literature.

Ehrenburg aroused comment from the proponents of orthodoxy in literature. An article in the August 29 Literatura i Zhizn declared that Ehrenburg's views part company with the trend of Soviet literature and "do not correspond to the esthetic principles of socialist realism." It seems clear that Ehrenburg's remarks do, indeed, conflict with the goals which the Party has set for Soviet literature. But there is evidence that the Party agrees with Ehrenburg in a least one regard, the elimination of descriptions of productive processes from Soviet literature. In October Literaturnaya Gazeta printed an open letter, supposedly reflecting the opinions of 19,000 collective farmers, asking Soviet writers to write more about man's "inner world" and less about the "square method of raising potatoes" and other productive processes. The letter declared that the farmers said in the letter that they wanted to find human beings in the literature they read. The letter implied that while the description of productive processes may have been necessary at one time, now the new generation has different needs which must be reflected in literature. Since Soviet literature, according to communist ideology, is supposed to reflect the desires of the people, this alleged expression of mass opinion is tantamount to a directive to Soviet writers to dispense with descriptions of productive processes in belles-lettres.

If writers like Ehrenburg are ready to support artistic quality when ideological restrictions interfere, there are those who openly support ideological considerations at the expense of esthetic value. V. Druzin and B. Dyakov in the September 6 edition of Literatura i Zhizn argued that because the "mastery of writers" varies, it is wrong for some publishing houses to reject manuscripts "which in the opinion of the editors are not outstanding." What is important, they said, is "that the author should occupy correct ideological-political positions in his work, clearly reflecting in his works the great struggle of our people for communism." If this is not so, the works harm "the cause of the nation's political education and become shoddy literary goods."

This emphasis on ideological correctness in literature to the detriment of artistic quality has in turn met with criticism. Alexander Tvardovsky noted that Khrushchev's speeches and the resolutions of the last two CPSU



congresses supported the "ideological-artistic" development of literature. He stated that while there was no point in calling Druzin and Dyakov "conscious opponents of the Party's resolutions on the questions of literature," it was necessary to "elucidate the absurdity and harmfulness of their brazen preaching of mediocrity and dullness in art."

Literatura i Zhizn on September 18 countered with two letters taking issue with Tvardovsky's stand on this subject, one by Druzin and Dyakov and the other by a V. Andreyev. Literaturnaya Gazeta in turn answered with an editorial on September 22 supporting Tvardovsky's plea for good artistic literature. The editorial criticizes Andreyev's remark, "I think Comrade Tvardovsky is wrong," by printing a statement of Khrushchev's at the Third Writers' Congress: "I think that Alexander Tvardovsky is right when he announced in his speech at the Congress that quality is of primary importance in literary work."

It is certainly unique on the Soviet literary scene for men such as Tvardovsky, who in the past have been known for their unorthodox views, to invoke the Party and Khrushchev personally in support of their stand on literature. However, present Party policy does emphasize both artistic quality and ideological conformity, thus being somewhere between the views of Ehrenburg and those of Druzin and Dyakov. It is possible, therefore, for those who desire higher quality literature to make use of the name of the Party to condemn those who emphasize ideological conformity above all else.

#### Division in the Literary World

This recent verbal clash over the subject of esthetic quality versus ideological content points up once again the basic division in the ranks of Soviet writers. At the same time, it illustrates what appear to be basic differences between the editorial policies of the two most important literary newspapers, Literatura i Zhizn and Literaturnaya Gazeta. As was pointed out above, Literaturnaya Gazeta has been in the forefront of those urging a policy of moderate freedom for Soviet literature. On the other hand, Literatura i Zhizn has been the main platform for those who wish to hold firmly the ideological line in literature. Interestingly enough, it has been the former members of the Literaturnaya Gazeta editorial board who have been using Literatura i Zhizn as means to publicize their views. V. Kochetov, the former chief editor, used Literatura i Zhizn to attack a speech by Konstantin Paustovsky given at the Third Writers' Congress and all but accused him of expressing "revisionist" ideas. Paustovsky had stated that "perhaps we shout so much and so loudly about truth in literature precisely because we lack it." Another example is V. Druzin, who had been Kochetov's

deputy on the Literaturnaya Gazeta editorial board. His recent articles in partnership with B. Dyakov illustrate his use of Literatura i Zhizn to support ideological conformity in literature at the expense of esthetic considerations.

Literatura i Zhizn is the organ of the RSFSR Writers' Union, which was created in 1957 to counterbalance the outbreak of dissidence in the USSR Writers' Union and in the Moscow writers' group. It now appears that the newspaper is fulfilling the function assigned to it two years ago -- that of providing an ideologically conservative brake on the more progressive members in the Soviet literary world. Under the present Party policy to encourage the production of good literature, however, the editorial board of Literatura i Zhizn and those who support its views and practices may be dragging their feet more than the Party would hope.

#### Writers Reappear in Print

Another aspect of the Party's current literary policy has been illustrated by the reappearance in print of several writers formerly in disrepute with the Party critics. It has been clear in the past two years that criticism of a writer's works does not necessarily ban the publication of his future works. However, during this past summer there has been such a noticeable reappearance of writers formerly attacked by the Party that it clearly reflects some basic policy changes. Presumably there have been some directives from above concerning these publications. At any rate, whatever has made the editors of the literary press feel free at last to publish these writers' works, their reappearance in print will certainly not go unnoticed in Soviet literary circles and may help thaw the "cold war" maintained by some writers against Party cultural policies.

One of those who again has been found on the pages of literary press is Margarita Aliger. This poetess had been a member of the editorial board of the "infamous" 1956 almanac Literaturnaya Moskva II, which drew heavy Party criticism for its inclusion of a number of unorthodox works. It has been reported that after persistent and harsh pressure, even from Khrushchev personally, Aliger was forced privately to recant her sins. As far as is known, Aliger's works have not appeared in print since that time. In recent months, however, poems written by her have been printed in at least three publications: in the July 31 Izvestiya, the July issue of Oktyabr, and the September edition of Novyi Mir.

One of Aliger's poems printed in Oktyabr expresses not only her restiveness with the restrictions imposed on



Soviet literature but also her impatience with those particular writers, "the grumblers," who use these restrictions as an excuse for not creating. In this poem, entitled "Write," Aliger implores other writers to write courageously according to their own feelings and not to worry about meeting publication requirements or about being personally accepted. If you are your own "honorable" law and your own "strict judge" and you commit your "life to paper," Aliger said, you will sooner or later hear "many good words" of approval. That Aliger is now telling her fellow writers to create in spite of the controls is particularly interesting because in the past few years she herself has been considered by some observers as one of those who maintained a "conspiracy of silence" against the Party's cultural controls. Aliger's verse in Izvestiya expressed a similar line exhorting writers not to waste their time railing against hack works written for the moment's purposes, but to save their energy for creative work. Both these poems seem to carry the optimistic message that, though there are restrictions in the cultural world, there is still good reason for artists to continue to create.

Of even more importance has been the appearance in print of two other formerly criticized poets, Alexander Yashin in the August Neva and Evgeny Eutushenko in the September Oktjabr. The most unusual aspect of these collections is the fact that some of the verses are far from what could be called "socialist realism" intended for the masses. The poetry is marked by its obscurity and vague metaphors and is obviously intended for a rather limited sophisticated audience. It is clearly not the type of poetry that would have been allowed in literary magazines a year ago.

As a poet, Yashin received the Stalin prize in 1950, but later in 1956, his short story, "Levers," was harshly criticized after its appearance in the Literaturnaya Moskva II. One dominant theme seems to show through the obscurity of his words, his present inability to deceive the people any longer in his works. In one poem, entitled "Dreams,"<sup>1</sup> he affirms his loyalty but suggests that

<sup>1</sup> Excerpts from "Dreams":

I was, as it were, born anew.  
It is easier to breath, I won't lie.  
I cannot now deceive anyone  
Either in one thing or in another,  
Even if I wanted to, I could not.

The world in all its dimensions  
For me is now on my shoulders:  
Thus free are my movements  
As if for the first time since birth  
I shall fly in my orbit.

(continued on next page)

because he has "grown up" he is no longer able to sacrifice the truth for the "hundred-mouthed glory." One gets the feeling that Yashin is attempting to make amends for his earlier works which won him praise and a Stalin Prize.

Evtushenko's poems are even more obscure than those of Yashin. In addition, they are marked by a lack of the kind of optimism usually associated with "socialist realism." The first four lines of a poem called "Salesgirl of Ties" clearly conveys the tenor of his work:

"When work is finished/  
Pale from stifling fuss/  
With the face of an exhausted child/  
You leave the store."

This is scarcely a picture of the happy Soviet worker finishing a glorious day at work. In this same poem Evtushenko affirms his loyalty to the revolution and to communism but finishes with a line which smacks of disillusion: "And what now, what now?"

The recent publication of Yashin's and Evtushenko's works suggest that the editors of Neva and Oktyabr have felt bold enough to print a type of writing which is clearly out of line with the main tenets of socialist realism. So far there has been no press comment on these works. However, if the publication of works similar to these continues, it would suggest that at least in the genre of poetry certain restrictions have been removed.

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(Footnote continued)

I am not a soothsayer  
Nor am I old in my view.  
Thus I don't take pride in righteous men  
Nor in former times,  
But I take pride in that  
I don't envy successful ones,  
For the unrecognized ones I don't fear.

More and more I feel a strange pain.  
I cannot get drunk without wine.  
And I study silence like an art.  
I am not tempted by hundred-mouthed glory  
Because it is useless for people.

My soul does not partake of faithlessness and doubt  
Only my view has become keener.  
My generation has grown up  
And I have grown up with them.



Dudintsev's name has once again appeared before the Soviet public, and there is a possibility that a new novel by him will be published next year. At the Writers' Congress last May Khrushchev clearly removed much of the stigma of past criticism from Dudintsev's name when he stated that this writer "has never been our enemy or opponent of the Soviet order." In Pravda on July 5 a letter in praise of Khrushchev's speech said that while Dudintsev's book was marked with thoughtlessness, it also had "a timely, fresh breeze." On August 1 Radio Moscow carried an interview with Dudintsev, who announced his plans for a new novel entitled The Unknown Soldier. And, on a back-page subscription advertisement of the September Oktyabr, this novel was listed among those works which may be published in next year's issues of that magazine.

#### Praise and Publication for Sholokhov

In late August Khrushchev visited the out-of-the way village of Veshenskaya, home of the Soviet writer Mikhail A. Sholokhov, and invited Sholokhov, to accompany him on his US visit. In a speech there on August 30 Khrushchev praised Sholokhov for the "party-mindedness" of his works and for his depiction of the "most important and decisive stages in the history of Soviet society." The meeting of the two and Khrushchev's speech were hailed by the cultural press in early September as though they marked the dawn of a bright new day for Soviet literature and the other arts. The pages of the cultural newspapers were filled with letters of writers, artists, and composers who had seen the great importance of Khrushchev's remarks for the further development of Soviet culture.

It is difficult to say what Khrushchev's bow to Sholokhov portends for Soviet literature as a whole. But at any rate, personal intervention by Khrushchev in the affairs of literature, it appears, has brought about a rapprochement between Sholokhov and Party critics concerning the publication of the second part of his novel Virgin Soil Upturned. During the past year there have been rumors that Sholokhov had completed this second book, which is about the collectivization of agriculture, but certain Party critics, in particular A. Surkov, prevented its publication because of its "pessimistic" ending. Portions of the book have appeared in print at various times since 1955, and in July of this year both the magazines Neva and Don published the first half of this second book. During his trip in the United States Sholokhov announced to newsmen that he had completed his novel and that it would be published soon.

That there had, indeed, been a controversy concerning the ending of this novel seems to be borne out by an article in an August 29 interview article in Sovetskaya

Kultura. The interviewer, obviously cognizant of the dispute, asked Sholokhov how the novel ends. Sholokhov answered: "Happy endings are not in my nature. It must be written as life prompts it." This remark suggests that Sholokhov has won out over the Party critics and that his novel will be printed as he first wrote it.

If Khrushchev did actually intervene in the literary world to bring about the publication of this novel, he had good reasons to do so. There have been reports that Khrushchev was greatly disturbed by the propaganda debacle caused by the Doctor Zhivago incident last year and hoped to avoid similar negative publicity in regard to Sholokhov's novel. In addition, it has been also reported that Sholokhov was greatly incensed over Pasternak's winning of the Nobel Prize. He purportedly felt that because the Soviet Government prevented him from publishing his novel, both in the Soviet Union and abroad, he was greatly handicapped in the consideration for this honor. The impending publication of his novel and his inclusion in Khrushchev's entourage in the US may well be an attempt by the regime to increase Sholokhov's chances for the Nobel Prize in the future. If such an honor was bestowed upon a Soviet writer whom the Soviet Government and Party praised, the negative aspects of the Pasternak case could be substantially countered. The regime could no longer be accused of suppressing great literature and socialist society could be pictured as proudly wearing the Nobel Prize.

#### Limitations to the Policy of Restraint

The foregoing comment has illustrated how the Party's literary policy has been tempered in an attempt to win the respect of Soviet writers. It is perhaps too early to tell the full significance of these events, which have happened in the main only since the Writers' Congress in May of this year. However, the following seems to be clear. Despite the regime's conciliatory moves, Soviet writers have not been given license to write as they wish. At the Writers' Congress Khrushchev criticized those who would portray the darker aspects of Soviet life and asserted that if anyone criticized, it would be the Central Committee. Nothing has occurred in the past few months that would suggest any change in this basic policy. If the Party is allowing writers to declare openly their desire for truth in literature, it is not allowing application of this principle.

This policy of moderation may have within itself the seeds of its own destruction. Writers may be encouraged by the Party's policy of restraint to test the limits of cultural controls. Editors and censors under the present policy toward literary criticism may be unwilling to condemn works of obvious literary merit even though they contain ideologically unorthodox views. Under these circum-



stances the Party would be obliged to violate its present policy. Despite the Party's desires to win approval among writers, it has shown beyond doubt that it will sacrifice popularity to protect those things it considers more important.

Thus the maintenance of a policy of moderation will depend in a large measure on how sensitive the writers and editors are to the desires of the regime. Restraint on the part of writers and the editors is the only thing that can now protect the few freedoms writers have been given.

It is likely that this restraint will be practiced by most Soviet men of letters in an effort to defend what Alexander Tvardovsky recently called the "new era of creativity." However, it is more difficult to predict the actions of those Soviet writers who in the past have been prone to express unorthodox views.

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Thaw literature of "exposure" is a matter of the past as are the specific historical conditions that gave rise to it. But the moral and artistic impetus of the literary thaw has survived. The collapse of the anti-revisionist campaign in the Writers' Union and the continued liberalization of Soviet life have made a new modus vivendi for literature at once more necessary and more feasible.

Not everybody, either in the Writers' Union or the Communist Party, has as yet recognized or accepted the need for further changes, and those who have differ widely about ways and means. Outdated concepts and conventions, mistaken suspicions, misunderstood motive, and a quaintly euphemistic terminology made for indecision and confusion, often conceal basic conflicts and distort genuine dilemmas. The clear-cut lines of the past between party authority and erring or recalcitrant writer are blurred as a result of the easing of party controls and the emergence of opposed groupings within the Union none of which can claim the party's undivided support. The party itself vacillates and prevaricates in its policy on literature -- if, indeed, it has such a policy.

In this situation the more permanent impulses of the Thaw are beginning to take effect: creative writers have begun to explore new subjects and techniques; in articles and speeches new issues are raised and discussed freely (often, it is true, under the guise of disconcertingly stale formulas); the first steps are being taken to adapt the activities and the structure of the Writers' Union to new purposes and tasks.

The initial, tentative stages of this process, the issues involved and the emerging alignments are reflected in the discussions prior to and during the Third USSR Writers' Congress.

## I

The announcement that the long-delayed Congress would be held in May was made in the first editorial article on problems of Soviet literature to be published by Kommunist since July 1957.<sup>1</sup> This article, together with E. A. Furtseva's report on ideological work at the XXI Party Congress,<sup>2</sup> must be assumed to have represented the official view on the state of Soviet literature and on its ideological tasks.

The article begins by stressing that the transition from socialism to communism initiated by the decisions of the XXI Congress requires not only the creation of a "material and technological basis" but also the "all-embracing development of the human personality." In well-worn clichés, but with a new intonation of urgency born of the growing conviction that the relaxation of discipline and compulsion has enhanced the ideological and educative value of



literature, Kommunist appeals to writers to

make an even greater effort ... to educate the working masses in the spirit of loyalty to the cause of socialism, of passionate love for their socialist Fatherland, in the spirit of proletarian internationalism and friendship between nations, and of hatred for the enemies of socialism.<sup>3</sup>

The article then goes on to formulate the "pre-conditions" which alone will enable literature to keep abreast with its tasks:

1. The writer must be closely linked with the life of the nation, and he must, in Khrushchev's words, "overcome his outdated ideas about our people." Only "direct participation in the nation's great creative experience" can forge this link; writers are therefore enjoined to go forth

more boldly to the construction sites, into the factories, mines, collective farms, laboratories, into the masses! There ... the writer will find his source of inspiration, the themes and subjects for his creative work...<sup>4</sup>

Writers' doubts about the artistic relevance of this procedure are countered with references to past experience which, Kommunist claims, has shown that such direct links with the nation can produce "great works of art" and not merely "material for reportage" as our "ideological opponents" assert.

2. Soviet literature must draw its true, "positive"<sup>5</sup> hero -- the traditional hero of Russian literature -- from the people, the builders of communism. This "main character of Soviet literature" reflects "our socialist reality" and the "true traits of the new man." Insistence on the positive hero must not be taken, however, to be an oblique demand for the return to "varnished" and "conflictless" literature:

There are still quite a few bad people, burdened with the survivals of the accursed past... The "theory of conflictlessness" was harmful precisely because it ignored the negative phenomena in our life and hindered the struggle against them... If a work criticizes short-comings in our life, it also serves... the cause of communism because it clears the way of everything that impedes our movement forward... If the author castigates shortcomings by way of affirming communism, he also follows the main line of our literature...<sup>6</sup>

3. The main task of Soviet literature -- to be affirmed by Congress -- is to "orientate itself towards contemporaneity." For Khrushchev in 1957 (and for Sobolev in December 1958 at the RSFSR Writers' Congress) the term sovremennost had meant no more than "close links with contemporary life": writers were expected to "study life" and to write about topical subjects. Kommunist now introduces a somewhat confused and artificial distinction the purpose of which, however, seems clear. In the first place, there was the danger of Khrushchev's formula encouraging writers to adopt (as some clearly had done recently) neo-realist methods in dealing with "life", the "people" and their problems. Secondly, it was obviously absurd to expect all writers to "go to the people." Lastly, "contemporary" bias had been a distinctive but unwelcome feature of Erenburg's Thaw, Dudintsev's Not by Bread Alone, Yashin's Levers, and of other works in 1956. An ideological "directive" had to be devised which would discourage the first, provide a niche in Soviet literature for the second, and re-emphasize the party-propagandist aspect of Soviet literature:

NOT TO BE MICROFICED

Writers are called upon to apprehend and express in artistic terms the greatness of the seven-year plan, to show that its fulfillment is the most important pre-condition for the transition to communism, and that its realization is an important revolutionary step in the development of our society.<sup>7</sup>

The distinction Kommunist wishes to make is further underlined by assigning to the "main task of Soviet literature" -- i.e. the expression of sovremennost -- extra-literary and purely journalistic genres. Earlier in the article writers had been assured that "closer links with the people" could produce not only "reportage" but "great works of art"; they are now told that the "most operative genres for this purpose /i.e. sovremennost/ are forms of artistic journalism": namely, the sketch (ocherk)<sup>8</sup>, the feature-story, and the "militant publicist poem."

4. A subject of special concern for the forthcoming Congress must be the raising of "artistic skill and craftsmanship (masterstvo)". Higher artistic standards are called for because "the nation expects great art"<sup>9</sup> and because

if a work is weak artistically even the most noble, the most progressive ideological conception perishes; the idea of a work of art is inseparable from its form....and without an appropriate form cannot be assimilated by the reader and cannot influence him.<sup>10</sup>

The low artistic standards of works recently accepted by periodicals and publishing houses are regretted; writers are once more invited to experiment boldly in their search for more vivid and striking means of expression. "Formalism is still to be condemned if it means the "primacy of sterile form" -- but it will be welcomed if the search for new forms serves to "reveal more strikingly a lofty ideological content."

The hollowness of Kommunist's championship of higher artistic standards is revealed in the same article. Kommunist is prepared to make allowances for low artistic standards provided the work is "contemporary" and, presumably, to exonerate periodicals and publishing houses for printing such work. Referring to some "recent controversial works," it is granted that "artistically they were not completely satisfactory", and yet

in spite of these shortcomings such novels arouse keen interest precisely because they portray our contemporaries ... in their daily struggles and clashes.... In these works the author's sympathies and antipathies are clearly expressed although mere tendentiousness is avoided....<sup>11</sup>

The Kommunist editorial points to the desire of at least a section of the party to nullify the writers' relative freedom by persuading them to confine their work voluntarily to "contemporary" subjects and "operative" genres for the popularization of the party's current policy and immediate aims. No marginal qualifications about the "raising of artistic standards" can hide the fact that Kommunist is indifferent to literary quality and anxious to win the support of the Writers' Congress for a narrowly-circumscribed formula which would open the doors of literature again to "literary bureaucracy" and the political hack-writer. At any rate, this is how leading party officials -- in their cruder and less guarded comments -- interpreted the party line:

Speaking at the IV Congress of Belorussian Writers, and addressing himself in particular to the dramatists, the First Secretary of the CC of the CP of Belorussia, K. Mazurov, had this to say:



I think the point is not so much that some writers lack dramatic skill but that they -- because of their poor knowledge of contemporary life and of the problems that agitate our people -- are simply afraid of writing plays about sovremennost; they are afraid to face the criticism of their audiences... Comrades! Don't try to retire from the battle; be so good as to fulfil your party command (zakaz) -- give us contemporary plays....<sup>12</sup>

And I. Zhelagin, the First Secretary of the Stalingrad District Committee of the CP, complains:

Stalingrad writers, although they have begun to write more often on local themes, are still powerfully attracted to their native city's past history. Of course, the past should also be written about ... but the present must not be forgotten. Some writers, however, shun contemporary themes and rarely publish sketches about the heroes of our time.<sup>13</sup>

These official utterances also betray the growing concern felt over writers' refusal to write according to old "prescriptions" spelled out in contemporary slogans. As recently as the RSFSR Writers' Congress it had seemed that as a result of the anti-revisionist campaign <sup>14</sup> little resistance was being offered to the imposition on the Union of a new rigidity and conformity under the slogan of the "portrayal of contemporary life." This had been reflected in the Congress resolution <sup>15</sup> and in the fact that only one speaker, Fedin, had ignored the demand for sovremennost and had emphasized Khrushchev's comments on masterstvo <sup>16</sup> (craftsmanship, virtuosity). (Fedin complained that although everybody was paying lip-service to artistic standards, in practice the prevalent tendency was the dangerous one of judging literature only on the merit of contents.) But at the XXI Party Congress it became clear that even writers who had backed Khrushchev in his destalinization campaign, and who supported his reforms, were not prepared to sacrifice again their artistic and professional integrity, and rejected the new line about themes, subjects and genres.

A. Tvardovski was the only writer to speak at the XXI Congress although A. E. Korneichuk, A. A. Surkov, V. T. Latsis and M. N. Sholokhov also attended as delegates. True literature, Tvardovski said, <sup>17</sup> can "confirm" only the "truth and essence" of life: dogmas and preconceived schemes superimposed on life are alien to the spirit of art. Khrushchev's call to writers to write about real life releases them from the prescriptive dogmas of the Stalin era. But there is too much talk about "contemporaneity", he complains -- in an obvious reference to Furtseva's report. Any indifferent, hurriedly-produced piece of writing with a "contemporary" or topical title is accepted by editors, publishers and critics. This impedes and distorts the progress of Soviet literature and causes grave misgivings to the writers in whose name Tvardovski claims to speak:

I am bound to say that many of our best writers -- some already well-established, others as yet unknown to the reader -- are deeply and anxiously aware of this deplorable position; in our everyday contacts we discuss this often and passionately. But as soon as we take the platform at our writers' meetings and congresses, we change to a completely different language rather like priests ... who in their domestic and everyday life speak colloquial Russian but in the pulpit change to Church Slavonic, the obligatory language of their ritual.<sup>18</sup>

In conclusion Tvardovski expresses "our (i.e. the 'best writers')" hope that, in contrast to the official desire to see sovremennost as the main theme, the Third Congress would concentrate on problems of form and masterstvo.

In their contributions to the discussions preceding the III Congress many writers took their cue from Tvardovski and endorsed or further elaborated his views.

Of some importance is the statement made by L. Leonov <sup>19</sup> on the eve of the III Congress, both for what he said (he supported Fedin and Tvardovski by suggesting that Congress should discuss the "writer's craft -- this would really be a discussion on the main theme") and for the fact that Leonov, one of the most outstanding of Soviet writers and a member of the Board of Management of the USW for many years, has in the past avoided all direct participation in literary controversies.<sup>20</sup>

M. Shaginyan in an article in Oktyabr <sup>21</sup> referred to the nineteenth-century writer Boborykin as a "topical" writer whose work had been "useless" to his contemporaries and who is completely forgotten now. Only a writer who deeply understands, feels and experiences his age can be truly "contemporary". But such a writer's work will not "trail behind the topical event", he will "blaze a trail through virgin soil of life, he will participate in the creative processes of life itself."

In an interesting contribution to the debate Abdulla Kakhkhar <sup>22</sup> expressed the views of many of his fellow-writers in the Republican Unions:<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately, problems of artistic craftsmanship are still pushed into the background. If our central organs from time to time -- although also rarely and, as it were, stealthily -- discuss masterstvo, our Republican publications remain stubbornly silent on the subject of the quality of our literature and the secret of our craft. The time has come -- and after the III Congress this general desire is bound to be fulfilled -- eradicate the evil which allows critics to take under their protection obviously unsuitable works. For some critics it is sufficient for a book to be <sup>24</sup> about a topical theme: the rest neither interests nor concerns them.

## II

The Third Congress was to be a demonstration of the restored unity of Soviet writers, the "Congress of Consolidation" around the kind of program enunciated by the Kommunist editorial. "Consolidation" had been one of the themes of Khrushchev's speeches as early as June 1957:

We want consolidation, unity of all the forces of literature and art on a principled basis, and not by concessions and deviations from the principles of Marxism-Leninism. In the interests of this consolidation principled criticism and self-criticism is being unfolded... Every man can make mistakes, but it is necessary to see not only what the man did yesterday, but also what he is capable of doing tomorrow, and that is the most important thing; we must help such a man to realize shortcomings and as quickly as possible eliminate them and rectify mistakes.<sup>25</sup>

Surkov, on the eve of the RSFSR Writers' Congress, had proclaimed his belief that thanks to Khrushchev's intervention the split in the USSR Writers' Union had already been healed:



The party document became the basis on which progressively -- not without great difficulties and much effort to overcome the survivals of cliquishness and the reluctance of some erring writers to re-appraise their false revisionist positions -- there was erected the structure of that ideological and creative consolidation without which the flowering of Soviet literature in this new stage of our struggle for communism would have been unthinkable.<sup>26</sup>

Neither the results of the RSFSR Congress nor the renewed controversy after the party's XXI Congress confirmed Surkov's optimism. Old issues, it is true, were no longer fiercely debated, and even terminology was changing ("revisionists" were turning into "neo-realists" and "varnishers" into "followers of the Dovzhenko school")<sup>27</sup> but the Union remained deeply divided about the place of literature in Soviet society, its character and its function. In his report to the Third Congress Surkov made no secret of the failure to achieve the unity that six months earlier he had proclaimed as accomplished.

After enumerating all the dangers against which Soviet writers still have to remain on their guard (such as: revisionism, dogmatism, vulgar sociologism, sectarianism, manifestations of bourgeois nationalism and of all forms of cliquishness), he added abruptly and sternly that

conditions are now favorable, comrades, to achieve a broad consolidation of all our forces. This is one of the most important conditions for successful creative work in the service of communism.<sup>28</sup>

Khrushchev himself, addressing Congress on 22 May, confirms that his appeals for unity had fallen, so far, on at least some deaf ears:

The aftermath of the struggle which not so long ago was of a quite sharp nature is still making itself felt in your midst.

But unlike Surkov, he claims that

now this struggle is a past stage. The carriers of revisionist views and sentiments have suffered total ideological defeat. The struggle is over and now, as they say, "conciliation angels" are already flying in the air. A process of healing the wounds, if we can put it that way, is going on at present....<sup>29</sup>

Consolidation on the conditions offered by Kommunist and faithfully echoed by Surkov had proved unacceptable. Attempts at re-imposing controls through ideological manipulation threatened to perpetuate the deadlock between the party and what Tvardovski called the "best writers" whose own terms were stated by K. Pautovski in an article that has attracted much attention in the West:

The writers' congress is approaching. Will it affirm that free and daring scope for writers which is the one thing that will make of Soviet literature the greatest literature of our time? Or will the congress rather take up matters of petty tutelage and long-term quarrels? If it does, it will be useless. We must at last cease calling friends enemies simply because they tell us unpleasant truths, are not hypocritical, and, while giving their selfless devotion to the people and their country, do not demand a monopoly of such devotion, or a reward for it.

There are two paths open to the Congress, the noble path of Consolidation, and the other, the destructive path of disagreement.<sup>30</sup>

III

Congress was attended by 497 delegates representing 4,801 members, an increase of 1,100 over 1954.<sup>31</sup> In the debate 59 delegates are reported to have participated; some 37 guest speakers (including the Minister of Culture, the secretary of the Komsomol, and Khrushchev) also addressed the Congress.<sup>32</sup>

Although Congress debates in general continued -- in a minor key -- the controversies begun earlier and although, clearly, the unity desired by Kommunist and Surkov was not achieved, some form of consolidation, probably unforeseen and unplanned,<sup>33</sup> did emerge. Congress proceedings confirm that, at least within the Union, the initiative has passed from the revisionist-baiters and "literary officialdom" to the creative writers. V. Druzin, the Deputy Editor, and V. Kochetov, the Editor-in-Chief, of Literaturnaya gazeta had resigned in March; Congress confirmed the appointment of S. S. Smirnov as Kochetov's successor; A. Surkov was replaced by K. Fedin as General Secretary of the Union: these personal changes and even, it would appear, the changes in the Union's constitution, ratified this shift in the control of the Writers' Union.<sup>34</sup>

Surkov's report, which was largely ignored by speakers in the discussion, was a more than usually longwinded hotchpotch of commonplaces and the kind of reasoning that had been employed in the 1956-7 Thaw, but was felt to be irrelevant to the problems and dilemmas writers faced in 1959. The main lines of the debate have already been indicated; the following quotations and brief summaries are intended to illustrate some typical reactions to the two most important aspects of official policy -- "close links" and sovremennost.<sup>35</sup>

Khrushchev's slogan "Closer links with the people", implying the much-resented suggestion that the Soviet intelligentsia forty years after the revolution was still alienated from the masses, had led in late 1958 and early 1959 to the revival of "creative assignments" undertaken by members of the Union either on behalf of the Union or at the instruction of literary journals and periodicals. For a period most of these featured prominently articles, travel-notes and writers' diaries dealing with the impressions these roving reporters had gathered in their more or less fleeting visits to the "construction sites of the seven year plan".<sup>36</sup> The overtly and often crudely propagandist character of these assignments and the attempt at proclaiming journalistic techniques as the Soviet writers' most operative contribution, provoked some of the strongest comments at the Congress. That writers could argue against the line laid down by Khrushchev himself in 1957 confirms convincingly that the anti-revisionist campaign has failed to put the clock back, and that persuasion and reasoning have largely replaced "petty tutelage" and intimidation in the party's relations with the writers.

#### K. Paustovski

A rather strange concept of the tie connecting the writer with the people is current among us today. This bond obviously cannot be created artificially. No special writers' expedition will help to do this, if those taking part intend to use it merely to play an "observer's" role, to study the life of the people with due deliberation, asking all the proper questions about their activities and jobs, sitting in at their meetings, and doing the rest of the things the other "amateurs" and tourists do, so as to gather copy....

At all times and in all lands true and genuine writers have learned from the people and been linked to them organically... Try naming even a dozen writers of the 19th and 20th centuries who had no ties at all with the people. I am speaking of writers in general, not dividing them into "our" and "alien" writers, into positive and negative. Is there one of them that has no shred of his roots



in the people, "no feeling of social responsibility" as they called it in the last century?

There are almost no such writers. And if in recent years there has been talk about the complete divorce of writers from the people, we should clear up the question as to whether such individuals were really writers at all.<sup>37</sup>

#### M. Rylski

...to be able to write about miners, blacksmiths, gold-prospectors, gardeners, etc. it is not at all necessary for the author to be himself a miner, blacksmith, etc. Moreover, even a thorough and detailed knowledge of a trade, or of the way of life of a certain milieu will not help one to do more than portray petty details, external features of a way of life and not life in its complexity.

Rylski goes on to remind his colleagues that Tolstoy created not only the characters of Natasha, Levin, Anna Karenina but also the horse Kholstomer and the dog Laska. A writer in addition to personal experience needs powers of observation, and "creative imagination." "Knowledge of life" is necessary but a true work of art cannot do without "deep love for life."<sup>38</sup>

#### Anver Bikchentaev

...Our writers, it is said, have insufficient knowledge of life... I must confess that all Azerbaidzhani and Bashkir writers who describe e.g. the life of workers in the oil industry, have a remarkable insight into production processes... they are quite capable of presenting dissertations on the subject...what we lack is a deep, fundamental knowledge of people's psychology, of what our classics used to call simply and accurately — the human soul.<sup>39</sup>

M. Dudin reminded his colleagues of Leskov's words:

"I have never understood, and still cannot understand those journalistic sermons that the people must be studied. The people one must simply know, as one knows one's own life by living it...that is how I knew the people -- from childhood without effort and strain; and if I sometimes failed to recreate the people in my works, then this was due solely to my lack of ability."<sup>40</sup>

#### Rasul Gamzatov

...The very fact that we talk so much about the writers' link with life proves that not all the members of our Union are genuine writers... Many comrades are only now beginning to find it necessary to study life and to "invade it actively" during long months of creative assignments... To share the life of one's nation ought not to be an obligation but an inner need for us..<sup>41</sup>

#### V. Soloukhin

For a writer it is vitally important to live in a highly intellectual milieu...and the greater the intellectual culture of his milieu, the better the chance for the writer to develop his own powers..<sup>42</sup>

Khrushchev's own comment on this subject in his reply to the debate was light-heartedly flexible, and double-edged to a degree that must have caused surprise and consternation to many delegates:

Why shouldn't a writer who wants to write about workers go where workers live and work, to study how they work? Shouldn't he live with them? Is that bad? Then he needn't waste time of "author's trips."

