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HISTORY A Modern History, 1640–1870

The age of bourgeois revolution as the Soviet syllabus taught it - 1640 to 1870, from the English civil war through 1848 to the unifications - published in the last full year of the Soviet Union.

Ye. Yurovskaya (ed.)

Introduction to the 1990 Edition

The copyright page of this textbook reads "© Progress Publishers 1990." That is the last full year of the Soviet Union. By the time a student opened *A Modern History, 1640–1870* in Moscow or Delhi or Addis Ababa, the state that commissioned it was dismantling the censorship, the planned economy and the one-party monopoly on which the whole apparatus of books like this one rested. The press was full of the words *perestroika* and *glasnost*; the Congress of People's Deputies was televised; the archives of 1937 were beginning, cautiously, to open. None of this reaches the volume in your hands. Search its 119,000 words and the terms *perestroika*, *glasnost* and Gorbachev do not occur once. Neither does Soviet Union, except in the imprint; the word "Soviet" itself appears exactly twice, once inside the printer's line and once in the single phrase "considered by Soviet historians." A book issued in the year the system fell is, in its intellectual method, entirely untouched by the crisis around it.

That is worth dwelling on, because it decides what kind of object this is. Progress translations frequently postdate their Russian originals by years, and a 1990 imprint can conceal a manuscript a decade or two older. Here the front matter gives no printing history, so the manuscript's true age cannot be fixed from the page. But the internal evidence is unambiguous. The footnotes cite editions of the Marx–Engels Collected Works published between 1976 and 1985 and the Selected Correspondence of 1982, so the apparatus was assembled no earlier than the mid-1980s. And yet the frame is pure, undiluted formational orthodoxy of the kind that had been standard in Soviet historiography since the 1930s. Whatever hand assembled the citations in the Gorbachev years, the historical philosophy they serve is the one that was drilled into every Soviet undergraduate long before reform was thinkable. This is not a *glasnost* book in any sense but the calendar. It is the old manual, carried across the threshold of 1990 with its doctrine intact, and that steadiness — in a year when so much else was moving — is itself the first thing to notice.

The doctrine announces itself in the opening sentence. "Modern History is that period which saw the victory of capitalism over feudalism and the establishment of the capitalist formation throughout the world." The word formation is the load-bearing term of the whole edifice, and it recurs eighty-one times. In the classical Soviet scheme, history is a ladder of socio-economic formations — primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism — through which societies ascend by law, each rung prepared by the productive forces maturing inside the one below. Modern history, on this account, is simply the name for the rung on which feudalism gives way to capitalism, and the bourgeois revolutions are the mechanism of the passage. The book's thirty-one chapters, from the calling of the Long Parliament in 1640 to the eve of the Paris Commune, are the story of that mechanism running: England first, then North America, then France, then the wave of 1848, then the unifications of Germany and Italy and the American Civil War, each an episode in a single law-governed process. The German Ideology, we are told in the chapter on socialism, disclosed "the objective laws which govern the development of productive forces and production relations" and "the laws that conditioned the revolutionary change from one mode of production to another, more progressive mode." History has laws; the revolutions obey them; the historian's task is to exhibit the obedience.

The teleology is explicit and it points forward, not back. The revolutions are rungs, and each rung is valued for what it prepares. "The bourgeois revolutions cleared the way for the industrial revolution," the socialism chapter begins, and the industrial revolution in turn produces the proletariat, and the proletariat produces the movement that will end all exploitation. This is why the survey, which nominally stops in 1870, is governed throughout by an event just past its own horizon. "The first revolution that set out to do away with all exploitation," the Introduction states, "was the revolution of March 18, 1871 in Paris." The Paris Commune is the vanishing point toward which every earlier chapter is arranged. The English Revolution "struck the first crushing blow to

feudalism"; the American War of Independence "helped the formation of the first bourgeois-democratic republic in Modern History"; and all of it is prologue to the moment when the working class first moves as a class for itself. The bourgeoisie's own revolutions, in this reading, are magnificent and necessary precisely because they dig the grave the proletariat will later occupy. It is a coherent and, in its way, a grand conception. It is also a machine for reading history backward from a predetermined destination, and the closer one looks at how it handles particular revolutions, the more the destination distorts the reading.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the recurring insistence on the "bourgeois-democratic stage." The category is applied with great uniformity: the English Revolution has one ("In 1647 the bourgeois-democratic stage of the revolution began"), the German revolution of 1848 is "the first bourgeois-democratic revolution in Germany," the American Civil War "was a bourgeois-democratic revolution," the Italian Risorgimento is an incomplete one. The stage is treated as a discrete and compulsory phase, a rung that cannot be skipped, and the book polices the boundary. Consider its verdict on Andreas Gottschalk, the Cologne physician who led that city's Workers' Association in 1848 and pressed for a workers' republic at once. The text convicts him of a category error: "Failing to understand that the objectives facing the German revolution were bourgeois-democratic and not socialist, he demanded the immediate formation of a 'workers' republic'." Gottschalk's crime is impatience with the timetable. He wanted to reach a rung before history had built it. The book's confidence that it can name the "objectives facing the German revolution" in advance — and grade a participant's tactics against them — is the teleology in its most operative form. The future is known; the actors are marked right or wrong by whether they marched toward it in step.

