

A MAJOR DOCUMENT FROM RUSSIA:

ON SOCIALIST REALISM

Introduction

The title of this article does not even begin to convey its importance as an intellectual and historical document. It is, we believe, one of the most significant pieces of writing to come out of contemporary Russia; and we take pride in presenting here the first full English translation.

*The article was written in Russia by a Russian writer, 37 or 38 years old. He managed to convey it to Paris, where the liberal monthly *Esprit* published a French translation. It was written before the Pasternak affair, and has, of course, not appeared in Russia itself.*

The version that follows has been translated from the Russian by Mr. George Dennis. Mr. Dennis notes:

"The style tells a good deal about the man. The article is written in poetic prose, the oldest type of Russian prose, whose persistence in Russia was recently revealed to the West by the publication of Doctor Zhivago. This persistence may well be news also to the Russians: this article should help to allay the fears recently expressed by Constantine Paustovski, a talented and humane Soviet writer, that the Russian language would be completely replaced by a party jargon.

"To a Western reader, Russian poetic prose does not always make easy reading. It is not only peppered with verse; it is also a series of lyrical outbursts. I can assure the reader that the original contains even more question marks and exclamation points than the translation. Moreover, the prose is shot through with poetic images, metaphors and rhythms. Fundamentally, it is a personal prose as well as a product of its national environment.

"A closer stylistic analysis will reveal that the poetic prose of this article has been formed by a process of historical accumulation. The succession of strata can still be seen, as in a geological formation. Over the original Slav stratum is a strong layer of Byzantinism, mainly contributed by the Orthodox religion. Then comes a layer contributed by the West, in this case mostly German idealistic philosophy and French literature. The top layer is Marxist or, if you wish, Communist. The Russian language has assimilated them all, just as, no doubt, it is now engaged in assimilating American influences...

"The best clue to unravelling the ambiguities in which the author's attitude toward Communism is inevitably involved," continues Mr. Dennis, "is the irony which sets the tone of the article. There is at least one example of it on every page. This kind of irony has been the favorite literary weapon of Russian and, indeed, European writers..."

"It might help American readers to understand the outlook of the author if they recalled how Swift, savagely lashing out against the 'English Ascendancy in Ireland, remained part of that Ascendancy. Our author has freed one of his feet from Communism. He uses it to kick Communism, and some of his kicks are pretty hard. But his other foot is still stuck in Communism—and stuck fast."

To these remarks very little need be added. We believe that this article presents an incomparable portrait of a highly intelligent and cultivated man, whose sentiments, ironies, even confusions may well be shared by other literate Russians. For democrats and socialists in the West, it is a moral responsibility to listen to the voice of this man with the greatest attention and sympathy.—EDITORS.

What is socialist realism? What is the meaning of this strange and jarring phrase? Can there be a socialist, capitalist, Christian or Mohammedan realism? Does this irrational concept have a natural existence? Perhaps it does not exist at all, perhaps it is only the nightmare of a terrified intellectual during the dark and magical night of Stalin's dictatorship? Perhaps a crude propaganda trick of Zhdanov or a senile fancy of Gorki? Is it fiction, myth or propaganda?

Such questions, we are told, are often asked in the West. They are hotly debated in Poland. They are also current among us, where they arouse eager minds, tempting them into the heresies of doubt and criticism.

Meanwhile, the productions of socialist realism are measured in billions of printed sheets, kilometers of canvas and film, centuries of hours. A thousand critics, theoreticians, art experts, pedagogues are beating their heads and straining their voices to justify, explain and interpret its material existence and dialectical character. The head of the state himself, the First Secretary of the CP, tears himself away from pressing economic tasks to pronounce some weighty words on the country's esthetic problems.*

* This refers to Khrushchev's speeches to Soviet intellectuals, collected and published in 1957 under the title, *For a Close Link Between Literature and Art and the Life of the People*.

The most exact definition of socialist realism is given in a statute of the Association of Soviet Writers: "Socialist realism is the basic method of Soviet literature and literary criticism. It demands from the artist a truthful and historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development. Moreover, the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic representation of reality must be linked with the task of ideological transformation and education of workers in the spirit of socialism." (First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, 1934, p. 716.)

This innocent formula is the foundation on which the entire edifice of socialist realism was erected. It includes the link between socialist realism and the realism of the past, as well as its new and distinguishing quality. The link lies in the *truthfulness* of the representation; the difference, in the ability to seize the *revolutionary development* and to educate readers in accordance with that development, *in the spirit of socialism*. The old realists, or, as they are sometimes called, critical realists (because they criticized bourgeois society), men like Balzac, Tolstoy and Chekhov, truthfully represented life as it is. But not having been instructed in the genius and teachings of Marx, they could not foresee the future victories of socialism, and they certainly did not know the real and concrete roads to these victories.

The socialist realist, armed with the doctrine of Marx and enriched by the experience of struggles and victories, is inspired by the vigilant attention of his friend and teacher, the Communist Party. While representing the present, he listens to the march of history and looks toward the future. He sees the "visible traits of Communism," invisible to the ordinary eye. His creative work is a step forward from the art of the past, the highest peak of the artistic development of mankind and the most realistic of realisms.

Such, in a few words, is the general scheme of our art. It is amazingly simple, yet sufficiently elastic to comprehend Gorki, Mayakovski, Fadeev, Aragon, Ehrenburg and hundreds of others. But we cannot understand this concept at all as long as we skim the surface of the dry formula and do not penetrate into its deep and hidden meaning.

The gist of this formula—"the truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development"—is founded on the concept of Purpose with a capital P. The Purpose is an all-embracing ideal, towards which truthfully represented reality ascends in an undeviating revolutionary movement. To direct this movement towards its end and to help the reader approach it more closely by transforming his consciousness—this is the Purpose of socialist realism, the most purposeful art of our time . . .

THE CONCEPT OF PURPOSE

Our art, like our culture and our society, is teleological through and through. It is subject to a higher destiny, from which it gains its title of nobility. In the final reckoning we live only to speed the coming of Communism.

A tendency towards purpose is part

of human nature. I extend my hand to receive the coins. I go to a movie to spend some time with a pretty girl. I write a novel to earn glory and the gratitude of posterity. Each of my conscious moves is purposeful.

Animals do not have such long-range intentions. They are moved by instincts. They bite to bite, and not for the purpose of biting. They don't think about tomorrow, wealth, God. They live without facing any complex problems. But man invariably wants what he has not got. This quality of our nature finds its outlet in a feverish activity. We transform nature into our own image and turn nature into an object. Aimless rivers become arteries of communication. Aimless trees become paper filled with destiny.

Our abstract thought is no less teleological. Man explores the world by attributing to it his own purposefulness. He asks: "What is the use of the sun?" and answers: "To give light and heat." The animism of primitive peoples is the first attempt to conquer senseless chaos by endowing it with many aims, and to animate the indifferent universe with a life useful to man.

Science has not freed us from the childish questions of "Why?" Behind the causal relations that it establishes we find the hidden and distorted purposefulness of natural phenomena. Science says: "man descends from the monkey" instead of saying: "the destiny of the monkey is to become man."

However man may have originated, his appearance and purpose are inseparable from God—that is, from the highest idea of purpose which is accessible to us, if not through our understanding, then through our wish that there should be such a purpose. This is the final purpose of all that is and of all that isn't, and is the in-

Communism passed from moral efforts of isolated individuals—"Oh, where are you, golden age?"—into the sphere of universal history, which became purposeful as never before and turned into mankind's march toward Communism.

At once, everything fell into place. An iron necessity and a strict hierarchical order harnessed the flow of centuries. The ape stood up on its hind legs and began its triumphant procession towards Communism. The system of primitive Communism arose because it was fated to grow into slavery; slavery, to give birth to feudalism; feudalism, towards capitalism; and finally capitalism, so that it could give way to Communism. That is all! The magnificent aim is achieved, the pyramid is crowned, history at an end.

A truly religious person relates all the splendid variety of life to his divinity. He cannot understand another faith. He believes in the Purpose so that he can despise other purposes. He shows the same fanaticism—or if you prefer, *printsipialnost'*—with regard to history.* A consistent Christian views the entire history previous to the birth of Christ as the prehistory of Christ. From the point of view of the monotheist, the pagans existed only to call upon themselves the will of the only God and, after a suitable preparation, to become monotheists.

