

attitude towards Soviet society. The article was, in short, a sorry though perhaps understandable substitute for a "defense" of his work. But the fact remains that Ehrenburg was not forced to recant and confess his sins. Apparently the authorities decided to publicize the *Thaw* controversy as an example of the new "freedom of discussion" in Soviet literature; the editors of *Literaturnaia Gazeta* drove this point home by inviting readers to participate in a general discussion of *The Thaw*, in order to "prove that the novel has not been banned by anyone, any more than readers or writers have been prohibited from uttering their opinions about it."²⁵

Within the ranks of the Writers' Union an important battle seems to be raging between writers who demand greater freedom for Soviet literature and those who stubbornly cling to the precepts of Zhdanovism. The leaders of the Writers' Union have come out against Ehrenburg's stand, but they seem willing to tolerate the Ehrenburg group as a "loyal opposition." And this in itself is a small ray of hope on the Soviet literary horizon.

At the First Soviet Writers' Congress in 1934, Karl Radek and several other speakers had found it necessary to justify the growing dominance of *partiinost* (party-mindedness) and tendentiousness in Soviet literature. Rather than viewing these qualities

²⁵ "Review of Readers' Letters on I. Ehrenburg's Novel," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, Oct. 5, 1954, pp. 3-4.

as ends in themselves, Radek saw them as necessary evils during a transitional period of change and upheaval:

The revolution, which is an army of labor . . . cannot devote much time to personality at all stages of its march, but after its victory the revolution is a soil upon which personality can bloom in all its richness . . . Communist society will be a million times richer in great personalities than any other type of society could be.²⁶

Ehrenburg obviously does not believe that the ideal society has been born. But he recognizes that a new society has been created with its own norms and institutions, and he feels that this society should be truthfully portrayed. In his view, strict control over the content and style of literature was justifiable in a period of revolutionary change, but that period is over and literature must be freed from its bonds. Ehrenburg is undoubtedly speaking for many of his colleagues when he declares in *The Thaw*:

We have taken a lot of trouble over one half of the human being, but the other half is neglected. The result is that one-half of the house is a slum.

If by the "other half of the human being" Ehrenburg refers to the personal dreams, problems, doubts and aspirations of Soviet man, to his "non-socialist" personality, the importance of his appeal cannot be overestimated.

²⁶ Karl Radek, *Reports and Speeches at First Soviet Writers' Congress*, International Publishers, New York, p. 177.

The "Thaw" and After

By WALTER Z. LAQUEUR

IT IS now one year since the last Congress of Soviet Writers, and not a few people are wondering what has become of the "thaw" in Soviet literature (as Mr. Ilya Ehrenburg put it). Has the post-Stalinist "fer-

A free-lance journalist now residing in London, Mr. Laqueur has written widely on Soviet and Communist affairs. His article is reprinted in abridged form from *Encounter*, Vol. V, No. 4, October 1955, published monthly by Panton House, 25 Haymarket, London, S. W. 1, for the Congress for Cultural Freedom.

ment of ideas" continued, or has it slowly petered out?

Unfortunately, this very way of putting the question is misleading. The Second Soviet Writers Congress held in December 1954, made it quite clear that there would be no quick and major changes¹; and in-

¹ See Gleb Struve, "The Second Congress of Soviet Writers," *Problems of Communism*, No. 2, Vol. IV (March-April 1955), p. 3.

deed there have been no great surprises in the literary field since then. Scientists, men of letters, *etc.* did not argue the issues that really preoccupied them; what did happen, and what was novel enough, was that a few daring spirits among them publicly hinted that they would be ready to discuss some of the "safer" of these issues. There was no great, stirring controversy, but instead a very cautious attempt to get some discussion under way. The Second Writers Congress brought clashes between certain personalities (such as authors Mikhail Sholokhov and Konstantin Simonov) who may have represented literary cliques or literary trends; but there was no open conflict of ideas.

And yet, it would be equally wrong to say that Soviet literary development over the past months has represented "no change" or a retreat "back to 1952." If present-day Soviet writing can be compared at all to any previous era, it is the 1938-40 period which comes first to mind. But even that comparison would be superficial in some important respects. For there are new and significant features in the mainstream of Soviet literature in 1955.

