

the most exquisite courtesy, and was the gayest person I ever knew. Because he understood God's plan better than most of us, he was an optimist from the foundation of his being.

His thought and vision were ahead of his time, he was indeed a path-finder and this must carry with it some sense of loneliness and sometimes of frustration. He never doubted the validity of his conclusions, and he was always certain that in time truth would triumph, and that others would be able to understand and accept his advance in human knowledge of truth. But he did sometimes wish this would happen more rapidly; he longed to share the joy of his revelation. He knew how important it was that this revelation should be recorded, and it is interesting and wonderful to see his thought is now being accepted; I believe as time goes on it will more and more permeate the world, and that his vision was another breakthrough for mankind in its progress.

This life of him makes fascinating reading; the many quotations from his own letters, essays and commentaries read like poetry; he loved and observed and rejoiced in every part of God's creation.

We read in detail of his scientific career, of the long years of patient excavation and research, in which he developed his thought, and learned so much of God's plan in the past, that he was able to understand its development in the future. In the latter part of his life it was this that absorbed him, he saw that evolution did not stop with producing man, but that man himself must continue to evolve, so that Christ was in a very real sense a second Adam.

There is much in this book to help us understand his thought, although nothing can replace the lucidity of his own writing. One is glad to learn more and read more about the man himself, so dearly loved by so many, so gentle, without bitterness or uncharitableness, witty, and so clear and simple in his conversation.

I could wish the translation had been less awkward, and that many very curious words, such as 'centration' had not been used. Nevertheless I found it absorbing to read, and it brought back to life one whose contribution to the world was that of a person and not merely a disembodied scholar.

J. E. Kelley

DISSONANT VOICES IN SOVIET LITERATURE. Edited by Patricia Blake and Max Hayward; *George Allen and Unwin, 30s.*

In *Sivtzev Vrazhek*, a novel written in the twenties by the emigré Ossorgin, the old ornithologist, Ivan Alexandrovitch, having suffered the vicissitudes of the Revolution, buys furtively – lest the police see him – the 'first white roll. Like a snowdrop! Not for the taste of it, but for the joy it brought; for was not it a real white roll, such as there used to be in the old days!' It is, one presumes, with something of the same feeling that the editors of this anthology have republished and amplified their previous selection from non-conformist Russian writers, that appeared in *Partisan Review* in 1961.

As the editors themselves admit, this is not a collection that is representative of the best writing in Soviet literature. Neither the better 'Socialist realists', nor those writers primarily concerned with the analysis of personal relationships – an important trend in modern Soviet prose – are repre-

sented. The collection is also heavily weighted on the side of prose: the meagre verse translations included are poor stuff, if one wishes to taste the most original achievements of post-war Soviet literature. Thus we are given Max Hayward's version of Evtushenko's impressive humanist affirmation, the already widely known *Babi Yar*, but nothing by the more technically gifted and subtly ironical Voznesensky: Richard Wilbur's excellent version of *Anti-Worlds*, for example, would have provided a good contrast.

The book suffers generally from an attempt to use literature as proof of an intellectual dissonance common to the optimistic then disillusioned *avant-garde* of the early years of the Revolution, the writers who tried to circumvent the rigours of Zhdanovist suppression, and the post-war writers of Thaws and half-Thaws.

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The selection of extracts from early Soviet literary criticism does not justly represent the important formalist school. The extract from Victor Shklovsky's *Literature and Cinema* might well have been rejected in favour of a piece by the more cogent Zhirmunsky or Engelhardt. Zamyatin's anti-symbolist *Literature, Revolution and Entropy* has a somewhat blurred effect:

'Into one second must be compressed what formerly went into a sixty-second minute. Syntax becomes elliptical, volatile; complicated pyramids of periods are dismantled and broken down into the single stones of independent clauses. In swift movement the canonical, the habitual eludes the eye . . .'

This is reminiscent of the painter Malevich's summoning of 'an economic council of the fifth dimension for the liquidation of all the arts of the old world', and it suffers from the vagueness of most futurist manifestos. It certainly does not convey anything like the force of Zamyatin's own creative writing in, say, *We*: the description of the 'Day of Unanimity' in this forerunner of Orwell's *1984* would have been a more suitable accompaniment to the other offerings.

Nevertheless, the collection contains some superb pieces that make it valuable reading for those who are interested more in literature, than in reversed agit-prop.

The pseudonymous Nikolai Arzak's *This is Moscow Speaking* (translated from a Polish version published in Paris) portrays the effects of a legally decreed day of licence – 'Public Murder Day' – on the behaviour of a group of people whose moral judgment has been atrophied by Stalinism: here, social satire and the analysis of intimate relationships are skilfully combined by interspersing the story with verse extracts that are pastiches of various styles and attitudes in Soviet verse, from futurism to conformism. One is reminded of similar shifts of style in that story of early revolutionary fervour, Zozulya's *Ak and Humanity*, where a similar public order for the extermination of the socially superfluous seemed merely grotesque.

Chukhovsky's *The Tramp* – a tale of Misha, the eternal social passenger – and Babel's *The Journey* are also bitter reflections of the violence engendered by the Revolution. Babel is at his best here: the symbolic murder and castration of a young Jewish teacher on a train that is 'singing a song of power' (the central image of so many of the novels of 'socialist construction'); the juxtaposition of moral with physical lice, and of revolutionary fervour with inescapable evil: this story by a master of critical realism sums up an epoch.

Apart from these, the most impressive extracts are those taken from Pilniak's *Mahogany* (1929) and Tendryakhov's *Three-Seven-Ace* (1960). The post-war story tells of a group of Siberian lumber-jacks – in a more conformist works these would be 'positive' and heroic types – who are brought to murder. Tendryakhov's use of Chekhovian irony enables him to make a timeless statement on the persistence of evil in human nature. The sizeable chunk of Pilniak's *Mahogany* must be read, if only for the description of the down-and-out 'pure' communists who fire the brickworks kiln for no more than the right to live underground, away from Soviet society above them; there, near the furnace, they practise 'true communism, brotherhood, equality and friendship.'

These are the undeniably excellent offerings. The fragment of early Pasternak, the Zoshchenko reminiscences and a piece from Ehrenburg's memoirs are interesting though unimportant when compared with most of the stories. A two volume collection of novellas from the early and later years of Soviet rule would have had a more powerful effect than an attempt to pack prose fiction, memoirs, verse and criticism from such momentous years into three hundred pages. Nevertheless, one is grateful for this opportunity to appreciate, through the editors' selection, the real misfortune with which these writers are concerned: we must obey the command of Pilniak's Ivan, and 'Weep . . . weep this very minute for the communism that is lost!'

John Cumming

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