It can therefore hardly surprise us that, in another religious system, ancient Rome has become an indispensable stage on the road to Communism. Or that the Crusades are not explained by their internal dynamics, by the ardent efforts of Christians, but by

* *Printsipialnost'* is a Russian word with no English equivalent. It describes the mental habit of referring every matter, however small, concrete or trivial, to lofty and abstract principles.

the action of the omnipresent forces of production that are now ensuring the collapse of capitalism and the triumph of socialism. True faith is incompatible with toleration. Neither is it compatible with historicism, i.e. with toleration applied to the past. And though the Marxists call themselves historical materialists, their historicism is actually reduced to a desire to regard life as a march towards Communism. Other movements are of little interest to them. Whether they are right or wrong is a matter of dispute. What is beyond dispute is that they are consistent.

If we ask a Westerner why the French Revolution was necessary, we will receive a great many different answers. One will reply that it happened to save France; another, that it took place to lead the nation into an abyss of moral experiments; a third, that it came to give to the world the great principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity; a fourth, that the French Revolution was not necessary at all. But if you ask any Soviet schoolboy—to say nothing of the beneficiaries of our higher education—you will invariably receive the correct and exhaustive reply: the French Revolution was needed to clear the way to Communism.

The man who received a Marxist education knows the meaning of both past and future. He knows why this or that idea, event, emperor or military leader was needed. It is a long time since men had such an exact knowledge of the meaning of the world's destiny—not since the Middle Ages, most likely. It is our great privilege to possess this knowledge once more.

The teleological nature of Marxism is most obvious in the works of its latest theorists. They brought to Marx-

ism the clarity, strength and rigor of military orders and economic decrees. A good example is Stalin's judgment on the role of ideas, taken from the fourth chapter of the *Short Course of History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*:

"There exist different ideas and theories. There are old ideas and theories which have outlived their time and serve the interests of outdated forces of society. Their significance lies in their hampering the growth of the society and its forward march. There are also new, advanced ideas and theories which serve the interests of the advanced forces of society. Their significance lies in facilitating the growth of the society and its forward march."

As long as its famous author lived, the *Short Course* was the bedside book of every Soviet citizen. The entire literate population was constantly urged to study it and in particular its fourth chapter, containing the quintessence of the Marxist creed and written by Stalin himself. A quotation from V. Il'enkov's novel *The Great Highway* illustrates the universal validity that was attached to the *Short Course*:

"Father Degtyarev brought in a small volume and said: 'Everything is said here, in the fourth chapter.' Vinkentii Ivanovich took the book and thought: 'There is no book on this earth that contains everything that a man needs . . .' But Vinkentii Ivanovich [a typical sceptical intellectual] soon realized that he was wrong and accepted Degtyarev's view, which was that of all advanced people: This book 'contains everything that a man needs.'"

Every word of this quotation is pervaded by the spirit of purposefulness. Even the ideas that do not favor

the movement towards the Purpose have their destiny: to hamper the movement towards the Purpose (once, no doubt, the destiny of Satan). "Idea," "superstructure," "base," "law of nature," "economics," "forces of production"—all these abstract and impersonal concepts suddenly come to life, are covered with flesh and blood and become like gods and heroes, angels and devils. They create purposes and suddenly, from the pages of philosophical treatises and scientific investigations, there resounds the voice of the great religious Mystery: "The base produces the superstructure so that it can serve the base." (J. Stalin: *Marxism and Linguistic Questions*.)

THE PURPOSE OF THE CREATION

This is not the only happy turn of phrase by Stalin which the author of the Bible might envy. The specific teleology of Marxist thought consists in leading *all* concepts and objects to the Purpose, referring them all to the Purpose and defining them all through the Purpose. The history of all epochs and nations is but the history of humanity's march towards Communism, and the history of the world's thought happened, so to say, in order to bring forth "scientific materialism," i.e. Marxism, i.e. the philosophy of Communism. The history of philosophy, proclaimed Zhdanov, "is the history of the birth, rise and development of the scientific world view and its laws. As materialism grew and developed in the struggle against idealism, so the history of philosophy is the history of the struggle between materialism and idealism." (A. A. Zhdanov, "Contribution to the Discussion of G. F. Aleksandrov's *History of Western European Philosophy*," June 24, 1947.) These proud words seem like the voice of God Himself exclaiming: "The

whole history is My history, and since I assert myself in the struggle with Satan, world history is also the history of My struggle with Satan."

And so it rises before us, the sole Purpose of all Creation, as splendid as eternal life and as compulsory as death. And we fling ourselves towards it, breaking all barriers and rejecting anything that might hamper our frantic course. We free ourselves without regret from belief in an afterlife, from love of our neighbor, from freedom of the individual and other prejudices, by now rather shopworn and looking all the sorrier by comparison with the great Ideal before us. Thousands of martyrs of the revolution gave up their lives for the new religion and surpassed the first Christians by their sufferings, their steadfastness and their holiness:

Polish commanders
 Branded our backs with
 Five-pointed stars.
Mamontov's bands
 Buried us alive
 Up to our necks.
The Japanese
 Burned us in fireplaces
 Or railroad engines
 And poured lead and tin
 Into our mouths.
They all roared:
 "Abjure!"
But from our burning throats
 Only three words came:
 "Long
 Live
 Communism!"

MAYAKOVSKI

To our new God we sacrificed not only our lives, our blood and our bodies. We also sacrificed our snow-white soul, after staining it with all the filth of the world.

It is fine to be gentle, to drink tea with preserves, to plant flowers and cultivate love, non-resistance to evil and other philanthropies. But whom

did they save and what did they change in this world, these ancient virgins of both sexes, these egoists of humanism who bought themselves an easy conscience penny by penny and rented themselves a cozy corner in the heavenly almshouses?

We did not want salvation for ourselves but for all of humanity. Instead of sentimental sighs, individual perfection and amateur dramatics for the benefit of the hungry, we set about to correct the universe according to the best of models, the shining model of the Purpose which we approached ever more closely.

So that prisons should vanish forever, we built new prisons. So that all frontiers should fall, we surrounded ourselves with a Chinese wall. So that work should become a rest and a pleasure, we introduced forced labor. So that not one drop of blood be shed any more, we killed and killed and killed.

In the name of the Purpose we turned to the means that our enemies used: we glorified Imperial Russia, we wrote lies in *Pravda* [Truth], we set a new Tsar on the now empty throne, we introduced officers' epaulettes and tortures . . . Sometimes we felt that only one final sacrifice was needed for the triumph of Communism—the renunciation of Communism.

O Lord, O Lord—pardon us our sins!

Finally, it was created, our world, in the image and likeness of God. It is not yet Communism, but it is already quite close to Communism. And so we rise, stagger with weariness, encircle the earth with bloodshot eyes, and do not find around us what we hoped to find.

Why do you laugh, scum? Why do you claw with your well-cared nails

the spots of blood and dirt that have stuck to our jackets and uniforms? You say that this is not Communism, that we took the wrong turning and that we are further from Communism now than when we started. Well then, where is *your* Kingdom of God? Show it! Where is the free personality of the superman that you promised?

Achievements are never identical with the original aim. The means used to reach the aim change its original appearance into something unrecognizable. The stakes of the Inquisition helped to establish the Gospel; but what is left of the Gospel after the stakes have done their work? Yet all of them—the stakes of the Inquisition and the Gospel, the night of Saint Bartholomew and Saint Bartholomew himself—add up to one great Christian culture.

Yes, we live in Communism. It resembles our aspirations about as much as the Middle Ages resembled Christ, modern Western man resembles the free superman, and man resembles God. But all the same, there is *some* resemblance, isn't there?

This resemblance lies in the subordination of all our actions, thoughts and longings to that sole Purpose, which may have long ago become a meaningless word but still has a hypnotic effect on us and pushes us onward and onward—we don't know where. And, obviously, art and literature could not but get caught in the meshes of that system and become, as Lenin predicted, "a small wheel and a small screw" of the gigantic state machine. "Our magazines, both scientific and artistic, cannot be apolitical . . . The strength of Soviet literature, the most advanced in the world, is that it is a literature for which there can be no other interests than those of the people and of the state.

(Decree of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b), August 14, 1946.)

It must be remembered, when reading this decree of the Central Committee, that the interests of the people and of the state—which, incidentally, are exactly the same from the point of view of the state—have but a single aim: the all-pervading and all-absorbing Communism. "Literature and art are part of the whole people's struggle for Communism . . . The highest social destiny of art and literature is to mobilize the people to the struggle for new advances in the building of Communism." (N. S. Khrushchev, "For a Close Link Between Literature and Art and the Life of the People," *Kommunist* magazine, number 12, 1957.)

When Western writers deplore our lack of freedom of speech, their starting point is their belief in the freedom of the individual. This is the foundation of their culture, but it is organically alien to Communism. A true Soviet writer, a true Marxist, will not accept these reproaches, and will not even know what they are all about. What freedom—if the comparison be permitted—does the religious person require from God? The freedom to praise God still more ardently?