There has been one, and only one, discussion on basic cultural issues in the Communist world during the past year. It has taken place not in the USSR but in China. However, it has been given wide publicity in the Soviet Union and its European satellites, and clearly has more than local significance. That is the Hu Feng affair.

Until he came under attack, Hu Feng enjoyed considerable prestige as a Chinese literary critic and as spokesman for a group of younger writers and critics who shared his cultural views. Although all of the group were fervent Communists or pro-Communists, they apparently became distressed over a period of time by developments on the Chinese literary scene. They formulated a program in the summer of 1954 pleading for greater intellectual and cultural freedom for Chinese writers and for a relaxation of party control over publishing. This astonishingly naive plea fell, not so astonishingly, on deaf ears: Hu Feng's "deviation" was officially condemned by the head members of the Chinese Writers and Artists Union in February 1955. A press campaign launched against the group picked up momentum until by May the original charge of "ideological deviationism" was supplanted by violent charges of "gangsterism," "sabotage," "counterrevolution" and "infamous imperialist spying."

The Hu Feng affair was followed with great interest in the Soviet and satellite press. Typical of satellite comment is the following excerpt from a programmatic article by Jerzy Putrament, a "keynoter" among official Polish theoreticians:

It is interesting to observe that some of Hu Feng's reactionary theories have been in currency in a somewhat different form in our country too. . . . Here and there, under the conditions of increasing pressure by hostile propaganda, the protagonists of bourgeois views exploit every possibility of revenge.

The implication of the case for Soviet Europe is, therefore, that however much the party may relax its reins over culture, there are fixed limits that may not be trespassed. The warning is almost certainly superfluous. But that it should be uttered at all is an indication that not everyone is happy over some recent trends in Soviet culture. Let us now examine some of these trends.

Hearts, Flowers and Production Records

ONE of the more interesting is the Soviet literati's "rediscovery" of love and sex. It is a development that invites easy irony, but its significance should not be underestimated. For more than fifteen years Soviet novels, poems, and plays had been centered on the problems of industrial and agricultural production: they described the Soviet citizen as he was—or rather should have been—at his work. People were in love, married, and begot children somehow, but these were mere trifles—a premium for hard work in many cases. A Rumanian magazine characterized the positive hero of the postwar period of "socialist realism" thus:

He has penetrating eyes, flashing with lightning, he is husky, robust, with Herculean chest and muscles, he radiates strength and optimism. He doesn't drink and he may even give up smoking. He repels the allurements of the beautiful sex, is chaste up to the day of his marriage. He will marry a chaste woman, and all their children also will be chaste (*Viata Romineasca* [Rumanian Life], March 1954).

Soviet readers are used to putting up with a great deal, but the suppression of sex in literature was really too much for them. During the "thaw" of 1953-4, readers and writers alike reacted fairly sharply against that particular aspect of socialist realism, and the opposition has continued to this day. Addressing movie directors this summer, one official spokesman thought it necessary to advise them that "work does not fill up the life of the people." V. Sukharevitch,

a literary critic, writing in *Literaturnaia Gazeta* (August 13th, 1955), asserted that Soviet literature had described all the spheres of human struggle and toil, but . . .

. . . however great an effort we make, we cannot remember any characters in love, with the possible exception of Grigori and Axinia from Sholokhov's *Quiet Flows the Don* and a very few others. And Grigori, *horribile dictu*, was a "White Guard"!

After so many years of intense effort and sacrifices, there is an overwhelming longing for more privacy, and the rediscovery of sex is but one aspect (though probably the most important) of this longing. The leaders had to comply, or at least to compromise, with this deep urge. Since 1954 most of the published novels prominently feature a love story side by side with the familiar production angle: some even enthusiastically describe two, three or more love stories.

It was comparatively easy to ridicule the Stakhanovite-marries-shockworker books of the last fifteen years; but it has been far more difficult to improve things. Soviet writers (with a few exceptions belonging to the older generation) had simply never written on love and sex. They did not know how to approach their subject. Their first steps in the new direction were very unsteady and frequently slightly comic.