The pivot of the whole survey, and its most substantial single chapter, is the eleventh: "The Development of Socialism from Utopia to Science." The title is Engels's, borrowed from the 1880 pamphlet, and the choice is deliberate, because this chapter is where the bourgeois-revolutionary narrative hands off to the proletarian one. Saint-Simon, Fourier and Owen are treated with real care and real respect — more on that below — but they are also arranged as a preparation, a lower stage superseded when "Marx and Engels turned communism from utopia into science." The utopians saw the injustice but not the agent; they appealed to enlightened capitalists because the proletariat was, in the chapter's phrase, still "too immature for the utopian socialists" to see it as the force of its own liberation; science arrives when the working class matures

enough to be recognized as that force. The chapter closes on the founding of the Communist League and the Manifesto, and from there the book's centre of gravity shifts decisively from parliaments and dynasties to workers' movements, congresses and internationals. The last chapter before the coda on literature — chapter thirty, on the road from the Communist League to the International Working Men's Association — is effectively the survey's true conclusion, the moment the class that will inherit modern history takes organized shape.

It is in these late chapters, dealing with a workers' movement rather than with kings, that the book's reflexivity shows — the habit of reading the past through the categories of a much later present. The survey ends in 1870, decades before the state that published it existed, so it cannot legitimate the Soviet order directly; there is no October here to defend, no Stalin to exonerate, none of the flashpoints — the Terror, the Trials, the Pact — on which this series usually catches Progress volumes falsifying the record. What it does instead is quieter. It reads the nineteenth-century workers' movement as an anticipation of Bolshevism, and it certifies that reading by importing Lenin as the retrospective judge. When the book summarizes what Marx and Engels learned from 1848, it reaches past both men to quote Lenin's *The State and Revolution* on the matter: "In this remarkable argument Marxism takes a tremendous step forward compared with the Communist Manifesto." The authority that settles the meaning of 1850 is a text of 1917. The same anachronism runs through the account of the First International, whose General Council is credited with having "proclaimed the right of all nations to self-determination" — a Leninist formula of the First World War era, retrojected onto a body of 1864 that spoke of the independence of Poland and Ireland in quite different terms. And the dissenters of the 1850s are labelled with the vocabulary of the twentieth-century faction fight: August Willich and Karl Schapper, who broke with Marx in 1850, are convicted of believing "that communism could be introduced directly as a result of the revolution... irrespective of objective conditions" and of trying to push the League "on the path of revolutionary adventurism." The charge sheet is drawn up in the idiom of a later orthodoxy and applied to men who could not have known they were being measured against it.

The handling of Bakunin belongs to the same pattern, though it is more restrained than one might fear. The Bakuninists are presented flatly — "Bakunin was against any form of state, calling for its destruction and the absolute freedom of the individual" — as one faction among several (bourgeois democrats, Proudhonists, trade unionists) that the "revolutionary proletarian nucleus of the International under

the leadership of Marx" had to overcome. Because the survey stops in 1870, it never reaches the Hague Congress of 1872, the expulsion of Bakunin, or the split that killed the International; the great confrontation is foreshadowed as a struggle Marx's tendency is winning, and left there. This is tendentious in its framing — the International is read as a proto-party with a correct line and deviations from it — but it does not descend to the caricature or the character assassination that the later, Stalin-era literature reserved for anarchism. On this terrain the book is more a partisan than a falsifier.

The deep objection to the volume is not to its facts, most of which are sound, but to the stagism that organizes them — and that objection was made, from within Marxism, long before this book was written. The theory of permanent revolution, worked out by Trotsky from 1905 and restated in *The Permanent Revolution* (1930), is precisely a critique of the idea that the "bourgeois-democratic stage" is a discrete compulsory phase through which every society must pass in order. Trotsky's starting point was the very fact this textbook records and then explains away. Recounting the German defeat of 1848, the book observes that "the first bourgeois-democratic revolution in Germany did not achieve its aims" because "there was no class capable of leading the movement," and that "from the very outset of the revolution the liberal bourgeoisie allied itself with the monarchy and the nobility against the people." That is not a minor detail; it is the central datum of the permanent-revolution thesis. Where the bourgeoisie arrives late on the historical stage, confronting an already organized proletariat below it and a world market above it, it dares not carry through its own revolution for fear of the class beneath — so the "bourgeois" tasks (the republic, the land, national unity) fall to the workers, who cannot stop at them. The book sees the bourgeoisie betray in 1848 and draws the conclusion that the proletariat was merely "immature." Trotsky drew the opposite conclusion: the bourgeoisie's incapacity is structural, not a matter of timing, and it means the neat sequence of stages will not hold.

Against Gottschalk's condemnation, set Trotsky's blunt answer to exactly this charge, in the chapter of *The Permanent Revolution* pointedly titled "On the Skipping of Historical Stages": "It is nonsense to say that stages cannot in general be skipped. The living historical process always makes leaps over isolated 'stages'." The stages of the textbook are, Trotsky argued, an abstraction — a theoretical decomposition of a process that in life runs together. Backward countries do not repeat the classical Western sequence at a slower pace; they telescope it. He put the same thought in his 1932 Copenhagen

address, describing the law of combined development: "To jump over intermediate stages is the way of backward countries." And the positive programme he drew from it is the direct negation of this book's schema. In the closing postulates of *The Permanent Revolution* he wrote that for "countries with a belated bourgeois development... the complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving democracy and national emancipation is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation." The democratic revolution, far from being a self-contained rung on which one halts, "grows over directly into the socialist revolution." This is not an eccentric heresy; it is a reading of the same nineteenth-century evidence the textbook surveys, and it is the reading that the twentieth century — Russia in 1917, China, the colonial revolutions — did more to confirm than to refute.