Contemporary Christians, who have broken their spiritual fast and accepted the spirit of individualism, with its free elections, free enterprise and free press, occasionally abuse the phrase "freedom of choice" that Christ is supposed to have bequeathed us. This sounds like a dubious borrowing from the parliamentary system to which they are accustomed, for it bears no resemblance to the Kingdom of God, if only because no president or prime minister is ever elected in paradise. Even the most liberal God offers only one freedom of choice: to believe or

not to believe, to be for Him or for Satan, to go to paradise or to hell. Communism offers just about the same right. If you don't want to believe, you can go to jail—which is by no means worse than hell. And for the man who believes, for the Soviet writer to whom Communism is the purpose of his own and humanity's existence (and otherwise there is no place for him either in our literature or in our society), there can be no such dilemma. For the man who believes in Communism, as Khrushchev correctly noted in one of his latest cultural pronouncements, "for the artist who truly wants to serve his people, the question does not arise of whether he is free or not in his creative work. For him, the question of which approach to the phenomena of reality to choose is clear. He need not conform or force himself; the true representation of life from the point of view of Communist *partiinnost'** is a necessity of his soul. He holds firmly

to these positions, and affirms and defends them in the work."

It is with the same joyous facility that this artist accepts the directives of the party and the government, from the Central Committee and its First Secretary. For who, if not the party and its leader, knows best what kind of art we need? It is, after all, the party that leads us to the Purpose in accordance with all the rules of Marxism-Leninism, the party that lives and works in constant contact with God. And so we have in it and in its leader the wisest and most experienced guide, who is competent in all questions of industry, linguistics, music, philosophy, painting, biology, etc. He is our Commander, our Ruler, our High Priest. To doubt his words is as sinful as to doubt the will of God.

These are the esthetical and psychological concepts the knowledge of which is indispensable to anyone who would penetrate the secret of socialist realism.

II

Works produced by socialist realists vary in style and content. But in all of them the Purpose is present, whether directly or indirectly, open or veiled. They are panegyrics on Communism, satires on some of its many enemies, or descriptions of life "in its revolutionary development," i.e. life moving towards Communism.

Having chosen his subject, the Soviet writer views it from a definite angle. He wants to discover what potentialities it contains that point to the splendid Purpose. Most subjects of Soviet literature have in common

a remarkable purposefulness. They all develop in one direction, and a direction well known in advance. This direction may exhibit variations in accordance with time, place, conditions, etc.; but it is invariable in its course and its destiny: to remind the reader once more of the triumph of Communism.

Each work of socialist realism, even before it appears, is thus assured of a happy ending. The ending may be sad for the hero, who runs every possible risk in his fight for Communism; but it is happy from the point of view of the superior Purpose; and the author never neglects to proclaim his firm belief in our final victory, either directly or through a speech of his

* *Partiinost'* is the point of view that considers everything in terms of the correct party line.

dying hero. Lost illusions, broken hopes, unfulfilled dreams, so characteristic of literature of other eras and systems, are contrary to socialist realism. Even when it produces a tragedy, it is an *Optimistic Tragedy*, the title of Vishnevski's play in which the heroine dies at the end but Communism triumphs.

A comparison between some representative titles of Soviet and Western literature is revealing. *Journey to the End of the Night* (Celine); *Death in the Afternoon* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (Hemingway); *Everyone Dies Alone* (Fallada); *A Time to Live and a Time to Die* (Remarque); *Death of a Hero* (Aldington) are all in minor key. *Happiness* (Pavlenko); *First Joys* (Fedin); *It is Well!* (Mayakovsky); *Fulfilled Wishes* (Kaverin); *Light over the Earth* (Babayevski); *The Victors* (Bagritski); *The Victor* (Simonov); *The Victor* (Chirikov); *Spring in the Victory Collective Farm* (Gribachev), and so on, are all in a major key.

The splendid aim towards which the action develops is sometimes presented directly at the end of the work. This method was brilliantly used by Mayakovsky. All his major works after the Revolution end with passages about Communism or with fantastic scenes describing life in the future Communist state (*Mystery Bouffe*; *150,000,000*; *About This*; *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin*; *It is Well!*; *With a Full Voice*). Gorki, who during the Soviet era wrote mainly about the days before the Revolution, ended most of his novels and plays—*The Artamonov Affair*; *The Life of Klim Samgin*; *Egor Bulichev and Others*; *Dostigaev and Others*—with a vision of the victorious Revolution, which was a stage on the way to Communism, and the concluding gesture of the old world.

Even when the book does not end

with such a grandiose denouement, it still exists implicitly and symbolically, commanding the development of characters and events. For example, many of our novels and stories deal with the work of a factory, the building of an electricity work, the application of an agricultural decree and so on. An economic task is carried out in the course of the action (e.g. the start of building introduces the plot; the end of building—the denouement). But the task is presented as an indispensable stage on the way towards a higher purpose. In such a purposeful view, even technical processes acquire dramatic tension and can be followed with great interest. The reader finds out step by step how, against all kind of obstacles, the plant was put to work, the "Victory" collective farm gathered a good crop of corn and so on. He closes the book with a sigh of relief and realizes that we have made yet another step towards Communism.

Since Communism is for us the inescapable outcome of the historical process, many of our novels have made the impetuous course of time the mainspring of their action. The course of time, working its way towards the Purpose, works for us. The Soviet writer does not think in Proustian terms. He does not search for lost time; his motto is rather: "Time, march on!" He hastens the course of life and affirms that each day lived is not a loss but a gain for man—because it brings him closer to the desired ideal, even if only by one millimeter.

This purposefulness of the historic processes is linked with the great interest our writers show in history, both recent and remote. Recent historical events like the Civil War and collectivization are landmarks on the road we chose. In more remote eras it is, alas, harder to find the move-

ment towards Communism. But if the writer concentrates hard enough he will uncover, even in the most remote of times, some phenomenon that might be called progressive because, in the final account, it aided in some way our victories of today. The writers merely anticipate somewhat and give these events the Purpose that they did not yet have. And so the leaders of the past like Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great or the peasant rebel Stenka Razin, though they did not know the word "Communism," still know quite well that our future will be brilliant. They never cease to celebrate this future from the pages of our historical novels, and they constantly gladden the heart of their readers by their astounding perspicacity.

Another subject is offered to our literature by the internal world of man's psychological life. This internal world moves towards the Purpose by dynamics of its own, fights against "the traces of the bourgeois past in its conscience," and re-educates itself under the influence of the party and of surrounding life. A large part of Soviet literature is an "educational novel" which shows the Communist metamorphosis of individuals and entire communities. Many of our books turn around the representation of these moral and psychological processes, which aim at producing the ideal man of the future. One such is Gorki's *Mother*, where an ignorant woman, defeated by life, is transformed into a conscious revolutionary. Written in 1906, this book is generally considered the first example of socialist realism. Or there is Makarenko's Pedagogical Poem about the young criminals who take the road to honest work, or Ostrovski's novel *How the Steel Was Tempered*, i.e. how the steel of our youth was tempered in

the fire of the Civil War and the cold of early Communist construction.

As soon as the literary character becomes fully purposeful and conscious of his purposefulness, he can enter that privileged caste which is universally respected and called "positive heroes." This is the Holy of Holies of socialist realism, its cornerstone and main achievement.

THE POSITIVE HERO

The positive hero is not simply a good man. He is a hero illuminated by the light of the most ideal of all ideals. Leonid Leonov called his positive hero "a peak of humanity from whose height the future can be seen." He has either no faults at all or else but a few of them—for example, he sometimes loses his temper a little. These faults have a twofold function. They help the hero to preserve a certain likeness to real men and they provide something to overcome as he raises himself ever higher and higher on the ladder of political morality. However, these faults must be slight or else they would run counter to his basic qualities. It is not easy to enumerate these basic qualities of the positive hero: ideological conviction, courage, intelligence, will power, patriotism, respect for women, self-sacrifice, etc., etc. The most important, of course, are the clarity and directness with which he sees the Purpose and strives towards it. Hence the amazing precision of all his actions, thoughts, tastes, feelings and judgments. He firmly knows what is right and what is wrong; he says plainly "yes" or "no" and does not confuse black with white. For him there are no inner doubts and hesitations, no unanswerable questions and no impenetrable secrets. Faced with the most complex of tasks he easily finds the solution—

by taking the shortest and most direct route to the Purpose.