There was an additional difficulty: Russian classical literature on the whole lacks any tradition of writing about physical love. *Anna Karenina* is a novel about adultery, to be sure, but intimacies are only seldom described, and anything pertaining to the physical act is never mentioned. A change came only after the turn of the century, when various modernist schools spread in Russia, and the first "discovery of sex" in Russian literature coincided with the prevalence of decadent trends: Mikhail Kuzmin, Anastasia Verbitskaya, and—most notorious of all—Artzybashev in his *Sanin* (1907). All of these are, of course, utterly outside the Soviet pale from a political point of view. There was no naturalist school in Russia in the late nineteenth century which could have suggested to Soviet writers that a frank discussion of sex could be connected with "progressive" politics. To be sure, there was always Maxim Gorki—but it is quite unthinkable that any Soviet novelist should write today as freely on the facts of life among the poor and the outcast as did Gorki (especially the young Gorki). And so the Soviet writers move quite awkwardly—like people who have not seen the sun for a long time and have to get slowly accustomed to the brightness of the light.

What Price Virtue?

TAKE, for instance, the new novel by V. Ashayev, whose *Far from Moscow* was the big success of the postwar period. Tanya loves Mikhail and the two walk for many hours through Moscow at night. At last they retire to the flat of Tanya's parents who are at present staying at their *dacha*, or villa, outside the city. Both are too excited to sleep and the author prepares us for the worst. But then, all of a sudden, Tanya gets a nettle rash and Mikhail has to rub her legs with alcohol. This again makes them excited, they forget the nettles and the rash. Mikhail holds the girl in his arms, kisses her lips, eyes, and shoulders. Their hot breaths meet. "Mikhail, we are alone in the house," Tanya says desperately and urgently. "My parents are in the *dacha*. I do not want to do this to them. I am afraid for our love." But Mikhail is up to the situation. He feels a burning choke in his throat. With a radiant smile he lays Tanya in her bed like a small child. Mikhail spends the rest of the night in an imaginary discussion with Tanya's father, a learned palaeontologist, who argues that his daughter is too young to marry. And that's that.

Yelena, by K. Lvova, is probably the most discussed Soviet novel of the year. Yelena is a scientist who is married; she also has a lover. At the moment when she has to choose between lover and husband, she is spared by being transferred to some remote part of the Soviet Union. When expecting a child from her lover she has a road accident, another *deus ex machina* that eliminates a difficult dilemma. After all this, Yelena nevertheless emerges as a "positive hero," and it is not surprising that the author was violently attacked by the Komsomol newspaper for "glorifying moral corruption." But she also has found supporters, which is rather more surprising and interesting.

While Ashayev's and Lvova's novels had a mixed reception, Daniel Granin's *Those Who Seek* has been acclaimed as one of the best books of the past year. It describes, among other things, the affair of Andrei Lobanov, an engineer, with Rita, a married woman. By Soviet standards it is quite risqué—not the subject as such but Granin's treatment:

Rita moved towards him, but he drew away, demanding an answer. He felt the pain he caused her by his rebuff. . . . "I need you, I need you always, but I can't go on like this. . . . This room . . . your friend. . . . Can't you yourself see how sordid it all is?" Rita lay back on the bed and placed her hands behind her head. Her small breasts were



1-й акт. На производстве.



2-й акт. Дома.



3-й акт. Встреча с любимой девушкой.



4-й акт. Свадьба.

A CONTEMPORARY PLAY ON AN INDUSTRIAL THEME

First Act: At Work.

Second Act: At Home.

Third Act: A meeting with his sweetheart.

Fourth Act: The Wedding.

Krokodil, Moscow, May 10, 1952

clearly outlined under the blouse. Again she sighed wistfully. "How ungrateful of you. Come to me. Come, dear. . . . What are you afraid of in me? . . ." He tried not to look at her unbuttoned blouse, at her long, finely-shaped legs. . . .

But in the end Andrei finds the inner strength to put an end to that sordid affair, and virtue is suitably rewarded by the author.

However, virtue is not always rewarded in recent Soviet novels. Andrei, in Yelena Katerli's *Long Road*, is a nice chap, a good Communist, a competent editor of the local newspaper. And yet Lyuba, the girl he loves, marries somebody else and there is no consolation for Andrei but work. The book ends:

As Andrei walked along the street he thought about the things he had to do. To set about editing *Tribuna* properly. Recently he had worked without enthusiasm, the last issue was dull.