The point matters beyond scholarship. The doctrine of a compulsory bourgeois-democratic stage was not a neutral academic position in the Soviet canon; it was the theoretical warrant for the Comintern's insistence, from the 1920s on, that Communists in the colonial and semi-colonial world subordinate themselves to a "progressive national bourgeoisie" and defer the fight for their own power to some later phase. That policy produced catastrophes — most infamously in China in 1927, where the workers' movement of Shanghai was delivered to the executioners of the very bourgeois ally the stage theory prescribed. A textbook that teaches undergraduates to grade Gottschalk a fool for wanting a workers' republic "too early" is teaching, in miniature and at a safe historical distance, the habit of mind that had real victims. That is the stake in what looks like a dry quarrel over the periodization of 1848.

None of this is a reason to discard the book, and it would be a poor service to a reader to leave the impression that it is worthless. It is not. As a survey it is competent, wide and, on its own terms, honest, and its materialist attention to class forces is often genuinely illuminating. The opening chapter on the English Revolution is a good example: its account of the enclosures, the rise of the "monied people" — the gentry and the new urban bourgeoisie — and the forcible expropriation of the peasantry through which "a potential labour army was formed for the manufactories and mines" is exactly the sort of social-economic grounding that a purely constitutional history of the period leaves out, and it holds up. So does its unsentimental tracing of how the Independents' republic, "put to power by popular victories," hardened into "a self-seeking oligarchic clique," and its careful distinction between the political Levellers and the Diggers, whose demand for

common ownership of the land the Levellers pointedly disowned — a class fracture inside the revolution that the book renders with real precision. The chapter on utopian socialism treats Saint-Simon, Fourier and Owen as serious thinkers wrestling with a real problem rather than as mere errors to be corrected, and it is generous about Owen's practical contribution to cooperation and trade unionism. The breadth is a virtue too: room is found for Portugal, Switzerland, the Balkans, Poland, the Netherlands and Scandinavia, small countries that a Western textbook of comparable length would likely omit. A student who read this volume for its facts and its economic sense, and ignored the ladder it hangs them on, would come away genuinely informed.

The long chapter on "The Emergence and Development of the Colonial System of Capitalism" deserves a particular word, because it is both the doctrine at its most persuasive and the scholarship at its most useful. Here the formational frame actually earns its keep: the book refuses to treat European industrialization as a self-generated European miracle, insisting instead that "the rapid development of Western Europe and North America was in large measure due to the colonial enslavement of many of the peoples of Africa, America and Asia." It notes coolly that "colonial exploitation became an integral part of the Dutch economy," traces the English colonial empire back to state-sponsored piracy, and cites Nehru on the "little battle of Plassey" and the bribery that decided it. This is the materialist method doing honest work — following the gold and the slaves rather than the flags — and it is precisely the sort of account a Western textbook of the same vintage would have been more squeamish about. It is also, not incidentally, the empirical ground beneath the very theory this book cannot bring itself to state: that capitalism was a world system from the start, developing the metropolis and underdeveloping the colony in a single combined process. The book sees the combination. It simply files it under a ladder of separate national ascents instead of drawing the conclusion its own evidence invites.

That, in the end, is the way to read it. *A Modern History, 1640–1870* is a real work of scholarship harnessed to a philosophy of history that its own best evidence contradicts. The scholarship is the enclosures and the New Model Army and the phalanstery and the St Martin's Hall meeting of 1864; the philosophy is the ladder of formations and the compulsory stages and the future known in advance. The two can be separated, and the reader who separates them gets the benefit of a diligent collective of Soviet historians without swallowing the teleology they were required to serve. The volume's most telling feature is the one with which we began: that in 1990,

with the intellectual foundations of the whole system visibly cracking, this book records not a tremor. Its authors had, on the evidence of their own pages, the facts that would have unsettled their frame — the bourgeoisie's treachery in 1848 chief among them. They had, in Trotsky and in much else, the critique that had drawn the harder conclusion decades earlier. They set it all down and let none of it disturb the ladder. The survey ends, as it must, in 1871, on the threshold of the Commune it treats as history's forward gate. What it could not see was that the state issuing it was, in the year of its printing, standing on a threshold of its own.

FICTION

Foma Gordeyev

Maxim Gorky

Introduction to the 1950 Edition

Sixty years before the book opens, a bargeman named Ignat Gordeyev is hauling for a rich merchant on the Volga. By the second page he is on his way to a fortune, and Gorky stops to explain what kind of man makes one:

one of those people who are always successful — not because they are talented and hard-working, but because, endowed with enormous stocks of energy, they do not spurn — are, in fact, incapable of spurning — any means that leads to the achieving of their end, and recognize no law save their own desires.

And then, because Gorky is twenty-nine and cannot resist finishing the thought:

Sometimes these people speak with awe of their consciences, they may even endure real torture struggling with them. But only a weak man is unable to conquer his conscience; a strong one easily subdues it and makes it serve his purpose.

That is the Russian bourgeoisie in its heroic decade, drawn from life by a man who had worked for it as a docker, a baker's boy and a night watchman. Foma Gordeyev is Gorky's first novel, and it is about what happens to the son.

The edition, and a difficulty on the cover

The novel was published in 1899, in the reign of Nicholas II, and dedicated to Anton Pavlovich Chekhov. This is the Foreign Languages Publishing House printing of 1950, translated by Margaret Wettlin and illustrated by the Kukryniksy — the caricaturist trio of Kupriyanov, Krylov and Sokolov, the most celebrated graphic satirists the Soviet Union produced, who had spent the previous decade drawing Hitler and would shortly be drawing the Nuremberg defendants. It is a remarkable pairing and the drawings are worth the volume by themselves.