The positive hero first appeared in some books of Gorki written in the first decade of the twentieth century. He started by proclaiming to the world: "One must say firmly yes or no!" Many were shocked by the self-assurance and straightforwardness of his formulations, by his tendency to preach at everyone around him and by his pompous monologues celebrating his own virtues. Chekhov, when he managed to read through *The Petty Bourgeois*, frowned with embarrassment and advised Gorki to soften the loud proclamations of his hero. Chekhov feared pretentiousness worse than fire: he viewed such purple passages as a boastfulness foreign to the Russian character.

But Gorki was deaf to such advice. He did not fear the reproaches and sneers of the shocked *intelligentsia* and its repeated assertions that the new hero was dull-witted and narrow-minded. He knew that his hero was the man of the future and that "only men as pitiless, straight and hard as swords will cut their way through." (*The Petty Bourgeois*, 1901.)

Since then the positive hero has gone through many changes and presented himself in many guises. He unrolled his positive qualities in many ways, grew big and sturdy, and finally drew himself up to his full stature. This happened already in the 1930s, when the Soviet writers dropped their little cliques and their literary tendencies, and accepted, almost unanimously, the best and most advanced trend of all: socialist realism.

To read the books of the last twenty or thirty years is to feel the great power of the positive hero. First he spread in every direction, until he filled all our literature. There are

books in which *all* the heroes are positive. This is but natural, once we are coming ever closer to the Purpose. So that if a book about the present deals not with the fight against the enemies but with, say, a model collective farm, then all its characters can and must be positive. To put negative characters in such a situation would, to say the least, be strange. And so we get dramas and novels where all moves smoothly and peacefully. If there is a conflict between the heroes, it is a conflict between good and better, model and supermodel. When these books appeared, their authors—men like Babaevski, Surkov, Sofronov, Virta, Gribatchev, etc.—were highly praised and set up as examples for others. True, since the Twentieth Congress—one hardly knows why—our attitude towards them changed somewhat and we apply to them the contemptuous adjective "conflictless." Once Khrushchev came out in defense of these writers, such reproaches were stilled somewhat but they are still levied here and there by intellectuals. They are unjust.

Since we don't want to lose face before the West, we occasionally cease to be consistent and declare that our society is rich in individualities and embraces many interests. And that it has differences of opinion, conflicts and contradictions, and literature is supposed to reflect all that.

True, we differ from each other in age, sex, nationality and even intelligence. But whoever follows the party line knows that these are heterogeneities within a homogeneity, differences of opinion within a single opinion, conflicts within a basic absence of conflict. We have one aim—Communism; one philosophy—Marxism; one art—socialist realism. This was well put

by a Soviet writer of no great literary gifts but politically irreproachable: "Russia took its own road—that of unanimity . . . For thousands of years men suffered from differences of opinion. But now we, Soviet men and women, for the first time agree with each other, talk one language that we all understand, and think identically about the main things in life. It is this unanimity that makes us strong and superior to all other people in the world, who are internally torn and socially isolated through their differences of opinion." (V. Il'enkov, *The Great Highway*, a novel which appeared in 1949 and was awarded the Stalin Prize.)*

Beautifully put! Yes we really are all alike and we are not ashamed of it. Those of us who suffer from superfluous differences of thought we punish severely by excluding them from life and literature. There can be no substantial differences of opinion in a country where even the anti-party elements confess their errors and wish to rectify them as soon as possible, and incorrigible enemies of the people ask to be shot. Still less can there be such differences among honest Soviet people and least of all among positive heroes who think only of spreading their virtues all over the world and of re-educating the few remaining dissidents into unanimity.

True, there are still disagreements between the vanguard and the backward and there is still the sharp conflict with the capitalist world that

does not let us sleep in peace. But we do not doubt for a single moment that all these contradictions will be resolved, that the world will become unified and Communist and that the last, by competing with each other, shall become the first. This great harmony is the final Purpose of Creation, this beautiful absence of conflict is the future of socialist realism. And so we can hardly reproach those over-harmonious writers who have indeed withdrawn from contemporary conflicts but only to glance at the future, i.e. to find out how they can best pay the debt which, as writers, they owe to socialist realism. Babaevski and Surkov have not deviated from the sacred principles of our art, but have rather developed it logically and organically. They embody the higher stage of socialist realism and the embryo of the coming Communist realism.

The growing strength of the positive hero is shown not only in his incredible multiplication—he has far surpassed other kinds of literary character in quantity, put them into shade and sometimes replaced them altogether. His qualitative growth has also been remarkable. As he approaches the Purpose, he becomes ever more positive, great and splendid. He also becomes more and more persuaded of his own dignity, especially when he compares himself to contemporary Western man and realizes his immeasurable superiority. "But our Soviet man has left *them* far behind. He is now close to the peak while they are still wandering in the foothills"—this is the way simple peasants talk in our novels. And the poet runs out of words when he tries to describe this superiority, this incomparable positiveness of our positive hero:

Nobody rose so high
For centuries and centuries.

* One cannot but recall in this connection Khrushchev's *cri de coeur* against the Jews: "They are all individualists and all intellectuals. They want to talk about everything, they want to discuss everything, they want to debate everything—and they come to totally different conclusions!"

You are above all glory,
You are beyond all praise.

M. ISAKOVSKI

The novel *Russian Forest* by Leonid Leonov, the first writer to be awarded a Lenin prize—which replaced the Stalin prize—is the best work of socialist realism for the last five years or so. It contains a remarkable scene. The brave girl Polya, entrusted with a dangerous mission, makes her way to the rear of the enemy—the action takes place during the Patriotic War. As a camouflage she is supposed to collaborate with the Germans. She plays this part for a while in talking to a Nazi officer, but with great difficulty: it is morally painful to her to talk the enemy's language. Finally she cannot stand it any more and reveals her true self and her superiority to the German officer: "I am a girl of my time . . . maybe just an ordinary girl, but I am the world's tomorrow . . . , and you should stand up, yes, stand up when you talk to me, if you have a trace of self-respect left! But there you sit, only because you are nothing but a horse that the Chief Hangman puts through its paces . . . Well, don't just sit there, do something! . . . Get up and show me the place where Soviet girls are shot!"

DETERMINATION A SECOND POWER

The fact that by this pompous tirade Polya betrays herself and moreover harms the mission with which she has been entrusted does not disturb the author in the least. He finds an easy way out of the resulting situation. The noble purity of Polya's heart converts a *starosta** who happened to listen to the conversation. His conscience suddenly awakens, he shoots at the German, loses his life and saves Polya's.

But this is not what matters. It does

* A peasant official put in charge of the village by the Germans.

not matter so much that the *starosta* moved, within the batting of an eyelid, from the rearguard to the vanguard. What matters very much more is that we have here the straight and immutable determination of the positive hero raised, we might say, to the second power. Polya's behavior may seem stupid from the point of view of common sense. But it is filled with an immense religious and esthetic significance. Under no circumstances, even to further his task, does the positive hero dare so much as to look negative. Even in the face of the enemy who must be outwitted and cheated he must demonstrate his positive qualities. They cannot be hidden or camouflaged: they are written on his brow and they sound in his every word. And so he defeats the enemy not by cleverness, wits or physical strength but by his proud attitude alone.

Polya's deed is the key to much that to the non-believer appears grossly exaggerated, stupid and false—especially the positive hero's propensity to pontificate on elevated themes. He makes Communist assertions at home and at work, in friend's homes and on lonely walks, on the love couch and on the death bed. But this is not a contradiction; positive heroes were created to present to the world, on every suitable and unsuitable occasion, a model of purposefulness:

Measure

Each detail

By the great

Purpose

MAYAKOVSKI

Only men who are as straight and hard as swords will cut their way through.

GORKI

Never before have there been heroes like this. Though Soviet writers are proud of the great traditions of 19th century Russian literature which they

want to follow in every possible way and sometimes actually do follow (even though they constantly upbraid Western writers for slavishly imitating outworn literary canons) the positive hero of socialist realism is a break with the tradition, not its continuation.

A very different type of hero prevailed in the last century, and Russian culture lived and thought differently then. Compared with the fanatical religiosity of our time, the 19th century seems atheist, tolerant, disoriented. It was soft and shrivelled, feminine and melancholy, full of doubts, inner contradictions and pangs of conscience. Chernyshevski and Pobedonostsev, the great radical and the great reactionary, were perhaps the only two men of the century who really believed in God. Of course, an incalculable number of peasants and old women also believed in God; but they were not the makers of history and culture. Culture was made by a handful of mournful sceptics who thirsted for God simply because they had no God.