There is no consolation either for Antonina in the same novel, who loves Yasha, a young rascal, and even has a child by him. Yasha belongs to the "stilyagi," the Soviet *jeunesse dorée*, who dress smartly, smell of *eau de cologne*, drink heavily, and prefer the

foxtrot to the polka: "The polka is only for the nursery."

It is still a far cry from the spirit of frankness and experimentation which prevailed in Soviet literature in the 1920's to the present, hesitant relaxation from prudery. The timid moves of today may well constitute the absolute limit for years to come. Nevertheless, their importance can be underrated. The reaction to decades of collectivization of private life seems to be in full swing in the Soviet Union, and the literary stirrings are but a faint reflection of it. People outside a totalitarian regime too easily forget that love and sex are "discouraged" there because they impede the enforced fusion of society. They are, in an indirect fashion but quite literally, "enemies of the regime." When attention is paid to love and sex, individuals become important—even the inner lives of individuals. In the long run, the rediscovery of love and sex in the Soviet literature of 1954-55 may well enter history as an event more important than some of the politico-diplomatic trends which seem to be developing.

Old Writers Between New Covers

A RECENT issue of a Soviet literary monthly contained selections from the writings of Ivan Bunin, the only Russian ever to have received the Nobel Prize for literature. Bunin left Russia in 1918 and died in France in 1953. The Soviet editors, in a short introduction, observed that Bunin had never understood the Communist revolution and that his political views and writings were unworthy of him. But they did go ahead to print him, and the very appearance of an émigré writer in a leading Soviet magazine throws some fresh light on the state of mind of those who are now setting the direction of Soviet literature.

The Soviet attitude to émigré writers, as to "doubtful characters" in Russian literary history in general, has not been consistent. Broadly speaking, it can be said that more cultural latitude is given to the publishing houses whenever a more liberal political line prevails, as in 1934-5 and 1942-5. During World War II, novels by Dostoevsky and Leskov were freely published. After 1946 such publication ceased and the literary critics again attacked the "reactionary and confused character" of Dostoevsky's writings. After Stalin's death, Dostoevsky reappeared in the form of *The Village Stepanikovo and its Inhabitants*, a minor but vivid novel. And this past July, an edition of *Crime and Punishment* came out, the first in many years.² Also published were works by some of the minor writers of the 1870-80's, such as Pomyalovsky (a man who drank too much and described mainly the goings-on in Orthodox seminaries), and by a few of the "reactionaries" of the 1860's such as the Aksakov brothers.

The same vacillations can be noted *vis-à-vis* writers and books of the earlier periods of Soviet literature. Perhaps most typical of the fate of such literature is Mikhail Bulgakov's play, *The Days of the Turbins*, which is based on a novel by the same writer written back in 1924. The scene is in the Ukraine in 1918. The Turbin brothers are officers in the White armies during the Civil War. Yet both are "positive heroes" in the modern Soviet sense, and there is not a single Communist in the whole play. In the end, the Turbin brothers do change sides: they have become convinced that as Russian patriots they have to

² *The New York Times* of October 23, 1955, p. 35, reports that the official Soviet publishing house Goslitizdat has announced it "will issue a complete collection of [Dostoevsky's] fiction works in ten volumes" beginning in February 1956. It remains to be seen whether ten volumes—a rather small figure for the prodigious output of the great writer—will include such "reactionary" works as *Brothers Karamazov* and *The Possessed*.—Editors.

support the Communists, not the various Ukrainian atamans, because only the former stand for Russian unity. Their conversion is for exclusively national reasons, not because they have accepted Communist ideology.

The Days of the Turbins (which, incidentally, includes a playing of "God Save the Tsar") was a big success in Moscow in the late 1920's, but was soon forbidden. The play was again permitted for a short time in the early 1930's, but was once more banned after about a year. For the last 20 years or so, *The Days of the Turbins* has not been performed, nor has its author (who died in 1936) been mentioned in the Soviet press. At the Writers' Congress last winter, however, Veniamin Kaverin, a Soviet writer of the older generation, suggested a new performance of the play, and according to a recent report it is included among the repertoire of a leading Moscow theatre. It should be stressed that Dostoevsky or Bulgakov are "border-line" cases for the Communists; not a single major Soviet writer who fell victim to the big purges (*e. g.*, B. Pilnyak or I. Babel) has been posthumously rehabilitated.