That pairing deserves a moment. The Kukryniksy signed as

one artist, worked as one, and were by 1950 the closest thing the Soviet Union had to an official eye — the poster, the Pravda cartoon, the wartime window. Set that apparatus of caricature on a novel about merchants and something unexpected happens: it stops being caricature. Gorky's Volga traders are already drawn to the edge of the grotesque, and three men whose trade was exaggeration found they had nothing to add. The thirty-two plates in this edition are portraits — heavy faces over heavy collars, a room of beards, a man alone at a table — and the restraint is the point. They read as though the artists had recognised that the author got there first.

The series title is Library of Selected Soviet Literature.

There is no way round it: this is a Russian novel of 1899, written under the tsars, by a writer who would not be a Soviet citizen for another eighteen years, published in a series that calls it Soviet literature. Readers of this series will recognise the operation from the Russian Classics Series, where Gogol and Turgenev are annexed as ancestors of a method invented long after they died. Here the annexation is applied to a living writer's early work, retrospectively, by the state he had come to preside over.

We say this without much heat, because the alternative label was not available. What word should FLPH have used for Gorky in 1950? He had been dead fourteen years; his name was on the Literary Institute and on the city of Nizhni Novgorod, where this novel is set. "Soviet" had stopped meaning a date and started meaning an allegiance. But a reader should know that the book in their hands predates the revolution by eighteen years and contains no communists, and that the series title is a claim rather than a description.

The apparatus: an American vouches

This volume carries no foreword. What it carries instead, on its opening leaf, is a long quotation from Jack London — from *Revolution and Other Essays*, London, 1910, with the page numbers given:

"Foma Gordyéeff" is a big book — not only is the breadth

of Russia in it, but the expanse of life.... One lays the book down sick at heart — sick for life with all its "lyings and its lusts." But it is a healthy book. So fearful is its portrayal of social disease, so ruthless its stripping of the painted charms from vice, that its tendency cannot but be strongly for good. It is a goad, to prick sleeping human consciences awake and drive them into the battle for humanity.

This is the same device the house used on the 1975 jacket of Alexei Tolstoy's *Ordeal*, where Romain Rolland and Theodore Dreiser perform the vouching. The foreign socialist writer, quoted at length, certifies the Russian to an English-speaking reader who might otherwise suspect he is being sold propaganda.

What makes this one different is that the endorsement is genuine, forty years old, and better criticism than a commissioned foreword would have produced. London had read the book as a novelist reads another novelist, and his sentence about laying it down sick at heart is exactly right. The house did not have to distort anything. It simply reached for a name its readers trusted, which is what publishers do, and in this case the name and the judgement both hold up.

The son

Ignat makes the fortune. Foma inherits it, and cannot use it.

He is named a thousand and twenty times in this novel, and everything turns on his inability to become what he has been left. He is not an intellectual; he has no programme and no alternative. What he has is a physical revulsion from the people he is supposed to join — the merchants of the Volga town, their piety, their charity committees, their deals, their talk about building Russia — and no vocabulary in which to put it except abuse.

Against him Gorky sets his godfather, Yakov Tarasovich Mayakin, named two hundred and fifty-five times: a shopkeeper-philosopher, the sharpest mind in the book and its real antagonist. Mayakin has a complete theory of the merchant class as the true creator of Russia and of himself as its natural aristocrat, and he argues it with a coherence Foma cannot touch. The novel is largely the record of Foma losing that argument while being right.

That is a genuinely difficult structure for a political novelist and Gorky does not cheat it. Foma's revolt has no content. He drinks, he wrecks a party, he humiliates himself with women, he shouts at his godfather. He is not a revolutionary in embryo.

He is a man with a functioning conscience and no instrument, which in 1899 is what a conscience mostly was.

Mayakin, and the one thing Foma sees

Yakov Tarasovich Mayakin is the reason this novel survives its own pessimism, and any introduction that treats him as a villain has missed the book.

He is a small shopkeeper who has made himself rich, and he has thought harder about his class than anyone in it. He is also, on the page, extremely good company. Asked what he makes of merchants snatching each other's contracts, he does not pretend:

"What do you expect?" his godfather said on hearing his opinion. "Trade, like war, is a reckless business. They're fighting for profits, and profits are their Prophets."

And on the ethics:

"There are some things about it I don't like either — too much trickery. But you can't be open and above-board when it comes to trade; you've got to be a diplomat."

He concedes everything Foma accuses him of and is not troubled by it, because he has a larger account in which the merchant class is the maker of Russia and its trickery is the cost of the making. Foma has nothing to set against that except the feeling that it is disgusting, and a feeling loses to a system every time.

But Gorky gives his hopeless hero one genuine insight, and it is worth more than all Mayakin's philosophy. Watching the men he is supposed to join, Foma arrives at this:

With every day he became more convinced that the men about him were worse than he was and lived lives that were even more meaningless. They were not the masters of life, but mere lackeys whom life ordered about as it chose, bending and twisting them at will.

Not the masters of life, but mere lackeys. A drunken merchant's son in a provincial Volga town works out, without any theory to help him, that the men who appear to command the process are in fact its servants — that capital has personifications rather than owners. Marx had put it in *Capital* thirty years earlier and Gorky had certainly not read it that way in 1899; he got there by watching. It is the single most valuable sentence in the novel, and it is given to the character least able to do anything with it.