Comrades, naturally I am not suggesting that writers from the capital be settled all over the Soviet Union at mines, factories and collective

farms. That would be unreasonable. What I do want to say is that writers must invade life more deeply, study it, translate into artistic images all that is new in the life of the land of the Soviets, to get greater depth into their portrayal of man, the creator of all material and spiritual values of our society.

Khrushchev then went on to relate to the delegates a pre-war incident when he had refused help in procuring a flat in Kiev for a "woman poet, a poet from the people, a peasant woman". He preceded his narration with remarks which were directed against the transplantation of young writers from their "natural milieu" into metropolitan "hot-house" conditions but which could be read as a refutation of Kommunist and even as support for Soloukhin's definition of the writer's "natural milieu":

Is it really of any benefit to uproot people from the environment -- collective farm, factory, office -- in which they have grown up and live and which nurtures them, and to transplant them into artificial hot-house conditions? If that is done, the ground can slip from under their feet, they will be deprived of their life blood and feel as plants torn out of the ground...in time they may strike root, get on their feet, but they may also wilt.<sup>43</sup>

Lack of support for Kommunist's line on sovremennost is the most noteworthy feature of Congress debates. In fact only Surkov, Mikhailov (Minister of Culture) and L. Sobolev (Chairman of the RSFSR Writers' Union) back what appeared to be official policy. The writers in their message to the Central Committee -- and Khrushchev in his speech -- studiously avoid even the term sovremennost.<sup>44</sup>

#### N. A. Mikhailov

Speaking about the contemporary theme from the point of view of the international obligations of Soviet literature, it must be pointed out that Soviet writers are called upon to tell mankind -- using the means characteristic of literature, i.e. artistic images -- about the construction of a new world in our Soviet country. In this manner the demand for the contemporary theme in literature is the expression of ideinost and partiinost in literature... To write about contemporaneity or, in other words, about the historic and universal struggle of our people, means to work for communism, to realize in practice the principle of linking literature with life, of helping the party, by means of artistic works, in the construction of a communist society.<sup>45</sup>

#### L. Sobolev

...why then is it that talk about the need for contemporaneity in literature provokes some writers in the way in which a red rag provokes a bull? One can understand why the party's call to write about sovremennost worries and irritates writers of the older generation for whom it is really difficult to enter fully into the new life...but it is completely incomprehensible why some young writers should run away from contemporaneity.

He goes on to attack Paustovski for praising the young prose-writer Yu. Kazakov who instead of following the true path "writes about cruel and stupid lads who leave the villages and their girl-friends in search of a sports career in town." Kazakov had recently been admitted to a Seminar held for young writers by the RSFSR Writers' Union in the hope that he would produce a story on a "contemporary theme." "This was a sine qua non for admission to the Seminar." Instead Kazakov shocked his tutors by presenting a story on a nineteenth-century theme.<sup>46</sup>



N. N. Mesyatev

The secretary of the Komsomol is more cautious than other official speakers in demanding that writers should focus their attention on "contemporary" themes. Soviet youth must not be allowed to grow complacent and to feel that there is nothing left to do but "to reap the fruits of the labor of past generations." Although he wants writers to "reflect the participation of youth in social labor, and to show that their work is essentially part of the process of revolutionary action," he insists that "one of the important problems /i.e. for literature/ is the education of young people in the revolutionary traditions of the past."<sup>47</sup>

K. Paustovski

The arbitrary and vulgar interpretation which criticism has given to the simple concept of "the contemporary" does not allow our literature the diversity and breadth it needs.

I am profoundly convinced that the contemporary in literature and in the arts as a whole includes everything that serves to form and develop man in communist society. This is a crystal-clear formula. But opposing this all-embracing interpretation is another one, which holds that only what is linked to today and its aims, only the topical is, in actual fact, contemporary.

This approach to the contemporary in literature discards all the age-old -- and especially the revolutionary -- history of our land, consigns to oblivion its great culture, one of the bases for the erection of a culture new and purely socialist.

In any accurate conception of the contemporary Taras Bulba exists alongside The Silent Don, and War and Peace by the side of The People Are Immortal by Vasili Grossman, with the same immediate impact on people's minds.

If the writer is really persuaded to substitute the topical for the contemporary, we shall no longer have a literature in the full sense of the word. We shall have news reports, efficient journalism, a newspaper with literary touches, hurriedly written stories, or a novel ripened fast and sspoilng soon thereafter. Have we really such a dearth of writers, and are we so helpless that our literature lacks the strength to produce numbers of excellent books in all genres and dealing with all periods but at the same time contemporary in spirit and ideas? Why should we consciously act to impoverish our literature?<sup>48</sup>

O. Gonchar

The "contemporary" theme ... cannot be treated narrowly, it cannot be reduced to the topicality of a feature-article... The concept includes everything that is of interest to our contemporary, all the important problems of our age, the whole of our Soviet period and its heroic feats..<sup>49</sup>

V. Luks

...some go so far as to date contemporaneity -- or, at least, its beginnings -- from 1956, others have decided on even later dates... Sovremennost is not a short interval of time framed between calendar dates, it is our age in its movement and development..<sup>50</sup>

D. Granin

...our Congress, it seems to me, is beginning to show a deeper and more creative understanding of contemporaneity -- a concept which fetters the writer neither by insisting on ... topicality nor by narrowing his thematic choice... It is an insult to Soviet writers if their efforts are suddenly to be classified as second-rate by the application of merely chronological criteria... Such a vulgar interpretation of sovremennost only serves the hack-writer..<sup>51</sup>

A. Tvardovski

That Tvardovski in his contribution should mock at the statistical approach to literature which measures its progress in quantities published during a "given period", caused no surprise. That he should brush aside the demand for sovremennost and assert that in literature "quality is first and foremost in importance", was to be expected. His conclusions, however -- if not startlingly new -- imply an emphatic challenge to traditional Soviet concepts of the writer's responsibilities and duties and of the ideological malleability of literature through "organizational methods":

The task of the literary education and creative development of our writers stems directly from the great overall task which is the main theme of our Congress: the task of improving the quality of our literature. I shall not dwell on how imperfect and even harmful at times the various organizational methods taken toward this end seem to me personally.

In our work as writers it is obviously not "organizational methods" that are of decisive significance, but example, specific examples of high artistry. The example is indispensable and of primary significance...

The reason I have stressed the necessity of a profoundly individual understanding of the task facing literature on the threshold of communism is that I thereby wish to underline an even more emphatic assertion.

We frequently speak of collective responsibility for the fate of literature, about the responsibility of each of us for "literature as a whole", etc.

I should like to say here -- I have already spoken of this in part -- that no matter how paradoxical it may seem at first glance, the highest form of collective responsibility in our work is a genuine awareness of one's responsibility for oneself, and not "for literature as a whole." Let us note that there are not so many among us who cope with this kind of responsibility. There are probably more who quite readily offer to answer for "literature as a whole," to guide it, to manage it, and direct it...

A writer can produce genuine literature only if it is not external considerations that compel him, but his whole inner being -- (even if my book should have no success, that is how I want to write it, that is how it should be written) -- only then can his work be worth anything... I want to speak of the personal, moral obligations and standards of a writer's work and how these are to be brought closer to the concept of communist labor.

We will, naturally, take these moral and ethical standards from the experience of the great masters of the past, our compatriots and others. These lived in different times, set themselves different tasks, had different world outlooks, in keeping with their times, but their selflessness and noble dedication to great art still serve us as the highest example and standard...

Write as your conscience dictates, as your knowledge of any given sector of life permits you to write, and do not be afraid in advance of editors and critics...<sup>52</sup>

If Tvardovski's views are shared -- as they probably are -- by many of his colleagues in the new leadership of the Union, further changes in the status and the activities of the Union will soon follow. Such changes cannot fail to uphold and enlarge the already wide range of choice and experiment typical of a good deal of recent Soviet writing.<sup>53</sup>



FOOTNOTES

1. Kommunist 1959 no.6, p. 13.
2. Vneocherednoi XXI s'ezd KPSS. Stenograficheski otchet (Moscow, 1959) vol. I pp. 262-275. Furtseva, in contract to Kommunist's conciliatory tone, calls in question the writers' ideological reliability. In a reference to the demand for "complete non-interference" by the party in literary affairs, contained in the Draft Program of the Yugoslav League of Communists (Cp. the English translation, London, 1959 pp. 191-192), she says: "But such non-interference amounts to lending direct support to positions in literature and art that are hostile to the working class and the peasantry" (*ibid.* p. 268.)
3. Kommunist 1959, no. 6, p. 13.
4. Ibid.
5. A terminological distinction is now often made between the post-Stalin "positive" hero and the "ideal" (i.e. "varnished") hero of pre-1956 literature. Cf. *ibid.* p. 18; also N. Maslin, "O geroye v literature i zhizni", Moskva 1959 no. 2.
6. Kommunist 1959 no. 6, p. 18.
7. Ibid. p. 19.
8. In an interview published in Literaturnaya gazeta 5 September 1959, V. Ovechkin, whose own sketches are often quoted as models for this type of literature, draws a distinction between what he calls the "documentary sketch" and the "explorative sketch", which permits "free rein to the creative imagination."
9. The claim that "the [Soviet] reader is always right" and, by implication that the party correctly interprets the reader's (or the nation's) mind, goes unchallenged no longer. Many voices have recently been raised against the "cult of the reader": the young poet A. Volkov (Literaturnaya gazeta 25 April 1959) has suggested that "the people love those works best which have been thoroughly premasticated for them by the author..." (According to a note in Literaturnaya gazeta 30 September 1959 many letters both for and against Volkov had been received by the editor.) V. Inber (*ibid.* 16 May 1959) is disturbed about readers' "Primitive approach to literature" and their "lack of a sense of humor". G. Gulia (*ibid.* 14 July 1959) complains that the development of literature is impeded by readers who "dislike complexity and demand primitive simplicity", and who identify "truth" with the "accuracy of a protocol." A. Makarov in a review of Ivanov's "Poviteli" praises the novel as a "positive and outstanding contribution to our literature" but expects that it will be received unfavorably by many readers (Znamya 1959 no. 3).
10. Kommunist 1959, no. 6, p. 19.
11. Ibid. p. 15.
12. Literaturnaya gazeta 17 February 1959.
13. Literatura i Zhizn 6 March 1959.
14. Attempts are now clearly being made to revise the results of the "anti-revisionist" campaign in literature and to remove misunderstandings and confusions. Some writers had preferred to keep silent or to absent themselves from public debates, others had paid lip-service (cf. Tvardovski's remark about writers' "ritual language", *infra*) to what they believed to be the obligatory party line because they either failed to understand or refused to believe in Khrushchev's proclaimed willingness to permit changes in "party-control and leadership in literature". This deadlock can only be resolved by convincing the writers that the party is no longer dispensing instructions which is not an easy task in view of the statements quoted above. But, as will be seen, progress has been made at the Congress and, more recently, the subject has been discussed in a frank statement by the Editor of Literaturnaya gazeta, S. S. Smirnov ("Zametki o kritike", 8 August 1959); in the key passage he defines the character of party leadership in literature as "constant ideological-educative work... amongst writers' and goes on to ask: "Is it really necessary to prove to anyone that the well-known party-document 'For closer

links....' was by no means a directive but an educative pronouncement?"

15. Literaturnaya gazeta 14 December 1958.

16. Ibid. 12 December 1958.

17. Vneocherednoi XXI s'ezd KPSS. Stenograficheskoe otchet (Moscow, 1959) vol. I, pp. 558-565; cf. also Soviet Literature 1959 no. 4.

18. Vneocherednoi XXI s'ezd KPSS.... vol. I, p. 564. The translation of this passage in Soviet Literature (p. 150) differs slightly from my own.

19. Literaturnaya gazeta 7 May 1959.

20. However, in a little-noticed essay "Talant i true" (Oktyabr 1956, no. 3, p. 166) Leonov had anticipated many of the propositions advanced in the present controversy. Cf. also: A. Yugov and L. Leonov, "Dumy o yazyke", Literatura i zhizn 26 April 1959. Many other writers have expressed their concern at the effect on literature of the progressive debasement of the language.

21. Oktyabr 1959, no. 5, p. 136.

22. Literaturnaya gazeta 12 May 1959.

23. Even the scanty reports of Republican Writers' Congress published in Literaturnaya gazeta indicate widespread articulate opposition to sovremennost. Cf. Literaturnaya gazeta 15 January 1959 (Armenian Congress); 5 February 1959 (Lithuanian); 17 February 1959 (Belorussian); 28 February 1959 (Tadzhik); 5 March 1959 (Kirgiz); 14 and 17 March 1959 (Ukrainian); 21 March 1959 (Turkmenian).

A central problem discussed at these Congresses was the difficulty of writing on "contemporary" Soviet themes while preserving national and local literary traditions and forms. Cf., for example, "Uzbek writers" sometimes say: Is it really necessary to search for and to emphasize distinctive national features in the portrayal of contemporary life when all the nationalities in the USSR live in identical social conditions..." (Askad Mukhtar, "Sovremennaya tema--eto i problema masterstva", Druzhba narodov 1959, no. 2). Similar points were made but not pursued very far at the III Congress; the composition of the new Secretariat (cf. Note 34 infra) will probably ensure greater attention for the problems of national literatures.

24. Cf. also e.g. V. Ketlinskaya's article in Literaturnaya gazeta 9 April 1959 and I. Erenburg's "Re-reading Chekhov" in Novy mir 1959 no. 5, p. 193.

25. Kommunist 1957, no. 12, p. 27. The translation is from Soviet Literature 1957, no. 10, p. 19.

26. Literaturnaya gazeta 19 May 1959.

27. The charge of "neo-realism" has been made e.g. against V. Panova for her novel A Sentimental Affair (Lenizdat, 1958) and G. Baklanov for his story "An Inch of Soil" (Novy mir 1959, nos. 5,6). A. Dovzhenko (1894-1956) was posthumously awarded a 1959 Lenin Prize for his film-script "Pesnya o more" ("Poem of an Inland Sea", Soviet Literature 1957, no. 6).

28. Literaturnaya gazeta 19 May 1959.

29. Ibid. 24 May 1959. The quotation is from Soviet Literature 1959, no. 8, p. 95.

30. Literaturnaya gazeta 20 May 1959. Cf. also Mainstream 1959, no. 9, p. 43.

(Some slight changes have been made in the passages quoted from this translation.)

31. Literaturnaya gazeta 21 May 1959. The report of the credentials committee claims that most of the new members are young writers; but only three delegates were under 30, and sixty-nine under 40 (352 delegates were over 50); twenty-three had joined the Union since the II Congress; all had started publishing before 1954.

32. Among writers who, apparently, made no contributions were: Sholokov, Simonov, Erenburg, Leonov, Kochetov, Aliger, Ovechkin, Panova, Shaginyan, Pogodin, Korneichuk and Tendryakov.



33. One wonders whether this is the reason why Khrushchev discarded his prepared brief. The many self-contradictory passages in his improvised statement lead one to believe that he was taken by surprise by the views expressed by many delegates. That Kommunist failed to print the speech is probably less significant than Khrushchev's much-publicized post-Congress pilgrimage to Sholokhov (reported in Literaturnaya gazeta 1 September 1959). This visit to the author of "The Fate of a Man" (Molodaya gvardiya 1957; translated in Soviet Literature 1957, no. 5) and "They Fought for Their Fatherland" (Molodaya gvardiya 1959; Soviet Literature 1959, nos. 7, 8) — war-time stories written without undue haste — may be regarded as a belated gesture of support and encouragement for the policy of greater artistic independence pursued by Fedin, Tvardovski, etc. This seems to be confirmed by the uninhibited attack by Tvardovski and the Editor of Literaturnaya gazeta on V. Druzin (the paper's former Deputy Editor) and B. Dyakov who in Literatura i zhizn defended, as Kommunist had done, poor artistic work if it was ideologically "correct", and who criticized editors and publishing houses for insisting on high artistic standards (cf. Literatura i zhizn 6 and 19 September 1959; Literaturnaya gazeta 10 and 22 September 1959).

Other commentators on the Congress unanimously disagree with this assessment.

Mr. R. Hingley, writing in Soviet Survey 1959 July-September, considers Khrushchev's speech to have been "the second most important event of the Conference" (i.e. the other was the change in the secretaryship of the Union) while speakers who preceded him "took trouble to conform to the ritual of servility".

Mr. M. Hayward in Problems of Communism 1959, no. 4 thinks that "apart from Khrushchev's address, the only other notable contribution to the Congress came in the shape of an article by K. Paustovski".

Mr. J. Lindsay who attended the Congress suggests in Mainstream 1959, no. 9 that "Khrushchev's long impromptu speech in many ways made the Congress, gave it its distinctive note....it may be taken to represent both a personal victory and a defeat for the cliques. Many of the older writers have opposed him for his revelations; one of these at least was moved to tears by his speech and went afterwards to him, saying 'I make my peace with you'."

34. A number of verbal changes and amendments were made, the most important of which seems to have been the re-insertion in the Rules of the "demand" for the "historically concrete portrayal of reality." More significant are the changes in the organization of the Union: the presidium has been abolished, and the Board of Management (144 members) has been given the right to re-elect the secretariat (27 members, including representatives from all Republican Writers' unions) biennially. The right to confirm enrolment of new members and expulsions will now devolve on Republican Unions (Literaturnaya gazeta 22 May 1959).

It may be worth recording that S. S. Smirnov reported to Congress (Literaturnaya gazeta 26 May 1959) that under his predecessor the paper had "lost a considerable part of its subscribers and contributors." Mr. J. Lindsay in Mainstream 1959, no. 9, p. 22 adds that "all remarks to the discredit of Kochetov evoked applause." Some literary periodicals seem to have fared not much better than Literaturnaya gazeta: Partiinaya zhizn 1959, no. 20, p. 33 discloses that official subscriptions, i.e. by party and state organs (excluding libraries, clubs etc.) account for 40-50% of the circulation figures of the following periodicals: Zvezda, Znamya, Oktyabr, Novy mir, Inostrannaya literatura, Druzhba narodov. Publication figures for three of the most important literary periodicals are as follows:

	<u>Novy mir</u>	<u>Znamya</u>	<u>Oktyabr</u>
1957 no. 12	140,000	130,000	130,000
1959 no. 1	140,000	100,000	168,100
1959 no. 5	140,000	102,000	173,200
1959 no. 10	140,000	99,000	169,100

35. Only two or three speakers dwelt on the theme of the "positive" hero.
36. This is not to deny, of course, that "creative assignments" did produce a few interesting and informative reports. Cf. e.g. A. Zlobin, "Na sibirskoi magistrali", Novy mir 1959, no. 1.
37. Literaturnaya gazeta 20 May 1959; Mainstream 1959, no. 9, pp. 37-38.
38. Literaturnaya gazeta 22 May 1959.
39. Ibid. 26 May 1959.
40. Ibid. 22 May 1959.
41. Ibid. 26 May 1959.
42. Ibid. 23 May 1959.
43. Ibid. 24 May 1959; Soviet Literature 1959, no. 8, pp. 102-103.
44. Literaturnaya gazeta 24 May 1959; also in Soviet Literature 1959, no. 8, p. 109. A resolution on Surkov's report was adopted but appears not to have been published.
45. Literaturnaya gazeta 23 May 1959.
46. Ibid. 28 May 1959; L. Nikulin, one of the tutors at the Seminar, had condemned this principle for selecting young writers (in ibid. 16 May 1959): "To me, a writer of the older generation, there was something unnatural and far-fetched in the way the Seminar was organized... Let us assume a no less (and maybe, even more) gifted young author had written his first story about the Civil War or the construction of Magnitogorsk, what then? In any case, can we rear a new generation of writers 'classified according to theme'?" Cf. also his post-Congress article, ibid. 30 June 1959.
47. Ibid. 23 May 1959.
48. Ibid. 20 May 1959; Mainstream 1959, no. 9, pp. 39-40.
49. Literaturnaya gazeta 20 May 1959.
50. Ibid. Alexander Chakovski, for instance, has very precise ideas about the character and "calendar dates" of the "contemporary" novel (cf. his article, "Sovremennost -- eto glavnoye", ibid. 19 March 1959); it should be "about Soviet man of the period between the XX and XXI Congresses. About his complex, often excruciating reflections related to the exposure of the cult of the personality. About his faith in the party's strength and wisdom. About his hatred for those who tried to use the decisions of the XX Congress to harm our regime...and about how this Soviet man -- grown in understanding and matured by experience -- welcomes the XXI Congress of the Builders of Communism enthusiastically, imbued with deep faith in the future, and ready to continue the struggle."
51. Ibid. 28 May 1959.
52. Ibid.; Mainstream 1959, no. 9, pp. 32-36.
53. E. g. Panova's "Sentimentalny roman" and Bakalov's "Pyad zemli" (cf. Note 25 supra); A. Kalinin's "Surovoye pole" (Molodaya gvardiya 1958, no. 2); A. Ivanov's "Poviteli" (Sibirskiye ogni 1958, nos. 2-4); Yu. Kazakov's "Otshchepenets" (Oktyabr 1959, no. 7). It is hoped to discuss these, amongst other works, in a further article.



SOVIET LITERATURE TOES THE LINE

Bulletin of the  
Institute of the USSR  
November 1959  
by A. Gaev

In the six months that have passed since the Third Congress of Soviet Writers there have been unmistakable signs that, in spite of the marked demonstrations of democracy on the part of the present Soviet leaders, the subjection of art to policy is one of the Party's foremost aims. The narrow limits of the official role played by art exclude any manifestations whatsoever of free thought or deviations from the directive contained in Khrushchev's article "For a Close Link Between Literature, Art and Human Living". The Third Congress itself passed quietly along the lines expected by the Party without any surprises. The three post-ponements had apparently been utilized to work out every little detail, assign the roles, and fix the conclusions. The few awkward moments took place minally behind the scenes. Even the replacement of the heads of the Union of Soviet Writers passed without the normal fuss and criticism. At the previous congress, for example, the Union's heads had been subjected to charges of following an incorrect line. The replacement of A. Surkov as head of the Union of Soviet Writers had been decided in beforehand. He read the main report, but did not make the final speech.

Presumably the problem of the provocative literature of the younger generation had been examined in detail; writers under the age of thirty were hardly represented at all at the Congress, only three delegates out of 497. This remarkably low figure is explained by the fact that most young writers are regarded as "seditious free-thinkers", engaged in the search for new forms and new subject matter. Some thorny problems arose during the Congress; but here again action took place behind the scenes. There was, for example, the case of Konstantin Simonov. On May 23, Radio Moscow reported during the Congress' last session that "Konstantin Simonov is on the tribune. He is reading out the greeting from the Congress participants to the Party Central Committee." Apparently Simonov's earlier mistakes had not yet been forgotten and it was decided not to mention him in connection with the publication of such an important document.

As far as purely literary problems are concerned, special attention must be paid to a statement made by the writer Konstantin Puastovsky, not at the Congress itself, but in the newspaper Literaturnaya gazeta during the course of the Congress. Entitled "Undebatable and Debatable Thoughts", it by no means paid lip service to the Party line.<sup>1</sup> The article ended by pointing to the two paths open to the Congress:

The writers' Congress is being held. Will it affirm for writers the free and courageous sweep of creation which alone will create the most important of the literature of our century, Soviet literature. Or will the Congress busy itself with petty supervision of writers and with old discords. In the latter case it will have served no purpose.

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<sup>1</sup>Literaturnaya gazeta, May 20, 1959.

Speaking of the unfavorable situation on the literary front he indignantly asked:

Why are persons admitted to literature and even accepted into the Writers' Union who do not know the Russian language and are completely indifferent to it? Why are we content with the monotony of a bureaucratic and philistine language, with its beggarliness and phonetic ugliness? What right have we to cast the classic and powerful speech created by a generation of our great predecessors into the backyard?

This appeal for a struggle for the purity of the Russian language ought, in Paustovsky's opinion, to find some expression in the decisions of the Congress. In spite of the situation prevailing at the Congress as regards young writers, Paustovsky found the courage to say in his article:

There is a (young generation). And a fine one at that. There are Yury Kazakov, Sergei Nikitin, Nataliya Tarasanko, Vladimir Tendraykov, Yury Trifonov, Richy Dostyan, Yur Bondarev, Iosif Dyk, and many more young writers.

Not only did he mention names, he even emphasized that one should not be alarmed by the militant enthusiasm of young writers. "Youthful enthusiasm is useful."

Ilya Ehrenburg's appearance in the press was just as unexpected and out of tune with the spirit of the Congress. His article in Novy mir, entitled "Rereading Chekhov," appeared shortly before the Congress. Apart from the fact that Marx, Engels and Lenin are not mentioned, the article advances numerous extremely "independent" concepts. Ehrenburg writes, for example, that love for writers "is primarily dependent on their proximity to the spiritual world of the reader";

A witness in court who relates what everybody knows is of no use to anybody, neither to the prosecution nor to the defense. Any writer deserving of the name sees things that escape the eye of the average observer. Isn't it time to repudiate observation as the main quality of a writer?

Developing his thought further, Ehrenburg quotes Chekhov on the basic demand of art:

Art is unique and admirable in that one cannot lie in it... One can lie in love, in politics, in medicine, one can deceive people and even God himself - there were such cases but one cannot deceive in art.

Ehrenburg lists various critical remarks about Chekhov in his time, remarks which could easily apply today. There is the astonished cry, "Why this decadence?"; the remark that Chekhov is not as great as many people believe; and so on. An excerpt from a letter of Chekhov's written at the time of his trip to Sakhalin also has a meaning for the present: "We are letting millions of people rot in prisons, ~~not~~ for nothing, without reason, barbarously... And all this is dumped on the red nosed prison warders." Finally, touching upon the basic principle of art, Ehrenburg emphasizes that contemporary works contain "an



assiduous blend of colors, a variety of nuances. The world 'realism' means nothing in itself..."

A further article which appeared at the time of the Congress was V. Nekrasov's critical review of A. Dovzhenko's motion picture A Poem of the Sea, which was awarded a Lenin prize three weeks prior to the opening of the Congress. Although the article only discusses the motion picture, it broaches questions directly related to Soviet art as a whole and, of course, to literature. Nekrasov writes:

...against a background of gigantic construction work conventional persons symbolizing particular ideas move about, not doing very much and talking garrulously, or rather thinking aloud in conventional journalistic...language...Pathetic...

One must bear in mind that A Poem of the Sea is built around the creation of the Kakhova Water Reservoir, when dozens of villages were submerged and their inhabitants compelled to leave their homes. Nekrasov is disturbed not so much by this fact as by the stereotyped characters. He is, for instance, indignant about the character known as General Fedorchenko who says of himself in the motion picture: "I'm a famous, happy chap and what I feel and do is fine."

Nekrasov writes bitterly about this:

But do you have the right to talk like this, Comrade General? You arrived at your kolkhoz after the war. And you arrived as though you were on holiday. But had you been there earlier? In the difficult postwar years? Oh, Comrade General, is every thing you feel and do really so wonderful?

Such thoughts about this motion picture can be applied to many literary works in which cheap pathos takes the place of truth.

The Soviet leaders carefully noted all the signs of dissent and took steps to "reestablish order in the literary household." The Congress decisions were intended to root out all undesirable elements in literary life and to subject writers to the Party. They were put into effect immediately after the Congress. Khrushchev's speech at the June Party Central Committee plenary session contained an additional directive. In the concluding section of the speech he stated: "We must, comrades, put more effort into the attainment of planned goals, criticize more boldly, display a Bolshevik implacability toward evident faults." Further on, the implacability and just what is meant by failings are expressed more concretely:

We have individuals among the writers who ask what sort of guidance is Party guidance of literature? We reply, you there, don't you recognize the Party's guidance? But what is Party guidance? It is the will of millions of people, the will of millions of minds, the collective wisdom of millions of people. But one writer sits in his dacha somewhere, once in a while produces some puny work, and hopes that it will be recognized as an expression of the spirit of the people of our time, of the entire people. Isn't this a real cult of one's own personality, which, as you see, is unwilling to put up with the guidance of a Party which expresses the will of millions...Such a fellow...wants to put himself above the Party, above the people.

It is quite obvious who is meant: Khrushchev is attacking Pasternak as a warning to other would-be rebels.

The line given was immediately adopted. The June issue of the magazine Inostrannaya literatura contained an article by E. Trushchenko on a review of Doctor Zhivago published in the Parisian journal Nouvelles Critiques. Trushchenko quotes the remarks made by the journal about Pasternak:

"Soviet literature has advanced, moving in step with the people. Pasternak has remained alone. His books cannot be considered the books of a Soviet writer."

...Pasternak has betrayed the society in which he lives and as a result has alienated himself from the people, the (Parisian) review concludes. Neither the talent nor the formal mastery of such a writer can create respect for him."

The literary critic V. Shcherbina attacked Nekrasov's censure of A Poem of the Sea in the newspaper Sovetskaya kultura:

All of Nekrasov's judgements on Dovzhenko's motion picture are intended to show that what is called romance, inspiration,...pathos is nothing more than lifeless convention.

Shcherbina accuses Nekrasov of an inability to believe in the sincerity of romantic pathos, and compares Dovzhenko's work with Nekrasov's criticism as follows: "One can also say that Dovzhenko has created the romantic and heroic image of Soviet man at war, while V. Nekrasov (is) deliberately earthbound and uninspired." Earlier the magazine Iskusstvo kino had carried an article by Y. Varshavsky entitled "One Must Look Into Things," which alleged that Nekrasov "belongs to a particular artistic school" and that he has no right to maintain that his is the only school. In the same issue, the Ukrainian poet M. Rylsky accused Nekrasov of ignoring the national factor in A Poem of the Sea.<sup>2</sup>

The Soviet press set about Konstantin Paustovsky for his above-mentioned article. It was represented on this occasion by a former editor of Literaturnaya gazeta, the author of the novel, The Brothers Ershov, V. Kochetov. His lengthy article "On Truth and Untruth" was published in Literatura i zhizn, the official organ of the Union of Writers of the RSFSR.<sup>3</sup> First, he expressed his amazement at the fact that there had been no objections to Paustovsky's article. Addressing Paustovsky, he exclaimed:

So, "we lack the truth". In the fall this thesis will be 42 years old. Earlier we became extremely agitated when our literature was accused of untruth. In 1956 and 1957, Soviet writers mercilessly fought against this thesis which keeps on popping up, fought since international revisionism attempted to use it as its weapon for attacks on us.

Thus, Paustovsky is tagged with the label of revisionism. Kochetov then endeavors to prove that Paustovsky's assertion that

<sup>2</sup>Iskusstvo i kino, No. 5 (1959).

<sup>3</sup>Literatura i zhizn, June 19, 1959.



Soviet writers lack the truth is a "complete falsehood." In particular, sharp attacks are provoked by Paustovsky's reproach that writers portray straightforward, primitive persons and drag colorless, stereotyped personalities into their works.

Next in line for attack was Ilya Ehrenburg for his article "The Laws of Art" which appeared in Literatura i zhizn of August 16, 1959. In this essay he had asserted that a society which is only interested in technical progress and neglects arts can never resemble the society which is anxious to create. A. Dymshchits, a member of the editorial board of the magazine Zvezda and one of the foremost antirevisionists, countered: "Ehrenburg's (work) contains, alongside some correct observations, incorrect thoughts which bewilder the reader. The advice which he gives to writers cannot but give rise to objections." The objections, or more exactly accusations, made by Dymshchits are: (1) The tasks of literature are being interpreted far too narrowly; (2) nothing has been said of the positive experience of Soviet literature; (3) Ehrenburg does not examine the faults of Soviet literature objectively; (4) he regrets that the word "inspiration" has been buried to no purpose. The following accusation is indicative of the general approach of the attack on Ehrenburg:

He sees the main task of literature as the training of his feelings, and considers the "management of the heart" to be the writer's main field of activity. "There is only one field," asserts I. Ehrenburg, "in which the writer is more informed than the politician, the engineer, the physicist, the astronomer, or the agronomist, this is the secret of the human heart: the sphere of the feelings..." However, the experience of our country's history does not substantiate this judgement: politicians, builders of (gigantic) industrial (enterprises) are more informed in psychology than writers.

The critic cannot understand how Ehrenburg can deny that any work can be written to order. To prove his point, Dymshchits cites dozens of works which, in his opinion, are exemplary, although written to order. These include: Mother by Gorky; the Iron Torrent, by Serafimovich; Chapayev by Furmanov; Seeds of Tomorrow<sup>+</sup> by Sholokhov; That's How Steel Was Tempered by N. Ostrovsky; The Young Guard, by Fadeev; Je brule Paris by Jasienski; and, surprisingly enough, The Second Day and The Fall of Paris by Ehrenburg. Then, the view that art must have a particular line is discussed and Ehrenburg's opinions on the subjects simply dismissed as unclear. There have been numerous signs that Soviet writers are taking note of Khrushchev's directives on art. Sholokhov has recently revised his Seeds of Tomorrow and They Fought For Their Country; Leonov has revised his novel The Thief; while Valentin Kataev has reported in Literaturnaya gazeta that he is revising the novel For the Power

<sup>+</sup>Also known as Virgin Soil Uplifted.

of the Soviets, which is apparently to be retitled In the Catacombs. Referring to this work, Kataev asserted that the revision is "proceeding well and gives him real artistic pleasure"<sup>4</sup>

From time to time the Party theoretical organs Kommunist has something to say about art. A recent issue contained the article "What is Abstractionism in Art?" by Y. Kolpinsky and F. Kaloshin.<sup>5</sup> Although it discussed mainly painting and sculpture, it touched on all forms of art. All formalistic tendencies came under fire as the work of "decadent intellectuals". The political tone of the article is revealed by the very first sentence: "The main aspect of contemporary history is the competition of the two systems, the capitalist and the socialist." In general, the article is another milestone in present policy in the field of art; it issues a strict warning: artists and writers must avoid abstract creation. A propaganda campaign in support of the decisions of the Third Congress of Soviet Writers is also being waged by the magazine Literaturnaya gazeta. Almost every issue contains a section entitled "Writers' Diary" in place of an editorial. Extracts from this "Diary" are extremely revealing:

The concept "modern writer" signifies not only that the writer responds to the basic themes of the present, but also how he responds (V. Lidin)

Contact with the people is one of the chief and constant features of Soviet literature. (Y. Lebedinsky)

Now the writer has no need to walk about with a notebook and to note down questionnaire data on outstanding workers. They go to him...He is happy, seeing, in this, his own civil contribution to the great life of the people. (S. Grakhovsky)

These are the main thoughts found in the statements of writers and they are in full accord with the aims of the Congress or rather of the Party leaders.