But you might object: How about Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, how about the thousands of other "seekers after God," from the Populists to Merezhkovski, whose search of God has lasted well into the middle of *our* century? I assume that to search means not to have. He who has, who really believes, does not search. And what should he search for, if everything is clear and all that he has to do is to *follow* God? God is not found; He finds us and comes upon us. When He has found us, we cease to search and start to act, doing His will.

The 19th century was a century of searching, of ardent or calm aspirations, unwilling or unable to find a solid place under the sun, torn by uncertainties and dualism. Dostoevsky regretted that the Russian was so

broad—he should be narrowed, he felt. But Dostoevsky was so broad himself that he could embrace within himself both Orthodoxy and nihilism. He could find room in his soul for all the Karamazovs—Alyosha, Mitya, Ivan, Fedor (some would add Smerdyakov). We don't know to this day which of them predominated. For breadth excludes faith: no wonder we narrowed ourselves down to Marxism, thus fulfilling Dostoevsky's wish. Dostoevsky fully understood the temptations of breadth, eternally disputed with himself and passionately wished to end these disputes, offensive to the one God.

This thirst for God, this wish to believe arose—as did the search—in a spiritual desert. It was not yet faith, and if the wish preceded faith—Blessed are they who thirst!—it is like hunger preceding a meal... The great hunger of the 19th century perhaps conditioned us Russians to throw ourselves so greedily upon the food prepared by Marx and to devour it even before we had time to analyze its taste, smell and consequences. But this hundred years' hunger was itself caused by the catastrophic absence of food: it was a hunger of godlessness. That is why it proved so exhausting and felt so unbearable, making us "go among the people," turn radical and renegade and suddenly remember that we are, after all, Christians. ... But there was no relief anywhere:

I want to make peace with heaven,
I want to love, I want to pray
I want to believe in the good.

THE RUSSIAN DEMON

But who is it that cries so anxiously for faith? None other than the *Demon* of Lermontov's poem.* It is the

* Lermontov, the great romantic poet, wrote this work in 1842—Tr.

very "spirit" of doubt that has torn us so long and so painfully. He confirms that it is not the saints that thirst for God but those who have no God and have left Him.

It is a very Russian Demon. He is too inconsistent in his passion for evil to figure as a full Devil and too inconsistent in his repentance to make his peace with God and rejoin the obedient angels. His tone is not straightforward but ambiguous—"not day and not night, not light and not dark." There are only semi-tones, the secret glitter of twilight that was later glimpsed by the symbolist poet Blok and the symbolist painter Wrubel.

A consistent atheism, an extreme and inflexible denial of God, resembles religion more than this vague incertitude. For this is the crux of the Demon's problem: he has no faith and he suffers from lack of faith. His is the eternal motion upwards and downwards, backwards and forwards, between heaven and hell.

Remember what happened to the Demon? He fell in love with Tamara, that divine beauty incarnated in a ravishing woman, and decided to believe in God. But as soon as he kissed Tamara she died, killed by his touch. She was taken from him, and he was once more alone in his anguished unbelief.

For a century this was also the story of Russian culture, which had been possessed by the Demon even before Lermontov. Russia went into a frenzied search for an ideal; and no sooner did she touch heaven than she fell. The slightest contact with God led to denying Him, and with the denial came the anguish of unrealized faith.

The universal genius of Pushkin took note of this collision in *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* and other early poems; but it was only in *Eugene One-*

gin that he unfolded the theme in its full amplitude. The plot of *Onegin* is a simple anecdote: as long as Tatiana loves Onegin and is willing to belong to him, he is indifferent to her; but when she marries another, he falls in love with her passionately and hopelessly. Embedded in this banal story are contradictions on which Russian literature has dwelled to the days of Chekhov and Blok: contradictions of a spirit without God and of a Purpose irrevocably lost.

The central hero of this literature—Onegin, Pechorin of Lermontov's *Hero of Our Time*, Beltoz of Herzen's *Whose Fault?*, Lavretski of Turgenev's *Nest of Gentlefolk* and Rudin of his novel of that name—is usually called "the superfluous man." For all his generous impulses he is unable to find a destiny and he presents a lamentable example of a purposelessness that is of no use to anybody. He is, as a rule, a reflexive character, with tendencies to self-analysis and self-flagellation. His life is full of unrealized projects, and his fate is sad and slightly ridiculous. A woman usually plays a fatal part in it.

Russian literature is full of love stories in which an inadequate man and a beautiful woman meet and part without achieving anything. The fault, of course, lies with the man, who does not know how to love his lady as she deserves, actively and with a purpose. Instead, he yawns with boredom, like Onegin and Rudin, or else he kills his beloved, like Aleko in Pushkin's *Gypsies* or Arbenin in Lermontov's *Masquerade*.

If only the hero were at least a low fellow, incapable of higher feelings! But no, he is a noble creature and the most attractive woman boldly offers him her heart and hand. But instead of rejoicing and taking life with

mysteriousness and her tenderness. Pushkin's dreamy Tatiana opened up an age; the "Beautiful Lady" to whom Blok dedicated his first collected poems closed it. Tatiana was indispensable so that Onegin should suffer *through the absence of somebody*. And, concluding a love story that lasted for a century, Blok took the Beautiful Lady as his Bride, only to betray Her and to lose Her and to torment himself all his life by the purposelessness of his existence.

Blok's poem *The Twelve*—a work at the boundary between two hostile and mutually exclusive cultures—contains an episode that puts a full stop to the love theme of the 19th century. The Red Guard Petka kills, against his will and in a fit of anger, his sweetheart, the prostitute Katka. The tragic murder and the sorrows of lost love resuscitate the old drama, known to us from the days of Lermontov's *Masquerade* and *Demon*. Blok himself used it in many variations—did not the fool Petka and big-mouthed Katka, with her new boy friend Harlequin-Vanka, issue from Blok's own Pierrot and Columbine? But if the old heroes, the Demons and Arbenins, just turn their emptied soul inside out and freeze into a hopeless sorrow, Petka, who followed in their footsteps, is not allowed to do it. His more politically conscious comrades rouse him and re-educate him:

You sure go on and on, you
bastard,
What are you? A little girl?
Sure, you want to turn your soul
Inside out for us to see? O.K.
Come on, snap out of it, look
smart,
Get yourself under control!

.....
And Petrukha soon slowed down
His hurried steps
.....
He threw back his head
And became gay once more.

55

Thus a new hero was born, never seen before. In bloody battles against the enemy—"I will drink blood for my black-browed beauty!"—and in the works and pains of the new era—"This is no time for babying!"—he cures himself of sterile reflections and useless pangs of conscience. He lifts his head proudly, cheers himself up and enters Soviet literature under the flag of the new God whom Blok, from old habit, calls Jesus Christ:

Forward, forward
Working people!

The superfluous man of the 19th century became even more superfluous in the 20th. To the positive hero of the new era he was strange and incomprehensible. The superfluous man seemed to him much more dangerous than the openly negative enemy. After all, the enemy was like the positive hero—clear, straightforward and, in his own way, purposeful. Only his significance was negative—to hinder the movement to the Purpose. But the superfluous man was a creature of different psychological dimensions, inaccessible to computation and regimentation. He is neither for the Purpose nor against the Purpose—he is outside the Purpose. Now this simply cannot be, it is a fiction, a blasphemy. While the whole world, having defined itself with regard to the Purpose, is divided into two antagonistic camps, he feigns not to understand this and keeps mingling his colors in vague and ambiguous schemes. He proclaims that there are no Reds and no Whites but simply people, poor, unfortunate, superfluous people:

They all lie in a row—
No line between them.
Look: soldiers!
Who's ours? Who's theirs?
He was white and now he's red—
The blood reddened him.

He was red and now he's white—
Death whitened him.

M. TSvetayeva*

In the religious struggle, the superfluous man proclaimed his neutrality and expressed his sympathy with both parties, as in these verses of the symbolist poet Voloshin:

Both here and there, among the
ranks
One voice alone can be heard:
"Who is not for us, is against us.
There are no neutrals. Truth is
with us."

And I stand alone among them
In the roaring flame and smoke
And with all the strength that I
have
Say a prayer for them both.

Such words, as blasphemous as a simultaneous prayer to God and Satan, could not possibly be permitted. It was more correct to proclaim them to be a prayer to the Devil: "*Who is not for us, is against us.*" And this is what the new culture did. If it turned again towards the superfluous man, it was only to prove that he was not at all superfluous but rather harmful, dangerous and negative.

Naturally, the leader of the new crusade was Gorki. In 1901 he sketched the first model of the positive hero and attacked those "who were born without faith in the heart," who "never felt that anything was true," who "forever wandered between yes and no."