Around that insight Gorky builds one of his best images. Foma goes on living "as if he were crossing a bog that threatened to suck him down at every step, while his godfather twisted up above him like a vine growing on firm dry ground and kept a sharp eye on him from a distance." The bog and the vine: one man sinking in ground that will not hold, the other climbing on ground that will.

"We always win"

The book's climax comes at the christening of a steamer, where Foma, in front of the assembled merchants of the town, tells them what they are. Gorky gives him his say, and then shows what a class does with such a moment.

They tie him up.

When Mayakin arrives, Foma is lying bound at his own celebration, begging to be released: "Tell them to untie me.... I won't say another word ... honest to God I won't. Untie me. It's shameful to lie here like this. I'm not drunk." They untie his feet and leave his hands. He stands, looks round at the faces, and says softly, "with a pathetic little smile":

"You win." "We always win," said his godfather with a harsh laugh.

Then the detail that makes the scene unbearable. Foma, hands tied behind him, twists his neck to force his collar under his chin and cannot manage it — and the old man comes over and sets the collar straight for him, smiling into his eyes:

"It's got to be suffered."

Mayakin pours him one glass of vodka, holds it to his lips, and refuses him a second. Then, softly enough that everyone hears:

"Don't expect us to forgive you," said Mayakin firmly and in a louder voice. "We'll never forgive you, even if we are Christians, and that's that."

And Foma, raising his head, produces the only line he has left, which is not defiance but a kind of apology:

"I forgot to mention you, godfather," he said thoughtfully. "I didn't say a single word about you."

Mayakin points at him and cries "Hear that?", and a low murmur of indignation goes round the room. Foma sighs. "But what of it?" he says. "What of it? Why did I bother at all? Nothing came of it." And he leans over the table again.

The last move belongs to the merchants, and it is the one a modern reader will find hardest. Foma insists he was sober — "I had only had two glasses of wine. I was perfectly sober" — and Bobrov draws the conclusion the room needs:

"That shows you're right, Yakov Tarasovich: he's mentally unbalanced."

A man tells the truth about his class in public; the class establishes that he is mad. Gorky wrote that in 1899, about merchants. We are not going to turn it into a prophecy — he was describing what propertied men did to an embarrassing son, and the machinery he had in mind was a private asylum and a family conference. But no reader in the tradition this series is written from can meet that sentence without a jolt, and it would be dishonest to pass it without saying so.

The ending

There is no recovery. Foma is taken to hospital, then sent to relatives in the Urals. Three years later he is back:

Ragged, unkempt, and nearly always drunk, he did indeed give the impression of being mentally unbalanced.... Lyuba Smolina let him live in a little out-house behind her house.

And the town has found a use for him:

Townsmen and merchants who remembered him were inclined to make fun of him. On seeing him come down the street, they would cry: "Hey, you prophet! Come here!" ... "Tell us something about the Judgement Day, will you? Ha-ha! A prophet indeed!"

Meanwhile a new firm has been registered: "Taras Mayakin and Afrikan Smolin." The business goes on, under the next generation's names, and the man who denounced it lives in a shed and is shouted at in the street.

That is how Gorky's first novel ends. No awakening, no collective, no dawn. The class wins, as Mayakin said it always does, and its critic becomes its entertainment.

What is living

The clarity, and the honesty of the defeat.

Foma Gordeyev is the best Russian novel about the bourgeoisie in its confident phase, and it was written by someone who had carried their cargo. Gorky knows how the

money was made, what the piety was for, and why the charity committee met. Mayakin is a great creation precisely because he is given the best arguments and allowed to win them.

And the book is honest about what it does not have. There is no working class in it to speak of, no organisation, nothing to put against Mayakin except one man's disgust — and Gorky shows, with no self-deception at all, exactly how far one man's disgust gets him. That is a more useful book for our tradition than a triumphant one would be. The question Foma Gordeyev leaves on the table is the question the next twenty years of Gorky's life were an attempt to answer: what does a conscience need, besides itself, in order to be of any use?

One last observation, for readers who know what Gorky became. The novel is dedicated to Chekhov, and the dedication is not a courtesy. Chekhov is the writer Gorky was measuring himself against in 1899 — the one who could show a class dying without supplying a replacement — and Foma Gordeyev is a young man's attempt at a Chekhovian subject with a much louder voice. It does not entirely work. The shouting scenes are better than the quiet ones, and Gorky cannot leave a silence alone the way Chekhov could. But the ambition is legible on every page, and the dedication tells you he knew exactly whose permission he was asking.

Read it beside *Childhood*, also in this series and also translated by Wettlin. The novel came first, in 1899, and is a young writer's frontal assault on a class. The memoir came fourteen years later and does not assault anything at all. Between them is most of what there is to know about Gorky.

FICTION Selected Works

Mikhail Lermontov

Introduction to the 1978 Edition

This volume contains four things connected with a poem called Valerik.

It reproduces Lermontov's own watercolour, "The Battle at Valerik". It reproduces a second drawing by him, of an episode in the fighting. It reproduces a pencil portrait of Lermontov made from life in a tent by Count Palen, immediately after the battle — "perhaps his best portrait", the caption says. And it reproduces a photograph of the autograph manuscript of the poem in the poet's hand.

It does not contain the poem.

Valerik is not in the contents and not in the text. The only part of it that reaches the reader is six lines quoted inside the foreword — a foreword which says of those lines that they contain "more than a condemnation of war", that "Tolstoy's War and Peace stemmed from these words", and that the question they ask is, alongside Pushkin's legacy, the whole of what Lermontov left to Russian literature.