An event such as Khrushchev's visit to Mikhail Sholokhov in the village of Veshenskaya and his invitation to the writer to accompany him to the United States must not be overlooked. Although various writers accompanied Khrushchev to the United States the invitation to Sholokhov is of special importance. There can be no doubt that the Kremlin is extremely anxious to have a Nobel Prize won by a Soviet writer who is a Communist. With this aim in mind, Sholokhov was sent on a mission to Scandinavia shortly before the 1958 awards were made. However, the prize for literature went to Boris Pasternak for a work which was rejected by Soviet publishers and has been harshly condemned in the USSR. These facts explain Khrushchev's efforts to put Sholokhov in a position to gain a Nobel Prize. The fact that the writer has not produced any important work in recent years is immaterial in the eyes of the Soviet leaders. Khrushchev set out to advertise a really great writer irrespective of his current literary efforts. The Soviet press treated the visit to Veshenskaya as an

<sup>4</sup>Literaturnaya gazeta, July 18, 1959.

<sup>5</sup>Kommunist, No. 10, 1959.



an event of unusual importance and produced the usual Soviet propaganda falsification. At a meeting held in Veshenskaya Khrushchev told the villagers: "We are meeting you today in Veshenskaya, to which I have come at the invitation of your countryman." Of course, the affair was not quite so simple. Sholokhov could not invite Khrushchev under normal circumstances as a good friend. The visit was specially organized. Khrushchev did not spare the compliments when speaking of the writer and the Soviet press echoed him. The writer Sergei Voronin wrote in an editorial in Literaturnaya gazeta:

In these days the attention of the Soviet people is focused on the important event which took place in the village of Veshenskaya. The head of the government Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev was there as a guest of the favorite writer of our land, Mikhail Aleksandrovich Sholokhov.<sup>6</sup>

The article went on that the meeting had become a national holiday and that Veshenskaya would henceforth be known as the "literary village". Literaturnaya gazeta of September 5 mentioned Sholokhov in an editorial blatantly entitled "An Artist who Enriches the World" and five days later published a further editorial entitled "The Master." A week after the visit Khrushchev's speech at Veshenskaya was issued in pamphlet-form. However, the publicity about Sholokhov did not gain him a Nobel Prize.

While Khrushchev was visiting Sholokhov, another important event was taking place in the Soviet literary world - the Swedish writer Henrik Birnbaum visited Pasternak. The meeting was rather unusual. At first the visitor had difficulty gaining admission to the disgraced writer, but finally Pasternak appeared and spent several minutes with the visitor in his garden. When Birnbaum was leaving, Pasternak said to him: "...don't forget, I beg you, that you weren't with me long. You know they don't like me to receive foreigners now." All sorts of assumptions can be made on the basis of such a brief meeting, but this remark in itself gives a good idea of the present circumstances of the fall writer.

There are thus enough facts available to illustrate the position of writers in the Soviet Union and Party policy in the field of art. The short period of the "thaw" is long past. One can only reminisce on it like Ilya Ehrenburg in his poem, Northern Spring, which appeared in Literaturnaya gazeta 2 months after the Congress and is clearly symbolic in character.<sup>7</sup> The author of the Thaw wrote: "What does it mean in the March frost,/ When gripped with desperation,/ To wait and wait /Until the awkward massive ice begins to move. / But we have known such winters,/ Have endured such cold./ That there was not even sorrow,/ But only pride and misfortune./ And with firm, icy malice,/ Dazzled by a dry blizzard/ We saw, while not seeing,/ The green eyes of Spring." Yet the works which are cultivated are those which fit in with the program proposed for the Congress by the Central Committee greeting. One example is a poem by Konstantin Simonov who has "slipped" so often in the past: "Prize our peaceful efforts,/ I was in the wars - but I live by belief in peace./ May the wind of peace bear the head of our state/ To you on its wings."

<sup>6</sup>

Literaturnaya gazeta, September 8, 1959.

NOT TO BE MICROFICHED

THE SOVIET WRITERS CONGRESS

Along the Middle of the Road

Soviet Survey

No. 29

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Ronald Hingley

The most important event of the Third Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers (Moscow, 18 to 23 May) was the removal of Alexey Surkov from the powerful post of First Secretary and his relegation to the relatively obscure position of Secretary, so that he is now no more exalted in rank than twenty-five other equal-ranking Secretaries. Surkov is an energetic and forceful man whose name has become identified with the practice of placing too much emphasis on committee work and administration, on interfering with authors' manuscripts and allotting them 'creative assignments' (tvorcheskie Kommandirovki). This latter phrase--not surprisingly--has acquired an ironical flavour among Soviet writers.

To those who have kept their ear close to the ground, Surkov's demotion will have come as no great surprise. For some time there have been indications that he has made powerful enemies among his fellow-writers and that these have been intriguing to accomplish his downfall. Since Surkov took a leading part in the recent campaign against Pasternak, some Western observers have interpreted his demotion as part of a move to reinstate Pasternak in the Union. But it is unlikely that this motive has been a factor. Among the people who have got rid of the First Secretary it is probable that only a minority--if any--hold an active brief for Dr. Zhivago. The rest have just got tired of being pushed around.

Fedin, who succeeds Surkov, will certainly push them around a great deal less. Like Leonid Sobolev, who heads the RSFSR branch of the Union, he is not a Party member. What is more important, he is not by temperament a leader or organiser--probably this is the very reason why he has been chosen. As one of the most distinguished living Soviet novelists he brings great literary prestige to his new office, while as an intellectual (and leading chronicler of the Soviet intelligentsia's evolution) he offers a striking contrast to his predecessor. Surkov



is by no means a negligible poet, but in recent years everyone has come to regard him as a literary apparatchik.

The manner of Surkov's removal has been interesting. He has not been in any way disgraced and the whole matter has been handled with the greatest possible decorum. During the proceedings of the Congress we had hardly any hints that he was about to go. He was simply voted out of office when the Congress was over. On the first day he had presented a long report: "The tasks of Soviet literature in the building of Communism." This report formed in theory the theme of the majority of the speeches which followed during the next five days. But very few of the speakers referred to Surkov by name. By those who did mention him he was not greatly abused, but he got absolutely no bouquets--in contrast, for example, with Tvardovsky and Sholokhov.

This report of Surkov's was long, boring, and heavily larded with Soviet literary clichés. That was to be expected. What was surprising was that some of the later speakers criticised it precisely because it was boring, thus introducing a dangerous new principle into the conduct of Soviet congresses and one which, if it became established, might ultimately prove entirely fatal to them. For example, Valentin Katayev, after mentioning the names of three promising young prose-writers, went on to say: "I could also mention a lot of other names, but I don't want to turn my speech into the monotonous reading of the traditional litany which has already become so painfully boring to everyone." This was a back-handed reference to the enormous catalogues in Surkov's report--catalogues of authors who, he claimed, had served Soviet literature in various ways.

One of the more outspoken attacks on Surkov was made in an interesting speech by Anatoly Kalinin from Rostov-on-Don. He complained that the Union had "caught a disease" which caused many writers to spend most of their time in committee meetings instead of at their own desks--a theme which was echoed by many other speakers. He also said that: "The poet Alexey Surkov is in some sense a victim of the Secretary of the Union Alexey Surkov. If one half of all those emotions which he has scattered with lavish hand on committee tables had gone to the building of his poetical strophes, then perhaps today readers might be enjoying more than one long poem produced by his pen."

Kalinin's speech contains several lyrical and almost sycophantic references to Sholokhov, and raises some interesting questions. Why did Sholokhov himself not speak at the Congress? He had made a memorable contribution to the Second Congress in 1954 with his vicious attack on Simonov. He is everywhere acknowledged as Soviet Russia's greatest writer, so that his failure to perform at the Third Congress could not fail to excite comment. Was he even in Moscow? Or sulking in his stanitsa? He is probably no friend of Surkov, and it seems to me quite possible that he "put up" Kalinin to make this speech. In an unpolemical conference it was one of the most polemical contributions and may well reflect His Master's Voice.

A speech by the Moscow poet Nikolay Gribachov contained an even more outspoken condemnation of Surkov's opening report. He said that such reports "degrade our literature, insult and oppress our writers. At the First Congress of Writers of the USSR Leonid Sobolev said that the Party and the Government had given us all rights and had taken from us only one right--that of writing badly. It would have been a good thing if we had at the same time been deprived of the right to such reports as that with which our Third Congress began."

Gribachov speaks with satisfaction of the atmosphere of businesslike calm in which the Third Congress is proceeding "after a serious ideological struggle, complicated by the unprincipled racket and unhealthy hullabaloo kicked up by little-talented and para-literary (okololiteraturny) persons." This is rather tantalising. Gribachov may of course be referring to the well-known series of rows about Dudintsev's Not By Bread Alone and the two Literary Moscow compilations. But it seems possible that he is referring to much more recent squabbles which preceded the Congress, of which we have little knowledge and which have hardly been allowed to erupt into its decorous atmosphere or into the rather less decorous atmosphere of the preliminary Congresses of Republican Unions.

This atmosphere of decorum forms a strong contrast between the present Congress and its more hard-hitting predecessor in 1954, when many harsh words were exchanged. It is perhaps the price which writers have had to pay for the removal of Surkov. It is not often that the Party permits a leading figure to be removed in this way from below, and the procedure has been entirely different from that of more familiar Soviet demotions. Surkov has not been humiliated. In fact he is still waiting in the wings. If necessary he can be reinstated. He may even become more useful to the Party as a threat than he was as a boss.

However this may be, the replacement of Surkov by Fedin remains a step away from illiberalism in the affairs of the Union. An element of greater tolerance is also to be found in what I judge to be the second most important event of the conference--Khrushchev's address which took place on the last day and has been interpreted by some commentators as offering an "olive-branch" to the writers. It certainly offered them a respite from boredom. He spoke impromptu. Although his speech, as reported in Pravda, may have been doctored after the event, it still makes very lively reading. It appears to especial advantage after the dull and incantational harangues which had preceded it.

This was of course far from being Khrushchev's first irruption into the literary world. He took a vigorous part in suppressing the 1956 movement of writers towards greater freedom of expression. Having handled these freedom-writers somewhat roughly, and having successfully stamped out the "revisionist" heresy for which they stood, he has now slightly shifted his position to one of armed benevolence. He spoke almost with approval of Dudintsev's Not by Bread Alone. Although "certain



ill-wishers abroad" (a common formula at the Congress) had been wrong in claiming that Not by Bread Alone was very nearly the greatest work of Russian literature, it did contain "certain pages deserving of attention." Indeed, Mikoyan had once remarked that in places Dudintsev's arguments were an exact repetition of Khrushchev's own. Dudintsev's error had been to exaggerate and to generalise. "But he was never our enemy and was not an opponent of the Soviet System." This drew applause from the delegates.

Does this graciousness imply that Khrushchev is now prepared to allow greater latitude to writers? Scarcely. He compared the present status of the heretics of 1956 with that of a reformed thief--they had better not lapse into crime again. "There is a correct proverb" (another typical turn of phrase) "one doesn't kick a man when he's down." Khrushchev made it quite clear that these writers had been kicked into a posture of submission, and that they would be well advised to remain prone. Otherwise they would get kicked again.

One abiding feature in Khrushchev's attitude to the writers is the ingrained contempt for intellectuals felt by the "worker" or practical man with mud on his boots or machine-oil on his hands. He revealed this in the genially patronising manner of his whole address, and also in his preamble, where he was careful to put writers in the same class not merely as composers and artists, but also as film executives and other "equally remarkable branches of the Soviet creative intelligentsia." And he went on to point out that "life is always incomparably richer, deeper, and more full-blooded than the very best artistic production."

Perhaps Russian writers particularly need this douche of cold water, since when given the slightest chance, they tend to adopt the postures of major prophets or arbiters of destiny no less easily than they adopt the postures of servility. In particular, Khrushchev is anxious that they should not usurp the function of the Central Committee by taking too seriously their role as critics of Soviet society. "Listen, friends, if there's anyone who reveals and lays bare deficiencies and vices, whose hand will not tremble when doing this--these matters (I have retained Khrushchev's "impromptu" syntax in my translation) are the affairs of the Party, they're handled by its Central Committee." One feels that Khrushchev's ideal of a writer is a man who devotes his days to some man-sized job with lathe or tractor, and spends his evenings helping to compile a collective illustrated brochure about youth in the Virgin Lands. Even the most pliable of Soviet writers will not quite stand for this. As a reasonable man, Khrushchev is prepared to humour his writers to some extent. But he feels that they need to be repeatedly reminded of their true place.

Few of the preceding speakers at the Congress needed such reminders, to judge from the trouble they took to conform with the ritual of servility. But at least four senior figures did not speak at all. Apart from Sholokhov, whom I have already mentioned, these were Leonov, Ehrenburg, and Simonov. These four had all taken a prominent part in the Second Writers Congress. Is their failure to speak at the Third Congress to be

interpreted as an example of "the heroic feat of silence" (the form of passive resistance often adopted by disgruntled Soviet authors) or are they in disgrace? Of the four Leonov, at least cannot be much in disgrace, since he has been elected to the Secretariat.

Of the remaining speeches at the Congress (which had 89 speakers in all) there is on the whole not very much that need be said, owing to their conformist character. Not surprisingly, the most independent and interesting contribution was that of Tvardovsky. Tvardovsky complained that "we still seem to be paying a certain tribute to the inertia of our existence of yesterday." He criticised the "lifeless phraseology" of certain speeches and their preoccupation with boring statistics. As any visitor to the USSR knows to his cost, Soviet citizens in all walks of life are obsessed with figures, the recital of which obviously has on them some mysterious therapeutic effect. Nowhere is this obsession more ridiculous than in the sphere of literature, where, as Tvardovsky points out, quality means everything and quantity nothing. He said that he would rather have seven decent plays which he would like to see again and again than seven hundred plays "written in the period under review." The important task was the raising of quality. There were all too many writers willing to take responsibility for "literature as a whole." It was time some of them began to think more of taking personal responsibility for their own individual work. The most provocative sentence in his speech was a blow against the self-congratulatory complacency of many other speakers: "We must say to our literary Yesterday, and even to our Today. 'We can't go on living like this and we shan't go on living like this.'"

Tvardovsky's speech was not calculated to set the Moskva River on fire, but it was a healthy sign. As some of his previous escapades show, he is a loyal but liberal-minded Party member who believes that the Party can afford to allow writers more latitude than it at present contemplates. He recently published an interesting poem in Novy Mir in which he complained against an act of censorship carried out against his work in Pravda. He is a loyal communist, but one whose fortunes serve as a useful barometer of the state of Soviet letters.

No Russian public function is complete without some sort of skandal. The skandal in this instance was provided by Paustovsky. He did not speak at the Congress, probably because he had to say struck too violently against the predetermined atmosphere of decorum. But he published an article in the Literary Gazette of 20 May, one of an otherwise undistinguished collection by various authors issued "a propos of the Congress." This takes a position far in advance of Tvardovsky and shows Paustovsky as a courageous and unrepentant rebel. It says much for the relative state of freedom of Soviet letters, when compared with their darker days, that such an article was printed at all.

Paustovsky gives a warning to those writers (including many of the speakers at the Congress) who take it upon themselves



to speak in the name of the people. He warns them that readers are very well able to distinguish sincerity from an ability to adapt oneself (prisposoblennost) and that they can differentiate a genuine from a merely "shouting" link with the people. He speaks with distaste of various literary "isms," and though he does not mention Socialist Realism among these, he was writing for people trained to read between the lines. He deplored the tradition that novels must always have a falsely happy ending and a balance between light and dark colours nicely calculated in favour of the former. Thank goodness Anna Karenina had been written before the appearance of this tradition. He wondered why, in the forty-first year of the existence of the Soviet system, it was still necessary to give the appearance of proving its superiority to the capitalist system "as if we ourselves doubt this and marvel at it as at some incredible miracle."

Paustovsky's most outspoken sentence reads: "Perhaps the reason why we shout so much and so loudly about truth in literature is because truth is what we haven't got enough of." He also made an eloquent plea for the use of good Russian and the abandonment of jargon. "The language is being bureaucratized from top to bottom, beginning with the newspapers and radio and ending with our ordinary everyday speech." Would the Congress secure freedom for the writers? Or would it occupy itself with submitting them to petty-minded interference and raking up old quarrels? It was time to stop calling one's friends enemies just because they spoke unpleasant truths and did not play the hypocrite.

One or two of the later speakers at the Congress took Paustovsky to task for writing this article, but considering its explosive quality he got off very lightly. The criticisms levelled against him were vague and half-hearted.

The appearance of Paustovsky's article raises an interesting and mildly comforting speculation. We tend all too easily to think of recent Soviet literature as divided into two quite distinct and opposing categories: (a) run-of-the-mill "Socialist Realism" of a drearily conformist type; (b) protest literature such as that associated with the year 1956. In fact, however, a third type of writing has been quietly gaining ground. This consists of works which either avoid politics altogether, or at least dodge the sharper implications of politics. They naturally make fewer headlines in the West, but they include much interesting writing nevertheless. To this "neutral" category belongs some of Paustovsky's own work, the stories of Antonov and such works as Nilin's Cruelty and Panova's Sentimental Novel. The appearance of such works would have been almost unthinkable under Stalin. What hopes does the Third Writers Congress offer for their future?

The other two categories have had their fates settled decisively. Run-of-the-mill Socialist Realism will continue to struggle on. Protest literature is out. As for "neutral" writing--that too has been under attack. But the attack has

taken a very devious form. The opponents of the "neutral" school have framed their attack on it as a plea for greater "contemporaneity." It so happens that the "neutral" writers are more at home describing either pre-revolutionary events or dealing with Soviet society of the twenties, for which there now seems to be a general feeling of nostalgia. The supporters of "contemporaneity" attack this approach under the label of the "theory of distance," that is, the idea that a writer can most effectively treat events with which he is not in too direct contact. Many words were spilled on this subject at the Congress. But these fulminations remained abstract. Individual practitioners of "neutral" writing were not pilloried. This clearly means that they are to be allowed to continue, and of the various signs of "liberalism" for which one searches in the Third Congress this is the most important.

One important result of the Congress has been a radical reorganization of the Union's administration. As set up at the Second Congress of 1954, this consisted of three main bodies:

1. A Board (pravleniye), consisting of well over a hundred members.
2. A Presidium of about 40 members.
3. A Secretariat of 11 members.

As the result of changes now adopted at the Third Congress the Board remains, but the Presidium has disappeared entirely while the Secretariat has been expanded to include 28 members (26 Secretaries in addition to the First Secretary, Fedin, and the Organizational Secretary, K. V. Voronkov). Fifteen members of the new Secretariat are the heads of Republican Unions of Writers. Since these are not normally resident in Moscow, it seems that the affairs of the Union will now generally be decided by a small Inner Secretariat, consisting at the most of 13 members.

One effect of this change has been to reduce the participation of senior writers in the administration of the Union. Sholokhov, Ehrenburg, Simonov, V. Katayev, Panova, and Pogodin were all members of the old Presidium. With its abolition they inevitably lose influence. As already suggested above, some of these writers may be boycotting the Union at the moment--or they may be being boycotted by it on Party instructions. It is difficult to tell.

To judge by the contributions of the minority nationalities to the Congress, few of their new representatives on the Secretariat are likely to lend distinction to its work. As each trundled out his pathetic bundle of painfully mastered ritualistic jargon, a vista began to spread before one's eyes of a far-flung literary empire from which the dust shall never rise. Although they had nothing interesting to say, at least some of these "funnies" lent a certain wild poetry to the proceedings through the medium of their extraordinary names. However ephemeral his actual contribution may have been, no one is likely to forget entirely a man called Toktobolot Abdumomunov.



THE THIRD SOVIET WRITERS CONGRESS: AN APPRAISAL

by Maurice Friedberg  
New York, 31 May 1959

The Third Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers is over. Originally scheduled to begin late in 1958, it was postponed several times and did not open until May 18, 1959.

The timing has not been conducive to great amounts of publicity and the five days deliberation of the Congress received comparatively little attention in the newspapers which had to devote a large part of their four, or at the most, six pages to coverage of the Foreign Ministers' Conference in Geneva. But then, in all likelihood, the editors might have decided that the present Congress has not merited the publicity of its two predecessors — the first, in 1934, at which the now famous doctrine of Socialist Realism was proclaimed, and the second, soon after Stalin's death.

Nevertheless, one should not minimize the importance of the 1959 Congress. Not only because the speeches of its participants offer some hypotheses regarding the destinies of belles lettres of a country in which, as the nineteenth century critic Belinsky put it, literature is almost the sole expression of culture; but also because, decades of regimentation notwithstanding, Soviet writers remain the most courageous, and certainly, the most eloquent segment of the Soviet intelligentsia. As writers in a country where men of letters have traditionally been regarded as teachers and spiritual guides, they are also the most influential living molders of the nation's moods — much more so, undoubtedly, than the official spokesmen for the Party. When, as the apocryphal tale has it, Stalin called the writers "engineers of human souls", he did not advance a program: he was merely stating facts.

The 1959 Congress itself was a rather ceremonial affair. True, there were speeches and objections at these speeches, there were even elections and disputes. But most of the serious work had been accomplished in preceding months in the frequently embittered battles waged in the pages of the writers' newspaper, Literaturnaya gazeta, in the literary periodicals such as Novyi mir, Zvezda, Moskva, as well as those appearing in the minority languages. Simultaneously, the seemingly smooth transition of power from the old to the new board of the Union of Soviet Writers may have concealed a struggle for power, the outcome of which is not yet completely clear.

For while the Party stalwart Alexei Surkov, a symbol of Communist orthodoxy, a mediocre poet and for some years head of the Union of Soviet Writers, had nominally been removed from his post, it was Surkov who delivered the main report entitled "The Tasks of Soviet Literature in the Building of Communism". Furthermore, while Surkov's speech did not go unopposed, the last important speaker, Nikita Khrushchev, threw his weight behind most of Surkov's premises. And Surkov's oration, while containing the customary reports of successes of Soviet literature, disclosed a number of dangers which, while officially no longer in existence, seem to haunt the Soviet leadership.

Thus, Surkov was able to announce proudly that between the last and the present Congress, the membership of the Union of Soviet Writers

grew from 3695 to 4801. Similarly, as usual on such occasions, it was disclosed by Surkov and a number of others that the translations of Soviet literature into foreign languages had greatly expanded and that the prestige of Soviet literature abroad had increased; in short, that Soviet literature is bigger and better than ever.

As far as can be ascertained, there were no objections to the first part of the above statement, but some vigorous exceptions were taken to the latter.

A few months before the Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers had opened, the well-known poet Tvardovsky, whose series "Vasili Tyorkin" gained tremendous popularity during World War II, had declared in his speech at the 21st Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union that the customary Soviet literary statistics are quite meaningless, because he, for one, would rather have six or seven works which he would want to re-read again and again, rather than several hundred dull ones. And no one would deny that the great bulk of recent Soviet literature has, artistically, been quite mediocre and, above all, artificial in inventions of heroes and situations. We should stress that this has been equally characteristic of both the orthodox and the "revisionist" works, for the latter -- with but a few exceptions -- have been constructed according to the same formulae; the positive hero, the villain, the clash between the absolute and the progressive, and the usual denouncement of the victory of good over evil. The most important shortcoming of the literary output of both camps has been the lack of psychological depth and the examination of the conflict from a narrowly politico-economic view. It is this approach that links such seemingly irreconcilable novels as Vladimir Dudintsev's "revisionist" Not By Bread Alone with Vsevolod Kochetov's "anti-revisionist" Brothers Yershov. And it is no mere accident that at the Third Writers Congress Khrushchev reiterated his belief that the much-criticized Dudintsev "is not an enemy of the Soviet regime," (indeed, he had some praise for the novel and quoted Mikoyan as saying that some of Dudintsev's opinions sound very much like Khrushchev's own). In contrast, Pasternak's Doctor Zhivago, which examines human destinies quite outside of politics, is not at all likely to be even partly "rehabilitated".

The lack of appeal of recent Soviet writing is, no doubt, aggravated by the fact that, for the first time in many years, Soviet readers have access to a substantial body of non-Soviet literature -- not only the Western and Russian classics, but modern Western literature as well. Thus the journal Inostrannaya Literatura enjoys an ever-increasing number of readers, and even the journals devoted to Russian literature not infrequently print Western European and American novellas and short stories -- and these are by no means limited to works by left-wingers, which would owe their appearance to their authors' political sympathies rather than artistic merit. Writers of the stature of Hemingway, Faulkner, Moravia, and Thomas Mann are now quite readily available to Soviet readers. The Old Man and the Sea, for example, seems to be enjoying great popularity with the more intellectual stratum of the public. It is understandable, therefore, that Soviet literateurs experience serious difficulty competing with these masters for the favor of Soviet readers, and that some Soviet writers exhibit a tendency to imitate the artistic devices of Western men of letters.

What has been the reaction to this at the Writers Congress?



Surkov, in his speech, was quite willing to concede the desirability of such ancient techniques as the introduction of love stories and even marital "triangles". But these, he emphasized, have no place in Soviet literature except within the framework of presentation of the total picture of Soviet society on the threshold of Communism. In other words, it appears -- and several of the recent works of Soviet literature verify this hypothesis -- that Surkov's demands can be reduced to a replica of what Soviet literature had so often presented in the post-Zhdanov period: the outcome of the love story, and indeed its progression, was to depend on indices of labor productivity. Except, perhaps, that Surkov would acquiesce to extra-marital love, a taboo in the late 1940's and early 1950's.

As for some of the other Western techniques, objections were raised by the ideological purists well in advance of the Congress: literary devices, they claimed, must express the spirit of the epoch, and therefore Soviet writers must develop their own rather than copy from Western writers.

Most of the discussion at the Congress, however, centered around the familiar socio-ideological problems. Thus, a good deal of attention was devoted to the problems of the "positive hero" -- a dilemma that has plagued Soviet literature since its inception and which, indeed, has roots going back to the Russian radical critics of the nineteenth century -- Dobrolyubov, Pisarev and Chernyshevsky (see, e. g., Ruffus W. Mathewson's fine study The Positive Hero in Russian Literature, Columbia University Press, 1958).

The problem could be summarized thus: since the primary purpose of Soviet literature is a didactic one, namely the molding of human psyches into an image desired by the Party, works of Soviet literature must be centered around a positive protagonist whose actions should present the reader with an example to be emulated. In this respect, Soviet literature departs even from the traditions of didactic literatures, both Russian and non-Russian, where the true moral is provided by the negative example of the villain or the hero who strays from the path of righteousness, with the positive hero remaining on the fringes of action -- not to speak of great literatures of all nations where the tragic element predominates, where the protagonists' downfall, while in itself instructive, is depicted as having taken place in spite (or in the absence) of his own free will. Some of these protagonists, by the way -- Oedipus, Anna Karenina, Don Quixote, Raskolnikov, Othello, Madame Ranevskaya, to mention but a few -- have to this very day a magnetic appeal to Soviet readers. Instead, works of Soviet literature are centered around the descendants of the artificial "positive" heroes of the pseudoclassical raisonneurs of the type of Pravdin and Starodum in the works of the eighteenth century Russian dramatist Fonvizin; or the notoriously purposeful revolutionary Rakhmetov in Chernyshevsky's moralizing radical novel What Is To Be Done?; or of the active, well-meaning and rather two-dimensional Stoltz from Goncharov's Oblomov.

The emphasis on the "positive hero" has become noticeably stronger since the end of World War II, and it is this emphasis which accounts for the deadeningly dull quality of many of the post-war Soviet literary creations. This is not an opinion of an individual Western writer hostile to Soviet literature -- at the Writer's Congress, Khrushchev himself complained that he must frequently rub his eyes and prick himself with a pin in order to keep awake while reading many a Soviet "masterpiece".

In the post-war years, Soviet novels, plays and poems came to be dominated by stuffy paragons of Communist virtue shown while carrying out the commandments of the Central Committee -- over-fulfilling production quotas, settling on virgin soil, improving the battle-preparedness of the armed forces, or excelling in studies at a university. To conform with the narodnost' requirement of the post-war interpretations of Socialist Realism, these protagonists spoke, more frequently than not, in the colorless, drab language of Pravda editorials; the postulate of ideinost' made them true believers in the Communist articles of faith; the demand of tipichnost' required that their opponents be shown as either agents of foreign powers, backward "survivals of the past" or other villains whose arguments have no real merit -- and who are, above all, doomed to extinction, while the upright Communist hero was, inevitably, to remain victorious.

Aside from the dullness, these works suffered also from the fact that they were so unbelievable -- their description of life under the Soviet regime were so unlike the experiences of the Soviet reader. Little wonder that one of the chief demands of the post-Stalin literary rebels was that an end be put to the "idealizers" and "embellishers" -- lakiroyshchiki was the Russian term -- and that Soviet literature pay some attention to the realities of Soviet life. The expressions of this revolt are well-known by now -- these included admissions of gruesome poverty and drunkenness in the poems of Yevtushenko; of blind obedience to the authority coupled with deep-seated indifference in the novellas of Granin; of state-condoned anti-Semitism and regimentation of the artist in Ehrenburg's Thaw; of an all-powerful bureaucracy in Dudintsev's Not By Bread Alone, and so forth. All those came to be known by the rather meaningless label of "revisionism" and were violently attacked in the years preceding the 1959 Congress. The dispute seems to have been resolved by Khrushchev himself. After stating that the term "embellishers" had been applied to abuse honest writers "show show the life-affirming strength of the new, of the Communist", Khrushchev went on to declare himself to be an "embellisher" of sorts whose sympathies are on the side of the traditional practitioners of Socialist Realism. Khrushchev continued:

Some of them ("anti-embellishers") say that the central task of literature consists of discovering all sorts of vices and shortcomings, while ignoring the great achievements of the Soviet society. Now hear this, dear friends: if there is anyone who unmask and unfolds vices and shortcomings, and whose hands don't tremble at doing this, then this is the Party and its Central Committee.

Let us turn to life itself. Did anyone twist our arm to compel us to make the report at the 20th Party Congress on the cult of personality and its consequences, to make public the mistakes committed in connected with this phenomenon?

(Pravda, May 24, 1959, p. 1. NOTE: This appears to be the first public admission of Khrushchev's "secret" speech condemning Stalin, the existence of which had previously been denied by the Soviet authorities and the text of which is still not to be obtained by Soviet citizens -- M.F.)



The historical genre is a bona fide variety of the literature of Socialist Realism and, indeed, there have been periods when it has enjoyed preeminence over the others. By projecting into the past some of the problems confronting the present, writers of historical novels and dramas have served the Soviet cause well. Works such as Konstantin Trenyov's The Pugachev Uprising, Alexei Chapygin's Stepan Razin, or Alexei Tolstoy's Peter the Great, identified current Soviet policies with everything that was noble and progressive in Russia's past, and suggested to their readers that the present-day enemies of the Soviet regime are the direct descendants the villains and oppressors of the days of yore. Soviet citizens have shown themselves to be very susceptible to this sort of propaganda, particularly during World War II, when Russo-German conflicts of past centuries were resurrected in Soviet fiction with the express purpose of strengthening the population's anti-German sentiments.

Very recently, however, many writers, for reasons of their own, became attracted to the historical genre. It appears that in the publication of novels, poems and dramas dealing with the past -- not only distant but quite recent as well -- the current requirements of Socialist Realism are enforced less strictly. It works dealing with eras gone by, the heroes need not be the virtuous automatons which are expected to inhabit a novel set in present-day Russia; further, one can also draw life-size and eloquent villains; finally, the situations can be livened up with exotic costumes, archaic language, as well as scenes showing the corruption of the exploiting classes and the backwardness of the enslaved, though noble, masses. Mutatis mutandis, the same can be accomplished in a novel dealing with the Civil War or even the period of the New Economic Policy in the 1920's and the first Five-Year Plan. The rationale recently used by Soviet writers who preferred to shun contemporary topics has been that of the "pathos of distance": only when the writer is sufficiently removed from the period he describes does he, it was claimed, gain the necessary perspective and insight.

This theory was resolutely rejected at the 1959 Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers as unsound: Pushkin and Tolstoy, declared the opponents of the "pathos of distance" theory, wrote about men of their own generations. Further, it was added, even a fine Soviet novel set in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries is no substitute for one describing the glory of the building of Communism. And the primary task of the Soviet writer is to reflect this glory in his works, thus inspiring his readers to new heroic deeds of labor. It is interesting that both the proponents and opponents of the "pathos of distance" argument thought it wiser to bypass in discreet silence the real reasons for the controversy, which are to be sought in the narrow limitations imposed on the writer's autonomy by the current formulae of Socialist Realism.

A frequent point of disagreement among Western students of Soviet affairs is the extent to which Communist dogma influences Soviet actions. There are those who claim that the importance of theory is paramount and those who object to it, pointing to numerous instances in which dogma has been reinterpreted to provide theoretical justification for Soviet policies. The latter view is certainly to be preferred when examining certain aspects of discussion at the Third Writers Congress.

The evaluation of the work of Mikhail Sholokhov is a case in point. Usually considered the Soviet Union's greatest novelist, the politically untroublesome Sholokhov seems, artistically, to violate all principles of Socialist Realism. Certainly, he is a practitioner of the "pathos of distance" theory: his most recent works, the long-awaited chapters from the novel They Fought for Their Country and even the novella The Fate of A Man, are set — the first completely and the latter for the most part — in the days of the second World War and not in the late 1950's. The protagonists of Sholokhov's works are not the ikon-like idealized Communists who are to be found in most of the orthodox Soviet literary output. None of his works has the almost mandatory Soviet cheerful ending — indeed, the tragic denouncement of his Silent Don has been the literary cause celebre for many years. Even the language spoken by his protagonists has been very much unlike that found in other Soviet books — Sholokhov's is more colorful, varied, spiced with folksy and, on occasion, quite obscene vocabulary.

