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THE THREE-SIDED LITERARY STRUGGLE

Ever since the 23rd Congress of the CPSU, when the Party issued an implied reprimand to both wings in the literary world by eliminating the editors of Novy Mir¹ and Oktyabr² from the Central Committee, three main cultural factions have been visibly active. They are the revisionists, centred mainly in Novy Mir and Yunost's editorial boards, the dogmatists grouped around Kochetov, and the centralists, who appear to be led by Petr Demichev, the Secretary of the CC for ideology, whose middle road at the Congress was powerfully supported by Brezhnev himself.

Proof that the Party leadership is not backing the more extreme demands of the Kochetov group became available when Tvardovsky retained his editorship despite the storm aroused by the Sinyavsky-Daniel case (the works of Sinyavsky had appeared primarily in Novy Mir), and when Tvardovsky's strongly anti-Stalinist play, "Tyorkin in the Other World," returned to the stage of the Satire Theatre soon after the end of the Congress.

The play had been changed in one respect. When Tyorkin is applying for admission to the communist part of the Other World, he has to be investigated by a Commission which asks whether he is a peasant or a kulak. In the pre-Congress version, Tyorkin held up a copy of his biography, saying "Why ask? You know it is all in here." But in the post-Congress production, the entire four-man Commission then swings round to face the audience, each holding up a copy of Novy Mir. And in unison the Commission declaims:

Ah! But the author of that work is also under investigation!³

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- 1) Tvardovsky had been a full member of the C.C.
 - 2) Kochetov, who had been a candidate member of the CC, CPSU.
 - 3) Daily Mail, 26 April 1966.

The play was again removed from the repertoire of the Satire Theatre at the end of October, but it is not yet clear whether this is because of the Revolution anniversary celebrations, because of dogmatic pressure, or simply because almost every theatre-goer in Moscow has now seen it.

Throughout the summer one of the main bones of contention was Vasily Bykov's book, "The Dead Feel no Pain." It was published in Novy Mir early in 1966, and contains some withering criticism of typical Stalinist police officers and courts-martial judges who executed their own men on the battle-field rather than let them be taken prisoner.

Pravda's literary reviewer, Vladimir Servuk, called it a failure resulting from "serious ideological-aesthetic inadequacies," a distortion of the truth, etc. Despite this criticism from the main Party daily, Novy Mir has continued to publish articles which offend the cultural watch-dogs of the Red Army (such as the story by A. Makharov called "At Home," describing a soldier on leave who lies, rapes, drinks and brawls). As a result the Defense Ministry's newspaper, Red Star, published a letter from an angry major who concluded.

It is a pity that the once-respected Novy Mir has lost its moral position. Criticisms of its editorial board have not yet succeeded in accomplishing anything.

This statement came seven months after the Congress, and undoubtedly the bellicose major is seething with frustration. Novy Mir has not yet seen fit to publish any self-criticism, unlike Yunost, the youth magazine which confessed to "ideological weakness" in its April issue, and since has become slightly more orthodox in tone.

In May the Union of Writers held a "discussion" on Yunost's work, which decided (predictably) that the magazine pays too little attention to the working-class and rural youth, too much to "empty-headed" boys and girls, and that it underestimates its civic responsibilities. Nevertheless in August it published a documentary novel about Babi Yar, written by Anatoly Kuznetsov, which makes it abundantly clear that Yevtushenko's much criticized poem of 1961 was fully justified. Kuznetsov writes that the Germans intended to execute only Jews at Babi Yar, but that a few Ukrainians and Russians were also shot there, either because they were witnesses or in sheer ignorance of their origin. Moreover it is now reported that the monument at Babi Yar which Yevtushenko demanded in his poem is at last to be erected,

4) Tass, 16 April 1966.

5) 15 October 1966, emphasis supplied.

after the lapse of five years.⁶

It was also in the wicked month of August when Novy Mir appeared with Mozhayev's story "From the Life of Fedor Kuzkin." It treats a kolkhoz in the early years of Khrushchev's rule, where the hero cannot earn enough to feed his family properly, has to take private work because the kolkhoz gives him so little return for his labor, and is persecuted by arbitrary Stalinist officials.

In the attempt to combat Novy Mir, the dogmatists have moved from perennial criticism and political denunciation into the field of allegory. A poet, Vladimir Fyodorov, has produced a novel describing the struggles of a heroic soldier-poet against a literary clique of pro-Western high-brows working for a magazine called Dawn. The editor of the cosmopolitan journal has all the same attributes as Tvardovsky, while one of the poets on his staff is clearly meant to be a negative portrait of Yevtushenko. Fyodorov's book is called "The Eternal Flame;" it was naturally acclaimed by Oktyabr, demolished by Novy Mir, and finally described as a "heap of rubbish" by Literary Gazette, the centralist mouthpiece of the Union of Writers, USSR.