We have begun here because it is the plainest example this series has found of an apparatus pointing at something it has decided not to give you.

The edition

Mikhail Lermontov (1814–1841) was killed in a duel at Pyatigorsk at twenty-six. This Selected Works was issued by Progress in the Russian Classics Series, first printed in 1976 and reprinted in 1978. It carries his 1837 watercolour self-portrait, with a caption noting that until 1962 it was in a private collection and known only from copies.

The book is generous: a large selection of the lyric poetry, the narrative poems *The Demon* and *Mtsyri*, and the whole of *A Hero of Our Time*. The verse is translated poem by poem, chiefly by Avril Pyman and Irina Zheleznova, with the translator named under each title — a courtesy this series rarely extends. Pyman is worth knowing about: a British

scholar of Russian symbolism and the biographer of Blok, who spent much of her working life in and around Russia. Her Lermontov is plain and unfussy and does not try to out-sing him.

The foreword, some four thousand words, is by Sergei Narovchatov — himself a poet, and at the time of this printing the editor of *Novy Mir*. It is translated by Pyman as well.

What the foreword does well

Narovchatov is candid about the politics of Lermontov's life in a way that should be said before anything critical.

He states that after "On the Death of the Poet" — the poem on Pushkin's killing that made Lermontov famous overnight and got him arrested — the Tsar's view was fixed:

For Nicholas I, however, Lermontov was a dangerous man better kept away from the capital. This time he was transferred to an infantry regiment almost permanently engaged on active service in the Caucasus. Lermontov immediately gained a reputation for reckless courage in the eyes of his fellow officers, but, in the Tsar's eyes, he remained a rebellious free-thinker who was in no case to be encouraged by promotion, decorations or leave.

That is accurate and unsentimental. A poet was posted to the most dangerous front available in the hope that it would solve him, was recommended for decorations by his commanders, and was refused them by the Tsar. Narovchatov says so.

He is also right about Valerik, and generous about it. Having quoted the closing lines — in Pyman's version —

"And with a secret, heartfelt sadness I thought: 'How pitiable is man, What does he lack! ... Clear shines the sky, Beneath the sky there's room to spare for All men. And yet unceasingly He wages fruitless war — why? Wherefore?'"

— he writes:

The great, eternal question Lermontov puts here contains more than a condemnation of war — it is a condemnation

of all enmity among men.... Tolstoy's War and Peace stemmed from these words and it was not fortuitous that when he spoke of this question of Lermontov's he claimed that the whole 19th century had failed to solve it. The power of this "wherefore?" passed into Russian literature as a whole, into Russian thought. And if we speak of the Lermontov heritage alongside the Pushkin heritage in Russian literature, it lies precisely in this great "wherefore?"

That is real criticism, and it is not the language of a man discharging an obligation. Narovchatov believes it.

Which makes the omission stranger rather than more sinister, and we should be careful about the difference.

The absence, and what can honestly be said about it

We do not know why Valerik is not in this book, and we are not going to pretend we do.

There are innocent explanations. It is a long narrative epistle in a conversational metre, the hardest kind of Russian verse to bring into English, and a selection has to stop somewhere. The volume is already carrying *The Demon*, *Mtsyri* and a full novel. No editor is obliged to print everything.

But an editor who prints the poet's painting of the battle, the poet's sketch of the fighting, the portrait drawn in the tent afterwards, and a photograph of the manuscript — while leaving out the text — has made a series of decisions that point in one direction and then stop. The reader is shown the poem as an object four times and never allowed to read it.

And there is a second absence that makes the first one harder to shrug off. In four thousand words about a poet who spent his adult life in Russia's war in the Caucasus and died there, Narovchatov's foreword mentions the Caucasus five times, exile four times, the duel three times — and the word mountaineer not once. Nor conquest, nor colonial, nor Shamil, the imam who led the resistance for a quarter of a century and whose war this was.

The Caucasus in this foreword is a landscape, a punishment posting and a place where a poet was in danger. It is not a country with people in it who were being conquered. And Valerik is precisely the poem in which those people appear — as men Lermontov's own company killed in a gully that, as he wrote in a letter reproduced in this very volume's captions,

"smelt of blood for an hour after".

What the volume is not afraid of

Before pressing the point about Valerik, fairness requires the opposite observation, and it is a strong one.

This book prints "On the Death of the Poet" in full — the poem Lermontov wrote in 1837 when Pushkin was killed, and the one that ended his career as a hussar of the Guard. It opens on Pushkin dead:

The poet is no more! He's fallen A slave to honour — Lead in his chest, for vengeance calling, The proud head bowed at last — he died!...

It turns on the society that let it happen — "Yet — are you blameless, you who banned / His free, brave talent out of spite" — and on d'Anthès, dismissed in four contemptuous lines as "this common émigré, / This fortune hunter, this upstart careerist, / This poor blind tool of destiny".

And then the sixteen lines Lermontov added afterwards, which were passed hand to hand in Petersburg, reached the Tsar, and got him arrested and posted to the Caucasus:

Who throng the throne, alert for gain — and gory As executioners who cloak their vile intent In robes of justice — so to slaughter Glory, Freedom and Genius, seeming innocent! But there's God's judgement, which fears not to wait; A dreadful Judgement that's not bought nor sold.... Nor all your black blood serve to wash away The poet's righteous blood.