And yet, at the Third Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers many speakers, including Khrushchev himself, referred in glowing terms to Sholokhov's work, pointing to him as a model of fine Soviet literature. It appears that Sholokhov is gradually achieving the status accorded in the Soviet Union to literary classics of the past — men whose works are to be read, discussed, admired, but not really imitated.

In connection with the classics, it should also be noted that their ghosts continue to haunt the Soviet literateurs. In his speech at the 21st Party Congress, which convened several months prior to writers conclave, the poet Tvardovsky noted the not unknown fact that among the present-day Soviet writers there are no Pushkins, Tolstoys, or even Gorkys.

The question may well arise: why should the literature of a nation living under the yoke of reactionary monarchs be so superior to that of the most progressive society in the history of mankind? Occasionally Soviet writers themselves hint at the real reasons. These are not only the accidents of literary genius, but also the fact that even during the most oppressive periods of tsarist rule, the government did not interfere in the writer's professional problems. True, there was censorship, which made it impossible to write on some topics and difficult to speak one's mind on others. But at no time did Russia's emperors institute a state-sponsored organization which would dictate to artists not only what to create but also how to create. Konstantin Paustovsky, a veteran Soviet author, hinted at this fact in his speech at the Congress when he suggested that Leo Tolstoy might not have been very comfortable in the Union of Soviet Writers. And some years ago Ilya Ehrenburg wrote in his novella The Thaw that Leonardo da Vinci might have had serious difficulties obtaining membership in the Union of Soviet Painters.

Judging by the regional writers meeting in the fifteen constituent republics, it appears that the recent All-Union Writers Congress was envisaged by the literary authorities as a triumphant meeting celebrating the victory over "revisionism" in literature. It may well be that the announcement of complete victory is somewhat premature, for only weeks before the opening of the Congress, reports from the republic meetings indicated that "revisionists" moods had not been completely uprooted among



the writers, particularly the younger ones. This, by the way, may offer some clues to the real reasons behind Khrushchev's insistence that young writers spend some time writing as amateurs before joining the Writers Union as full-time members; the same topic was discussed at length in numerous articles in the Literaturnaya gazeta shortly before the Congress. It is also of some interest to note that the "revisionists" are to be found in special abundance in the newly acquired Soviet territories, particularly in Lithuania.

And yet, it appears that many of the delegates arrived at the Congress full of hope that something might be salvaged from the relative freedom enjoyed by them during the short-lived "liberal" period after Stalin's death. To be sure, it seemed unlikely that the Soviet authorities might yield where the content of literature was concerned. The Party leadership was still much too worried about the subversive potentialities of the "revisionist" writing and criticism produced in Poland and Yugoslavia and, since the Moscow International Congress of Slavists in the fall of 1958, about the literary scholarship in the Slavic field produced in the United States. The frequent violent attacks on all of these in the Soviet literary periodicals attest to the existence of this fear. But there was a possibility of concessions in matters pertaining to literary form.

The importance of this problem has long been felt by many Soviet writers whose creative individualities were gradually being obliterated by the uniform demands imposed on their output by the official interpreters of Socialist Realism. It was almost universally agreed that recent Soviet writing has been characterized by a tedious uniformity of language and style. The former could be neither too difficult for the "average" reader - failure to comply with this requirement would invite accusations of "formalism" - nor too folksy, a deviation known as "crude naturalism". As for style, and excessive innovationist zeal would almost immediately be interpreted as an instance of "modernism", which is a very dangerous charge, since - by logic comprehensible only to Soviet critics - "modernism" is considered a literary manifestation of political "revisionism".

Shortly before the Congress one of the Soviet Union's most sophisticated poets, Ilya Selvinsky, wrote in an article in Literaturnaya gazeta that only the poetry of Surkov, the then secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers, of Tvardovsky and of Isakovsky, the writer of lyrics for Soviet marching songs, is looked upon with favor by the literary pundits. As for the writers of "difficult" poetry (i.e., men like Pasternak and Selvinsky himself), their lot is scorn and reproaches. Soviet music, Selvinsky continued, permits the coexistence of military songs and popular tunes on one side, with the serious music of Prokofiev, Shostakovich and Khachaturian. Why then could not Soviet poetry do the same? Why cannot there be light verse side by side with difficult poetry which may not necessarily be comprehensible to everyone, but which - just as serious music - brings enjoyment to a select audience?

While Selvinsky's article has been attacked at the Congress, there is hope that writers shall be given somewhat larger latitude in their choice of artistic devices. A. Dymshits, one of the last speakers at the Congress, recalled Mayakovsky's dream of a time when poets, while

ideologically unanimous, would engage in professional polemics on problems of language and style. Said Dymshits, "This time has come".

An interesting by-product of the intensification of emphasis on contemporary themes have been the suggestions in the speeches of both Khrushchev and Surkov -- and also in a newspaper article by David Zaslavsky who specializes in "timely" topics -- that writers would do well to devote more time to publicistic writing on important issues of the day. It also appears likely, on the basis of the speeches at the Congress, that writers eager to cultivate "contemporary" themes will now favor short stories and novellas over full-length novels. A humorous account of tribulations of one writer has recently appeared in a literary monthly: the author, it seems, responded to the call for "contemporary" themes now in favor by writing a novel about the planting of kok-sagiz, a rubber-producing vegetation. When his novel had finally been completed, the hapless author learned that Soviet scientists have in the meantime perfected a method of synthetic rubber production -- thus making both kok-sagiz and his novel obsolete. Similar disappointments would, of course, be less likely to occur in the writing of shorter works.

It is also probable that shorter works will help solve the apparent conflict of interests between Russia's writers and readers. The reasons for the clash are of rather capitalistic nature: the royalties of Soviet writers are calculated on the basis of their works' length -- with obvious results (indeed, a Soviet lawyer has recently demonstrated that certain greedy poets favor the meter used by Mayakovsky -- one word in each line). Soviet readers, on the other hand, have only limited time at their disposal and Khrushchev pointed out that many of them -- including himself -- shy away from thick volumes. Indeed, in view of the above complaints one might venture the guess that the time is not too far off when Soviet publishing houses will begin to bring out book digests which are as yet unknown in the Soviet Union.

The Third Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers bore little resemblance to the preceding one which took place at a time when the leadership of the country was still more or less collective. The Second Congress was a gathering of great expectations and a good deal of freedom. The old dictator was dead and a new one had not yet appeared. And, to paraphrase Dostoyevsky, when there is no God, everything is permitted.

But the recent Congress was in many respects reminiscent of the first one which was held in 1934, or exactly a quarter of a century earlier.

Both were held at a time when the struggle for power had ended and when the transfer of authority from one dictator to the other had been completed.

Both Congresses heralded the establishment of the new dictator as a guide and mentor of the nation's writers. Thus, e.g., Pravda reported on May 23, 1959:

Comrade Khrushchev's (extemporaneous) speech was frequently interrupted by impassioned, prolonged applause.



Overcome with joyful and noble feelings, the writers expressed their heartfelt gratitude to the Party for this new manifestation of its paternal solicitude for the growth and blossoming of Soviet literature, for the wise directives which brighten the path of Socialist Realism during the expanded building of Communism, directives which inspire writers to serve the Soviet people with their work.

Both Congresses reaffirmed the primacy of the utilitarian aspect of imaginative literature. Thus Khrushchev repeated the Stalinist appellation of writers -- "engineers of human souls" -- while the Central Committee of the Communist Party in its message to the Congress (Pravda, May 23, 1959) stressed that

The high calling of the Soviet writer is to unfold truthfully and imaginatively the beauty of the heroic toil of the people, that grandeur and majesty of the struggle for Communism, to be an impassioned propagandist (!) of the Seven-Year Plan, to uproot the survivals of capitalism in the consciousness of the people, to assist in the removal of everything that still hinders our movement forward.

Both Congresses were held in the wake of an embittered struggle between the "liberals" and the Party "militants"; both promised the liberals a somewhat more lenient treatment and both restrained the overly zealous militants. Thus the 1934 Congress was held after the dissolution of the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers, and the newly-formed Union of Soviet Writers was to admit all writers, including the so-called fellow-travelers whose support of the regime had been lukewarm and whose ideological mistakes were many. At the 1959 Congress Khrushchev proposed that the prodigal sons -- the "revisionists" -- be readmitted into the fold, and that their mistakes be forgiven, though not at all forgotten:

In my view, it is necessary to help these comrades to go over from their mistaken views to correct, principled positions. One must not reproach them for their past errors, one must not constantly point one's finger at them. This will only benefit our common cause. (APPLAUSE). One must not remind them, but one must not forget, either. (APPLAUSE). As they say, one must "tie a knot", just in case, so that, when necessary, to be able to take a look at it and see how many knots were tied and to whom they belong. (ANIMATION IN THE HALL).

At both Congresses a militant Party hack was replaced as head of the writers' organization by an elderly, respected, benign and essentially apolitical writer. In 1934 the change was from Leopold Averbakh, who had headed the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers, to the venerable Maxim Gorky. In 1959 Alexei Surkov was replaced by Konstantin Fedin, 67 years old, former member of the non-political literary organization, The Serapion Brothers, one of the very few Soviet writers who had ever lived abroad (during World War I Fedin was interned in Germany), and author of a number of distinguished works, including Cities and Years (1924), the

story of a Russian intellectual who cannot make peace with the Soviet regime; Transvaal (1928), an interesting study of a greedy, cruel but respected kulak, reminiscent of some of the self-made businessmen in the works of Gorky; The Brothers (1928), which depicts the conflict between an artist's yearning for independence and his obligations to the Soviet state; The Rape of Europe (1934-35), a rather involved tale about Western capitalists, Soviet trade officials and several "international" love affairs; and The First Joys (1945-46) and An Unusual Summer (1948) which show a small town on the Volga, the first novel on the eve of World War I, and the second in 1919, i.e., after the Revolution. Several years ago Fedin had been attacked for his volume of non-political memoirs. The only English-language evaluation of Fedin's works in English seems to be the recent volume by Ernest J. Simmons (Russian Writers and Soviet Ideology, Columbia University Press, 1958).

Finally, at both Congresses the conciliatory attitude toward the non-conformists was conditioned by the demand that they mend their ways. Furthermore, the desire to bring them back into the fold of a single writers' organization was prompted by the desire to enable the Party to supervise their activities in the future. The results of the 1934 "amnesty" of the persecuted "fellow-travelers" are well-known -- many of the formerly independent have, indeed, become efficient "engineers of human souls". At the 1959 Congress Khrushchev noted that the "angels of reconciliation" are already in the air, but then, after warning that the Party forgives but never forgets, added:

You may ask -- what am I appealing for? Am I inflaming passions in a struggle, or am I appealing for reconciliation? I shall say this: I am appealing for a consolidation of forces on a principled base.

Indeed, it was Khrushchev himself who admitted at the 1959 Congress that the status of the Soviet writer had not really been altered in the twenty-five years since the First Writers' Congress, that the Soviet writer is still in no sense an independent artist:

Comrades! Can one speak of a "writer's right to mistakes", of a "writer's right to failures"? I think that the writer's very position and role in society deprive him of such rights. Leonid Sergeyevich Sobolev put it well at the First Writers' Congress in 1934: the Party and the Government gave the Soviet writers absolutely everything and took away from him only one thing -- the right to write badly. In my view, the people took away from the writer not only the right to write badly but, above all, the right to write incorrectly.

Khrushchev's memory had failed him. The statement was made in 1934 not by Sobolev, who presently listened to Khrushchev's speech, but by a writer who in the late 1930's disappeared in a Soviet concentration camp. The name of the writer was Isaac Babel. And the quotation given by Khrushchev was not complete, either, for after making the above observation Babel continued:



Comrades, let us not fool ourselves: this (the right to write badly, to write incorrectly) is a very important thing, and to take it away from us is no small thing. Let us give up this right, and may God help us. And if there is no God, let us help ourselves....

Soviet Studies

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by Alfred Dressler  
(extracts)

## I

The renewed crisis - after a brief superficial consolidation of Soviet literature between the XX Congress and the publication in May 1957 of Khrushchev's statement on 'Closer Alliance of Literature and Art with the Life of the People,'<sup>1</sup> was part of the political and social processes of that period. It was part of the ambiguous and confused interpretation of the decision to liquidate 'the cult' and its results, and of the increasingly obvious disunity within the collective leadership which extended to the forms and limits of party control over literature.

The crisis manifested itself in the temporarily unchecked demands of writers and critics for more freedom in the choice and treatment of subjects, in the rehabilitation of the literature of the '20s and of writers and critics victimized during Stalin's purges, in a disregard for political taboos and literary conventions, and in the publication of works that pleaded the case of the 'small man' against the bureaucratic rule of party and state.

Even the events in Poland and Hungary passed almost unnoticed. Literary controversies continued in the absence of immediate official reactions. The second volume of Literaturnaya Moskva was published at the end of 1956.<sup>2</sup> In December K. Simonov published his controversial 'Literary Notes'.<sup>3</sup> At the Plenum of the Managing Committee of the Union of Ukrainian Writers, A. Surkov confessed his reluctance to write poems of 'affirmation' for fear of being daubed a 'varnisher of reality.'<sup>4</sup> As late as March 1957, at what seems to have been a stormy meeting of the Board of Management of the Moscow section of the Union of Soviet Writers, Dudintsev, Evtushenko, contributors to Literaturnaya Moskva and its editors defended their positions and refused to yield.<sup>5</sup>

By the time of the Moscow meeting, the writers seemed to have gained a fair measure of freedom of expression (Pasternak's novel, however, had been rejected by Novy mir in September 1956) and an unwonted immunity from reprisals. They had been encouraged to settle their conflicts by free discussion within the Writers' Union, and measures had been taken to enable publishing houses to decide their policy without outside interference.<sup>6</sup> But the party appeared to be speaking with two voices: while hopes that yet more irksome restrictions might be swept aside had been fed by Shepilov's unorthodoxy ('eager for personal popularity, he began to flirt with the demagogues')<sup>7</sup>, the faction in control of Pravda, Kommunist and Literaturnaya gazeta refused to abdicate the party's mentorship over literature, and their emphasis on ideological conformity had grown more urgent and menacing recently.<sup>8</sup>

These inconsistencies and the absence of the customary lead from the Central Committee were reflected in the sharp divisions at the Moscow meeting and in the non-participation at this meeting of 'eminent writers' and 'leading officials of the Union.'<sup>9</sup> The writer left to their own devices, had reached a deadlock that could only be resolved by the Central Committee's intervention.

The timing of Khrushchev's statement must be stressed against this background: it was published only in August as an abridged



summary of speeches made on 13 May (at a joint session of the writers with the Central Committee), on 19 May (at a reception of writers, artists, sculptors and composers), and at a meeting of active party members in July 1957. When Khrushchev met the writers on 13 May, the showdown with the 'anti-Party group' was eminent, and when he addressed the active party members in July, the dismissal of Molotov etc. from the CC was an accomplished and published fact. For the first time since the XX Congress the formulation of a monolithic party line in literature had become possible.

The writers had gathered in Moscow for the third (extended) plenary session of the Union of Soviet Writers, which had been postponed from February and took place 14-18 May. What impressions about the split in the collective leadership they had taken away from their meeting with the members of the CC on 13 May, is a matter for conjecture. One gathers that they had been confronted by a divided CC: it is claimed that the anti-party group 'tried to disparage and discredit the importance of this meeting...which played such an important part in creating a healthier atmosphere' in the Union, and that some writers had frankly accused Shepilov of 'disorienting writers and their press by his double-dealing.'<sup>10</sup> The reports of the proceedings of the plenary session<sup>11</sup> leave little doubt, however, that the conservative, anti-revisionist elements in the Writers' Union had regained the initiative. The attacks on Yashin, Aliger, Dudintsev and other critics, and on the Moscow section of the Union are cantankerous, belligerent, intimidating; their refusal to recant or even participate in the debates is angrily denounced as a 'conspiracy of silence' instigated by the enemies of the Soviet Union abroad.<sup>12</sup>

Endorsement of the new alignment in the Writers' Union is given by Kommunist 1957 no. 10 (July). Molotov, Malenkov and Kaganovich are denounced in the first leader for having worked for 'a return to the incorrect methods of leadership and control condemned by the XX Congress'; the second leader, dealing more specifically with literature, accuses Shepilov of attempting to replace party leadership and control over literature with 'bourgeois-idealistic ideas of creative freedom'. The artists are again assured of their right to settle their 'ideological and creative problems' freely within their professional unions but a reference to Lenin's attitude to Proletkult makes nonsense of this right.<sup>13</sup> A brief summary of Khrushchev's statements of 13 and 19 May differs (as does the whole article) considerably in tone and emphasis from the fuller version.

The purpose of Khrushchev's statement was to reconcile both the 'conservatives' and the 'critics' to his current policies, and to formulate the conditions for a truce between the warring factions in the Union. Even if short-lived, an arrangement along these lines would prepare the ground for either a more stable compromise in the future or the emergence of a new, loyalist grouping. The impending, or already accomplished, eclipse of the 'anti-party group' made it desirable to gain the support of, or at any rate, not to antagonize further, their literary sympathizers who were well entrenched in leading positions in the Writers' Union. The reiterated partial rehabilitation of Stalin 'in whom we all sincerely believed' is linked with the rehabilitation of the 'varnishers of reality', Stalin Prize winners, and those writers who stood 'closest to Stalin'. In dealing with the 'critical' writers, Khrushchev is anxious to call to order those (he names Dudintsev and Aliger) who have gone too far in their one-sided condemnation of past mistakes (they are 'ignorant of life, lack adequate political experience and the

ability to understand the main determining factors in life'); his harshest remarks are addressed to 'unreliable' editors and heads of publishing houses who 'succumbed to the strong influence of men holding wrong positions and...became vehicles for unhealthy moods and tendencies.'<sup>14</sup> At the same time he makes it clear that a return to the monochrome literature of the Stalin period is undesirable, and that constructive criticism will be encouraged; glorification through embellishment is no longer incumbent on the Soviet writer, criticism is welcomed if it leads to affirmation. No excommunications are announced, and even the indicted writers are not to be ostracized, the door is to be left wide open for their return to the fold.<sup>15</sup>

The short-term result of this policy statement was a temporary freeze-up. The long-term results are still in the making. Editorials and letters of welcome and endorsement seized on Khrushchev's denunciation of the thaw-writers and on his demand for *partiinost* - overlooking the fact that he had not only confirmed new methods of party control, but that his new policy (as he had presented it to the writers) promised to modify the meaning of *partiinost*, and was meeting many of the criticisms made in 1956. Literary journals began to play safe again; Novy mir, in particular, filled its pages with translations, memoirs and historical and documentary material devoted to the 40th anniversary of the revolution. The intensified political campaign against Yugoslav and international revisionism created a situation in which even the freedom granted by Khrushchev seemed to weight heavily on the writers, and to give added advantages to the conservatives. No major work was published in 1957 (after G. Nikolayeva's Struggle Along the Road, Oktyabr nos. 3-7); critics were preoccupied with repulsing Yugoslav and Polish attacks on Socialist Realism, and with trying to repair the damage done in 1956. The fourth plenary session of the Board of Management of the Writers' Union (11 to 13, February 1958)<sup>16</sup> confirms the predominance of the die-hards whose claim that the 'party-document' (i.e., Khrushchev's speeches) has played and is playing an important part in the struggle against revisionist tendencies' is unchallenged: the 'critics' (Aliger, Kazakevich, Rudny - co-editors of Literaturnaya Moskva and Ovechkin<sup>17</sup> are named) are absent or ignore the appeal to 'break their silence and disarm.' The debate is remarkable mainly for its avoidance of theoretical and programmatic pronouncements. Commonplace appeals to the traditions and achievements of Soviet literature reveal a singular lack of ideas on how to solve the impasse. S. Babayevski seemed to hint at the uneasiness felt by many writers, on both sides, when he called for a halt to 'banging writers' head together...let us concentrate on our main job, our literary work.' But nobody undertook to answer the implied question as to what 'new contents and appropriate form' (S. Smirnov) should take the place of the 'literature of denunciation'. The failure of the die-hards to exploit their apparently undisputed control is evidence of the efficacy of non-cooperation on the part of leading writers and members of the Moscow section. The Central Committee, too, cannot have failed to be impressed by his demonstration of 'absenteeism' which proved once more that cooperation could only be bought by further concessions. Behind-the-scenes intervention, even prior to the Plenum, to restrain the anti-thaw faction cannot be excluded in view of the fact that its political and literary platform, The Yershov Brothers,<sup>18</sup> written in 1956-1957, was published only in the summer of 1958...



Since Khrushchev's statement, the party had studiously abstained from direct and open intervention - e.g. not a single editorial on literature appeared in Kommunist from August 1957 to December 1958. Significantly, neither the government nor the Central Committee intervened in the Pasternak affair.<sup>44</sup> Its own anti-revisionist campaign appeared to identify the party with the conservative writers' group of which the author of Yershov Brothers, as editor of the official organ of the Union of Soviet Writers, was an important member. The apparently delayed publication of his novel and its far from unanimous reception by critics, together with other developments in 1958, betrayed the Central Committee's anxiety to dissociate itself from its embarrassing allies.

The XX Congress, it will be remembered, had instituted eight annual Lenin Prizes for Literature and Art. In 1957, five prizes had been awarded, including two for works of literature. In 1958 four prizes were awarded but none for literature. Kochetov, whose novel The Zhurbins had been recommended for an award by the Union in 1957 (his Yershov Brothers is recommended by his publishers for a 1959 award), in a signed article in Literaturnaya Gazeta (24 April 1958) protested against the Lenin Prize Committee's failure to encourage the development of Soviet literature. The recommendations of the professional Unions, he complains, have counted for less in the award of prizes than 'the black and white balls used in the committee's secret vote'. In his reply the committee referred to the 'well-known fact' that 'Stalin Prizes were often awarded with underserved generosity and unbecoming haste; the result was that, alongside with really good work, insignificant and often downright bad work was given awards. This year's awards, to be published in April, are unlikely to reveal any changes in the committee's policy.

Even more significant (in its wider implications) was the announcement - a belated response to widespread demands in 1956 for the revision of the 1946-48 policy - of the Central Committee's decision 'On the correction of mistakes in appraisal of the operas 'The Great Friendship', 'Bogdan Khmel'nitski' and 'With all my Heart''.<sup>45</sup> The Central Committee still goes through the motions of defending the principles and intentions of the 1948 resolution but it firmly repudiates the practical applications of these principles as 'incorrect, unfounded, unjust', due to the cult and to the influence of Molotov, Malenkov and Beria on Stalin. The motivation and even wording of this decision had been foreshadowed as early as February 1957 in a leading article in Kommunist<sup>46</sup> but its release at the height of the anti-Yugoslav campaign and simultaneous with the publication of Kochetov's novel, was calculated to affect, sooner or later, the outcome of the struggle for control of the Writers' Union.

The recently formed Union of Writers of the RSFSR<sup>47</sup> will, no doubt, play an important part in determining future policy. It is to comprise more than half of the total membership of the Union of Soviet Writers: 2,539 members (including 1,200 in Moscow) in 48 branches. The decision to form it was taken at the third plenary session in May 1957, and confirmed by Khrushchev in his speech on 19 May. Three main functions have been assigned to this body: (1) to stimulate literary and cultural developments in provincial centres affected by Khrushchev's economic and administrative decentralization;<sup>48</sup> (2) to work out and put into operation plans for a New Deal for provincial writers: to negotiate a re-allocation

NOT TO BE MICROFICHED

of paper supplies, to start new journals, to remove inter-regional barriers that artificially restrict the sale of a writers' book to his native region, to improve welfare services such as housing and provision of clubs for writers, to put the underpaid and 'underdeveloped' provincial writer on a more equal footing with his metropolitan colleague, and to attract new cadres;<sup>49</sup> (3) to provide an organizational counterweight to the influential and (as events in 1956-57 had shown) less reliable and less controllable Moscow section.<sup>50</sup>

The result of the RSFSR Union's efforts on behalf of the provincial writer cannot yet be assessed; but it is clear that the intended anti-Moscow bias of the Union had to be shelved.<sup>51</sup> The Board of Management, with 123 members, seems to be fairly well balanced and includes a large number of Moscow writers (but the non-election of Ehrenburg and Simonov should be noted); the Bureau of the Board has 20 members of whom 13 live in Moscow.<sup>52</sup> The Board is to meet annually (in one of the capitals of the Autonomous Republics), the Bureau monthly; day-to-day decisions will be taken by the chairman (L. Sobolev) and vice-chairmen; the detailed control of local activities, however, will be in the hands of an 'itinerant' committee (suggested by the chairman) the composition of which is not clear.

Little need be said about the discussions at the Congress of the RSFSR Union of Writers. Most speakers dealt with the practical aim and tasks of the new Union, with the situation in the provinces, with children's literature, with the puzzling problem of recruiting to the ageing ranks of the Union a generation that has shown little respect for the traditions of their 'fathers'.<sup>53</sup> Sobolev's keynote speech and some contributions reflect the inconclusive pre-Congress discussion around Khrushchev's appeal in 1957 to the writers to deal with 'contemporary life and problems' (sovremennost) and to improve and perfect their 'artistic craftsmanship' (Maserstvo). Attempts at defining these new slogans revealed the old dilemmas. Critics found themselves wrestling again with the 'pernicious theory of artistic distance'; sovremennost, it is held by some, is an attitude of mind that can be brought to bear on any subject, historical or contemporary; others will sanction only works reflecting recent events and a 'new hero: evasion of 'burning contemporary problems' is perversely branded as a 'variety of revisionism'.<sup>54</sup> Emphasis on masterstvo has invoked again the ghost of formalism, and the discussion has run into difficulties over the priority of content over form (Fedin has referred to this as 'inverted formalism'), and the elusive meaning of socialist realism.<sup>55</sup>

On the eve of the Third USSR Writers' Congress (it was, originally, to have been held in December 1958) there are signs to suggest the resumption of the literary thaw<sup>56</sup> but it is too early yet to assess the modifications that will, undoubtedly, change its character. The prevailing mood (end of January 1959) is one of wait-and-see: the future direction of Soviet literature will probably be decided by the Congress, and much will depend on the nature of the changes in the control of the Union and its publications.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Kommunist, 1957 No. 12. Translated in Soviet Literature 1957, No. 10 and The Current Digest of the Soviet Press 9 October 1957.

<sup>2</sup> Literaturnaya Moskva, Sbornik vtoroi, 1956. Cf. Soviet Studies, vol. IX pp. 322-345.



<sup>3</sup>K. Simonov, 'Literaturniye zametki' Novy mir 1956, No. 12.

<sup>4</sup>Literaturnaya gazeta, 15 January 1957.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid. 19 March 1957.

<sup>6</sup>Kommunist 1957, No. 3, p. 24; for a summary of this article cf. Soviet Studies, vol. IX p. III.

<sup>7</sup>Kommunist 1957, No. 10; cf also Novy Mir 1957. no. 8.

<sup>8</sup>In November 1956 B. Rurikov, the former editor of Literaturnaya Gazeta, had still tempered his stern reminder that Lenin had not hesitated to demand the closing down of a Menshevik paper (during the civil war) with the tentative suggestion that 'the state and its organs' should confine themselves to supporting 'flexibly, tactfully, sensitively - without interfering in details, without thrusting their tutelage upon the artist, and without dictating artistic solutions - all progressive manifestations; (they should) create conditions for the forging of close links between art and life, for daring artistic searches etc.' (Kommunist, 1956, No. 17, p. 43, 48, 55). A more bellicose and dogmatic tone against the 'nihilists' and loud mouthed demagogues' is adopted by L. Novichenko, D. Eremin and the editors of Kommunist. Condemnation of the 'critical school' is now linked with the defence and reaffirmation of the 1946-48 decisions (Literaturnaya gazeta, 15 January 1957 and 5 March 1957; Kommunist 1957, no. 3). Only hopelessly backward people 'can take it upon themselves to defend the individual against the state in a socialist society' (N. Shamota in Kommunist 1957 no. 5, p. 87; cf. also Soviet Studies vol. VIII pp. 437 and 458). An important straw in the wind was the implied self-criticism in Simonov's censure of Dudintsev at the Moscow Writers' meeting (Literaturnaya gazeta 19 March 1957), and his implicit disavowal of views he had expressed as recently as December 1956, in a polemical article against the Polish revisionist writers Kott and Toeplitz (Novy mir 1957, no. 3). Simonov's chief critics, however, were not satisfied. Even his recantation at the fourth Plenum - cf. Literaturnaya gazeta 21 May 1957 - fell short of their requirements. Simonov lost the editorship of Novy mir in July 1957.

<sup>9</sup>Literaturnaya gazeta 19 March 1957.

<sup>10</sup>Kommunist 1957, no. 10.

<sup>11</sup>Literaturnaya gazeta 16, 18, 21, 22 May 1957.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. I. Sobolev's speech, reported in Literaturnaya gazeta 22 May 1957.

<sup>13</sup>Kommunist 1957, no. 10, p. 20. Kommunist here refers to Lenin's draft resolution for the 1920 Proletkult Congress: '...all Proletkult branches must consider themselves as subsidiary organizations of the National Commissariat of Enlightenment...and carry on their activities under the control of the Soviet government... and the Communist Party...' (Collected Works vol. 31, p. 292).

<sup>14</sup>Soviet Literature 1957, no. 10 pp. 15 and 16.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Khrushchev's references to Tvardovski and Panferov - ibid., p. 19. Tvardovski had been removed from the editorship of Novy mir in 1954 for publishing articles by Pomerantsev, Shcheglov, etc.; he was reinstated in July 1958. Panferov was appointed editor of Oktyabr in November 1957.

<sup>16</sup>Reported in Literaturnaya gazeta, 13, 15, 18 Feb. 1958.

<sup>17</sup>In September 1956 Ovechkin had joined the editorial board of Literaturnaya gazeta from which Paustovski and Pogodin had recently be removed. He ceased to be a member of the Board in September 1957. In July 1958, on the re-appointment of Tvardovski to the editorship, he became a member of the Editorial Board of Novy mir. His play 'Navstrechu vetru' (Novy Mir, 1958, no. 3) presses the case (already widely discussed at the time of publication) for the handing over of the MTS machines to the collective farms, and illustrates the pernicious influence that the Borzovs are still allowed to exert, even after retirement. He is severely taken to task by V. Dorofeyev in Literaturnaya gazeta 6 May 1958 for failing to show 'how the victories of the kolkhoz system, the immense economic, social and political achievements of socialism and the great changes in people's consciousness require new forms for the organization of the national economy...' Ovechkin ascribes the need for 'new forms' to the lack of incentives and the conflict of interests between MTS and kolkhoz: 'We MTS-workers (his hero explains) hold the fate of the kolkhoz harvest in our hands, and to tell the truth, it doesn't matter to us whether it turns out to be a good or a bad harvest...altogether, we aren't hurt even if a very bad harvest...'

<sup>18</sup>V. Kochetov, Bratya Yershovy, Neva, 1958, Nos. 6-7. All references in this article are to Romangazeta 1958, no. 15 (171) for Part I, and 1958, no. 16 (172) for Part II. The English translation announced by Soviet Literature (for nos. 1,2,3, 1958) was not yet available at the time of writing.

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<sup>44</sup>This shortlived hysterical campaign against Pasternak strikes one as an attempt to discredit and split the obstreperous Moscow section of the Union by associating it with an obnoxious decision. While feeling was being whipped up in the country, the decision to expel Pasternak from the Union was taken by the presidia of the Union of Soviet Writers, of the Preparatory Committee of the Union of Writers of the RSFSR, and of the Moscow section. More than 30 members spoke at this meeting in support of the motion (Literaturnaya gazeta 28 October 1958). At the general members' meeting of the Moscow section, 13 members are reported to have spoken from the floor (Literaturnaya gazeta 1 November 1958) but no indication was given of how many members attended. The resolution demanding what amounts to Pasternak's deportation from the USSR was passed unanimously.

<sup>45</sup>Literaturnaya gazeta 10 June 1958. In English: Supplement to Soviet Literature 1958, No. 6; also The Current Digest of the Soviet Press 16 July 1958.

<sup>46</sup>Kommunist 1957, no. 3; cf. also Shepilov's speech at the Second Congress of the Union of Soviet Composers in Literaturnaya gazeta 4 April 1957.

<sup>47</sup>Reports on the Foundation Congress (7-13 December 1958) of the Union of Writers of the RSFSR held in Moscow are in Literaturnaya gazeta 8, 10, 12, 14 December 1958. Khrushchev is reported to have addressed the writers after the Congress but his speech has not yet been published.

<sup>48</sup>Viz. Congress reports. Cf. also e.g. M. Bazhan's speech at the third plenum, Literaturnaya gazeta 21, May 1957.

<sup>49</sup>Viz. Congress reports. Cf. also on publishing and distribution: A. Petrashik, 'Oblastnoye izdatelstvo i evo produktsiya



Kommunist, 1956, no. 9, and an unsigned article in Kommunist 1957 no. 17 'Utuchshit rabotu mestnykh izdatelstv'; on royalties, etc.: N. Rylenkov's contribution at third plenum, Literaturnaya gazeta 21 May 1957; Khrushchev, 'Closer Alliance...', Soviet Literature, 1957, no. 10, p. 21, and V. Sokolov, 'U literaturnoi karty Rossii,' Novy mir 1958, no. 11.

<sup>50</sup>Cf. Khrushchev, 'Closer Alliance...' Soviet Literature, 1957, no. 10, p. 20.

<sup>51</sup>Cf. leader in Literaturnaya gazeta 4 December 1958. This could, of course, mean that the Moscow writers had capitulated (cf. 44 above) or, more likely, that a modus vivendi has been agreed.

<sup>52</sup>A notable absentee from the Bureau is N. Gribachov who had been in charge of Russian provincial literature (cf. Soviet Studies, vol. VI p. 439).

<sup>53</sup>Already at the Second Congress in 1954 Surkov had reported that the average age of members was 10 to 15 years higher than in 1944, and the proportion of members under 30 much smaller. Cf. Soviet Studies vol. VI p. 410.