Gorki roared "No!" at these superfluous men, who roused his ire by their indefiniteness, and called them "petty bourgeois." Later he extended the concept of "petty bourgeois" far and wide and cast into it all who did not be-

* Marina Tsvetayeva returned to Russia in 1940 after a long exile and committed suicide two years later. She has been posthumously "rehabilitated" recently and her work republished.—TR.

long to the new religion: property owners large and small, liberals, conservatives, hooligans, humanists, decadents, Christians, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy. Gorki was a man of *printsipialnost'*; G. Chulkov called him the only truly believing writer of his time. He knew that all that is not God is Devil.

The literary revaluation of the superfluous man and his rapid transformation into a negative figure was intensified in the 1920s, the formative years of the positive hero. When they were placed side by side, it became obvious to everybody that there are no heroes without Purpose, but only heroes who were for or against the Purpose and that the superfluous man was, when all is said and done, a camouflaged enemy, a base traitor who should be unmasked and punished as quickly as possible.

Thus wrote Gorki in *The Life of Klim Samgin*, Fadeyev in *The Debauchee*, and many others. In *The Towns and the Years* Fedin purged his heart of the last drop of pity for the super-

fluous hero, formerly so enchanting. The only dissonant note was perhaps struck by Sholokhov in his *Quiet Flows the Don*. Having shown the tragic fate of that superfluous man, Grigori Melekhov, he bade him an affectionate farewell. Since his hero belonged to the simple people and not the intelligentsia, it was possible to close an eye to Sholokhov's behavior. Today his novel is considered a model of socialist realism. But it is a model that, for obvious reasons, has found no imitators.

Meanwhile, other superfluous men, wishing to save their lives, renounced their past and duly transformed themselves into positive heroes. One of them recently said: "There is nothing in the world more disgusting than fence-sitters . . . Yes, yes, I am a Red. A Red, the devil take you." (Fedin's *An Extraordinary Year*, 1949). The curse was addressed, of course, to the Whites.

Thus did the hero of 19th century Russian perish ingloriously.

III

In its content and spirit, as in its central figure, socialist realism is much closer to the 18th century than to the 19th. Without realizing it, we jump over to the heads of our fathers and revive the tradition of our grandfathers. Like ourselves, the 18th century had the idea of political purposefulness, the feeling of its own superiority and a clear consciousness that "God is with us":

Hark, hark, O Universe
To vict'ries beyond human power;
Listen, O astounded Europe
To the exploits of these Russians.
Peoples, know and understand,
Believe ye that with us is God;
Believe that, aided by His hand,
A single Russian can defeat
All your abysmal evil forces.

Peoples, know this dread Colossus:
God is with us, so honor ye the
Russian.

These verses of the 18th century poet Derzhavin have a very contemporary ring, though the language would, of course, need modernizing. Like the socialist system, so 18th century Russia conceived of itself as the center of Creation. Inspired by the plenitude of its virtues—"self-created and self-fortified"—it proclaimed itself as an example to all peoples and all eras. Its religious self-conceit was so strong that it did not even admit the possibility of the existence of other norms and ideals. In his *Portrait of Felitsa*, Derzhavin, praising the ideal

reign of Catherine II, expressed the desire that

Peoples savage and remote,
Covered still with wool and scales,
Dressed only with leaf and bark,
And adorned with wings of birds,
Should all gather at Her throne,
Hear the gentle voice of Law,
So that tears should run in torrents
Down their swarthy, sunburned
faces.

They should cry and understand
The bliss of living in our time,
Should abandon their equality,
And all subject be to Her.

Derzhavin simply cannot imagine that these "savages," the Huns, Finns and other peoples that surrounded the Russian throne somewhat in the manner of the Internationale, should reject this flattering offer and not wish to submit at once to Catherine, who is, after all, "celestial grace incarnate." For him, as for our writers, anyone who does not wish to become like the model proposed to him and does not hasten to forget his barbarous "equality" and accept the proffered gift of "bliss" falls into one of two categories. He either is so stupid that he does not understand his own interests, in which case he must be re-educated. Or he lacks virtue and is, to use one of our words, a "reactionary," in which case he must be liquidated. For in our world there is nothing finer than this state, this faith, this life and this Empress. So Derzhavin believed, just as a contemporary poet who celebrates the new reign in Derzhavin's language:

There is no country like vast
Russia,
No flowers grow as bright as ours,
Great is our people, free and
deathless,
Our proud, eternal Russian people.

It stemmed attacking hordes of
Batu
And broke all chains that held it
down,

It made Russia and it raised her
To heights of stars and crests of
time.

A. PROKOFIEV

Eighteenth century literature produced its own positive hero. He is "the friend of common good"; he "strives to surpass all in courage," etc.; i.e. he constantly raises the level of his political morality, possesses all the virtues and tells everybody just what to do. This literature knew nothing of the superfluous man. Neither did it know the destructive laughter that was the chronic disease of Russian culture from Pushkin to Blok and reached its climax among the decadents. "All the most lively and sensitive children of our century are stricken by a disease unknown to doctors and psychiatrists. It is related to the disorders of the soul and might be called 'irony.' Its symptoms are fits of an exhausting laughter which starts with a diabolic mockery and a provocative smile and ends as rebellion and sacrilege." (A. Blok, *Irony*, 1908.)

Seen in this way, irony is the laughter of the superfluous man who divides both himself and everything sacred in this world. "I know men who are ready to choke with laughter when they learn that their mother is dying, that they are starving to death, that their fiancée has betrayed them. Through this accursed irony, everything is the same to them: good and evil, the blue sky and the stinking pit, Dante's Beatrice and Sologub's Untouchable Lady. [Fedor Sologub, a poet of the turn of the 20th century, with decadent tendencies.] Everything is confused, as in a tavern or a fog." (Blok, *ibid.*)

Irony is the faithful companion of unbelief and doubt; it vanishes as soon as there appears a faith that does not tolerate sacrilege. There was no irony

in Derzhavin, nor in Gorki—except for a few early tales. In Mayakovsky there are a few examples, mostly from prerevolutionary times. Mayakovsky soon found out what he could and what he could not laugh about. He could not permit himself to laugh at Lenin, whom he praised to the skies, any more than Derzhavin would laugh at his Empress. Pushkin, by contrast, addressed indecent verses even to the chaste and modest Tatiana. Pushkin was the first to taste the bitter joys of self-negation, even though he was gay and had a balanced character. As for Lermontov, he almost seems to have imbibed the poison in his childhood. In Blok himself and in his contemporaries Sologub and Leonid Andreev, destructive laughter became an elemental force sweeping everything before it.

As in the 18th century, we became severe and serious. This does not mean that we forgot how to laugh; but laughter ceased to be indecent and disrespectful; it acquired a Purpose. It eliminates faults, corrects manners, keeps up the brave spirits of youth. It is laughter with a serious face and with a pointing finger: "This is not the way to do things!" It is a laughter free from the acidity of irony.

Irony was replaced by pathos, the emotional element of the positive hero. We ceased to fear high-sounding words and bombastic phrases, we were no longer ashamed to be virtuous. The solemn eloquence of the ode suited us. We became Classicists.

When Derzhavin, in his old age, wrote the ode "To the great boyar and military commander Reshemysl," he gave it a subtitle "or the image of what a great lord should be." The art of socialist realism might be given the same subtitle: it represents the world and man as they should be.

Socialist realism starts from an ideal image to which it adapts the living reality. Our demand "to represent life truthfully in its revolutionary development" is really nothing but a summons to view truth in the light of the ideal, to give an ideal interpretation of reality, to present what should be as what is. For we interpret "revolutionary development" as the inevitable movement towards Communism, towards our ideal, in the light of which we see reality. We represent life as we would like it to be and as it is bound to become, when it bows to the logic of Marxism. This is why socialist realism should really be called "socialist classicism."

Some theoretical books and articles by Soviet writers and critics use the terms "romanticism" and "revolutionary romanticism." Gorki wrote much about the links between romanticism and socialist realism. He longed for "the illusion that exalts" and defended the artist's right to embellish life and to present it as better than it is. These calls did not remain unheeded, though many of Gorki's formulas are now veiled by an embarrassed silence or interpreted pharisaically: it is obviously not easy to admit that what we really need are some pretty lies. No, no, God forbid! We are against illusions and against idealization, we write only the truth and at the same time present life in its revolutionary development... Why should we embellish life? It is quite beautiful as it is, we are not out to embellish it, we just want to show the germs of the future it contains...