Throughout 1966, a consistent theme has been the slow emergence of tolerance, instead of condemnation, for the works of the surrealists. In October the play by Beckett, "Waiting for Godot," was finally published for the first time in the USSR by Inostrannaya Literatura, which has previously offended the neo-Stalinists by publishing the works of Kafka and Inonescu. Robert Falk's surrealist paintings, once described as the work of a donkey's tail by the last 1st Secretary of the CC, CPSU, are now on show at the headquarters of the Moscow Section of the Union of Artists. And at the very moment of the 23rd Congress, Furtseva's Ministry of Culture was holding an exhibition of the Chagall-type paintings of Aleksandr Tyshler,¹⁰ who has often been denounced for experimenting with surrealism. Even the official journal of the Ministry, Soviet Culture, has openly advocated the public recognition of Kandinsky, Chagall, Malevich and Tatlin, despite the fact that many of their works have been buried in the basements of the Moscow and Leningrad galleries for four decades.¹¹

In June, an unusual alliance was formed between Prof. Kapitsa and Komsomolskaya Pravda to try to obtain recognition for a young impressionist from Kazan, named Aleksei Anikeyenok. The scientists at the Moscow Institute of Physical Problems held an exhibition of his work, while the Union of Soviet Artists continued to deny him membership,¹² on the questionable charge of "formalism." Yet the official

6) New York Times, 25 August 1966.

7) Sunday Times, 30 October 1966. 8) Emphasis supplied.

9) Tass, 24 October 1966. 10) New York Times, 9 March 1966

11) Soviet Culture, 22 March 1966. 12) New York Times, 4 June 1966.

mouthpiece of the communist youth organization is praising him for "creative integrity."

These incidents are revealing in two ways. Firstly they show that the battle in art is rapidly shifting from the questions of form to content, since even surrealism can now be tolerated, and secondly they show that the obstacles to progress are not so much at ministerial or Politburo level as at the level of medium-rank provincial officialdom. An interesting opinion to this effect, perhaps based on a personal impression, was cited by Giancarlo Vigorelli on his return from a Moscow summer:

So sind die Harten und Verknoecherten nicht so sehr die Ideologen -- Suslow selbst zum Beispiel ist weniger dogmatisch und vernuenftiger und beweglicher als man glaubt -- sondern die Durchschnittlichen, die Marionetten, die Maenner ohne Kopf. (Der Monat, August, 1966)

Towards the Fourth All-Union Congress

The Fourth All-Union Congress was originally scheduled to be held in the spring of this year. It still has not begun, but the recent Ukrainian Writers' Congress and the beginning of the RSFSR Congress this week in Moscow both suggest that it is not far off. All the signs are that it will be a carefully controlled, centralist affair with few surprises. Certainly this is the impression derived from the ideologists' conference in Moscow in October¹³ and the platitudinous speech made by Shelest to the Ukrainian Congress.

Honchar, the Chairman of the Ukrainian Writers' Executive, was a shade more interesting. He sounded off against "miniatures, nocturnes, etudes, and superintimate sketches," as well as "forced psychologism, artificial pathos and pretentiousness."¹⁴ He also spoke of "so-called anti-literature," which was "primitive trash calculated for indiscriminate petty bourgeois tastes" (it seems that there are plenty of the latter in the Ukraine). But he also admitted that these evils continue year in and year out, and he denounced the dogmatic school for "illustrativeness, literary poster-painting and superficiality."

On the purely political plane, he rushed to the defense of Vasyl Symonenko, praising him for strength, sincerity, dynamism and purity of feelings. Despite the "professional

13) R.M., 25 October 1966.

14) Literary Gazette, 17 November 1966.

mourners in Munich," Honchar said, Symonenko remains a poet-patriot and a communist.¹⁵ But he was careful to name no names among those he criticized collectively, and it is surely a step forward when we find a communist functionary such as Honchar praising the translation of the Decameron into Ukrainian. Quite where the Decameron fits into socialist realism it would be hard to say.

Pravda, on October 5th, was bemoaning a recent tendency to dissolve socialist realism in the broader concept of "socialist art." Despite the fact that Pravda was naturally strongly opposed, this is probably as good a description of what has happened to the arts in the USSR this year as any, except that in the free world the phrase "socialist art" would probably be replaced by the more precise definition, "bureaucratic art." Nevertheless the slow dissolution of socialist realism is making visible headway, and in this respect Pravda, for once, comes near the truth. Centralism is a great improvement on neo-Stalinism, and preferable to Khrushchev's "campaigns" against the artists of 1957 and 1962-63, but it is too static a concept to prevent the slow erosion of the ideology. For those who prefer concrete examples to general propositions, one need only point out that the second most popular film of 1965, according to the weekly of the Council of Ministers' Committee on Radio and TV,¹⁶ was "Marriage Italian Style," a highly amoral comedy starring the curves of Miss Loren and the effete decadence of Mr. Maestroanni against the eminently capitalist background of post-war Italy.

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- 15) For a contrary view of Symonenko, see Rheinische Merkur, 7 July 1966.
- 16) R/T. October 24-30, 1966. The sample of the poll was 10,000, and the most popular film was "The Chairman," about a kolkhoz.