<sup>54</sup>Cf. Congress reports and e.g. V. Nikonov's article in Literaturnaya gazeta 10 June 1958; A. Elkin, 'Dykhaniye zhizni, dykhaniye sovremennosti', Znamya 1958, no. 11; Novy mir 1958 no. 11, p. 201.

<sup>55</sup>Viz. Congress debates and cf. e.g., V. Ivanov, 'Zametki o spetsifike iskusstva', Kommunist 1958 No. 12; O. Iygi's article in Literaturnaya gazeta 18 December 1958.

A cryptic reference to the 'principles of socialist realism in the message sent to Congress by the Bureau of the Central Committee (Literaturnaya gazeta 8 December 1958) must have caused some surprise among delegates. Of course, it could have been a slip but it could also have been a hint of the Central Committee's attitude, in keeping with recent developments. The substitution, in the Rules of the Union of Soviet Writers of the term 'method' (in the phrase 'Socialist realism is the basic method of Soviet literature...') by 'principle' was discussed by Simonov in Novy mir 1956 no. 12, p. 253. Many feel, he writes, that the term restricts 'stylistic variety' and is exploited by critics to demand uniformity (p. 254). Simonov attributes little importance to this 'terminological quarrel' but suggests the adoption of 'principle' because it would define socialist realism as an ideology rather than a technique. Others (e.g., L. Novicheko at the Ukrainian Writers' Congress, Literaturnaya gazeta 15 January 1957) cling to the paradox that the specifically 'artistic cognition of reality' can only be achieved through the socialist-realist method of expressing it. Congress ignored the Central Committee's formula; Sobolev speaks of the 'method' of socialist realism 'expressing partiinost in Literature' and the Congress resolution proclaims that Soviet Russian writers will remain 'faithful to the principles of partiinost in literature and to the method of socialist realism.'

<sup>56</sup>E.g. the resumed controversy on the rehabilitation of A. Vesely, I. Babel, I. Katayev, etc. has led to frank exchanges and bitter recriminations. Cf. M. Charny on A. Vesely in Oktyabr 1957, no. 9; A. Markarov 'Razgovor po povodu...' Znamya 1958, no. 4; and an article by 'Literator' in Literaturnaya gazeta 24 April 1958, and Panferov's reply in Oktyabr 1958 no. 5; Or the outspoken discussion on the state of Soviet comedy opened by B. Frolov with the

article 'Pochemu plokho na khoroshem meste?' in Oktyabr 1958, no. 3 (Promptly denounced by 'Literator' in Literaturnaya gazeta 17 April 1958), Fourteen contributions are published in Oktyabr 1958, no. 6. Many contributors agree with Frolov that the decline of the Soviet comedy is due to the 'outraged feelings' of influential individuals who 'recognize themselves in characters' held up to ridicule. Their unobtrusive intervention with 'cautious' directors may prevent the production of a good comedy or its withdrawal. Writers are discouraged and turn to other genres. Playwrights must 'stand together' and 'speak up'. Earlier charges of bureaucratic violations had been denied by A. Sokolova in Kommunist 1958, no. 3.



DIB, Radio Liberation  
22 May 1959

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES IN THE EXECUTIVE ORGANS OF THE SOVIET

WRITERS' UNION (1954-1959)

On May 12, a few days before the opening of the All-Union Writers' Congress, Literaturnaya Gazeta published two contributions by republican writers on proposed changes in the executive organs of the Soviet Writers' Union. In this way the readers of Literaturnaya Gazeta who are without access to inside information in the Writers' Union learned for the first time about the existence of such a problem and its impending discussion at the Writers' Congress.

Although both contributions are hedged in the usual way as a "basis for discussions," etc., there can be little doubt that the rails have already been switched into a definite direction: towards greater representation of the Union republics in the Secretariat and Presidium of the Board of the Soviet Writers' Union.

Briefly, the proposed changes are as follows: Vilis Lacis, writer and Chairman of the Latvian Council of Ministers, would like to reduce the size of the "unwieldy" Presidium of the Board, but at the same time increase republican representation by making all chairmen of the boards of the 15 republican writers' unions ex officio members of the Presidium. The latter should include also the Secretaries of the Board and "perhaps 2-3 comrades from among the most respected, authoritative masters of literature." As regards the Secretariat, this should be composed of the First Secretary, as hitherto, plus three "permanent" and three "alternate" (smenniy) Secretaries, who would be delegated to Moscow from the Union republics for a definite period.

The other contribution, by the First Secretary of the Board of the Azerbaydzhani Writers' Union Mekhti Guseyn, limits itself to suggesting that the Secretariat of the All-Union organization should be organized "by shrubs" ("po kustam"), i.e. along regional lines, with Secretaries responsible for the literatures of the Transcaucasian republics, the Baltic area, Central Asia, etc.

Both Lacis and Guseyn seem to be agreed, therefore, that there should be at least 3-4 Secretaries representing the Union republics in the reorganized Secretariat of the Soviet Writers' Union.

In order to realize the significance of the proposed changes we will have to look first at the executive organs of the Union of Soviet Writers as elected at the first plenary session of the Board of the Soviet Writers' Union following the Second Writers' Congress in December 1954. At that time a 42-member Presidium was elected, composed of 40 writers:

ABASHIDZE, I.V.  
ANTONOV, S.P.  
AUEZOV, M.O.  
AZHAYEV, V.N.  
BAZHAN, N.P.  
BROVKA, P.U.  
CHUKOVSKIY, N.K.  
EHRENBURG, I.G.  
FADEYEV, A.A.  
GLADKOV, F.V.  
FEDIN, K.A.  
GONCHAR, A.T.  
KAKHKHAR, A.  
KARAVAYEVA, A.A.

KATAYEV, V.P.  
KORNEYCHUK, A. Yo.  
LATSIS, V.T.  
LAVRENEV, B.A.  
LEONOV, L.M.  
MARKOV, G.M.  
MARSHAK, S. Ya.  
PANOVA, V.F.  
POGODIN, N.F.  
POLEVOY, B.N.  
PROKOF'YEV, A.A.  
SHCHIPACHEV, S.P.  
SHOLOKHOV, M.A.  
SIMONOV, K.M.

SMIRNOV, V.A.  
SMUUL, I. Yu.  
SOBOLEV, L.S.  
SURKOV, A.A.  
TIKHONOV, N.S.  
TURSUN-ZADE, Mirzo  
TVARDOVSKIY, A.T.  
TYCHINA, P.G.  
VENTSLOVA, A.T.  
VURGUN, S. (VEKILOV, S.)  
YERMILOV, V.V.  
ZAR'YAN, N. Ye.

and 2 Party apparatchiki: POLIKARPOV, D.A. and  
RYURIKOV, B.S.

Four writers have died: Samed Vurgun (S. V. Vekilov), A. Fadeyev, F. Gladkov and B. Lavrenev.

One Party apparatchik (D. A. Polikarpov) may have been replaced by another Party apparatchik (K. V. Voronkov) when the former was appointed Chief of the Culture Department of the CPSU Central Committee early in 1956. But this is far from certain.

Unless there have been cooptions to the Presidium which were not announced in the Press, we must assume that the Presidium of the Board is composed at present of 38 members.

While most of the writers serving in the Presidium are well known, a few remarks may be needed to elucidate the background of the Party apparatchiki.

D. A. Polikarpov, a member of the Central Auditing Commission of the Party, was Secretary of the Moscow City Party Committee before being appointed Secretary of the Board of the Writers' Union.

B. S. Ryurikov has been Deputy Chief of the Culture Department of the CPSU Central Committee since 1955. He entirely owes his career, which he began as a little known literary critic to sycophancy, swash-buckling and Simonov's protection (according to Sholokhov's testimony at the Second Writers' Congress, rpt. Literaturnaya Gazeta, Dec. 26, 1954)

The present functions of Konstantin Vasil'yevich Voronkov (apart from those as Secretary of the Board of the Writers' Union) have not been revealed, but he is known to have made his career as Komsomol apparatchik. He has not gained any literary laurels, but already in 1948 when many of his present colleagues were still waiting for their Stalin prize on literature, he was awarded the Order of Lenin in connection with the 30th anniversary of the Komsomol. At that time he was Department Chief of the Komsomol Central Committee. (rpt. Pravda, October 29, 1948).

The Secretariat as elected in December 1954 was composed of 11 members:



SURKOV, A.A.	First Secretary
AZHAYEV, V.N.	Secretary
BAZHAN, N.P.	Secretary
FADEYEV, A.A.	Secretary
FEDIN, K.A.	Secretary
LEONOV, L.M.	Secretary
POLEVOY, B.N.	Secretary
POLIKARPOV, D.A.	Secretary
SIMONOV, K.M.	Secretary
SMIRNOV, V.A.	Secretary
TIKHONOV, N.S.	Secretary

It is certainly worth recording that in the four and a half years that have elapsed since the Second Writers' Congress no Secretary of the Writers' Union has been ousted: a truly remarkable record at a time when all central Party and Government organs were subjected to more or less severe purges.

But three Secretaries were newly appointed: K. V. Voronkov (replacing D. A. Polikarpov upon the latter's promotion in the Party hierarchy) and the writers G. M. Markov and S. V. Smirnov (following Fadeyev's suicide). As a result of these minor changes membership in the Secretariat increased from 11 to 12 Secretaries.

Now, what would the Presidium of the Board of the Writers' Union be like of Lacis' proposals were to be adopted?

First of all we would have 15 ex officio members, viz. all the chairmen (or first secretaries) of the republican writers' Unions.

They are:

	Chairman, Board,	RSFSR Writers' Union
SOBOLEV, L.S.	" "	Ukrainian "
GONCHAR, A.T.	" "	Belorussian "
BROVKA, P.U.	" "	Uzbek "
YASHEN, Kamil	1st Secy., "	Kazakh "
MUSREPOV, G.M.	1st Secy., "	Georgian "
ABASHIDZE, I.V.	1st Secy., "	Azerbaydzh. "
GUSEYN, Mekhti	1st Secy., "	Lithuanian "
VENTSLOVA, A.T.	Chairman, "	Moldavian "
LUPAN, A.P.	" "	Latvian "
UPIT, A.M.	" "	Kirghiz "
ABDUMOMUNOV, T.	1st Secy., "	Tadzhik "
TURSUN-ZADE, M.	Chairman, "	Armenian "
TOPCHYAN, E.S.	Resp. Secy., "	Turkmen "
KERBABAYEV, B.	Chairman, "	Estonian "
SMUUL, I. Yu.	Chairman, "	

Secondly, all the Secretaries of the Board would likewise become ex officio members of the Presidium.

Problems of Communism  
November-December 1959  
by Tom Scriven

Whatever our view of the Bolshevik Revolution, one thing is certain - seldom have the mass of participants in such a decisive historical event so little understood the import of their actions.

The Russian intelligentsia for over a century had been debating whether the peasant was to become the subject of Russian history or to remain an object, the raw material to be worked up by other existing or emergent forces. Was he a natural communist, destined to outsoar the West in social development if protected from its debauching influence? Was he even perhaps the humble vessel of divine grace for the renewal of a world relapsed into paganism? Or was he a barbarous anachronism, to be swept away by the onrush of industry and bourgeois civilization? Lenin's revolutionary strategy demanded that the peasant should briefly become the subject of Russian history, or at least the deuteragonist at its most critical turning-point, and should then be remolded by the proletariat in its own image.

The depth of the peasants' misunderstanding of this allotted role - leading to their later profound disillusionment - was evidenced in the distinction which they so often drew in the 1920's between "Bolsheviks" and "Communists." The Bolsheviks had given the land to those who worked it, decreed peace, set up local organs of peasant self-government. They were obviously not to be confused with those inexorable and incomprehensible fanatics who came down from the towns to raid the peasant's barn, conscript his sons, and seduce him into a new, weird form of propertiless servitude. The literature of the 1920's copiously testifies to the peasant's bewilderment, his ludicrous and pitiful insistence that the revolution meant what he had wanted it to mean. In Artem Vesyoly's Native Land (1924) the leader of a peasant uprising proclaims: "I hereby annul the Soviet power!...Death to Communists! Long live the Bolsheviks and all the common people!" And Boris Pilnyak, in The Bare Year (1922), makes one of his characters expound the "muzhik" (peasant) view of the revolution:

So I say at the meeting - there's no international, there's no The Russian people's revolution, a bunt (peasant revolt) and nothing more...What about Karl Marx, they ask. A German, I say, so he's a fool, must be. And Lenin? Lenin, I say is from the muzhiks, a Bolshevik, but you must be a Communist...Land for the peasants! Down with the landowners! Down with the skin-'em-alive Constituent Assembly! We want a Soviet for the whole land, so that everyone who wants to can come and decide under the sky...Down with the Communists as well - the Bolsheviks, I say, can manage on their own.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>For a recent reference to this distinction see N. Virta in Literaturnaia Gazeta, March 21, 1959.



This confusion of thought, or rather this typically Russian mythopoetic self-delusion, has persisted. In the late 1940's for example, fantastic rumors reportedly spread through the countryside that at last the Communists, chastened by the experience of the war, were about to yield some of their usurped power to a peasant party, perhaps with alenkov - Lenin's son, some said - at its head. And even now there are peasants, not all of them very old, who execrate the regime and venerate Lenin the land-giver.

### Errors in Retrospect

That writers of the 1920's, even Bolsheviks like Vesoly, candidly described the hostile and uncomprehending attitude of the country towards the towns was not always, as later Soviet critics claimed, a sign of ideological instability. More often it was because the writer shared the new rulers' contempt - sometimes fanatical and heartless, sometimes humorous and half-affectionate - for unlettered, drunken, starving and greedy, frightened and treacherously violent muzhik Russia. The ideology of the peasant, along with put shoes and wooden ploughs, was part of the paraphernalia of backwardness. So one could write about him factually, and even with a touch of sentiment for his romantic wildness, such as one might feel for a picturesque bog which none the less must be drained.

Scholars of the period made the same "mistake", viewed retrospectively, as the imaginative writers. They "failed to overcome the Menshevik-S.R. (Socialist-Revolutionary) view of the peasant movement and the agrarian revolution," "considered the peasant movement in isolation from the actions of the workers," "exaggerated the spontaneity of the seizure of landlord estates," "inadequately displayed the political and organizational role of the party in winning over the peasant mass."<sup>2</sup> In short, they wrote objectively. At the same time, failing to anticipate the demands of socialist realism and the Stalin school of history, novelists and scholars neglected to show the middle and poor peasant masses as from the start natural and loyal allies in the building of socialism except when foreign agents, kulaks (the richer peasants) or enemies of the people hiding behind party cards misled them. Many of the best early Soviet writers on peasant themes fell into disfavor in the 1930's, and some of them paid the supreme penalty for their "Historical misunderstanding." Vesoly, and more precariously Pilnyak, seem to have regained a modest place in Soviet literary history, but it is uncertain which of their works will be republished.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See review of P.N. Sobolev, "Bedneishee Krestianstvo" (The Poorest Peasants), Voprosy Istorii, March 1959.

<sup>3</sup> Another posthumously rehabilitated writer on peasant themes is Ivan Makarov, purged in 1936, died 1940. His interesting novel about collectivization in a flax-growing region, Golubye Polia (Blue Fields), was serialized in Znamya, Nos. 1-3, 1959.

The difficult early years of the kolkhoz set an attractively baited trap for writers. Some of them felt a fresh access of revolutionary enthusiasm after the debilitating stagnation of NEP. For the first time since the civil war they had a truly dramatic theme: the martyrs and heroes of the Komsomol and the "twenty-five thousand" (the contingent of urban activists sent to help enforce collectivization); kulak terrorism and sabotage; the desperate struggle of Communist devotion and principle against peasant suspicion and instability. Then too, the horrific tale of rural backwardness had to be retold, to heighten the heroism of the civilizers and to offset the splendor of the new life they were building. But those writers who rose to the theme found that it bristled with vexatious problems. For one thing, if they painted a satisfyingly dark picture of the village and its inhabitants it was extremely difficult to make a rapid transformation plausible. And to make matters worse, it soon became obvious that the immediate result of collectivization was a deterioration in the material condition and morale of the peasants.

### Literature of the 1930's

Two novels relating to the period are of lasting importance: Mikhail Sholokhov's Virgin Soil Upturned (Part I, 1931) as a literary masterpiece, and Fedor Panferov's Whetstones (Bruski, Part I-I 1928-1937) as a precious historical document.

Both books bear the stamp of sincerity. In Sholokhov's case, it is perhaps no more than a rapt exultation in violent action, intoxication with the "music of revolution," and at times merely, the hypnotized single-mindedness of a master storyteller. Panferov is simpler: there is no mistaking the genuineness of his loathing for the milieu from which he had escaped, and his yearning to rescue his kin from age-old misery and barbarism. Yet it was Panferov who crashed through the obstacles which reality raised in the path of "kolkhoz literature," and Sholokhov who balked at them.

Sholokhov, by choosing the Cossack Don as his setting, might seem to have complicated his task. In fact, he turns the specific difficulties of this theme to good account. His Cossacks are not so ignorant and superstitious, not so abased and perverted by centuries of want and oppression as the benighted Russian peasant. Their very spirit of independence - they boast that they did not stand too much nonsense from landowners in the old days - is a virtue they have in common with Sholokhov's idealized proletarian, and brings the two classes closer together. At the same time, Sholokhov is able, not implausibly, to focus resistance to collectivization around the White Cossack officers Polovtsev and Lyatevsk and their kulak stooges. His collectivizers have a hard and dangerous, but not, as Sholokhov represents it, a prohibitively difficult task.

Panferov was more ambitious. His village is a rural slum in the drought-stricken Middle Volga region, his peasants brutalized by an existence in which only ruthless selfishness can lift a man, and then not securely, out of reach of famine, people crippled and stupefied by their almost bare-handed struggle for life against poor soil and a baleful climate, unable even to sleep at sowing and harvest times when they must feed their draft-animals through the night, lapsing into fatalistic lethargy when crop failure threatens, their only relief in drunkenness and murderous brawls.



The middle peasants and the least miserable among the poor peasants, dread collectivization, which they believe will level them all in destitution. Without a horse or an ox, and a few barnyard animals, a man has only a slippery hold on life. Panferov, unlike Sholokhov shows the enormous psychological problems of collectivization in their true dimensions.

### Story Without an End

There is a further startling difference in the reactions of the two writers to the realization that collectivization had not brought about a quick improvement in the lot of the peasants. Sholokhov simply fell silent after completing his Part I, leaving the White conspirators undiscovered, the saboteur Ostrovnov still adviser on husbandry to the kolkhoz organizer Davydov (hero of the novel), and the Cossacks by no means fully converted to the new way of life. Readers have had to wait over a quarter of a century for the next instalment.<sup>4</sup> It would be presumptuous to claim any certain insight into the reasons for his silence, but there are clues.

A comparatively obscure literary journal,<sup>5</sup> in a very unusual article, recently informed us that Sholokhov had been deeply distressed by "absurd and monstrous" charges of Communists, who, like his Davydov, had been "twenty-five thousanders" and founders of kolkhozy. He was, we read, so overwhelmed with anxiety that he had stopped writing; even with his writer's imagination he could not foresee the future of the rural community and the characters he had created. This evidence lends some credibility to the rumor, at first sight fantastic, that when Sholokhov finally returned to his story in recent years, he had to be dissuaded from making Davydov perish in the great purge - a disaster which would have disturbed Russian readers as powerfully as anything in the work of the revisionist writers.

The same article reminds us that in the years 1932-1935 there was an acute grain shortage in the Cossack lands, which Sholokhov himself ascribed (in 1937) to Trotskyist sabotage. Is it not possible that in the middle 1930's he could see no way ahead for his politically vulnerable heroes - Davydov, the greenhorn whom a disguised kulak could mislead into strewing an ox-stall with sand instead of straw; and Nagulnov, the peasant fanatic painfully learning English in anticipation of the world revo-

<sup>4</sup>The first "new chapters" appeared in Pravda in 1955. Part II was published in full in Neva, July 1959. It is a prolongation rather than a development of Part I, and although Sholokhov cannot write boringly, this latter-day work seems - perhaps not surprisingly - rather half-hearted.

<sup>5</sup>M. Soifer, "Sholokhov in Veshenskaia," in Zvezda Vostoka, Tashkent, No. 8, August 1959.

lution, and impatiently resorting to the readiest argument against local obstacles, the fist or the gun ("if every contra I clubbed gave up a hundred poods of grain I'd spend all my time at it.") Davydov and Nagulnov are ready-made deviationists - of the right and left respectively. And what of the inchoate kolkhoz - how would it weather the years of Trotskyist sabotage and non-filment to come? Recently it has been said of Sholokhov that he can write only the truth; the remark was made at the 1955 Conference of Writers on Kolkhoz Themes (about which more later) by a speaker who, perhaps coincidentally, went on to mention the great purge as an example of hushed up "negative phenomena."<sup>6</sup> It certainly seems likely that Sholokhov could see no end to his story which would satisfy both his conscience and the political exigencies of the time.

### Retreat from Reality

Panferov did not choose silence, but hurried ostentatiously after every swerve in the line. The result is a nightmarish discontinuity. The thousand pages of Whetstones, composed over 10 fatal years, epitomize the degeneration of Marxist idea and the failure of Soviet literature in its middle period. Panferov so admirably down-to-earth in his early chapters, takes flight - as the story grows more difficult and dangerous to the teller - into the dizzying air of paranoid fantasy. The last outbreak of peasant resistance is provoked by a conspiratorial group uniting Trotskyists, Bukharinists, Zinovievites "and other oppositionists." They aim at the "physical destruction of Stalin" and the restoration of capitalism. To discredit the regime and raise the whole people in arms against it, their agents in "the agricultural organs, the People's Commisariat of Education, cooperative establishments and the Academy introduce shallow ploughing ("citing American experience"), so that the following year's crop is weed-choked. They blacklist unstable villages, condemn them to starvation, and spread panic through the countryside by sending peasants near death from hunger on errands to other villages. Some villages they sweep clean of every last grain, rewarding them with honorific red banners, and their native local Communists with rest-cures and scholarships, and leaving the peasants without bread. At the same time defaulting kolkhozes those who were given banners of matting as a mark of disgrace, have enough to eat. In one village members of the conspiracy sprinkle millet in the ears of the horses, which run amuck, are declared mad by the veterinary (a conspirator) and are destroyed. And all this because the conspirators, who did all their deeds under the party flag, but "just a little bit to the left," never really share the ideals of the proletariat, but wanted, when the landowners were driven out, "to occupy their mansions and live in them with the same rights."

Panferov's attempts to show the transformation of the peasant character as a result of cooperative effort in the kolkhoz are equally facile and feeble. In one astounding episode a peasant who just a few chapters back had sat on his last sack of grain, feeding himself and giving his starving daughter not a mouthful, demonstrates his reform by ceremoniously returning to the kolkhoz the four cart loads of grain given to him as a prize.

<sup>6</sup>N. Satyan, quoted in Literaturnaia Gazeta, November 1, 1955.



Because they could not resolve their stories satisfactorily, what Sholokhov and Panferov leave most clearly imprinted on our minds is the picture of peasant fears, suspicions and resentment in the early days of collectivization. A Davydov may see the peasants are parasites: "They have lain down under the Soviet power like a lousy calf under a cow. They can suck all right, but they won't grow." But the peasant feels that he is the victim. Collectivization is like "giving your wife to uncle and going to a whore. The government is so exacting that you "pay for the smoke out of your chimney." The peasant is so attached to his horse - without it he is a "fly without wings" - that he stands about the kolkhoz stable watching it with anxious yearning, and even finds it a little extra feed. Perhaps, after all, the government will disband the kolkhoz when they find that it is a failure. Who is likely to take good care of what belongs to everyone - and no-one? What respectable hardworking peasant is going to work for the benefit of loafers who have spent their lives on the sovket, dreaming of a tasty piece? Even the "good lads" hang back, waiting to see how the kolkhoz will turn out, and "mostly digging their own gardens." There is hope - after all, the Communists had to disband the "hens' kolkhoz," because the "consciousness" of those birds had not yet "grown up to it."<sup>7</sup>

The usual absurd rumors fly around: the women will be made to sit on nests and hatch out eggs, and very likely they will be "driven into one yard" and held in common. There is violence - both Davydov and the Communist, Ognev are terribly beaten, not by kulaks but by the peasant mob. And in Whetstones there is a vivid presentation of the prelude to the great famile of the early 1930's: the senseless, reckless, panic massacre of the animals, when "the whole muzhik kingdom gorged itself on meat." You can't go into paradise, says a cynic, with property.

### The Heyday of Stalinist Literature

That "socialist realism" from the 1930's on paradoxically produced a literature that was both unrealistic and socially harmful is the unanswerable charge against it. Significantly, at the aforementioned Conference of Writers on Kolkhoz Themes, the eminent author Valentin Ovechkin mentioned the use of the term "critical realists" to distinguish the post-Stalin school from their discredited predecessors. After collectivization the party would not discuss frankly the true nature of its agricultural policies or the extent of its difficulties in the countryside. Writers could only copy the complacent prevarications of officialdom. It is sometimes said that Stalin, sealed off from reality by the triple ring of dogma, sycophancy and sedentary routine, came at last to believe his own propaganda. Can he really have watched that favorite film of his, Cossacks of the Kuban, renamed Eldorado by some Soviet cine-magoers, with infatuated self-congratulation? However this may be, the unrealistic Stalinist literature on the countryside reached its apogee and the bankruptcy of Stalin's agricultural policy became

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<sup>7</sup> A reference to the unsuccessful attempt to socialize all live-stock undertaken by collectivizers "dizzy with success"; later poultry and other species were restored to peasant ownership.

frighteningly obvious at the same time - in the last five years of Stalin's life.

Subsequent critics of this literature concentrated their attacks on the most recent and readable culprits, Semyon Babaevsky and Galina Nikolaeva.<sup>8</sup> As always in Stalinist writing, the work of these authors is twisted and vitiated by their efforts to ignore or conceal all-important but unmentionable facts: that the kolkhoz was unprosperous and unpopular because the state took too much from it and paid too little; and that the Stalinist conception of the agricultural year as a campaign of two bureaucratic offensives (for sowing and for harvesting) against the peasant was obsolete and counterproductive. Writers could only spin fables about the magical results to be obtained from mechanization, organization and political education, and they were as glib and vague about the practical workings of these panaceas as Stalin himself. If Babaevsky's farm is backward he builds it a power station - never mind where the money comes from, even if last year's harvest was poor. If the farm needs new buildings he sends a large part of his labor force timbering in high summer, confident that the harvest will be gathered in somehow. In fact, nothing can go wrong, because the hero is a demi-Stalin complete with magical powers, with his local "personality cult," with his own sickening pose of modesty and respect for the masses. There is no difficulty in mechanizing, says Babaevsky. "It's not hard to get a turbine, but how will you get your people on their feet?" "Cadres" and "consciousness" - that's the infallible recipe. Replace incompetent raikom (district committee) secretaries and dishonest kolkhoz chairmen - and don't forget to send reapers into the fields with their textbooks on Marxism-Leninism.

The results are, indeed, remarkable: "Only half a year had passed and how much had been done!" says Nikolaeva, with the air of the serial writer who delivers his hero from a hopeless predicament with a twist of the pen, à la Edgar Wallace's "One might bound and Standish was free." As for the trifling problem of peasant incomes - this, let us remember, at a time when kolkhozy paid miserable little, less than a ruble in cash and half a kilo of grain for a day's labor - if incomes are low it must be because the work-day has "not been teamed up with the machine" (Babaevsky), or because the agronom (agronomist) is not abreast of the latest methods of cultivation, or most likely because the peasants, discouraged by the mismanagement or speculation of their chairman, dodge work in the communal fields.

One of the most irritating features of such books is their abuse of hindsight. An innocent reader might think that Nikolaeva, in Harvest, was fertile in interesting practical suggestions: in fact she was only cataloguing measures which the party had already promulgated, disguising them as spontaneous deductions from her story and avoiding discussion of their application or efficacy.

<sup>8</sup>In particular, Babaevsky's Kavalier Zolotoi Zvezdy (The Knight of the Gold Star), 1947, (A Stalin prize winner for 1948), and his Svet nad Zemlei (Light over the Land), 1949; and Nikolaeva's Zhatva (Harvest), 1950.



Heroes and Villains

Worst of all, however, is the superficial treatment of human beings. Characters were merely conventional stereotypes for progressive or retrograde attitudes. Family relations became incidental to productive activity. ("Because they had started talking about great matters [husband presumed dead, comes home to find wife living with another man] seemed to become less important."<sup>9</sup>) Lovers' meetings were the occasion for bickering about sowing times. Woe betide the lad who acted on an emotional impulse, and not at the dictates of civic conscience and business-like calculation! Not that there was much room from convincing practical discussion or ratiocination. Babaevsky was later criticized for finding "no forgiveness for such an offense as sober, businesslike calculation in the management of the economy," viewing those who attempted it as potential "enemies of the people."<sup>10</sup>

These were the limitations imposed on the main characters, usually drawn from a standard dramatis personae: Raikom secretary, kolkhoz chairman, agronom, brigadiers, team leaders, kolkhoz-specialists. Where were the ordinary peasants? They were a crudely sketched background - a ballet chorus of "paysans" drifting in groups behind the solists, "positive" or "negative" as the case might be.<sup>11</sup>

This literature in effect reduced the problems of the countryside to a struggle between good and bad elements in rural cadres. It excluded from its view the desperate financial plight of the kolkhoz, the costly absurdities and injustices of agricultural planning and administration, the effects on the peasant of natural and certainly of political disasters. What could it say about the drought of 1946, or the currency reform of 1947, or the premature attempt to transfer the peasant's cow into the kolkhoz herd? Not until after 1953 did any Soviet writer dare to describe that "difficult time at the beginning of the 1950's" when a kolkhoz chairman could wake up to find another peasant family had fled in the night:

The kolkhoz was "burning". People, people, he thought, where is your consciousness? But he himself understood; how did your consciousness come into it when the labor-day was "gramm da grōsh - zhivi kak khosh" (a gram and a farthing - live as best you can.)<sup>12</sup>

Pastoral Thaw

The great change in Soviet literature on the kolkhoz theme - and this is an important and difficult point for interpreters of Soviet domestic politics in that puzzling period - began in the last year of Stalin's life, with the first instalment of

<sup>9</sup> Nikolaeva, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> See F. Abramov, "Lyudi Kolkhoznnoi Derevni v Poslevoyennoi Proze" (People of the Collective Village in Postwar Literature), Novyi Mir, April 1954.

<sup>11</sup> See Abramov, op. cit., and I. Vishnevskaya, quoted in Literaturnaia Gazeta, October 27, 1955.

<sup>12</sup> M. Zhestev, "Communism Comes to Alexandrovka," Literaturnaia Gazeta, March 5, 1959.

Valentin Ovechkin's Raion Weekdays, a work which contained refreshing if still cautious signs of a shift toward a new realism.<sup>13</sup> Landmarks on the new course were the subsequently condemned articles of Pomerantsev, "Sincerity in Literature" (1953) and Abramov "People of the Collective Village in Postwar Prose (1954); the Conference of Writers on Kolkhoz Themes in December 1955; and Ovechkin's article based on his speech at that conference ("Collective Life and Literature").<sup>14</sup> Important representatives of the new trend, besides Ovechkin, are Tendryakov, Ivanov, Troyepolsky, Vinnichenko, Dorosh and Solukhin. Some of these writers are bolder and more radical than others. Some are primarily interested in human beings, others in technical matters. What unites them is their realistic approach to the question which their predecessors handled so gingerly: the relationship between officialdom and the peasant, the interaction between state policies and peasant attitudes.<sup>15</sup>

Their works trace many kolkhoz troubles to faults in the system itself, aggravated by the inadequacies of those who administer it. Stereotyped, inflexible planning, without regard to local conditions or allowance for unforeseen circumstances, is a favorite target. A farm which could make a good profit from flax might have to grow grain, at production cost three times its selling price. Farms on the Komi border were made to grow corn, at the incredible expenditure of 25 work-days per stem. Essential pasture was ploughed up to fulfill the plan for developing virgin land, milch cows slaughtered to complete a meat delivery quota. Officials lived from campaign to campaign: seed might be sunk in mud - but the raion (district) must be able to report to the oblast (region), the oblast to the republic, and the republic to the "center" that sowing was completed by the appointed date.

<sup>13</sup>V. Ovechkin, Raionnye Budni, 1952.

<sup>14</sup>V. Pomerantsev, "O Iskrennosti v Literature", Novyi Mir, June 1953; Abramov, op. cit.; Proceedings of the All-Union Conference of Writers on Kolkhoz Themes, Literaturnaia Gazeta, October 27-November 1, 1955; V. Ovechkin, "Kolkhoznaia Zhizn i Literatura", Novyi Mir, December 1955.

<sup>15</sup>Generalizations as well as specific examples and quotations in this part of the discussion are drawn from the following work: Abramov, op. cit. Proceedings of the Conference on Kolkhoz Theme loc. cit. Ovechkin, both works previously cited and "Trudnaia Vesna" (Difficult Spring), Novyi Mir, March 1956. Vladimir Tendryakov, "Nenaste" (Dirty Weather), ibid., February 1954; "Ne ko Dvor (Not Suited)", ibid., June 1954; and "Sasha Otpravliaetsya (Sasha Sets Out)", serialized in ibid., February and March 1956. G. Troyepolsky, "Aspiski Agronoma" (Notes of an Agronomist), "Odin Den" (One Day), "Sosedni" (Neighbors), and "Krutyi Yar" (Steep Bank), ibid., respectively in March 1953, and January, April and September issues, 1954. Ivan Vinnichenko, "Na Vzlyote" (At the Take-off), Oktyabr, June 1958, Yefim Dorosh, "Derevenskie Zametki" (Village Notes), Literaturnaia Gazeta, No 27, 1955; "Derevenski Dnevnik" (Village Diary), Literaturnaia Moskva, 1956; and "Dva Dni v Raigorode" (Two Days in the District Town), Novyi Mir, July 1958.