A Progress edition of 1976 prints, without apology or hedging, a poem accusing the courtiers around the throne of being executioners in judges' robes and promising that their black blood will not wash out a poet's. Whatever this volume is, it is not squeamish about attacks on autocracy.

That is exactly why the missing poem is worth remarking on. The absence is not a general timidity about Lermontov's politics; the volume is bold about those. It is specific. The verse that indicts the court is here in full. The verse that asks what a Russian soldier is doing in a Chechen gully is represented by a photograph of its manuscript.

Mtsyri, and the boy who could not get home

The volume also carries *Mtsyri*, and it belongs in the same

argument.

Its epigraph is from the First Book of Kings: "I did but taste a little honey, and, lo, I must die."

It opens on a ruined monastery in Georgia, and then does something worth stopping over. Lermontov gives the annexation of Georgia in the official register — a Georgian tsar who "did of Russia gain / The patronage o'er his domain", after which

'Twas then God's love descended on The land, and Georgia bloomed, and gone Her old fears were and old suspense: Of friendly bayonets a fence Did, bristling, rise in her defence.

Friendly bayonets. And then, without a paragraph's pause, in the very next sentence:

A Russian General on his Way one day was, bound for Tiflis, A captive bearing there, a child

The imperial formula and the thing it produces, set one against the other in consecutive lines, with no comment between them. A child is taken prisoner by a Russian general, falls ill on the journey, and is left at the monastery, where he is raised as a monk. On the eve of taking his vows he escapes, spends three days trying to find the way back to his own country, fights a leopard, gets lost, and is found dying within sight of the monastery he fled. His last request is to be carried out into the garden where he can see the Caucasus.

It is one of the most beautiful narrative poems in Russian and it is, plainly, about what conquest does to a child: raised kindly by people who took him, unable either to belong to them or to find his way back. Lermontov wrote it in 1839, between postings to the war.

Narovchatov's foreword mentions it — he notes that Lermontov "completed and rewrote Mtsyri and The Demon, both begun almost in boyhood" — and treats it as a work of Romantic aspiration, which it also is. The captured child is not discussed as a captured child.

What the volume does print

None of this should suggest the book conceals the colonial relation. It does not. It simply does not discuss it, while printing a novel in which it is the entire plot.

A Hero of Our Time opens with "Bela", and the mechanism of

that story is a transaction. Azamat, a chieftain's son, wants Kazbich's horse, and offers what he has:

"Listen!" said Azamat, his voice firm now. 'You see I am ready to do anything. I could steal my sister for you if you want. How she can dance and sing! ... If you want her, wait for me tomorrow night in the gorge where the stream flows; I shall go by with her on the way to the next village — and she'll be yours. Isn't Bela worth your steed?'"

Kazbich answers with a song about the relative worth of wives and horses:

"Wives by the dozen are purchased with gold, A mettlesome steed is worth riches untold"

And then Pechorin — the Russian officer, the hero of the title — overhears, and arranges the trade for himself. He gets the girl. He keeps her in a Russian fort. He wins her, tires of her within weeks, and she is killed by Kazbich in revenge for the horse.

Lermontov does not editorialise and does not need to. A bored Russian officer on garrison duty acquires a Circassian girl through a theft he has organised, and she dies of it. That is the war in a single novella, told by a serving officer of the occupying army, and it is the most unsparing thing written about Russian rule in the Caucasus in the nineteenth century.

The foreword discusses "Bela" as a study in Pechorin's psychology. So it is. It is also the other thing, and the reader will notice.

Pechorin

The rest of A Hero of Our Time is the anatomy of a man with great powers and nothing to spend them on — the type Russian criticism christened the superfluous man, and the direct ancestor of Turgenev's Rudin and Bazarov, both of whom appear elsewhere in this series.

Pechorin is not likeable and is not meant to be. He ruins people out of curiosity, records the ruin in a journal, and analyses himself with a precision that never once modifies his behaviour. Lermontov wrote a preface to the novel's second edition, after the first had been attacked, insisting that Pechorin was a composite of his generation's vices rather than a self-portrait. Readers disbelieved him then and have gone on disbelieving him since.

That preface is not in this volume either. It is a small omission

beside the missing poem, but it points the same way: the piece of apparatus in which the author explains himself, and defends a hostile portrait of his own class and generation, has been left out, while a foreword explaining him to us has been put in. A reader who wants Lermontov's own account of what he thought he was doing will have to go elsewhere for it.

For our purposes the interest is structural. Pechorin has energy, intelligence, courage and no object. He is a man of the 1830s: after the Decembrists were hanged and exiled, before anything replaced them. Put him beside Bazarov, who had a philosophy and no movement, and you have the two halves of the same Russian problem thirty years apart — the first with nothing to think and the second with nothing to do.

What is living

The great "wherefore?", and the novel that earns it.

Read A Hero of Our Time for Bela and for the duel in "Princess Mary", which is the best-written duel in Russian literature and was rehearsed, five years early, for the author's own. Read the lyrics for "The Sail" and "My Native Land". Read Mtsyri for a boy who escapes a monastery to find his own people and cannot.

And when you reach the foreword's six lines of Valerik, note that you are holding a book which shows you the poet's painting of that battle and the manuscript of the poem, and stops. Then find the poem elsewhere — it is not hard to find — and read it whole. It asks the question this volume's own foreword says is Lermontov's entire bequest to Russian thought, and it asks it about a specific war, fought by the man holding the pen, against people whose names the foreword does not print.