EARLY ROMANTICISM

All this talk is merely our usual literary politics. In reality—as Gorki knew—romanticism suited our tastes only too well. It gravitates towards the

ideal, makes our wishes pass for the truth, likes pretty knick-knacks, is not afraid of bombast. This is why it had its well-known success among us. Yet romanticism has played a less important part in our art than might have been expected. It made its presence felt mostly in the prehistory and initial period of socialist realism. In its mature period—the last 20, 30 years—socialist realism has had a comparatively slight romantic tinge.

Romanticism is intimately connected with the *Sturm und Drang* period of Soviet literature, the first five years after 1917, when life and art were flooded with sentiment, when the blazing elan towards a happy future and the world-wide significance of the revolution were not yet regimented by a strict political order. Romanticism is our past, our youth for which we long. It is the ecstasy of swollen banners, the explosions of passion and rage, the rattling of sabers and the neighing of horses, the shootings without judgment and without consequences, the "On to Warsaw!", the life, sleep and death under the naked sky lit by the fires of regiments as nomadic as the Tartars of old:

Youth that led us
To the march of sabers,
Youth that threw us
On the ice of Kronstadt.

Battle horses
Carried us off,
On city squares
They massacred us.

E. BAGRITSKI

These are not just the sentiments of revolutionists who have survived and grown fat. The memory of the revolution is as sacred, both to those who took part in it and those who were born after it, as the image of a dead mother. It is easier for us to grant that everything that happened

after the Revolution was its betrayal than to insult its memory by reproaches and suspicions. Unlike the party, the state, the Ministry of State Security, collectivization, Stalin, etc., the Revolution needs no justification by the Communist paradise that awaits us. It is self-justified and justified emotionally, like love or inspiration. And even though the Revolution was carried out in the name of Communism, its name does not sound less sweet to us for that. Maybe even sweeter . . .

We live between past and future, between the Revolution and Communism. And if Communism promising us golden mountains and representing the inevitable logical outcome of all human history imperiously pulls us forward, the past too pushes us in the back. For it is we who accomplished the Revolution. How then can we blame it or blaspheme against it? We are caught in this psychological squeeze. In itself, we may like it or not. But both before us and behind us stand temples so splendid that we could not bear to attack them. And when we remember that, should our enemies win, they would make us return to the prerevolutionary mode of life (or incorporate us in Western democracy, it hardly matters), then, I am sure, we will start once more from where we started. We will start from the Revolution.

While working on this article I have caught myself more than once dropping into irony—that unworthy device! I caught myself trying to avoid the phrase "Soviet power." I preferred to use its synonyms, like "our state," "the socialist system" and so on. No doubt this was due to the fact that when I was young, the words of one of our Civil War songs went straight to my soul:

All of us into the fight
For Soviet power
And as one man we'll die
Fighting for it.

It is enough for me to pronounce the words "Soviet power" to make me see the Revolution with my mind's eye. I see the taking of the Winter Palace, the cracking motion of machine-gun belts, the bread cards for one eighth of a pound, the defense of Red Petersburg. In a strictly logical judgment, "Soviet power" and "the socialist state" are the same thing. But if I have a few things against the socialist state—trifles, all of them—I have absolutely nothing against the Soviet power. Ridiculous? Maybe. But this is also romanticism.

Yes, we are all romantic with regard to our past. But the further away we are from our past and the closer we come to Communism, the weaker becomes the romantic halo that art has bestowed upon the Revolution. This is understandable: romanticism is, indeed, part of our nature; but it is not all of it. Sometimes it even violates our nature.

Romanticism is too anarchical and too emotional, while we are becoming ever more disciplined rationalists. It is at the mercy of turbulent feelings and diffuse moods, forgetting logic, common sense and law. "The folly of the brave is the wisdom of life," the young Gorki assured us. This advice was timely when the Revolution was made: fools were necessary then. But can we call the Five Year Plan "folly of the brave"? Or the guidance of the Party? Or, indeed, Communism itself, inevitably prepared by the logical course of history? Here every point is thought through, rationally foreseen and subdivided into corresponding paragraphs. What folly is this? Hm, comrade Gorki, you obviously haven't read your Marx!

Romanticism is powerless to express our clarity and precision. Composed gestures and even moderately solemn speech are foreign to it. It waves its arms, gets excited and dreams distant dreams of the time when Communism is all but built and will be seen any moment.

In affirming an ideal, romanticism is not binding enough. It takes the wish for the reality. This is not bad in itself, but it smells of subjectivism and lack of self-restraint. The wish is the reality, because it must be. Our life is beautiful not only because we want it to be beautiful but also because it must be so: it has no choice.

All these arguments, mostly voiceless and unconscious, gradually dried up the hot current of romanticism. The river of art was covered with the ice of classicism. As art became more precise, rational and teleological, it squeezed out romanticism.

THE SHIFT TO CLASSICISM

The cold breath and ponderous heaviness of classicism was felt by us long ago, but few men dared to be outspoken on this subject. "The spirit of classicism blows upon us from all directions. All breathe it; but they either cannot distinguish it or don't know its name or simply are afraid to speak about it." (A. Efros, *The Messenger on the Doorstep*, 1922.)

The most daring of all was N. Punin, a fine art critic. At that time he was connected with futurism; he is completely forgotten now. Already in 1918 he noted "the marked classicism of Mayakovsky's verses." He declared that in his *Mystery Bouffe*—his first major post-revolutionary work—Mayakovsky "ceased to be a romanticist and became a classicist." He forecast that "much as he would like to, Mayakovsky will never again rebel as impetu-

ously as he did in the past."

Although his forecast proved remarkably correct—and not only as regards Mayakovski—the term "classicism" did not take hold in a Soviet literature that kept becoming more clearly classicist. It was, perhaps, too embarrassingly frank. Also, it recalled certain undesirable associations that seemed to lower our dignity. We preferred to call ourselves modestly "socialist realists" and hide our name under this pseudonym...

Beginning with the 1930s, the passion for solemnity finally imposes itself and a pompous simplicity of style, the hallmark of classicism, becomes fashionable. We call our state "the Power"; the mujik—"cultivator of the bread"; the rifle—"saber." We capitalize a great number of words. Allegorical figures and personified abstractions invade our literature, and we speak with slow solemnity and grandiose gestures.

Yes, we believe, we must believe
That truth exists—this is our stand;
And that the good is not defenseless
And conquers evil in the end.

A. TVARDOVSKI

The time has come! In vain with
cruel fate

The Fascist Lord has Moscow
threatened long.

But to victorious Moscow fell
Berlin.

M. ISAKOVSKI

The first heroes of Soviet literature stormed the fortresses of capitalism with torn bast shoes on their feet and sexual oaths on their lips. They were coarse and unrestrained: "Vanka! Put some paper rubles in your shoes! You can't scoot barefoot to the meeting!" (Mayakovski). But now they acquired good looks, elegant clothes and refined manners. If they are sometimes lacking in taste, this is the na-

tional and social trait of our classicism, born as it was of Russian democracy. But neither the heroes nor their authors ever suspect that they are in bad taste. They try with all their power to be beautiful, polite and cultured. They present every detail "correctly" and "in the best of tastes."

"Under the white ceiling sparkled an elegant chandelier, fringed with transparent glass pendants, as with icicles... Tall silvery columns supported a blindingly white cupola, decorated with necklaces of electric bulbs."

What is this? A Tsar's palace? No, an ordinary club in a provincial town.

"On the stage, by the polished wing of the grand piano stood Rakitin, dressed in sober gray. Like a blue river, a necktie flowed down his breast."

A singer? A fashionable tenor? No, a simple party worker.

And now let's look at the people. It does not curse, it does not fight, it does not drink itself senseless the way the Russian people used to do. And if takes a drink at a wedding table covered with exquisite foods, it is only as an accompaniment of toasts:

"Terentii raised his eyes, looked at the round of guests, rumblingly coughed into his fist, caressed the silver flow of his beard with a trembling hand, and said:

'First of all let us congratulate the young couple, may they be happy and embellish the earth by their presence.'

The guests followed him with their toasts, among the melodious clinking of the wine glasses:

'May they honor their parents!'

'May they have healthy children!'

'And not injure the glory of the kolkhoz!'

The quotations are taken from the novel *From the Whole Heart* by E. Maltsev, published in 1949. It is like

dozens and hundreds of other novels. It is a sample of classicist prose of average literary quality. The style has long become a commonplace of our literature, and passes from author to author without undergoing any substantial change.

Every style has its distinctive quality. But classicism is more prone than other styles to impose its mark, to observe pedantically definite canons and norms, to be conservative as to form. It is among the most stable of styles. It brings and accepts new elements mostly in its formative period, but later tries to follow established models faithfully and is hostile to researches in form, experimentalism and originality. This is why it rejected the talents of many poets who wanted to embrace it but retain their personality: V. Khlebnikov, O. Mandelshtam and N. Zabolotski among them.* Even Mayakovski, whom Stalin called "the most talented poet of our Soviet era," remained in it a tragically solitary figure.