Local officials believed "not our own eyes, not the peasant, but bits of paper." The plan which "the government has sent down" was sacrosanct, and those who criticized it "almost enemies of the people." If it were in principle permissible to modify the plan, the backward farms would take advantage and dodge their obligations. Officials were so intent on often illusory tactical gains that they lost sight of the strategic objective - bigger harvests. Thus, the peasants of a prosperous farm might be little better off than their laggard neighbors, because they would have to make extra deliveries above plan to cover any shortage in the district quota. At the same time relentless insistence on the recovery of arrears from the weak farms often drove the latter into bankruptcy. The machine-tractor stations (MTS) - "organizers of the socialist countryside" - also passed on their difficulties to the kolkhoz. At one time, for instance, they found it easier to fulfill harvesting and fuel economy plans if they sowed sparsely and kept down yields.

The multitudinous bureaucratic authorities concerned with agriculture were ill-coordinated, so that a kolkhoz might receive machinery, which it perhaps did not need, and be denied the materials to build sheds for them. Skilled personnel were distracted from practical work. The agronomist could not get into the fields because he was too busy with absurd forms. ("Average number of bugs on each stem. How can I count them - they jump.") Often the critical period in the agricultural year was the occasion for a marathon round of meetings, at which all key personnel were immobilized for days on end, while they listened resignedly to ignorant windbags pointing out how important it was to hurry into the fields and belaboring such themes as "the pig is a useful animal."

#### Frank Portraits, Fair Criticisms.

The new literature turns a clearer eye on the peasant as well as on the bureaucrat. "Survivals of the past" and "contradictions" are more vigorous in the country than in the towns. Everyone has always admitted it, in theory. But the Stalinist writers had been very coy about it. They did not know, for instance, what to say about the private plot - so they made the peasant speak scathingly of it, knowing surely that nobody would be fooled. The new school has rejected the ridiculous oversimplification that if the collective farmer is poor, it is because he does not work hard. Only higher incentives could attract the peasant from his plot to the communal sector and, equally important, check the drift of young people and able-bodied males to the towns. Peasant incomes and the capital-funds of farms have been reinforced by higher state prices for produce: they must be protected against the encroachment of bureaucratic bunglers and tyrants. Rural life must be made easier and more secure. A speaker at the 1955 Conference quoted a peasant as saying that his village sometimes received three or four "plenipotentiaries" a day - and never one who wanted to know what the peasant ate, where he slept, whether his roof leaked. And then there was the glaring fact that only wealthy farms operated social insurance schemes. Officials should stop treating the peasants either as follows - imagining that they cannot put a horse between the shafts without instructions - or as an alien, almost hostile class, after the fashion of Ovehkin's party secretary who says: "You carry on managing people with your peasant justice, I'll do it the proletarian way."

The "proletarian way" was the way of several of Tendryakov's negative characters: the raikom secretary who forces the peasants to waste their precious seed because he dare not risk a rebuke from above ("Dirty Weather"); Katya, the rural komsomol who goes straight from school into the party offices, identifies the party with its apparatus and cannot understand anyone working on the kolkhoz from choice (Sasha Sets Out); above all, Mansurov, the raikom secretary whose over-ambitious miscalculations and inhumanity drive the kolkhoz chairman Murgin - one of the best-drawn peasant characters in Soviet literature - to suicide (also in Sasha).

But sensational dramas like the story of Murgin are rare. For the most part the new literature of the countryside is busy with more prosaic matters: painstaking discussion of kolkhoz problems, minute and sumptuous description of the way in which the peasant lives, and exploration of historically and geographically conditioned regional peculiarities. Yefim Dorosh, in his story of a North Russian area not very far from Moscow, perhaps Rostov Yaroslavsky, exhibits all three preoccupations, and gives an excellent account of the collectivized countryside. Dorosh writes well, but it is an extraordinary reflection on previous Soviet literature that his work should be as impressive as it is. It is exciting mainly because he describes things as they are, honestly admitting the conditions and problems which were almost known to exist.

If our interest is in the size of the kolkhoz labor force for example, Dorosh will tell us that "the village has grown poor in people"; it is a long time since he saw a large peasant family of three generations filling their wooden home with noise and merriment. Most of the kolkhoz peasants are war-widows, or younger women who cannot find husbands but often have illegitimate children to keep. Their lives are hard: what with work in the fields and on their own plots, looking after homes and children, and taking produce to market, women are old at forty. Of course, it would be better if the communal sector guaranteed them a good wage, so that they need not bother about the private plot or the market. But at the time of writing, the "private sector" was both the surest source of income for the peasant and the only reliable supplier of certain fruits and vegetables to the local towns. Moreover "the kolkhoz as yet cannot compete with the high agricultural technique of the plot"; for Dorosh's peasants, unlike most of their brothers in Soviet literature, are allowed to demonstrate a remarkable heritage of agricultural lore, accumulated through ages of intelligent husbandry on once poor soil which they have made rich themselves. They would "waste" less time if local trade were better organized; if the rural cooperative did not feel that it could do well enough out of "vodka and short measure" without handling peasant produce; and if the peasants did not have to go into Moscow for such goods as roof iron, lamp chimneys, felt boots and soap, crowding trains on these excursions and creating "harmful irritation" against themselves.

What about time wasted on religious holidays - in practice the excuse for drinking and jollifications in the streets? The village, Dorosh shows, offers little in the way of entertainment or cultural activity, and the lives of many of its female inhabitants are laborious and lonely. Can they be blamed if, as soon as they can spare the money, which may be at the height of the harvest, they club together to buy drink and finish work early



to have a party? And how do the youngsters spend their leisure? Well, there is always the street gathering, with singing and dancing to an accordion. There the girls will bring their "rather absurd" dance the yeletsky. Two or four of them step into the middle of the ring and start slowly circling about, frantically stamping their feet, their arms limply dangling, their faces deliberately expressionless. Soon one of them yells out a chastuska (peasant ditty) with a significant refrain which could be translated, in doggerel not much worse than the original:

They miscall us and they bawl us  
out, but still we jog along;  
Whatever names they like to call us,  
We're so tough we can't go wrong.

The town, of course, must raise the village up to its own level. But rather startlingly, the inhabitants of Dorosh's raigorod, (district town), except for the workers in its one factory, are provincial philistines and parasites not very different- he says himself - from their counterparts before the revolution. Other emissaries of urban civilization include an incompetent and time-wasting ministerial investigating commission, led by a "self-sacrificing blockhead"; and a blustering, shifty MTS director who stands on a platform as though it were a fortified position from which to bombard his audience. Dorosh praises his raikom secretary for learning to behave not like the usual urban bureaucrat come to reform the ignorant but rather like the old-style, country-bred farm chairman: "I think that we should have more confidence in the peasants - their common sense, their experience and last but not least their desire to have something to eat."

#### Limitation of the New Literature

To sum up, the recent work on rural themes deserves respect because it is informed with a refreshing common-sense and down-to-earth humanity unknown in the Stalin era and still rare in other reaches of Soviet literature. But its importance should not be exaggerated, whether one is looking for evidence of a change of heart towards the peasant or signs of literary rejuvenation.

The new trend in kolkhoz literature has been the product of Khrushchev's break with the discredited agricultural policies of his predecessors, and of that practical, undogmatic approach to rural problems which, he has told us, once provoked Stalin into calling him a "Narodnik." Unlike the Babaevsky and Nikolaevas, Ovechkin and his fellows have not always trailed along behind party decisions: sometimes, indeed they have anticipated official policy. It is nonetheless true that their work is for the most part an artistic elaboration of the critical observations and practical deductions which are embodied in the party's enactments on agriculture in the period 1953-1958. Since the party itself has recognized and prescribed reforms against the abuses and absurdities with which the writers are largely concerned, most of their work is inevitably ephemeral. Obviously, they cannot discuss the results of Khrushchev's innovations as frankly as they have discussed those of his predecessor's mismanagement. Similarly they will have to turn from examination of the peasant's grievances, which the party now regards as a thing of the past, and portray his progressive assimilation of the Communist ideal. In

short, a new stabilization of agricultural policy may mean a new stagnation in kolkhoz literature.

The recent work considered here is essentially journalistic: its preferred forms are the essay, travel notes, the journal, the short story, the conte. This is partly because the writers were urgently concerned with matters of topical importance, but perhaps also because by avoiding large rounded forms they spared themselves the problems of balance between "positive" and "negative" which bedevil the Soviet novel. In any event, the skittishness of the work makes it a very flimsy foundation for a new literature on rural themes. The spirit of Ovechkin, Tendryakov and Dorosh is admirable, but its embodiment is too insubstantial to preserve it.

Soviet literature on rural themes has passed through four phases. In the 1920's the writers, though often ideologically committed, were artistically free. With the beginning of mass collectivization they were forced into the struggle to reconcile realistic art with political expediency - a struggle which Sholokhov abandoned, but which Panferov pursued to the ruin of what might have been a great book. Art and truth alike disappeared from mature Stalinist literature. Finally since Stalin's death, what we have seen is a new, humble and perhaps not very hardy flowering.

The lesson which should be evident - and many good Soviet writers are aware of it - is that a literature whose themes and aims are purely sociological can create work of high artistic and social value only if writers can freely range the historical and psychological depths of their subject matter. The Soviet writer has no such freedom. He is limited to his treatment of "what is" by taboos on the discussion of "what has been" and a rigid prescription of "what must be". Soviet literature can securely restore its credits for the future only if it pays its debts to the past, and many of the writers know this. Those who subscribed to the condemned "theory of distance" - the idea that literature can best make valid comments on reality in distant retrospect - were probably not all simply anxious, as official critics suggest, to avoid the difficult "actual themes" of the present. Some of them surely were motivated by the desire to reopen the awkward questions of yesterday, of the sort which the newly published party history so blandly evades. Not the least important of these questions is the fate dealt out to the Soviet peasant seen in historical perspective. The starting point for a new, artistically powerful and socially useful literature of the countryside could only be a novel such as Sholokhov or Panferov might have written but for Stalin.



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Vera Alexandrova

Editors' Note: Miss Alexandrova's article is the second in our series of reports on current Soviet literature as a reflection of Soviet reality (see "The Factory Manager in Soviet Fiction," by George Gibian, in the March-April, 1959 issue). The next two articles will deal with agriculture and the status and position of Soviet women.

In stormy historical epochs youth always regards itself as a "new generation," ready to replace its elders. One of the Soviet Union's most talented young poets, Evgeny Evtushenko, wrote in an article on "Two Poetic Generations" in early 1955:

"New poets do not appear in literature singly. We connect the image of every poet with a specific poetic generation. ...Only a poet who is profoundly related to his generation can later become the spokesman for the intellectual moods of the entire people...."<sup>1</sup>

Evtushenko classified himself as a member of a generation distinct from that which was old enough to take an active part in World War II, and whose poets' works directly reflected that experience. The new generation is also and profoundly a product of the war, but only a few of its eldest fringe actually joined in the final stages of fighting. Most were children at the time (Evtushenko himself was about eight when the war broke out) and they felt the war's impact in a different way.

Glimpses of this generation in its childhood are furnished by some of the writings of the war period. A common characteristic of the children is enforced self-reliance beyond their years. There is the boy Vova, in Tatyana Oks' "On the Petrograd Side" (1942), who is the son of a Red Army soldier fighting at besieged Leningrad. Vova's mother works in a defense plant. The boy takes care of the home, and in the evenings goes to meet his mother, so that she need not be afraid coming home alone. Similar self-sufficient personalities are exhibited by Olya in Nikolai Tikhonov's "The Family" (1942) and Petrusha in the late Andrei Platonov's "Ivanov's Family" (1946). These children became accustomed from their earliest years to live by themselves, concealing from their elders their thoughts, sorrows and dreams. Petrusha's father, home from the front, catches himself in the feeling that he has lost touch with his family, that he feels no real tenderness for the boy: "Talks like a grandfather, but I'll bet he cannot read." It is only

It is only when Petrusha speaks in his sleep, "tenderly and piteously" -- "mama, mama, pick me up in your arms, I am so tired" -- that we realize how young he still is, what a "childish soul is in him when it is untouched by care."

That the theme of childhood looms large in the latterday creative works of this generation is thus understandable. The young writer Korenev muses:

"The spirited boy may not remember  
Those days; that road, and that heavy burden.  
But childhood knows  
With its special sense  
Of the most important...."2

And with the same acuity these children "saw their elders without masks," says the young poetess Yulia Neiman, recollecting a child's view of the war in her poem "1941."3

#### Life "Without Embellishments"

The war's formative influence on the new literary generation is summed up by the Soviet writer Vassily Azhaev (author of the novel Far From Moscow, 1952) in an article entitled "The Young Forces in Soviet Prose."4 Azhaev asks: "What is the common feature in the lives of the youngest generation?...how do its writers differ from the young writers of preceding generations?" and he answers:

"They were formed by the war...whether they fought in it or were merely torn away from their homes and sent into evacuation. In either case they felt the impact in childhood and youth of a life full of trials and hardships; they came to know (life) not from books but from experience, and certainly without embellishments."

Azhaev apparently felt impelled to add that this acquaintance with life as it was--not "from books" (in other words, not according to the official stereotype) -- "did not prevent the children of this generation from absorbing with their mothers' milk a deep love for their socialist homeland." Yet the literature produced by the new generation reveals that whatever its feelings for country may be, they are something quite apart from the hackneyed depictions in earlier writing of youth's enthusiastic "socialist patriotism."

Among recent writings which have probed youth's attitudes is Nikolai Pogodin's sketch, "Kustanai Meetings," portraying the young people lately mobilized for developmental work on the virgin lands.5 Noting that these youths bear "very little resemblance" to the zealous contingent which undertook the building of the city of Komsomolsk in the 1930's, Pogodin remarks:



"The times are different. The romanticism and novelty of the first five-year plans are things of the past. There has been a great national war, and the work itself on the virgin lands is not the building of a romantic city."

The virgin-lands workers, he goes on, are mostly "fellows" who have left secondary school before graduating. Many of them have lost their families. They are sparing of words and smiles, and their speech is frequently punctuated by "uncultured" expressions. They all share a dislike of pompous slogans:

"Some quiet-eyed boy will listen in silence when you call him an emissary of his homeland. The truth, it turns out, is that he has come here to change his life.... There are young people here whose lives in some factory, in some collective did not work out, cracked somewhere. And so, as one told me, they went to look for...a new place where they were not known, where they would not be condemned for old mistakes, and where, discarding their past, they could start life over again."

There are very few "hopeless cases, incorrigibles or hooligans" among the new settlers on the virgin lands. But if some of them are still unsuccessful in reordering their lives, then the blame, says the writer, can often be laid to a lack of helpful understanding and interest on the part of local authorities.

### Bureaucratic Blinders

Some instances of this soulless approach of the party officialdom are described in a sketch by Leonid Volynsky, also titled "Kustanai Meetings."<sup>6</sup> He relates, for example, the cases of Tolya Kostiuhenko, a boy who was unable to finish school and left home to go to work in a factory in Kazakhstan. At first everything went well. But later Tolya began staying away from work and drinking to excess. Called to the office for a talk, "he honestly admitted that he could not restrain himself, and asked that his mother come to live with him" (Tolya's father was killed in the war). The mother wanted to come, but was given no help in arranging for work. Eventually Tolya fell into bad company, was caught stealing and sent to prison. Seeking help for him, the mother came and appealed to the district committee of the Communist Youth League (Komsomol). Too late, they realized that they themselves had failed the boy. The author muses a good deal about "how deeply injustice wounds the young defenseless heart, and how little the people whose task it is to teach and educate concern themselves with the problem."

This idea finds further illustration in a play by the young writer Alexander Volodin, "Factory Girl" (1956). The simple plot centers around a young spinning mill worker named Zhenka Shulzhenko. A motion picture director comes to the mill to film

a group of the women workers, showing what a "cultured" life they lead. In an amusing scene at the dormitory--where the girls hasten to clean up the disarray and to exhibit books from what they call the "Red Corner" -- Zhenka stands out for her prettiness, high spirits and impish frankness. Later, at the staging of a party in the workers' club, Zhenka is asked to leave the dance floor because she behaves too boisterously and merrily. A party organizer named Bibichev then scores her in the local newspaper as a typical example of workers who "spoil the reputation of the whole group" by their conduct. Zhenka is "taken to task" and almost loses her job; her friends intercede for her, however, and the play ends happily.

It is highly interesting that this play, dramatically weak as it is, has enjoyed great success at public presentations. The critic M. Stroeve in a commentary entitled "Critical Turn of Mind" <sup>7</sup> (an attribute which Zhenka gaily claims in describing herself), states that he does not recall an equal success since "Pavel Grekov" by Voytekhov and Lench, in 1939. "The cheeky, merry girl" has conquered the young viewer by her "free truth." At the theater, filled with young people, "you are carried along by the passionate and attentive reaction of the public, you will hear the soldier or officer in front of you mutter encouragement and approval to the mischievous Zhenka..."

Other recent plays which have been received favorably by the public are Rozov's "Bon Voyage" (1955) and Shtein's "Personal Affair" (1954) and "Hotel Astoria" (1957). These, like "Factory Girl," are theatrically weak yet seem to have evoked a sympathetic response through the portrayal of youthful characters who tend to be critical of petty party authority.

### Apathy and Honesty

A valuable source of clues to young people's attitudes was a collection of commentaries entitled "Today, September 1st," published in Novy Mir in connection with the opening of the 1955 academic year.<sup>8</sup> Of particular interest was a piece by L. Rozanova, secretary of a Komsomol unit at Moscow University, who reported the results of interviews with young Communist freshmen. One Komsomol member, when asked what "social" activities he would like to participate in, replied:

"You know, I have decided to stay away from social activities here."

"Why?"

"Well, you know...I did quite a bit at school. I think it's enough. I am tired. There is too little free time... Then, after some thought, he adds calmly: "Besides, honestly speaking, there is no point to it all."

"No point to what?"

"Oh, Komsomol work..."

The writer records that these ideas are familiar to her; she has heard the same talk--"theories about fatigue, and, 'honestly speaking, 'the uselessness' of social activities"--from other students. She remarks:

"Of course, we have met such people in the past. They ma



not have expressed these "theories" with so much frankness, but they certainly practiced them. Yet I have never before encountered such coll skepticism in a freshman, a boy just...graduated from secondary school."

The conclusions reached by Rozanova are not too flattering to party methods of youth training. It appears that those students who entertain the "correct" ideas generally "think in stock phrases," while the genuinely interesting young people are either disillusioned in Komsomol work or are not members of the Komsomol at all.

The remarks of the student quoted above call attention to a notable characteristic of the young generation, its tendency to adopt favorite phrases or words and to invest them with a special meaning. "Honest" and "honestly speaking" join with the commonly-heard expressions, "wholeness" and "of a piece," key words used to assert and to defend individuality. Evtushenko devoted an entire poem to the theme of "Wholeness" (its title), concluding it with the lines: "Yes/This is very difficult--/becoming happy/Yes, first one must/become himself."<sup>9</sup> And Nelly Ivanova, in Leonid Volynsky's story mentioned earlier, says to the writer: "A person must be whole and honest, don't you think? And first of all honest with himself." The main concern of the young man Andrei in Rozov's "Bon Voyage" is being thus "honest with himself." Other terms in the special lexicon of youth similarly express a groping effort to discover and to assert individual personality.

An interesting sidelight of the young generation is the curiosity exhibited by some of its members about literature that has been criticized or banned by the authorities. A case in point emerges in "Letters from a Young People's Dormitory," by V. Mikailov, a writer who went to live for a time at a factory dormitory in the Urals.<sup>10</sup> His roommate was a young rolling-mill worker named Sasha who loved literature, especially poetry. One day he surprised Mikhailov with the question, "Where can you get rare...forbidden books--say, Essenin or Pushkin?" He revealed that he already had a small collection of such books and that he made a practice of copying obscured poems to his taste when he was able to find them. On another occasion Sasha commented on the stupidity of rejecting Mayakovsky or Essenin, since both, in his opinion, had written some remarkable poems. And thoughtfully he quoted a line from Mayakovsky: "When the soul has frozen to the rib, then see if you can thaw it off..."

### The Appeal of Revisionism

The above discussion necessarily provides only a few clues to the thinking and attitudes of the young Soviet generation; yet those characteristics which have been underscored are important ones, for without understanding them, we cannot understand the emergence and persistence of the phenomenon of "revisionism" on the Soviet scene. In the field of literature--which is the particular concern here--the label of "revisionism" has been applied by the authorities to stigmatize the effort of a notable sector of the intellectuals to break away from certain esthetic and literary values of the Stalin era, expressed in the precepts of socialist realism."

There have been other instances in Soviet history when "oppositional" moods developed within the society. As a rule, the authorities quickly dissipated such moods by the simple expedient of disposing of the people suspected of harboring them. This time, however, the regime has found its task much more difficult and protracted. While it has put a stop to the publicizing of "revisionist" ideas and works, it has by no means vanquished the spirit which produced them, as its own persisting complaints have attested. The intensity of the anti-revisionist campaign is indeed the surest index of the widespread support these ideas have evoked among literary people and the general reading public--particularly in the ranks of the younger generation.

So much has been written concerning the causes, emergence and course of the revisionist trend in literature that it would be neither possible nor profitable to dwell on its history here. Yet in the context of the present paper it might be interesting to recall the positions taken by some of its protagonists who are still fairly young in years themselves, and whose viewpoint represent the most articulate expression of that yearning for "truth" in literature--and in life--which has been under discussion here.

One of the memorable forums for such ideas was the Third Plenum of the Moscow section of the Writers' Union held in March 1957, which formally marked the onset of the authorities' crack down on the revisionists and which in turn evoked some vehement speeches in defense of the ideas and works under official criticism.<sup>11</sup> Notable among the speakers was Vladimir Dudintsev, whose novel Not By Bread Alone (published in 1956) was a prime target of the "orthodox" critics' wrath.

Pleading openly for "the possibility of creative discussion," Dudintsev returned his censors' fire by likening the critic to a cripple who "threateningly bangs his crutch." And in another analogy, he maintained that the time had come when Soviet writers

"...might be allowed, like young swimmers, to try their skill at swimming on their own. Perhaps we might not drown, after all! But alas, I constantly feel the pressure of that leash, which is sometimes used to lead children. And it hampers me in swimming."

In a separate address to the Plenum Dudintsev referred to the circumstances under which his novel came to be conceived, in a story which has cogency for our earlier discussion concerning the war's influence:

"I remember the first days of the patriotic war. I was lying in the trenches, and over me an aerial battle was going on. Messerschmidts knocking down our planes. At that moment something began to give in me, because until then I had always heard that our air force was faster and better than all the others. Some people say that I express 'derogatory' tendencies. This is not true. I simply want to prevent a repetition of what I have experienced. And I have a right to want it!"



Another speaker at the Plenum was the young poet Semyon Kir-sanov, whose scathing poetic allegory "Seven Days of the Week" (1956) roused the authorities' anger as much as had Dudintsev. Kirsanov, too, pleaded that literature had entered "a new phase of development" -- a phase that "does not deny the past" but that should allow greater creative license to do things that we were not always able to do in former time." The principle short-coming of literature in the past, he went on, was the attempt to depict Soviet life as if it were devoid of conflicts. "In its more 'crass' manifestations, it was a varnishing of reality." Instead of showing life as a struggle of contradictions, writers showed "only its positive aspects."

Among others who protested the regime view at the Plenum were Evgeny Evtushenko, the poet of the "new generation" mentioned at the start of this article, and Veniamin Kaverin, a member of the editorial board of the journal Literaturnaia Moskva, which had come under attack for its publication of so-called "revisionist" writings. Both of these men were sharply rebuked in the official report of the Plenum for their stubborn defense of their ideas. 12

Not all critics, of course, are in the ranks of the conform-ists. One of the most vivid talents among the younger literary critics was the late Mark Shcheglov, whose views have been a vital element in the controversy over revisionism although he himself died in 1956 (at the age of 30). 13 A recurrent theme in Shcheglov's writing was an attempt to define the essence of truth in art. The aim of art, he felt, should not be the mere reflection of life, but the expression of the truth of life by artistic means, creating the irresistible and eternal truth of art. This truth could be created and projected most graphically in the theater. He minced no words in expressing what he felt was wrong with Soviet theater, as stated most clearly in his article "Realism in Contemporary Drama":

"Despite their modern clothes, the heroes of many of our current plays resemble living people, our contemporaries, only in a most general way....For a genuine resemblance they lack too much: they lack a vital plenitude of emotions, intensity, simplicity and irony....They are not endowed with the ability to think about anything except 'the business at hand,' they have no philosophy and no values of their own in appraising the phenomena of life.... They are severely ill with pathos and rigorism; without a penny's worth of thought or feeling, they are insanely spendthrift of pompous and loud words. This is why one is so often overwhelmed with a sense of falseness and untruth in the most elevated scenes."14

### The Repercussions

It is not hard to see in these ideas of the younger intellectual elite a reflection, in a highly articulate and positive form, of the characteristics and attitudes of Soviet youth analyzed earlier. And so it is no surprise that some of the staunchest and most fervent support for the "revisionist" works

and ideas came from the young generation, particularly the student populace at the universities, in the short months of 1956 and early 1957 when open debate was still permitted.

The new intellectual trend was, of course, a product not only of the representatives of the young intelligentsia but of many established talents -- Ilya Ehrenburg, Konstantin Simonov, Anna Akhmatova and others -- and its appeal spread to all of the more educated layers of Soviet society. Indeed, combined with other events, the initial widespread reaction to the "new look" in literature made the 1956 period and its immediate aftermath one of the most dramatic in Soviet history.

Yet the real proof of revisionism's profound impact is to be found in the sequel to those dynamic days -- that is, in the veiled yet stubborn resistance of the revisionist spirit to the authorities' efforts to extirpate it. The seriousness with which the regime viewed the situation became eminently clear when Khrushchev personally intervened in literary affairs with his three speeches of the spring and summer of 1957 (published in September of that year under the title, "For Close Ties between Literature and Art and the Life of the People" <sup>15</sup>), which bluntly warned the intellectual world that it must bow to the dictates of party-determined orthodoxy. That the reaction to this attack from highest authority fell far short of its intended effect became vividly apparent in succeeding months.

#### The Voice of Silence

In February 1958 a Plenum of the Executive Board of the Soviet Writers' Union was called at which the dominant theme was a complaint against the persistence of revisionism. <sup>16</sup> One of the key speakers was Sergei Smirnov, a regime-line spokesman who recently (March 1959) was appointed editor-in-chief of the Union's organ, Literaturnaya Gazeta. He offered the opinion that those of the "revisionists" who were disposed to regard their recent "enthusiasms" as mistaken or accidental should be given some attention and help in returning "to the correct path" -- for them, let bygones be bygones. But, he added:

"...what is to be done if some of our writers cherish these 'bygones' as something sacred, and reply with dead silence to the demand of literary public opinion that they re-evaluate their recent positions? If at the (aforementioned) Third Plenum their silence evoked 'concern,' today this stubborn silence rouses not concern, but indignation, for theirs is the pose of men who have not disarmed..."

Others extremely aggressive in their criticism of the "revisionists" were the writers Nikolai Gribachev and Alexander Chakovsky. Gribachev deplored the persistence of revisionist manifestations both at home and in the people's democracies and complained that Soviet publicists were not waging a sufficient energetic campaign against them. He declared in summary:

"The principal danger to our literature is revisionism, which appears in many forms--from vilification of everything



we have done, to attempts to dance rock and roll on the backs of the dead and the living, down to cunning attempts, with the aid of theoretical acids, to undermine the foundation of our literature -- its Marxist-Leninist esthetics."

Chakovsky similarly summed up the results of the struggle against revisionism with the statement:

"The soap bubbles of revisionism are bursting....But it would be naive political simpering to assert that the struggle with revisionism is finished. It is not finished either in the Soviet Union or internationally...."

### A Sea of Troubles

In the same month that this meeting was held, a revealing article entitled "When the Compass is Lost," by the writer E. Surkov (not to be confused with Alexei Surkov, First Secretary of the Executive Board of the Writers' Union), was published in the journal Znamia.<sup>17</sup> The article constituted a scathing attack on the entire "revisionist" front, but in particular on its tenacious influence in the sphere of drama. Among Surkov's targets were a number of the young drama critics of the magazine Teatr (N. Velekhova, V. Kardin, A. Anastasiev and others) as well as the Georgian tragedienne Veriko Andzhaparidze (in connection with her public remark at a theater-union gathering that "The divine is gone from the theater"). The late Shcheglov and his aforementioned article, "Realism in Contemporary Drama," also were dragged out anew for criticism.

Surkov's main complaint against the Teatr staff was tied up with his fury against the "not-unknown" Polish writer Jan Kott and his article, "Hamlet After the Twentieth Congress," an interpretive critique of a Cracow production of "Hamlet" which had caused a stir in Polish literary circles. What incensed Surkov was Kott's view that the production was "built on political allusions to contemporary facts....This Hamlet is all action, instead of reflection. He is rabid, this young intransigent, drunk with his own indignation, suddenly finding an opportunity for action. It is Hamlet after the Twentieth Congress, one of many..." Ominously, if somewhat ambiguously, Surkov complained that instead of exposing "this frankest of the Polish revisionists," the "political infants" of Teatr "have with great interest paraphrased in its pages 'Kott's original interpretation,' little suspecting into whose arms (his italics) it is possible to fall once the Marxist-Leninist party compass is lost. This is whose shores you can drift to, if you passively submit to the 'will of the waves'...."

Throughout 1958 regime pressures of this sort continued. At the year's end, just last December, the First Congress of the newly-constituted Writers' Union of the RSFSR again took up the cudgels. The greater part of a keynote speech by Alexei Surkov was devoted to "revisionist attacks against us." Though he concentrated his remarks on the revisionist danger in Eastern Europe, he urged Soviet writers to re-examine carefully their "ideological weapons...to make sure there are no nicks of revisionism nor rust of dogmatism or sectarianism" on them. <sup>18</sup>

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In very recent weeks, as this paper was being written, there was evidence from Moscow that the current year may bring a new and milder phase in the anti-revisionist campaign. At the May Congress of the Writers' Union, regime spokesmen seemed to make a special effort to inject a more conciliatory note into their speeches, to stress--in the words of the aforementioned Smirnow--the theme of "let bygones be bygones." But if the tone of speeches was friendlier, they made clear that the regime still considered "revisionist" ideas and critical attitudes toward the new orthodoxy dangers to be guarded against with utmost "vigilance." 19

Today Soviet writers who sympathize with "revisionism" are unable to come out in open defense of their ideas. Yet evidence as well as logic strongly suggest that the "silent" revisionists--to borrow again from Smirnow--continue to cherish their views as "something sacred."

That a great deal of the vigor and originality, as well as the tenacity, of revisionism has been attributable to the role of the younger Soviet intelligentsia is, in the present context perhaps its most significant aspect, and warrants some concluding reflections. For the first time in Soviet history, the Communist Party's effort to stamp out what it has considered a form of intellectual heresy has met with protracted resistance from a leading element of the younger generation. For the first time this active and socially valuable sector of the society has not been moved by the party's appeals that it adapt itself wholeheartedly to the official orthodoxy. It has instead resolutely asserted itself against conformism, perhaps without even realizing that it has thereby challenged the very basis of Communist dictatorship. That this intellectual element is, in the poet Evtushenko's words, "profoundly related to its generation," is clear enough; whether it has actually been or will ever become "the spokesman for the intellectual moods of the entire people" remains a question for the future.



Footnotes

- 1 Literaturnaia Gazeta, January 25, 1955.
- 2 A. Korenev, Octyabr, (October), 1956.
- 3 Literaturnaia Moskva, Vol. 2, 1956.
- 4 Novy Mir, March 1956.
- 5 Znamia, November 1955.
- 6 Novy Mir, November 1958.
- 7 Teatr, June 1957.
- 8 September issue, 1955.
- 9 Novy Mir, March 1956.
- 10 Literaturnaia Gazeta, October 1, 1955.
- 11 Proceedings published in ibid., March 19, 1957.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 See the collection of his "Literary-Critical Articles," posthumously published in Sovetskii Pisatel (Soviet Writer), Moscow, 1958.
- 14 Literaturnaia Moskva, Vol. 2, 1956.
- 15 Kommunist, No. 12, 1957.
- 16 Proceedings published in Literaturnaia Gazeta, February 13 and 15, 1958.
- 17 February issue, 1958.
- 18 Literaturnaia Gazeta, December 14, 1958.
- 19 For more information on the Congress see Max Hayward's article in this issue--Ed.

REFLECTIONS ON SOVIET NOVELS

By Alexander Gerschenkron  
World Politics  
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There is every likelihood that future historians of the Russian novel will praise the Soviet period for the record number of volumes produced and blame it for an equally unprecedented decline in artistic standards. Yet one may hope that the twenty-first-century critic, in fairness to an unhappy past, will not overlook a redeeming feature of the Soviet novel, i.e., its considerable anthropological value. The present reflections about a few recent or fairly recent Soviet novels do not deal with their literary qualities. They are concerned exclusively with the light these novels cast upon various aspects of everyday life in Soviet Russia, including, it may be added, the life of the novel makers themselves.

## I

Leonid Leonov's Russian Forest,<sup>1</sup> written between 1950 and 1953, provides perhaps more illumination and more food for thought than any other Soviet product in the field since the end of the last war. (Because of its public repudiation in Russia, if not for other reasons, Pasternak's Doctor Zhivago may be safely excluded from the list of Soviet novels.) Russian Forest has both an apparent and a real theme. While the latter is much more important, the former is by no means without interest. In addition, there are a number of political judgments strewn over the pages of the novel, some of which are worth noting.

The theme apparent is writ large over the title page: it is the problem of Soviet forestry politics. The hero of the novel, a professor of forestry, loves the forest and wishes the forest-covered areas of the country to be maintained unreduced and unthinned. He would not only preserve the aggregate extent of the forest, but also freeze the existing geographic distribution of forest lands. In defending his position, the professor adds to the long list of Soviet claims to invention by asserting that the concept of "sustained yield" (i.e., the concept of a forest which is "normal" as to age structure and produces year in, year out, a harvest maximized in some rational fashion) was developed by Russian students of forestry (p. 318).