The Past Appropriated

FOR the prerevolutionary literary heritage, we have now a fairly accurate up-to-date yardstick of Soviet opinion. It is the tenth volume of the *History of Russian Literature*, published by the Academy of Science some months ago. A big, exquisitely produced volume, it deals with the period most interesting in this context: 1890-1917. About half of this great volume (more than 800 pages) deals with Gorki, Gorki's pupils, and Lenin's influence on Russian literature. (Gorki is described as a disciple of Lenin who occasionally strayed from the ideological instructions given by the master.) Stalin and Andrei Zhdanov are quoted time and again as final arbiters; the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky owes his place in this history to a chance remark by Stalin, while Georgi Plekhanov survives—despite his unsavory political record, from the Communist point of view—because he received a good notice in Zhdanov's famous speech in 1946. Some of the exceedingly third-rate writers of the time who later became Communists are inflated out of all measure and made into leading literary figures. (Or perhaps they are not really overrated but simply have to be played up because the Bolsheviks had so few sympathizers among the prerevolutionary intelligentsia.) As for party affiliations, it seems roughly to be the case that the Soviet editors prefer members or sympathizers of

bourgeois parties to Social Revolutionaries, and Social Revolutionaries to Mensheviks.

What is perhaps most significant in this book is the attempt, by fair means and foul, to adopt all the major prerevolutionary realistic writers, regardless of their political orientation. A whole chapter is dedicated to Bunin (but only ten lines to his many works after 1917, thereby omitting mention of some of his most important writings); for Bunin, after all, is the greatest of those writing in the classical tradition of Tolstoy and Dostoievsky. In a sense, Bunin is nearer to socialist realism than Gorki, especially the early impressionist and violent Gorki. The volume of the *History* is full of crying injustices and distortions. But somehow or other, often with considerable ingenuity, the editors do succeed in laying claim to most of the important writers of the Russian and Soviet past. If the writer in question was an incorrigible individualist, far removed from the social and intellectual currents of his day, he now can be safely described as a "great Russian patriot." Usually,

the Soviet editors also can find in his lifetime some form of mild protest, if only once or twice, against the powers-that-were, which can now be emphasized as an indication of how the spirit of progress permeated that particular writer. In any case, whatever the reasons, most of the great Russian writers are thus saved for Communist posterity.

This sometimes ludicrous effort to appropriate as much as possible from the Russian literary heritage will probably have beneficial effects in the long run. It means that certain standards of creativity are preserved; and, further, there cannot be the slightest doubt that the books of the great Russian writers of the nineteenth century are some kind of an antidote to totalitarian ideology. The Soviet reader will tend to compare Soviet literary output of the present day with the great chain of literature from Pushkin to Chekhov and Gorki, and this is bound to raise questions in his mind. It is not utopian to hope that these questions will be asked each year with an ever greater emphasis.

New Trend In Soviet Justice?

By VLADIMIR GSOVSKI

SINCE the death of Stalin in March 1953, there have occurred in the USSR a number of developments which have been widely interpreted outside the Communist orbit as harbingers of a liberalization of the Soviet system of legal justice. Of these developments, the two amnesties decreed by Stalin's successors—the first on March 27, 1953, immediately after his demise, and the second on September 17, 1955—have roused particular interest.

In this observer's view, however, there is reason to question any hasty assumption that the Soviet amnesties really signify a trend toward a substantive

liberalization of the legal concepts and institutions of the USSR. An amnesty, by its very nature, has a specific and limited application; it does not necessarily have a direct effect on the established legal system. Generally, it is more reflective of temporary political considerations than of intent to bring about enduring legal reforms. This was clearly true of the March 1953 amnesty, as numerous earlier analyses have pointed out.¹ The present article will endeavor to probe the real significance of the second amnesty of last September from the same standpoint and then will explore briefly other recent developments which shed light on the existence or non-existence of a liberalizing trend in the Soviet legal sphere.

Mr. Gsovski, a well-known American authority on Soviet law, is head of the Foreign Law Section of the Library of Congress and author of *Soviet Civil Law* (two volumes), University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1948-49.

¹ For an analysis of the first post-Stalin amnesty, see the author's article in *Problems of Communism*, No. 6, Vol. II (1953).