Mayakovski was too much of a revolutionary to become a traditionalist. To this day he is accepted politically rather than poetically. For all the peans written to his glory, his rhythms, images and language seem overbold to most of our poets. Those who want to follow in his footsteps copy his mannerisms but are unable to grasp what is essential in him—his boldness, inventiveness and passion. They imitate his verses but don't follow his example . . .

Geniuses, of course, are not born every day, and the state of art rarely

seems satisfactory to contemporaries. Still I must sadly confess, with other of my contemporaries, that our literature has become progressively impoverished in the last two or three decades. Fedin, Fadeev, Ehrenburg, Ivanov and many others have written worse and worse with the years. The twenties, of which Mayakovski wrote that "Only poets, alas, we have none," now seem to be the years in which poetry flourished. Since the writers accepted socialist realism en masse—the beginning of the thirties—literature has gone down and down. Some few glimmers of light during the Patriotic War did not save it.

In this contradiction between the victory of socialist realism and the low quality of literary production, many are inclined to blame socialist realism. They say that great art cannot be written under it and even that it is the death of all art. But Mayakovski provides a refutation, to start with. For all the originality of his talents he remained an orthodox Soviet writer, perhaps the most orthodox Soviet writer—and this did not stop him from writing good poetry. He was an exception to general rules, but mostly because he observed these rules more strictly than others. In his poetic practice he carried out the demands of socialist realism more radically and more consistently. For the contradiction between socialist realism and literary quality, the blame must fall on literature, i.e. on the writers who accepted the rules of socialist realism but did not have sufficient artistic consistency to embody them in deathless images. Mayakovski had that consistency.

Art is not afraid of dictatorship, severity, repressions, or even conservatism and clichés. When necessary, art can be narrowly religious, dumbly

* A. F. Khlebnikov, who died in 1922, was one of the founders of Russian futurism; Mandelshtam, who rebelled against the symbolists, died after deportation; Zabolotski is among the most talented Soviet poets today.—Tr.

governmental, devoid of individuality—and yet good. We go into esthetic raptures over the stereotypes of Egyptian art, Russian icons and folklore. Art is elastic enough to fit into any bed of Procrustes that history presents to it. But there is one thing it cannot stand: eclecticism.

Our misfortune is that we are convinced socialist realists but not convinced enough. Submitting to its cruel rules, we are yet afraid to follow to the end the road that we ourselves have chosen. No doubt, if we were less educated, it would be easier for us to attain the integrity that is indispensable to a writer. But we went to school, read all kinds of books, and learned only too well that there were great writers before us—Balzac, Maupassant, Tolstoy and, yes, what's his name?—Chekhov. This is what has undone us. We wanted to become famous and to write like Chekhov. This unnatural liaison produced monsters.

It is impossible, without falling into parody, to produce a positive hero in the style of full socialist realism and yet make him into a psychological portrait. In this way, we will get neither psychology nor hero. Mayakovsky knew this and, hating psychological analysis and details, wrote in proportions that were larger than life. He wrote coarsely, poster-style, homerically. He avoided like a plague descriptions of common life and rural nature. He broke with "the great traditions of the great Russian literature" and, though he loved Pushkin and Chekhov, he did not try to imitate them. All this helped Mayakovsky to lift himself to the level of his epoch and to express its spirit fully and clearly, without alien admixtures.

But the writing of so many other writers is in a critical state right now precisely because, in spite of the clas-

sicistic nature of our art, they still consider it realism. They do it because they base their judgments on the literary criticism of the 19th century, which is farthest away from us and most foreign to us. Instead of following the road of conventional forms, pure fantasy and imagination which the great religious cultures always took, they try to compromise. They lie, they maneuver and they try to combine the uncombinable: the positive hero, who logically tends towards the pattern, the allegory—and the psychological analysis of character; elevated style, declamation—and prosaic descriptions of ordinary life; a high ideal—and truthful representation of life.

The result is a loathsome literary salad. The characters torment themselves not quite like Dostoevsky's, are mournful not quite like Chekhov's, found their happy families not quite like Tolstoy's, and, suddenly becoming aware of the time they are living in, scream at the reader the copybook slogans which they read in Soviet newspapers, like "Long live world peace!" or "Down with the Warmongers!" This is neither classicism nor realism. It is a half-classicist half-art, which is none too socialist and altogether not realism.

THE CONTRADICTION

It seems that the very term "socialist realism" contains an insoluble contradiction. A socialist, i.e. a purposeful, a religious art cannot be produced with the literary method of the 19th century called "realism." And a really faithful representation of life cannot be achieved in a language based on teleological concepts. If socialist realism really wants to rise to the level of the great world cultures and produce its *Communiad*, there is

only one way to do it. It must give up the "realism," renounce the sorry and fruitless attempts to write a socialist *Anna Karenina* or a socialist *Cherry Orchard*. When it abandons its effort to achieve verisimilitude, it will be able to express the grand and implausible sense of our era.

Unfortunately, this is unlikely to happen. The events of the last few years are dragging our art on a road of half-measures and half-truths. The death of Stalin inflicted an irreparable loss upon our religiously esthetic system; it cannot be resuscitated through the now revived cult of Lenin. Lenin is too much like an ordinary man and his image is too realistic: small, bald, dressed in civilian clothes. Stalin seemed to be specially made for the hyperbole that awaited him: mysterious, omniscient, all-powerful, he was the living monument of our era and needed only one quality to become God—immortality.

Ah, if only we had been intelligent enough to surround his death with miracles! We could have announced on the radio that he did not die but had risen to Heaven, from where he continued to watch us, in silence, no words emerging from beneath the mystic moustache. His relics would have cured men struck by paralysis or possessed by demons. And children, before going to bed, would have kneeled by the window and addressed their prayers to the cold and shining stars of the Celestial Kremlin.

But we did not listen to the voice of our conscience. Instead of intoning devout prayers, we set about dethroning the "cult of personality" that we ourselves had created. We thus blew up the foundations of that classicist colossus which, if we had waited but a little, would have joined the Pyramid of Cheops and the Apollo of Bel-

vedere in the treasury of world art.

The strength of a theological system resides in its constancy, harmony and order. Once we admit that God carelessly sinned with Eve and, becoming jealous of Adam, sent him off to labor at land reclamation, the whole concept of the Creation falls apart, and it is impossible to restore the faith.

After the death of Stalin we entered upon a period of destruction and re-evaluation. It is a slow and inconsistent process, it lacks perspectives, and the inertia of both past and future lie heavy on it. Today's children will scarcely be able to produce a new God, capable of inspiring humanity into the next historical cycle. Maybe He will have to be supplemented by other stakes of the Inquisition, by further "personality cults" and by new terrestrial labors, so that after many centuries a new Purpose will rise above the world. But today no one yet knows its name.

And meanwhile our art is marking time between an insufficient realism and an insufficient classicism. After the loss it suffered it is no longer able to fly towards the ideal and to sing the praises of our life in a sincere and high-flown style, presenting what should be as what is. In our works of glorification resound ever more openly the notes of baseness and hypocrisy. The most successful writers are those who can present our achievements as truthfully as possible and our failings as tactfully, delicately and untruthfully as possible. This is what happened with Dudintsev's novel *Man Does Not Live by Bread Alone*, which stirred up a lot of noise and was publicly anathemized for blackening our bright socialist reality.

But is the dream of the old, good and honest "realism" the only heresy

to which Russian literature is susceptible? Is it possible that all the lessons that we received were taught in vain and that, in the best of cases, all we wish is to return to the naturalist school and the critical tendency? Let us hope that this is not so and that our need for truth will not interfere with the work of thought and imagination.

Right now I put my hope in a phantasmagoric art, with hypotheses instead of a Purpose, an art in which the grotesque will replace realistic descriptions of ordinary life. Such an art corresponds best to the spirit of our time. May the fantastic imagery of Hoffmann and Dostoevsky, of Goya, Chagall, and Mayakovski (the most

socialist realist of all) and of many other realists and non-realists teach us how to be truthful with the aid of the absurd and the fantastic.

Having lost our faith, we have not lost our enthusiasm about the metamorphoses of God that take place before our very eyes, the miraculous transformations of His entrails and His cerebral convolutions. We don't know where to go; but, realizing that there is nothing to be done about it, we start to think, to set riddles, to make assumptions. We may thus invent something marvelous? Perhaps; but it will no longer be socialist realism.

*(Translated from the Russian
by GEORGE DENNIS)*