In temperament and Weltanschauung, our professor -- his name is Virkhov -- is a direct descendant of Doctor Astrov

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<sup>1</sup> Russkii les; the page references below are to Sobraniye sochinenii (Collected Works), Vol. vi, Moscow, 1956.



in Chekhov's Uncle Vanya, except that Chekhov's médecin de campagne expressed himself simply, using good Russian, while the Soviet professor prefers a dubious jargon. "The forest," he teaches and preaches, "is the sum of productive forces and not of production forces" (p. 251). This obscure formulation in pseudo-scientific style sounds very much like a quotation from the official Soviet textbook of economics. But the tenor of the professor's pronouncements does imply some criticism of Soviet policy. The official Soviet line consists, first, of accusing the pre-revolutionary government of barbarous destruction of forests and, second, of demonstrating how after the revolution the traditional pre-revolutionary principles of forest conservation prevented, for a number of years, full utilization of timber resources. This is not a very consistent position, but it is a fact that in 1929, when Soviet policies were radically revised, forest utilization was completely subordinated to the general policy of high-speed industrialization and the amount of lumber cut for domestic use and for export came greatly to exceed natural growth.<sup>2</sup>

Thus Professor Virkhov may be regarded as a critic of Soviet policy. To be sure, the criticism is very mild. First of all, except for charges of poor workmanship, it never is made quite explicit. Nor are the Soviets likely to be very sensitive to strictures in this area. Considering the extent of their general trespasses upon sound principles of resource conservation, the predatory use of forests would seem the least grievous of Soviet sins. Some permanent reduction in extent or density of forests, of course, may well have been justifiable. The problems of rational forest utilization are in general much more complex, and the choices to be made involve many more factors than Leonov and his professor seem to grasp. Not that there is any evidence that the Soviet government was guided by an accurate calculus. On the contrary, some of the elements involved, such as a reasonable "forest per cent" (i.e., an interest rate with the help of which the optimum rotation, or felling age, can be determined), were proscribed in Soviet Russia for ideological reasons. The Soviet ideas of forest exploitation were gross and crude. Still, quite apart from permanent changes in rotation that can be quite sensible, temporary deviations from "normalcy" are a regular phenomenon in forestry policies and can be as rational as "normalcy" itself. At any rate, the losses suffered need not be irreparable. Some of them can be remedied by afforestation. A log is not like a chunk of iron ore. It can be replaced, even though at some cost. It is also quite possible, and in fact likely, that by the beginning of the 1950's, when Leonov wrote his novel, the Soviet government was getting ready for a change in its forestry policy and Leonov's novel

<sup>2</sup> Cf., e.g., V. A. Popov, Lesnaya promyshlennost' S.S.S.R. (The Forest Industry of the U.S.S.R.), Vol. 1, Lesoekspluatatsiya (Forest Exploitation), Goslesbumizdat, 1957, pp. 15 and 33.

was a welcome -- if not a government-inspired -- vindication of the new policy.

However this may be, the wish to protect the Russian forest is painted over in the novel with such a heavy coat of Soviet patriotism that the light touches of criticism tend to disappear beneath it. Some of Leonov's interpretations of recent events are gems of Soviet metaphysics and/or historical accuracy and should not be overlooked. We are treated, for instance, to an analysis of the feelings of the Soviet population in the summer of 1941 after Hitler's attack upon Russia: "Behind regrets about construction work that had to remain unfinished, one could discern contempt for the enemy -- for this immediate enemy and also for the other -- the main and hidden enemy who got scared of peaceful competition between the two systems" (p. 105; italics added). Apparently the reference is to the mythical being known as "capitalism." Or is it to the United States? The ambiguity seems intentional and purpose is to suggest, subtly and darkly, that the United States had stood behind Hitler's aggression and that, in doing so, it was moved by fears of Soviet achievements. In this connection also, a perceptive view of American national character is helpful. In a conversation between Professor Virkhov and a friend who is an old Bolshevik and a model of a revolutionary hero, the latter describes some uncivilized acts which, he says, have been committed by the American army. The professor, duly horrified, asks the deeply probing question: "Who are they then? -- soldiers or robbers?" and promptly receives an illuminating answer: "They are merchants. Soldier is the great title of a man who knows how to die for an idea. ...But name for me at least one idea which in the course of the last hundred years has emerged from the merchant class and was implemented in the name of life (sic).... Merchants, at the very best, grow to be pirates" (p. 680).

One must wonder whether Leonov himself realized that his perfect Communist repeated almost verbatim ideas from Werner Sombart's Haendler and Helden (Merchants and Heroes), a book of "patriotic cogitations" written in Germany during World War I and directed against England (Munich, 1915). Even Leonov's style in those paragraphs with its nebulous haecceities sounds very much like a rendition into Russian of reactionary German writings.

In view of these deplorable characteristics, it is not surprising to learn how despicably the Americans acted during the war. Day in, day out, Professor Virkhov and his neighbors wonder where the second front will be opened; they continue to speculate for nine hundred days, until on the nine hundred and first, when the Germans attack in the Ardennes, the Muscovites smilingly read the telegraphic prayers for help which come from their allies (p. 718). Thus the Anglo-American forces apparently managed to get to the



Ardennes without ever opening a second front. The moronic effrontery of this presentation of the course of World War II in the West would be difficult to surpass. It is also hard to believe that the average Soviet reader is, or that Leonov believes him to be, so stupid, ignorant, and gullible as to accept Leonov's counterfeits for true coins. In general, it is probably more reasonable to assume that statements of this sort are to be taken within the context of Soviet mores as part of a ritual; as a somewhat pompous affirmation, that is, of loyalty to the regime. But Leonov does seem to go further than is required by the Soviet code of proper behavior for a writer. In addition to mistreatments of the past, his novel also contains some glimpses of future history. Varya, the ideal heroic figure of a young Soviet girl who loses her life fighting the Germans, places the last war in its proper historical perspective: "You see," she explains to her friend, the professor's daughter, "the fascists are just an episode in a great historical competition....Remember your history: if it took full thirty years to settle the trifling dynastic conflicts between the Red and the White Roses, then it should not be surprising if it takes a century to decide the great argument between the Red and White halves of mankind. But you may assume that we have done the first twenty per cent of the job" (p. 129).

This is very strong stuff indeed, and one can only conclude that the insurance premiums which Soviet writers must pay are high. Still, it seems advisable to be over-insured rather than underinsured. A writer who shows such fervent loyalty in magnis surely must be permitted a fleeting moment of eccentric independence of judgment in parvis silvanis. Leonov is widely regarded as one of the foremost Soviet novelists. It is almost frightening to see a man who aspires to the reputation of a great Russian writer cast aside all pretenses at historical veracity, and common sense, and common decency. The Soviet novel does reveal the predicament of the Soviet writer and, through him, that of the Soviet system.

All this is by no means devoid of interest. There is more to Leonov's novel, however, than cheap sentimentality in the style of Otto Ludwig's Erbförster, or semi-literate ideas about rational calculus of forest utilization, or shameless distortions of historical truth. It is only in a very superficial sense that Leonov's novel deals with the vicissitudes of the Russian forest. Its actual subject is the vicissitudes of Soviet man. For it is novel about the Lebenslauf, the span of life, the human biography in Soviet Russia. This is the real theme of the novel and a much more rewarding one.

Professor Virkhov's forestry theories may be flat, but his view of human biography probes deeply into the very core

of the Soviet social system. Progress, our professor believes, consists in an increase of moral duties which must proceed pari passu with an increase in the volume of material goods; only the perfect man can achieve perfect happiness. "Hence everybody must make it his business to have a perfect biography" (p. 59; italics added). This is indeed a sentence full of significance. Unfortunately its translation in English does not do justice to the Russian style, which uses a phrase taken from the archaic language of the Tsarist ukazy. In fact, for a moment the reader hesitates, not knowing whether Leonov and his hero really mean what they say. The concept of perfect biography and the way in which it is expressed are irresistibly reminiscent of Shchedrin's celebrated satirical sallies against Imperial Russia in which he glorified yedinomysliye, perfect conformity in thinking, as the great ideal of the rulers of Russia. But the reader's doubts are out of place, for Leonov is very much in earnest. The problem of perfect biography is indeed a crucial problem of Soviet society. Not that it originated in Soviet Russia, but it is there that it acquired an extent and a weight and a significance which it had never possessed before. It would seem useful therefore to clarify the concept, before examining its application in Leonov's novel.

There are many possible criteria for classifying societies and civilizations. But the prevailing attitude toward a man's biography is far from the least important among those criteria. For it is related to another and perhaps more widely noted distinction, that between settled and migratory or immigration societies. The settled society, as the term is understood here, is one in which the whole life of an individual as a rule is passed within one fairly narrow social circle. In such societies there is no caesura in a man's ideal biography. His biography is perfect in the very specific sense in which a settled society values such perfection: it achieves a unity of life. According to a Russian proverb, no word can be thrown out of a song. No part, however small, can or need be thrown out of a man's biography in a settled society.

The values of a migratory society are radically different. This is a society in which the process of the stranger's losing his alien quality is perennially undone or renewed by the influx of new strangers. The migratory society may coincide with one growing industrial city; it may comprise a region like the valley of the Ruhr, or a huge country like the United States. A society can be more or less "migratory" depending inter alia on its geographic extent or its rate of growth, or on the distance separating it from the areas whence the migrants come and the degree of irreversibility inherent in the act of migration. But the likelihood is that the attitude to a man's life of such a society will tend to differ greatly from that of a settled society. Naturally, such an attitude does not emerge instantaneously.



In a sense the puritanism of New England in several of its aspects was an attempt to negate the basic experience of migration. To become fully migratory, the American society had to shed much of puritan provincialism. Just because the ideas of the "old country" travel with the migrants and are brought in as a specific "brain-case" imports, establishment of a migratory society is a long process even in a young country such as the United States. Once such a society has been established, however, and a new ideology peculiar to it has developed, the migratory society acquires easily discernible traits. In such a society a unit of life, a perfect biography, cannot be regarded as the ideal. The very fact of the migration, the very transformation of a peasant into a city dweller, of a European into an American, create a hiatus in biography. They tear it asunder and force the man to begin a new life. It is not an accident that it was an American philosopher who emphasized the moral characteristics of the "twice-born."<sup>3</sup> In a sense, emigration is death. The emigrant, as the Parisian argot has it, ravale son bulletin de naissance; the naturalization certificate attests the second birth.

The newcomer to a migratory society may have very wighty reasons to forget his past. By suppressing the memory thereof he liberates himself from a record of failure or crime or humiliation. He may want to dismiss his past simply because the burden of nostalgic sentiments is too heavy to carry; or because he feels that the memories lame his energies and thwart his will in an environment that invites action and places high value upon the will to act. In such circumstances, the scriptural injunction against looking backward is filled with new significance. Goethe's urgent advice, "Stirb und werde!" should be written over the gates of immigration societies. The immigrant must obey it or pay the penalty of becoming, again in Goethe's words, "ein trueber Gast auf der dunklen Erde."

The specific "migratory" attitude toward unity of life affects many areas of behavior and endeavor. Examples are not far to seek. The manners of an immigration society do not favor inquiries into a man's past. One of the causes for the temporary success of Senator McCarthy must have lain in the pleasure of overstepping in public an ancient taboo, a well-established rule of private life. Business life provides many an instance of differences between settled and immigration societies. In the former, bankruptcy is likely to end a businessman's career. Even a protested bill of exchange is extremely hard to live down. In an immigration milieu, failure does not block the road to subsequent success and, in fact, success, once achieved, either obliterates the memory of the failure or even tinges it with glory. In

<sup>3</sup> William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, New York, 1903, particularly pp. 166 et seq.

a settled society, the Jack-of-all-trades is presumed -- has been presumed since the days of the Homeric or pseudo-Homeric Margites -- to be a tyro in all and is looked upon with disdain. The man who keeps changing from one trade to another is expected to fail; indeed, given the prevailing attitude, he is most likely to fail. In a migratory society, the virtues of specialization tend to remain unrecognized and unrewarded. The feeling of being up to any task, of being "a man and not a mollusc," is the specific attribute of a man in such a society, as was discovered by the French worker whose report about his downright un-French experience in California was quoted by Marx.<sup>4</sup> It is another matter that the organization of modern factories often requires the worker to perform a single recurring operation. Such operations are quickly learned and, in a growing and mobile society, they are as quickly abandoned and forgotten.

In an immigration society, a second marriage is much more likely to repair a previous marital failure. At any rate, the milieu does not diminish the second marriage's chance of success by refusing to accept it. (It may be easily ascertained by appropriate comparisons that specific religious injunctions are quite insufficient to explain the difference in attitudes.) An even clearer case is provided by marriages of widowed persons. They are frowned upon and viewed as attestations of disloyalty in a settled society and greeted with gladness in a migratory society. To be sure, differences in family structure, the resulting differences in the position of aged people, fear of loneliness in one case and social approval of solitude in the other -- all these affect the social judgment of remarriage. Still, it is the willingness to forget -- i.e., the refusal to place a high value upon unity of life -- that makes possible the position assumed in immigration societies. It is not surprising, therefore, that the propensity to write memoirs is so much more widespread in a settled society than in a migratory society. At the same time such memoirs as do get written in an immigration society are much less in the nature of autobiographies in the proper sense of the word. They tend to deal with events, not with the span of a unique life. Maeterlinck once said that is memory that presupposes and constitutes the unity of life. In the settled society it is the memoirs that as a rule are concerned with revealing a man's life as a straight line placed within limits that are both narrow and predetermined by the fixed co-ordinates of birth, family, social set or class, and professional endeavor.

These are significant differences which penetrate deeply into man's customs and feelings. They are the threads from which the fabric of everyday life is woven. They stem

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<sup>4</sup> Das Kapital, Volksausgabe, Moscow, 1932, p. 513.



from the nature of the society in which they exist and they themselves exert a powerful influence upon the mobility and fluidity of social bodies. There is little doubt that they have direct bearing upon much of modern economic history. An immigration society and an industrial society are not coterminous. Obviously, there were immigration societies that had nothing to do with modern industry. On the other hand, a developed industrial society may have shed most of the qualities of an immigration society. Certain elements of such a shedding process have been clearly perceptible in the United States over the last quarter of a century or so. This is particularly true with regard to some of the aspects mentioned in the foregoing. And yet, one way of looking at the industrial evolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is to regard it as a change from a settled society to an immigration society. Every industrialization which was more than a mere development of manorial handicraft or a growth of cottage industry almost naturally tended to partake of the elements of an immigration society. Industrialization was destructive of provincialism. It metropolized the society. It broke the unity of man's life and, by so doing, tended to reduce the value attached to it.

It is true, of course, that within the old established political entities the transformation was slower and often less complete. To some extent, pre-industrial values have been adjusted to new conditions rather than abandoned altogether. Still, no one can compare the habits of the population, say, in the teeming cities of the Ruhr valley with those of the little towns in Mecklenburg or in any two similarly comparable areas in France, Italy, or any other European country without registering a profound difference in attitude toward a man's life. What is so peculiar about the Soviet type of industrialization is that it represents an attempt to build up an industrial society while preserving the basic features of a settled society. Revolutions, civil strife, and foreign wars have convulsed the land. The countryside has disgorged millions and millions of muzhiks into industrial employment. Large cities have been built in places where not even a tiny hamlet had anticipated the urban future. Tremendous migrations over the face of the enormous country have taken place. And still throughout this period of unprecedented change the government which has been responsible for most of the change has refused, as it were, to recognize its impact upon the course of individual lives. To repeat, this refusal is the real theme of Leonov's novel, to which we may now return.

In accordance with the established custom in Soviet novels, the "positive" hero, Professor Virkhov, has an antagonist, Professor Gratsianski. This bearer of a family name which was chosen to indicate descent from the Russian clergy bitterly attacks Virkhov's views on forestry policies. While Virkhov is a conservationist, his opponent is

in favor of placing the forest at the service of industrialization. This is clear enough. The substantive arguments used are much less so. Some of them are mere abuse and inconsistent abuse at that. While Virkhov accuses the bourgeoisie of destroying the Russian forest, Gratsianski refuses to be "scared" by the conservative rules of forest utilization invented by the bourgeoisie for its own purposes (cf. p. 421). But there is no need to seek for clarity. For arguments do not matter in reality. It is not by puncturing the opponent's logic or erudition that an argument can be won, but by puncturing his biography. Gratsianski derives most of the support for his point of view from the fact that Professor Virkhov as a boy had received a present of twenty-five rubles (about \$12.50 in pre-1934 gold dollars) from a big businessman (p. 143). Furthermore, while he was a student, several payments of twenty-five rubles were made to him from a source that remained unknown. Gratsianski explains that it would be unrealistic to believe in pure philanthropic motivations on the part of the mysterious donor; it is much more natural to assume that he had some long-term designs and hoped to be recompensed at the cost of national properties at some remote future time when the former student would be holding a responsible position in forest administration. Furthermore, Virkhov had married a girl who had been raised on a gentry estate, and this circumstance, too, is used to refute Virkhov's ideas on what to do with the forests. Finally, there is an even more potent, seemingly incontrovertible argument which Gratsianski is holding in reserve as a secret weapon for the moment of the real showdown: this is knowledge of the fact that Virkhov had adopted and raised the child of a "dekulakized" peasant.

This array of far-fetched nonsensicalities may be quite irrelevant to the point at issue. Yet they are taken seriously. Professor Virkhov's young and virtuous daughter, when informed of her father's dubious past, and particularly of the unexplained twenty-five rubles, is plunged into black despair. She tries to change the pronunciation of her name by shifting the accent to the first syllable so as to dissociate herself from her father; and she wonders whether acquaintance with the daughter of a tainted man will not be detrimental to her friend, Varya. The technical expression used throughout the novel for damaging a person's reputation by associating with him or her is "to cast a shadow upon somebody."

It would be pleasant, and in fact almost liberating, if one could regard all this as a satire directed against the Soviet attitudes to biography. But unfortunately this is not possible. First of all, because Leonov's "positive" character himself is the inventor of the concept of perfect biography. Second, because the plot of the novel, divested of the incidentals of partisan fighting and air raids on Moscow, consists of nothing but the gradual unmasking of



Gratsianski. His theories of forestry are confounded by showing that in his student days he had seduced and then heartlessly abandoned a girl and her child that was also his. And the coup de grâce falls when, through a series of contrived coincidences, it transpires that Gratsianski, again in his student days, stood up an audience of workers to whom he was supposed to deliver a lecture and, in addition, betrayed to the police (somewhat unwittingly, it appears) a mutual friend of his and Virkhov's, the great revolutionary, who, as we have seen, later on was to become a student of Werner Sombart's theories. Once these events of some thirty years ago have been revealed or are close to being revealed, Gratsianski is finished. A richly deserved punishment is in store for him while Virkhov is rewarded by a medal and in addition recovers the wife who had left him many years earlier. (The separation, incidentally, had seemed final; still, mindful of the unity of their respective biographies, neither the professor nor his spouse permitted themselves to enter into any new relationships.) But a man with Gratsianski's biography does not even know how to wait patiently for just retribution from the society, as represented by the appropriate organs of the Soviet government. He remains an obdurate individualist and, after having composed a monograph on suicide, he himself chooses this "most despicable way of deserting from life" (p. 673). Thus virtue has triumphed and the battle of biographies has been satisfactorily decided by the victory of the less imperfect life story.

To summarize: this is an unattractive book. It contains half-baked disquisitions on forestry, brazen distortions of historical truth in supine obedience to the wishes of the dictators, a preposterous search for closets filled with skeletons, and characters drawn with the tritest means. And all this is presented in a pretentious, perfectly unnatural style and is spread thinly over nearly eight hundred pages of dense print -- with frank disregard of all counsels of artistic economy. And yet it is an important book which makes a real contribution to our understanding of Soviet society. In dealing with the curiosities of imperfect biographies, it actually reveals the imperfections of Soviet industrialization.

It is not the first time in Russian history that economic development designed to close the gap between Russia and the West has westernized Russia in some respects while keeping it oriental or even "orientalizing" it in others. The reforms of Peter the Great were a great step toward westernizing the country. But the simultaneous curtailing of the liberty of all classes of the population was a step away from the West. The unevenness of Soviet progress is its most outstanding trait. Soviet industrialization conducted under the auspices of a ruthless dictatorship has not received its economic consummation: the Soviet government cannot afford to let its population enjoy the fruits of industriali-

zation in the form of a rapid increase in the levels of consumption. But just as consumption is kept close to pre-industrialization levels -- thus, in effect, ignoring the changes that have taken place in the size of capital stocks, in the knowledge of technological processes, and in the skill of the workers -- so the evaluation of human beings is still kept at a level consonant with small and stable pre-industrial settlements rather than with the large and rapidly growing industrial centers. These provincial attitudes have been perpetuated with a vengeance. Just as serfdom in Russia was conjoined with a modern police state and hence approached outright slavery to a degree unknown in the West, the ubiquitousness of the Soviet dictatorship has raised provincialism to the level of a national dogma and, in so doing, has made it more destructive of individual freedom and happiness than genuine provincialism ever was.

It is the essence of pre-industrial societies to stand upon traditionalism, to live in the past and according to the past, and to value it highly. It is the essence of industrial, or at least industrializing, societies to let bygones be bygones, to live in the present and to think of the future. It is paradoxical indeed that the Soviet society, which is so strongly bent upon change, has shown such a high rate of economic growth, and claims to live for the future, should unceasingly probe into the past of its individual members; it is strange that a system which has discovered for itself that only falsifying the past yields perfect history should persist in clamoring for perfect biography. If the Soviet writers were allowed to notice these inconsistencies and to discuss them publicly, they might well be tempted to speak of "dialectics" and "historical contradictions." As it is, they prefer to think in absolutes. The government establishes a categorical distinction between good and evil in a man's past and makes it operational through the instrument of the questionnaire -- the Soviet substitute for, and improvement upon, memoir writing. Perfect memory is enforced by law. The Ivany Nepomnyashchiye, the non-remembering Ivans, who used to roam over the Russian plain and were the bane of the Tsarist police, are still not allowed to plead poor memory. They have been taught to read and write. Accordingly, they must read the questions and write the answers, weaving the flimsy web of a flawless life story.

One did not need Leonov's book in order to know that the life of the average Russian citizen is dominated and kept in perennial jeopardy by the questionnaire -- this embodiment of, and the perennial menace to, perfect biography. But Leonov's novel does show how the institution of the ubiquitous questionnaire translates itself into men's thinking about men, and how it becomes an institutionalized and internalized piece of social ideology, and, as such, an



instrument of domination. It is perhaps not pretty to see a writer of reputation extol and glorify the tools of police oppression. But whatever our judgment of Leonid Leonov, his book has both clarified and enriched our judgment of the social system that exists in Soviet Russia.

## II

Relations between the sexes present an obvious field for exercises in perfect biography. Marital fidelity is of course well suited to epitomize the unity of life and to stress the stability of a provincial society. Accordingly, Soviet literature as a rule has shown no interest in matrimonial deviations and sexual irregularities. For a long time the novelists went on mass-producing cheap figurines of Baucis and Philemon, dressed up in Soviet style, and sometimes even had recourse to the Soviet Olympus for appropriate substitutions for the roles of Zeus and Hermes in the Greek story. It is one thing, however, to track down and to expose the possessor of an impure biography. It is another thing blandly to deny his existence. By depicting Soviet citizens, male and female, either as fierce virgins or monogamous maniacs, Soviet novels inevitably came into conflict with reality, which, in these particular areas, was neither fierce nor maniacal.

Fortunately, there are limits to this decline of Russian literature to the level of penny -- or kopek -- novelettes. Presumably, the tradition of the Russian novel -- which means its competition with the Soviet novel for the interest of the modern reader -- is a strong force in keeping the Soviet novel within the bounds of verisimilitude. As a result, there have been two or three ethnographically more valuable treatments of marriage in Soviet Russia. First, the novel Ivan Ivanovich by Antonina Koptayeva (Moscow, 1949) produced surprise among Soviet readers by demonstrating the incredible fact that a marriage of two perfectly decent people can fall apart; and that even an energetic intervention on the part of the local party boss (first secretary of the Raykom) may fail to put it together again. Koptayeva then wrote a second novel, Druzhba (Friendship -- Moscow, 1956), in which the tradition of the happy ending -- even more deeply rooted in the Soviet novel than in the Hollywood movie -- emerged triumphant. In the inferno of besieged Stalingrad, the hero, Ivan Ivanovich, a surgeon by trade and an abandoned husband by misfortune, manages to form a new attachment after having saved the life of his former wife through a skillful operation and having wavered for some time among several attractive candidates. These novels, too, contain some expressions of opinion on international politics and the course of world history. Such cogitations fully deserve to be placed beside those of Leonov which have been quoted earlier. The two books provide some sidelights

on the grasping arrogance of the local party boss, who even tries to prescribe the types of operations which a surgeon may or may not perform in the local hospital; the way in which these ambitions are curbed by a successful appeal to higher party authorities is no less instructive than the threat of criminal prosecution to which a wrong diagnosis seems to expose the physician. But the novels' main interest stems from their having blazed the trail for a fuller and freer treatment of Soviet marriage.<sup>5</sup>

Such a presentation is contained in Galina Nikolayeva's Bitva v puti (Battle on the Road), a novel which appeared serialim in 1957 in the journal Oktyabr'.<sup>6</sup> This no doubt is one of the most revealing products of recent Soviet belles-lettres. It is not simply a novel about the risks of Soviet matrimony. Like most Soviet novels, Battle on the Road provides valuable insights into aspects of Soviet life which, although unflattering, are so common within the Soviet system that they are considered perfectly natural, and their inclusion in a work of fiction is simply a sort of Kleinmalerei. For the same reason, they escape the blades of the censor's scissors. But Nikolayeva's novel offers a good deal more than a collection of obiter pincta. It bears the clear stamp of having been written after the Twentieth Party Congress, at the apogee of the rebound from the restraints of the Stalinist era. Both in being deliberately critical and in disregarding taboos, this novel is quite unusual and probably much more significant than Dudintsev's Not by Bread Alone, which happened to catch the eye of the reading public within and without Soviet Russia.

The novel supplies a broad canvas of Soviet life. In many respects, it confirms impressions previously gained of the way Soviet factories and collective farms operate. We have heard before about the problem of managerial honesty. Still it is interesting to note that the successful factory manager, in reporting the percentage of flawed goods in total output, deducts the permissible amounts, thus producing a more favorable picture by false means (No. 7, p. 120). A chairman of a Kolkhoz caught in various prevarications insists that it is his honesty that makes him lie: "Honesty requires me to manage the Kolkhoz in such a way as to yield profit to the State and to the Kolkhozniki (the Kolkhoz farmers). But planning sometimes is plainly directed against profit." And the writer dots the "i's" by adding that "the

5 In what appears to be her latest novel, Derzaniye (Daring -- Moscow, 1959), Kopteyeva proceeds to wreck the second marriage of the surgeon, who leaves his wife in order to correct an error of choice made in Stalingrad a decade earlier. Fortunately for the abandoned wife, she too is put on the road to an alternative happiness.

6 Nos. 3-7; in subsequent references, only the issue and page numbers will be cited.



errors of planning and the trammels upon initiative" make it necessary for alert and dedicated men "to lie and to act deviously" (No. 5, p. 43). This is not in any sense novel information. We have known for a long time that illicit activities of the managers are designed both to evade the plan and to make its operation possible. But it is perhaps the first time that a Soviet writer has stated the complexity of the situation so sharply and so frankly.

The factory manager has an "exchange fund," that is to say, concealed stacks of goods which he can offer to the railroads as a consideration for extra-quick service; alternatively, he lets his factory shops perform special and quite unscheduled repair work for the railroads (No. 5, pp. 26, 27, 92). This again is a well-known phenomenon -- a part of the Soviet concept of blat or blatmeysterstvo, terms which originally referred to the underworld and underworld operations, but in Soviet Russia have come to connote illicit economic operations.<sup>7</sup> But the description of these conditions is given a very modern, post-Stalin twist in the novel. The director of the factory, which manufactures tractors, returns from Moscow to announce that the factory will henceforth contribute its share to the output of consumers' goods by establishing workshops producing beds, frying pans, stove parts, and similar commodities. The decision reflects the promises to improve the levels of consumption made first by Malenkov and then by Khrushchev. But the reason for the director's readiness to add output of pots and pans to that of tractors should be noted: to have consumers' goods at his disposal will greatly increase his bargaining position in various blat operations. And equally enlightening is the fact that the director's opponent in the factory, the chief engineer -- the "positive" hero of the novel -- combats inclusion of consumers' goods in the production program because what Soviet factories need is efficient specialization in a few well-defined operations rather than dissipation of energies in attempts to produce a wide variety of articles. According to the chief engineer, it is bad enough that the factory must continue to produce the smallest and simplest parts that go into a tractor engine instead of receiving them from the outside (No. 5, p. 67). The difficulties in organizing efficient inter-factory co-operation have long been a very sore point in Soviet industrialization. It is quite instructive to see how the half-sincere attempts to satisfy the consumers by make-shift arrangements, while avoiding the requisite structural changes, are received within Soviet factories.

<sup>7</sup> Etymologically, the term blat comes from the German Platte -- i.e., gang (of criminals or rowdies). It probably fits well into the Russian language because of the subconscious association with the Church-Slavonic blato, swamp or filth.

Nikolayeva's critique does not confine itself to the relative safety of local conditions in the factory. The target has been widened to include the powerful first secretary of the Obkom, the virtual boss of a huge region and of the Ministry to which the tractor factory reports and which is accused of having lost its grasp of the enormously expanded productive machinery. In the end, the struggle within the factory is satisfactorily resolved. Both the director of the factory and the first secretary of the regional party committee are exposed and demoted. The secretary, who is described as having worshipped the infallible, mysterious, incomprehensible power of one man, the chosen vessel of wisdom (No. 6, p. 44), tries to speak of the "magnificent constructions of our era" which make it inevitable for the Ivan Ivanovich Ivanovs to restrict themselves and even to make some sacrifices (No. 7, p. 115). But the chairman of the Central Committee meeting which sets everything right cuts the secretary short: "But some people regard those sacrifices as a grave and temporary necessity which must be terminated as quickly as possible; others regard them as a natural law which it does not pay to think about and which it is harmful to talk about" (*Ibid.*). The practical effect of the two positions may be identical. But this remark spells the doom of the secretary and the director. The chief engineer becomes the director of the factory, eager to remedy past errors and omissions and in particular to do something about the main evil of Soviet factories and collective farms: "the mechanization without organization" (No. 4, p. 73; No. 5, p. 113; No. 7, p. 129), which certainly is an aphoristically felicitous way -- thrice repeated -- of pointing to a crucial problem of Soviet economic development, a disability to which much attention is likely to be devoted in the next few years.

To appreciate the full breadth of Nikolayeva's criticism, add to the foregoing, first, the fact that the husband of the heroine, a devoted party member, is arrested and executed as an "enemy of the people"; then the description of the general atmosphere of shivering cowardice, including the suggestion that members of the secret police are not above taking advantage of the wives of arrested men; and, finally, the expulsion of the heroine, even prior to her husband's execution, from the Communist youth organization on charges of being overdressed at a meeting and of having failed to greet her fellow members properly (No. 4, pp. 28-33).

Some of Nikolayeva's strictures simply justify certain reforms of the Khrushchev era. The attacks upon economic ministries which adumbrate Khrushchev's decentralization are of this kind. But, on the whole, her criticism has been bold, comprehensive, and far-reaching. To be sure, she has remained true to the Soviet tradition and has served up a happy ending in which rewards and retributions are distributed to each according to his or her deserts. The reader is left with the



strong suggestion that the change for the better within the tractor factory is bound to be duplicated over the whole range of the Soviet economy. The fateful knocks on the door in the dead of night belong to the past. The Soviet citizen can sleep quietly, and the future seems bright.

And yet, the peculiarity of Nikolayeva's novel is that her happy ending is confined to the public sphere, as it were. At the level of private relations and in terms of individual happiness, the novel ends in gloom and despair.<sup>8</sup> It is at this level that Nikolayeva's novel represents a real innovation in Soviet literature, being the first whose central theme is adultery. The subject is introduced and treated with circumspection. "Socialist people are not made for adultery," says the hero (No. 7, p. 93). There is no description of the pleasures of the flesh. But there is human truth in the irresistibility of the attraction which the hero -- the chief engineer -- and the heroine -- an engineer in the same factory -- feel for each other. An oft-told story is related with simplicity and dignity, and the long years of spinsterly modesty enforced upon literature by a government that trod under foot all laws of decency elevate the appearance of this story to the rank of a political sensation.

Its primary significance, however, does not lie in providing a high point on the gauge by which fluctuations in post-Stalinist liberalism can be measured. Much more important is the unusual glance into the more permanent and more stable structure of the Soviet value system which Nikolayeva's story affords. The happiness of the lovers finds a sudden termination in the fashion standardized by the second-rate French novel of the nineteenth century. By accident, the deceived wife surprises the sinful pair in the pied-à-terre which they have rented on the periphery of the town. By the next morning the story is the talk of the town. The party cannot remain indifferent, and the new first secretary of the Obkom hastens to the factory to comfort the new director, who bravely exhibits the "face of a fighter." And the woman? Alas, no one comforts her. She cannot return to the factory and must leave town, which she promptly does, after having confessed her sin to her husband and having received from her lover 300 rubles for travel expenses.

Once more the provincialism of the Soviet value system has been exposed. A settled society has little respect for privacy. Neither the town, nor the factory, nor the party boss is willing to regard the episode as the private affair

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<sup>8</sup> In this respect, the present novel is very different from Nikolayeva's earlier novel, Zhatva (Harvest), for which, in 1950, she received the Stalin Prize. The high award was richly deserved. For in that fully standardized and altogether uncritical presentation of a life on a postwar collective farm, public and private happy endings were indeed one and indivisible.

of those immediately concerned. But what is even more striking is that in this case Soviet provincialism has not only the same form but also the same substance as the time-honored provincialism of the so-called bourgeois societies. It is the woman whose biography has received the indelible stain. The man can escape unscathed, the beauty blemish hardly affecting the perfection of his biography. His marital life will go on as before and the unity of his life will remain unbroken. Again, one can only marvel at the paradoxical complexity of Soviet society. It has allowed women to become engineers in steel mills and to perform physical jobs which in less socialistic countries are entrusted to men, and preferably to machines. But right and wrong in sexual relations are still distributed in patterns that were formed in the days when the village blacksmith was the main exponent of industrialization. Thus, when the provincial quest for perfect biography is somewhat relaxed, the underlying provincialism of the value system becomes even more apparent and even more surprising.

## III

Thanks to Nikolayeva's critical attitude, the curtain has been lifted to allow at least a glance at some hitherto concealed sides of Soviet life. It would be quite erroneous, however, to assume that novels lacking in critical spirit are necessarily uninformative and unilluminating. Vsevolod Kochetov's novels, including his recent bestseller, are a case in point. Here is a writer raised and steeped in the atmosphere of Soviet conformity. Through his novels, beginning with Pod nebom rodiny (Under the Sky of the Fatherland -- Leningrad, 1955), which was written between 1947 and 1950, usually passes a member of the secret police who is a truly a fine chap, possessed of all kinds of virtues. Even in a discussion between two agronomists on the structure of relative prices in the United States and Soviet Russia -- the price ratio of cars and horses in the two countries is at issue -- the hero quickly confounds his adversary by a thinly veiled threat of denunciation to the GPU (Pod nebom rodiny, p. 124). It is natural for Kochetov to deprecate increases in the standard of living of the Soviet population: what matters, he says, is increase in the productivity of labor (ibid., p. 259).

In pre-revolutionary Russia there was a type of writer generally characterized as belonging to the school of chego izvolite? -- "What can I do for you, sir?" Kochetov's servility has been remarkable even under Soviet conditions. In his second novel, Zhurbiny (The Zhurbins -- Leningrad, 1953), published in the last year of Stalin's life, the novelist was quick to notice the rising tide of Soviet anti-Semitism, and he obliged by assigning to a Jew the role of



the only unreformed scoundrel in the book. Some scholars have preferred to withdraw from the pressures of life in Soviet Russia into pure theory. Again, Kochetov's watchful eye is upon them -- and in his third novel, Molodost's nami (Youth Is with Us -- Moscow, 1957), this contemptible behavior is appropriately castigated (p. 93). In the fourth novel, Brat'ya Yershovy (The Yershov Brothers), which is said to have sold several hundred thousand copies, Kochetov rushed to the defense of the dictatorship against the critics of the post-Stalin era.<sup>9</sup>

In a sense, the book is a deliberate retort -- novel for novel -- to Dudintsev. If the latter tried to show how factory management, government bureaucracy, academic experts, and even judicial organs conspired in order to suppress an invention and punish the inventor, Kochetov puts the conspiratorial shoe on the other foot, and serves up a fraudulent inventor who is engaged in criminal intrigues directed against the factory director and the party bosses. In addition, he also manages to insert into his novel (No. 6, p. 97) some brief mockery of Erenburg's The Thaw, which was one of the first, if not the first, literary expressions of dissatisfaction with Stalin's era. He is anxious to issue warnings against the tendency to accept with open arms the returnees from jails and forced labor camps: "One must distinguish between those who suffered innocently and those who were released out of generosity.... The Soviet government has a generous soul...It is generous because it is strong..." (*ibid.*, p. 20). In short, Kochetov is a faithful servant of the regime, its willing mouthpiece. And still his novels contain much more than just a few grains of useful information, the value of which is all the greater since one must assume that it has been imparted quite unwittingly. A few examples may be in order here.

It is Brat'ya Yershovy that most impressively and quite effortlessly gives the reader some feeling of the extent of informing and denouncing which thicken the air in Soviet Russia. The city boss, the first secretary of the Gorkom, Gorbachev, is presented as a person of excellent standing and impeccable reputation. But the enemy is on the march. The wily and false inventor composes a denunciatory epistle in which Gorbachev is accused of having used city snow ploughs in order to clear the street in front of his daughter's house on the day of her wedding. The denunciation goes to the next higher party authority, the first secretary of the Obkom, i.e., the regional committee. The latter knows that the maligned person has a weak heart; there is no doubt about the trifling character of the complaint. But the Soviet code of action prescribes paying full attention to every accusation. Gorbachev is shown the letter, suffers a heart

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<sup>9</sup> Brat'ya Yershovy appeared in 1958 in Neva, Nos. 6-7; in subsequent references only the issue and page numbers will be cited.

attack, and dies (No. 7, pp. 119 et seq.). It is truly impressive to observe Kochetov's uncharming naïveté which makes him believe and make believe in his turn that it is the anti-Soviet inventor who has killed Gorbachev rather than the defenselessness of the dictatorial police state against informers.

That informing is a problem not even Kochetov can pretend to ignore. Another member of Kochetov's collection of ideal GPU men suddenly breaks out in a long tirade against the "slanderers, careerists,...whose denunciations clog the machinery of the party, of the soviets, and of the judiciary." He adds, "I am afraid of them" (Molodost' s nami, p. 433). The colonel's further suggestion that "there should be a law against informing" may be a helpful one, provided that the law also institutes a different attitude to human biography.

It is in the same novel that incidentally, by way of explaining the weakness of a character, Kochetov refers to an earlier episode in his life. The character, a professor, in filling out a questionnaire, had represented himself as the son of an artisan when in reality he was the son of a miller. An amateur hunter for inconsistencies in questionnaires discovered and denounced the falsification. A long investigation followed in which an unbelievable number of various government agencies and party authorities participated. It was the professor's wife whose boundless energy and perseverance beat off the attack, but not before she had gone to the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Her husband was saved, but he never recovered from the experience (ibid., pp. 218-19).

Nor is it merely the state and the party that are on the lookout for biographical chinks. The private citizen is well trained to do his own private investigating, as it were, in a supplementary fashion. One of the brothers of the Yershov family was a prisoner of war of the Germans. After his return to Russia he spent years in a forced labor camp. When, finally, he is allowed to return to his home town, his own brothers subject him to a grueling, humiliating, and pointless cross-examination (Brat'ya Yershovy -- No. 6, p. 80). These are indeed useful illustrations of Leonid Leonov's ideal of a perfect biography and of what it means when the concept is shifted from abstract theory to everyday life. Soviet novels explain both Soviet life and Soviet novels. With the help of Kochetov's novels one can place Leonov's ideal of a perfect biography in a perfect society in its proper perspective and learn to distinguish more clearly between the mechanics of power exercised within a dictatorial system and the trappings of an outworn ideology.



There is much said in Brat'ya Yershovy about art and literature. One gets some idea as to how far-reaching has been the dissatisfaction with the official art and official literature, and how important was the wave of fresh air that came rushing in from Poland and Hungary. "They say in Poland that socialist realism is good for nothing but plywood constructions," says one of the heroes in Kochetov's novel (No. 7, p. 84), possibly one of those who, again according to Kochetov, kept their mouths shut for decades and now after Stalin's dethronement have been emboldened to raise their voices in criticism (ibid., p. 94). Will this movement of long-suppressed protest bear some permanent fruit? Or will the Kochetovs and those behind them -- and above them -- continue to keep Russian literature within the pincfold of socialist realism under the watchful eye of dictatorial censorship? The prospect may be as cheerless as the retrospect. There is no doubt that the Soviet government can effectively preclude the revival of the Russian novel. But it is quite unlikely that it can fully succeed in obstructing the Soviet novel's revelatory function. This is the conclusion that emerges a minori ad maius from Vsevolod Kochetov's literary exercises.

NOT TO BE MICROFICHED

'THE VOLTAIRE OF OCTOBER'

The New Leader,

March 14, 1960

by Giovanni Radicati

According to a brief biography accompanying the Italian translation of one of his early books, Ilya Ehrenburg must now be 68 years old. He seems younger, although he stoops a little. He walks with a slightly rolling gate; his grey suit is faded and somewhat threadbare and he wears heavy red boots.

We met in the little reception room of the Italy-USSR Association, where a number of journalists and writers had been invited to a press conference on "the most topical" problems of Soviet culture, as the invitation card put it. The Communist press had already published articles and interviews describing Ehrenburg's visit to Italy as an instance of détente in the sphere of cultural relations. In the front row of chairs - which were upholstered in red plastic - sat Mme. Ehrenburg, comfortably dressed in an elegant fur coat, with a smart scarf. Ehrenburg nonchalantly faced a barrage of photographers' flashbulbs and then took his seat at the table, between the Russian interpreter - a tall, curly-haired young man - and Senator Barbieri, secretary of the Association. Barbieri introduced the Soviet writer as "the man who opened the dialogue between East and West at a difficult moment," adding that circumstances had now become more favorable.

As soon as Barbieri finished speaking, Ehrenburg rose, with a mischievous smile, and began to speak in French, twisting the stub of a pencil in his short fingers as he spoke. "People talk endlessly about culture," he declared, "whereas what's needed is to create culture." He spoke rapidly, in the offhand manner of one accustomed to public speaking. His style was lively and his speech studded with the quips of a brilliant causeur. Listening to him, one remembered how some Russian intellectual had declared that Ehrenburg's great dream - crushed without difficulty by Stalin - had been to become the "Voltaire of the October Revolution". It would perhaps be more accurate to say that Ehrenburg resembles certain characters in Russian literature who had an urge to identify themselves with the French novels which they so admired.

"I have always been accused of pessimism," he went on to say, "but now I feel optimistic about the international situation." He introduced his theme with a metaphor that had the quality of a syllogism: "They say one swallow doesn't make a summer. But there are a number of swallows flying around nowadays - Macmillan, Khrushchev and Gronchi too. And swallows are no fools - no one ever saw a swallow arriving in a northern country in autumn." He went on to make the point that "proverbs are the wisdom of the nations. But they aren't always logical, in fact they are sometimes silly and inaccurate. Then they have to be turned back to front, to recover their meaning." Thus, with respect to the proverbs about the swallows "It is summer that brings the swallows. They (the politicians) took to the wing, but it was the promise of summer - the détente that made them do so."



Ehrenburg seemed to be implying that the détente is an irresistible imperative. With that as his starting-point, he launched his appeal for an end to be put to cultural isolation. In themselves, his arguments were neither novel or unusual. Their one original feature was the fact that they were advanced with such cordiality by an official representative of Soviet culture.

Ehrenburg acknowledged immediately that isolation results in stagnation and is fatal to scientific and cultural development. This had become obvious in the field of science where cooperation had been facilitated by the absence of ideological barriers. He went on to declare - in the tone of someone venturing upon an unconventional truth - that no one would suggest that it was Marxist ideology which had enable man to reach the stratosphere. Cooperation, he then added, was more difficult in the literary, artistic and cultural fields because of ideological differences. He gave an example to show that ideologies cannot be adapted to the requirements of art. "I have often been asked for my opinion about bourgeois literature. My reply is that great literature has never been bourgeois or served as an apologia for capitalism. Balzac was a reactionary, but in his art he destroyed what he wanted to preserve in life. All genuine literature serves to defend mankind and human values."

The intellectuals present were naturally gratified by this statement. Although Ehrenburg did not actually say so, he was letting it be understood that just as there could be no such thing as bourgeois literature, there could be no such thing either, as Marxist literature singing the praises of the Soviet "positive" hero. And if that was what Ehrenburg believed (that literature is independent of ideologies), he might well be allowed to confine his example to bourgeois literature.

As an illustration of the felicitous results of cooperation in the cultural sphere, Ehrenburg inevitably mentioned the Italian cinema. For several famous Italian directors have admitted the influence of the great Russian films made at the beginning of the Revolution, while the Italian cinema, in its turn, helped the Russian filmmakers to get rid of their remaining servitude to the traditions of the theater. At this point Ehrenburg, abandoning the chatty manner and the display of Russian vivacity he had shown hitherto, embarked upon a species of peroration. "Without exchanges", he affirmed gravely, "culture cannot survive. Are we to suppose that artists are less sensitive and competent than businessmen? It is our turn now to set aside ideologies and talk about our joint task, about the possibility for extending reciprocal contacts in the sphere of art. This is all the more urgent because science and technology are beginning to dominate the scene."

This was the most original point that Ehrenburg made. He was there as the cultural representative of the country that had reached and photographed the moon; but he was calling upon artists and writers throughout the world to form a united front, in the name of art, against scientific materialism. Moreover, his appeal was indicative of the situation which is tending to develop in Russia, where artists regard the current passion for science as a danger whose consequences are not

fully grasped. Ehrenburg, a skillful interpreter and promoter of this attitude, was reaffirming the belief that culture is on a higher spiritual level than technology. "I don't so much care," he said, "who the first man to set foot on the moon will be; I want to know what kind of man he will be. I am more interested in the diversity of human hearts than in the diversity of worlds. Without the sputniks of poetry our lives would be very drab!" He recalled the fact that Nazi Germany had been in the forefront in technology, but that it had been a barbaric community nevertheless. The example, he said, deserved thought - scientific achievements were not enough, art was necessary as training for the feelings.

In conclusion, Ehrenburg repeated his earlier encouragement to the listeners, as though rather anxious to convince them that he was being absolutely candid: "Ask me whatever you like, quite frankly, quite bluntly; if I know the answers to your questions I'll tell you." For a moment the audience seemed to hesitate. After all, everything Ehrenburg had said had been fairly obvious. But there had been something ingenious, almost wistful, in his appeal for new relationships. The fact is that the Russian intellectuals, even if they may not admit it, are clearly hoping that the political détente will lighten the atmosphere a little, give them a chance to slip into the international circuit and shake off the fetters of bureaucracy to a certain extent. At the same time, the listeners could not quite suppress certain doubts; how did Ehrenburg think that exchanges could take place without ideological questions intervening? Was he genuinely convinced that artists should be allowed to work in complete freedom?

These reflections, doubts or objections were summed up in the first question, put by the journalist Giovanni Russo, who said: "Cultural exchanges are desirable and needed. Your appeal for frankness is gratifying, too. So we would like to ask you whether, as one who thinks that a stop could be put to cultural isolation, you consider it right for a book by a Russian writer to be barred from publication in the Soviet Union?"

Ehrenburg's tone in answering this question was rather irritable, and suddenly revealed the "limits" set by the Soviet leaders to the extent of cultural exchanges. "You are thinking," he said aggressively, "that I shall turn pale when you allude to Pasternak.<sup>2</sup> (This was the last idea that would have occurred to anybody who knew anything about Ehrenburg). "As a matter of fact, I am not in the least afraid to reply and you needn't have put it so tactfully. You want to know what I think about the Pasternak affair. I consider that it was an episode in the cold war...At this distance of time it's impossible to say which side shouted loudest. I regard Pasternak as a great Russian poet, lyrical and egocentric; but I think he is a bad novelist, because a novelist has to depict other people and Pasternak is too egocentric to get inside the skin of another person. Dr. Zhivago is raté, a failure, and it depressed me. The fact that it was not published was due to the unfavorable atmosphere. Personally, I wouldn't attribute too much importance to the episode, though it started so many sputniks flying in the West. But I rather think a lot of people are beginning to get tired of the business, and that the atmosphere is becoming more normal again for Pasternak's true friends and his phony ones."



Ehrenburg then went back to the subject of cultural exchanges. "The review, Tempo Presente, has published essay's by Silone," he said, "Those essays are not to be published in Russia, and neither are Spender's books. When something comes along that you don't like, you keep it out of your house, If I'm asked whether I want a dialogue with Silone, my reply is that I do not, unless he says he is in favor of a dialogue and of the détente." This mention of Ignazio Silone rather surprised Ehrenburg's audience, if only because it seemed irrelevant. It becomes understandable, however, if we remember that Ehrenburg regards any reminder of certain fundamental truths as the most serious threat to attitudes based on propaganda.

Ehrenburg was about to sit down again, when Anna Garofalo pointed out that he had not answered Giovanni Russo's question, and asked whether it would not have been better for Pasternak's book to be published, even if the critics had treated it severely afterwards. A few communists in the audience protested against what they regarded as exaggerated and rather impertinent persistence. Ehrenburg again replied evasively saying that "we have to get rid of that atmosphere." Then he counter-attacked: "Do you want me to say it was a mistake not to publish Pasternak's novel? If you want me to say that, I will."

Ehrenburg went on to declare that the affair was an instance of "collective madness" and that the West made the mistake of using Pasternak as a weapon in the cold war. He defended the Soviet attitude by saying that "the matter became terribly complicated in Russia owing to the book being handed to the Italians." He reiterated his unfavorable opinion: "I don't think the novel is anti-Soviet, I think it is a-Soviet. Pasternak describes events that made no impression on his feelings, events he didn't understand." But, asked somebody again, did he think that now ("now that the cold war is coming to an end") Pasternak's book will be published? Ehrenburg said he couldn't foretell the future, but he thought it would be desirable.

Senator Barbieri suggested that no further questions should be asked about Pasternak, as other matters might then be discussed. But then Senator Spano, a Communist, suddenly leaped to his feet and demanded: "How much money has been sent to Pasternak, out of the large sums he has earned in the West?" Spano thought, perhaps, that the Western publishers had been keeping all the money without bothering to send Pasternak his royalties. But Ehrenburg evidently was not sure that that was the case, for he obviously found the question ill-placed, and rejected it, saying drily, "I can't answer that question."

Ehrenburg's replies about Pasternak had a decisive effect. It was pointless to object to questions concerning this "affair", for no other subject would have shed such clear light on the "limits" that Ehrenburg and the Soviet leaders would like to fix for what are referred to as cultural exchanges, or on their views concerning international cooperation. The short discussion revealed those limits which - it should be stated at once - have to be transcended and certainly not accepted; the "dialogue" will always be to the advantage of the participant who sincerely believes in freedom.

Above all, it is evident that art is still regarded as subordinate to other extraneous factors, such as public taste or Marxist theories. This is very far from the notion of artistic autonomy. It is still a functional concept, required, at best, to illuminate or to inculcate a moral lesson. So far as the Pasternak affair is concerned, it may be admitted that certain Western circles were impelled by considerations prompted more or less directly by the cold war; but to what is it really to be attributed, except to the complete lack of freedom suffered by Russian writers and to the atmosphere of intimidation created around Pasternak (whose friend Ehrenburg claims to be) by his fellow writers?

In speaking of Pasternak, Ehrenburg contradicted everything he had said previously. He asserted that the Soviet authorities were entitled to ban certain writings from publication, and showed himself to be confusing aesthetic judgment with political disapproval. Even if we admit, for the sake of argument, that Pasternak's novel is extremely bad (a view taken by some writers even in the West, among them Vladimir Nabokov, himself a Russian), the fact remains that cultural freedom consists essentially in the liberty to publish even bad novels.

On the other hand, it is highly probable that in advocating a breakout from cultural isolation, Ehrenburg was speaking for a considerable number of Russian intellectuals. And the very fact that this tendency is becoming apparent while the principles invoked in the Pasternak affair still continue to apply reveals the deep seated contradiction in which the Communist intellectuals find themselves involved when the question of a real détente or "liberalization" of culture arises. Ehrenburg uttered some eloquent phrases and put forward some flattering invitations, but he did not explain how the Russians expect to solve the contradiction on the aesthetic, philosophic and artistic levels. How can the East-West "dialogue" to which Ehrenburg invites us begin while so many impediments to freedom of the mind still persist on the Soviet side? We may agree that ideologies can easily be set aside in the scientific sphere. But what does it mean to set them aside when it comes to matters of culture, art and philosophy?

From that point of view, indeed, Ehrenburg's proposal is quite meaningless. Free intellectuals have always called for the "liberalization" of cultural exchanges; they have always fought for it against every form of totalitarianism, including Communism; they know that in the cultural sphere there can be no cooperation without complete freedom to judge, discuss and create, though with due respect for the views of others.

On the other hand, for Ilya Ehrenburg, cooperation is a question of private or official visits by delegations of writers and artists from East to West and vice versa. If that is really what he means, we can assure him that we have no objection to such trips, but that meetings of that kind serve no purpose whatsoever beyond an empty exchange of courtesies. We shall wait for Pasternak's novel to be published in Russia, even if the critics declare it to be a very bad book; we should then say that the Russians have taken their first step toward breaking out of cultural isolation. For the time being, however, it is easier for the Communists to send a rocket to the moon, or perhaps even to Mars, than to grant poets, writers and artists the freedom to be themselves.



THE PARTY SECRETARY IN THE POST-WAR SOVIET NOVEL

By Philip Bruce Cook  
Soviet Survey  
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Every party organisation in the Soviet Union has its Party Secretary. He transmits the Party policy to his organisation as he receives it from higher echelons of the Party. He supervises his own organisation in accordance with this policy, and serves as the Party's link with the masses, especially at the level of the primary, the district, and the city organisations. He is, perhaps, the key figure in Soviet life.

What kind of person should a Party Secretary be? The Soviet novel from 1945 to the present day provides an unambiguous answer. In most of these novels he appears as a type—clearly defined and easily recognisable, although there are some deviations that will be worth noticing. Once the type is established, the significance of the deviations from it will be made clear.

Leadership is the quality authors emphasise in the Party Secretary. Nearly always he is shown with people over whom he is in authority. Rarely is he represented as a subordinate, even when meeting with a Party Secretary of a higher organisation than his own. This quality of leadership is deliberately constructed from certain recurrent elements, the first of which is physical appearance. Physical appearance within the type is not uniform, but its delineations give a uniform impression—one of force and insight. Striking, piercing eyes are a familiar feature, and the portrait as a whole might be described as that of a 'leader of the people.'

Perceptiveness and personal sympathy are indispensable to the fictional Party Secretary. He has an intuitive grasp of people's personal problems, and takes a personal interest in them. In so doing, he displays impressive knowledge and vision.

The type normally exercises firm control over his own emotions (occasionally he is just plain inscrutable). But usually his great joy of living and involvement in his work are uppermost. They drive him on steadily in his determined tasks. This devotion to his job is reinforced by a built-in sense of responsibility and the habit of leadership. Geniality and friendliness in him are tempered with a firmness born of the necessity to lead the advance towards the specific goals of the Party.

Occasionally he is afflicted with what would be called in Western novels 'the loneliness of command,' the result of a hard family life, long hours of work, protracted absences from home, and the constant sense of urgency and crisis that infects his labours. The great personal sacrifices he often makes for the sake of his Party work are made willingly.

In spite of his hard personal lot and exacting daily routine, the Party Secretary type retains the same attitude towards work that he has towards life, a positive and enthusiastic one, because, especially for this type of Soviet man, his work is his life. He brings to it a front-line attitude and a sense of power. The enemy is uncontrolled nature, whose allies are men harbouring 'capitalist survivals' in their consciousness.

Within the collective struggle, the Party Secretary still encourages and praises individual successes and skills. The need for trained workers dictate a positive and practical attitude towards study and culture. He is constantly urging people of all ages in his organisation to study, although usually in a technical and limited field, for example, agronomy, tractor-driving, animal husbandry, or lathe operation. That the Party Secretary is most concerned with political education probably goes without saying. He is normally shown to have a great thirst for books and an interest in art because of its ability to influence people; and he, too, studies as much as possible.

The Party Secretary in these novels understands the work problems of his organisation's members because he is himself a worker. He is technically proficient, and, in the primary Party organisations, works at a job as well as being Party Secretary. In higher Party echelons he reveals his practical knowledge, and often asks technical questions of baffled workers in the Socratic manner; their answers then help them to see their tasks more clearly.

Most often, however, the Secretary prefers more forceful methods. The agitator is the modern gadfly—an adept at exhortation, inspirational meetings, public addresses, publicity campaigns, and work challenges. His criticism is frank and open as his agitation, and although normally quite sharp in tone, it is in this criticism that the Party Secretary is most inclined to use ironic humour as a stimulant.

The virtue called 'Party tact' is the quality of using absolute truth and frankness in delivering constructive criticism. More laudable, however, than receiving criticism in a true Party spirit is the ability to criticise one's self. Oddly enough, the Party Secretary is rarely depicted applying self-criticism, is frequently heard recommending its practice to someone else. When he does apply it, the Secretary's offence is either a peccadillo or an error shared by a whole group.

Although the type is a worker or ex-worker and has the common touch, he is still the object of special respect. He has both earned it by his knowledge and work, and been given it as a result of his official position. He is constantly asked for personal and technical advice. From his position he teaches others the Communist way and trains new Party members, by example as much as by precept.

The Party Secretary serves as the driving force in Soviet society by example, by agitation, by personal help, and by planning. Azhayev, in Far from Moscow, characterises the Party Secretary as the conscience of Soviet man. The object for which the Party Secretary works is to gain effective mass support for the Party and its programme. Harvest, by Nikolaeva, and Fleetfooted Deer, by Shundik, give a detailed exposition of the type's qualities of leadership—physical and emotional strength, sympathy, insight, devotion, a positive attitude towards work and study, technical proficiency, activity as an agitator, teacher, and guide, and a gift for the constructive use of criticism and self-criticism. Light Over the Earth, by Babaevsky, Heart and Soul, by Maltsev, and Floating Stanitsa, by Zakrutin, show the type clearly, but in somewhat less detail. The Party Secretary is not usually the leading character in a novel, but in Harvest a married couple who are both Party Secretaries are major figures, and in Fleetfooted Deer the Party Secretary is the leading character. A concise portrait of the type is found in Apsheron, by Hussein, in which the Party Secretary, though present only in nine pages of the novel, embodies every important element of the type. In many novels the Party Secretary, as a minor character, presents only a few typical features. These figures do not depart from the type; they are merely fragments of it.



The Party Secretary's relationship with superiors is described in a scene in Apsheron as being that with 'an intimate older friend.' His Party feeling of loyalty and 'togetherness' is not called into doubt, but it is not emphasised so much as his role of leader. He submits to orders and adheres to policy voluntarily. 'The plan' and his will are inseparable. He is shown directing the execution of the plan, not criticising or revising it. The actual process of making policy is not described in the novels of the period from 1945. Subordination of the Party Secretary to higher authority is obscured by his leadership activities in carrying out Party policy. The discipline and subordination demanded of him as a Party member account for roughly ten per cent of the total space devoted to portraying the type in the novels upon which this article is based. The other ninety per cent refer to leadership and its tributary qualities.

It is not without interest to examine, in this connection, The Rules of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, section I, paragraph 3; duties of a Party member. Paraphrased and condensed, they are as follows: (a) defend the Party's unity, (b) be an active fighter for carrying out Party decisions, (c) set an example in work, (d) strengthen ties with the masses, (e) increase one's own knowledge of Marxism-Leninism, (f) observe Party discipline, (g) develop self-criticism and criticism from below, (h) inform Party leaders of shortcomings in work, (i) be honest with the Party, (j) guard Party secrets, (k) observe the Party's injunctions on selection of personnel. Here the stress falls on obedience and discipline. The stress in the literary type of the Party Secretary falls on his leadership and initiative. Authors underline his capabilities rather than his limitations. It is this special obligation to lead that sets the Party Secretary apart from the rank-and-file Party members, and this is the distinctive characteristic of the literary type.

The Party Secretary is also used as a literary device. From his special position he cuts administrative Gordian knots which threaten the work of the main characters, and in such novels as Floating Stanitsa, Living Water, by Kozhevnikov, Students, by Trifonov, and Those Who Seek, by Granin, he serves as a deus ex machina.

Of forty-one Party Secretaries noted in 23 selected novels written since 1945, ranging from fully portrayed characters to those mentioned only casually, 13 Secretaries show some noticeable variation from the type.

The largest group of variants are those who are ugly or in poor physical condition. Dudin, in Far From Moscow, is 'corpulent, though still young.' Savin, in Those Who Seek, has the 'unhealthy corpulence of a man obliged to lead a sedentary life.' Borisov, from the same novel, has an inexpressive face, no eyebrows, and a potato nose. He is saved from complete ugliness by his bright blue eyes, which shine with 'a kind of joyful eagerness.' In Kruzhilika, by Panova, Makarov is drawn with 'clever, slightly malicious eyes.' He is stopped and seems small, and has the 'well-kept hands of a man who has not done manual work for a long time.' In the cases of Dudin, Savin, and Makarov, these bad features are shown as their only faults.

Another variation from the type is the Party Secretary who goes wrong at his work through lack of experience. This classification includes Bekishev, in Bright Shore, by Panova. He feeds some cattle incorrectly, thus showing himself to be a better Party Secretary than a farmer, but redeems himself by work and study. Potato-nosed Borisov's path is harder than Bekishev's, because Borisov is inexperienced in Party work itself. Lacking confidence, he is often ineffectual, and is easily deceived, but by the end of Those Who Seek he has mastered his short-

comings and evolved squarely into the regular Party Secretary type. This is the only example of such gradual development shown in the 23 novels mentioned.

If Borisov and Bekishev faltered through inexperience, Korytov, in Pavlenko's Happiness, does so through too much experience. Overworked, he is presented as played-out in his job. Strain shows in his repellent face, which is sallow, wrinkled, and sickly. But finally assistance comes, both physical and moral, and enables him to carry on without succumbing to his impulse to become phrasemonger and a bureaucrat.

Zorin, Those Who Seek, is a Party Secretary who does not want to be one. He would prefer to devote himself to full-time engineering and drop Party work. Out of apathy he loses his authority to a scheming careerist.

In contrast to Zorin, the only fault ascribed to Andrey, in Harvest, is his too impetuous and unrelenting driving power. For a moment he indulges in selfish thoughts, when his wife chooses to continue her Party activities at the expense of their home-life, but both Andrey and his wife are dedicated to the Party, and resolve the dilemma in favour of Party activity.

Problems of physical well-being, experience, and motivation involve the lesser deviations from the type. Major catastrophe has befallen the Party Secretary who becomes a bureaucrat. Julian H. Franklin, in his article The Democratic Approach to Bureaucracy, suggests that bureaucratic behavior is characterized by a depersonalisation of authority, with decisions becoming routine, habitual responses. Franklin writes: 'The opposite of bureaucratic behavior is discretionary, creative choice, ideally the monopoly of the political authority.' The Party Secretary is a representative of political authority, and within the limits of Party policy can act or forcefully recommend action to others. Since as a type he is presented as sympathetic and personally involved with others in order to aid them in their work for new and rapid results, ideal behavior of the Party Secretary would be the opposite of bureaucratic.

In Chakovsky's novel, A Year of Life, the hero has to sneak into the Regional Party Secretary's office in order to get to see the Secretary. He is then dryly reproved by the Secretary, who declines to consider his request for better working housing because it is an economic matter and the Secretary is a political official. Throughout the novel there are disparaging references to bureaucrats, and when Baulin, the Regional Party Secretary, suddenly reconsiders the question and puts through approval for the new housing, he explains that he is 'not such a bureaucrat as all that.' Baulin had been in danger of becoming a bureaucrat through thoughtlessness, but caught himself in time. Chakovsky follows this up with a speech in which one character condemns a hypothetical Party Secretary whose vision is limited to his superiors, to the letter of the law, who lives by bureaucracy.

A Year's Span, by Panova, depicts a Party Secretary who has become a full-fledged bureaucrat. Golovanov is an ordinary middle-aged man, good-hearted and unashamed, who, having been removed from his post, sincerely admits his fault and expresses remorse. Power had corrupted him. While he was the Party Secretary Golovanov put on airs of importance, so that no one could get to see him. He was accused of riding too often in an official automobile, and basking in the respect shown him, which was really intended for the party he represented. Golovanov's speech had turned into the mouthing of commonplaces.



Another who became a bureaucrat is Kovalevsky, a second Secretary of the District Party Committee in Those Who Seek. He slights petitioners and avoids responsibility. A one-sentence allusion is made to a certain Ivan Ivanovich in Light Over the Earth, showing him to have been a bureaucrat and careerist of the same type. The passages dealing with Kovalevsky and Golovanov are also quite brief, though vivid.

Skorobogatov, from Koptaeva's Ivan Ivanovich, is the most completely portrayed atypical Party Secretary. He is shown to have given valued service to the Party in the past, but in the novel he appears throughout as a completely negative man. 'Keenly conscious of his own superiority,' and habitually domineering, Skorobogatov is rude, tactless, supercilious, technically ignorant, and thoroughly disliked by the people. He is fat and has ugly eyes. He threatens. He goes to extremes in behavior and falls behind the times. Opposition to himself, Skorobogatov interprets as opposition to the Party and declares that his job is to 'penetrate into the very essence of a person's soul, not his work.' Without doing anything to help other people in their work, either with thought, money, or materials, Skorobogatov (which means 'get rich quick') attempts to meddle in their private lives. He is, above all, unjustly suspicious of everyone. When charges are at last preferred against him for his ruinous practices he is genuinely surprised; so out of touch with the masses has he become. Skorobogatov has gone to the very worst limit and is branded as a dictator. As a literary figure he is not particularly interesting. There is nothing good about him and he is as incomplete a personality as the Party Secretary type who has nothing bad about him. Koptaeva makes no attempt to explain or comprehend his character; she gives no hint of how Skorobogatov became such a villain, but is most concerned to judge him, and carefully points out that Skorobogatov is only 'a tiny dot' on the enormous surface of the Party. The interesting thing about Skorobogatov is that a Soviet writer finds it necessary to recognise the possibility of his existence.

In all cases considered here where a Party Secretary has gone wrong, the authors have dramatised his exposure or reform, usually by the hand of another and senior Party Secretary.

Significant as the antithesis of the Party Secretary type is a Chukchi shaman drawn by Shundik in Fleetfooted Deer. This superstitious old witch-doctor attempts to dominate his people by fear, and to murder their Party Secretary. He dies in a fit, after an excess of rage and superstitious fanaticism.

Panova, Chakovsky, Granin, Koptaeva, and Pavlenko are the writers who have dealt most extensively with atypical Party Secretaries. On the whole, they do at least attempt a full psychological portrayal of their characters more often than the authors of such works as Far From Moscow, Light Over The Earth, or Light in Koordi. In these last three works the figures are flat and uncomplicated. Psychological complexity, on the other hand, is characteristic of the literary method of Panova particularly, of Chakovsky and Granin to a large degree, and also of Koptaeva (notwithstanding Skorobogatov's flatness), and of Pavlenko to a lesser extent. Of the novels dealing with atypical Party Secretaries, the best, artistically, have appeared since Stalin's death. These are A Year's Span (1954), Those Who Seek (1955), and A Year of Life (1956). Here the characters—not only of Party Secretaries—are more fully delineated. Ideologically they attack nothing that Pavlenko did not attack in Happiness (1957), that is, bureaucracy, and their remedies are the same way, that is, other Party members, other Secretaries, and self-criticism. The distinction of Panova, Granin, and Chakovsky is that their work is better literature. They present no brief against the Party and its Secretaries in their novels, but rather against bureaucratic corruptions of them. Bureaucracy is apparently recognised as the chief occupational hazard of the Party Secretary's job, and the purpose of presenting atypical Party Secretaries in novels is to alert others to the danger, and so help them to avoid it.

The type of the Party Secretary has been consistent and persistent in novels since 1945. It appears to resist literary change, and no variant Party Secretary is left uncorrected at a novel's end. He is, after all, the pillar of society and Soviet Ibsens, exposing the pillars and undermining society, are clearly unwanted.