FICTION

25 Stories from the Soviet Republics

Various authors

Introduction to this Edition

On page 71 of this anthology there is a headnote of eight lines. It reads, in full:

AKSEL BAKOUNTS Armenian Author (1899-1937) There are stories that imperceptibly usher you not only into the psychology of their characters, but also into that of the author. It is stories such as these that Aksel Bakounts wrote. He began his literary career by penning a little fairy-tale when he was a boy of twelve. He did not write much, but the little he did write—a volume of short stories and two novels that he had no chance to finish—placed him among Armenia's prominent authors.

Read the dates and read the clause again. A writer born in 1899 who died in 1937, and who wrote "two novels that he had no chance to finish". The volume does not say why a man of thirty-eight had no chance to finish them. It prints the year and the phrase and moves on to the story.

The story is *Cyclamens*, and it carries a dedication: To the memory of Arphenik Charents.

The edition

Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow. The half-title reads LIBRARY OF SOVIET LITERATURE. There is a Russian title page, but the scan reduces it to unreadable Latin lookalikes, so it is not transcribed here.

And, for the sixth Foreign Languages Publishing House volume in a row in this strand: no date, no copyright line, no colophon. The last leaf is a "TO THE READER" card and nothing else.

Our catalogue says 1955. The book says otherwise, in its own headnotes. Ostap Vishnya's gives his death as 1956. Derenik Demirjyan's mentions an article "which he wrote shortly before his death in 1956". And Valentin Katayev's headnote opens by recording that his sixtieth birthday was celebrated in early 1957 — both scans corrupt the word birthday, so that

clause is paraphrased rather than quoted — before going on to say that he is "already familiar to the English reader from *A White Sail Gleams*, which Alexei Tolstoi described as 'a delightfully translucent book about children.'" The volume cannot be earlier than 1957, and the 1955 should be dropped. That is the fifth catalogue date in this strand to fail against the object.

But this volume does something the others in the FLPH run do not, and it is worth crediting. It has apparatus. Every one of the twenty authors gets a headnote: name, nationality, usually dates, and half a page of biography or — in several cases — a passage of the writer's own prose standing in for a biography. Yon Drutsa's headnote is his own recollection of having no shoes as a boy and his father carrying him to school through the mud, asking, "Do you think you'll grow up to be something?" Andrejs Upits's is a description of a peasant family on a winter night, the women spinning, a child reading aloud from a calendar's "pulpy 'literary supplement'". These are the best-made front pages in the whole collection.

And the translators are credited, story by story, at the foot of each. Harvest them and you get ten names for twenty-five stories: S. Apresyan (eight), Robert Daglish (two), D. Sanders (two), Eve Manning (two), V. Shneerson, D. Rottenberg, G. Ivanov-Mumjiev, L. Navrozov, Y. Triumfov. Apresyan carried a third of the book alone. Daglish turns up here as he does across the strand.

What the title claims, and what the book contains

Count the nationalities the headnotes assign, and the anthology's politics are on the page before you read a story.

Twenty authors: Russian four (Sholokhov, Granin, Menshikov, Katayev), Byelorussian two (Bryl, Samuilyonok), Ukrainian two (Gonchar, Vishnya), Armenian two (Demirjyan, Bakounts), Abkhazian two (Gulia, Lakerbai), and one each Chukchi (Rytkeu), Lithuanian (Cvirka), Kazakh (Auevov), Estonian (Vilde), Tajik (Aini), Uzbek (Kahhar), Moldavian (Drutsa) and Lettish (Upits).

Set that against the sixteen union republics of the day. Eleven

are represented. Five are not: Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kirghizia, Turkmenia, and the Karelo-Finnish republic. Georgia's absence is the loud one, because Georgia is not absent at all — it appears twice, as Abkhazia, an autonomous republic inside it. Two of the twenty slots go to Abkhazian writers and none to a Georgian, in a book assembled within two or three years of Stalin's death.

The other absence is a whole literature. There is no Jewish writer and no story translated from Yiddish. The volume was put together at the end of the years in which Soviet Yiddish literature was destroyed and its leading writers shot, and in a collection that reaches as far as the Chukchi peninsula for a nationality, that gap is not an accident of taste.

A last arithmetical oddity: the book is called 25 Stories and its contents lists twenty-five. The body contains twenty-seven titled pieces. Sadriddin Aini's twenty pages carry three — *My Last Days at the Madrasah*, *The Pilgrims' Shoes* and *The Girl in the Desert* — and only the first is listed. Nobody counted.

Two dates

The anthology's real subject, for a reader now, is what its headnotes can and cannot say.

Aksel Bakounts (1899–1937). The dates are printed. Armenian readers knew what 1937 meant; an English reader in the mid-1950s was given a year and the phrase "had no chance to finish". *Cyclamens* is the best story in the book, and it is dedicated to the memory of Arphenik Charents. It is a slow, cold piece about riders coming up to a ruined fortress, Kaqavaberd, where the sky is overcast most of the year. (Its opening sentence begins with a decorative capital that both scans lose, so it is described here rather than quoted.) The dogs fly barking at the horses; the guide tries in vain to put them off with his whip; and then "The stones of Kaqavaberd seemed to have come alive to speak with the archaeologist. He walked up to this or that slab and bent to look, to take a measure[ment]". The name is the point. Charents is the surname of Yeghishe Charents, the greatest Armenian poet of the century, who died in prison in 1937, the same year as Bakounts. The dedication is to his first wife, who had died ten years earlier. Whatever the compilers intended, the word Charents stands on the page, in a Soviet state publisher's book, attached to a writer who died in 1937.

Ostap Vishnya (1889–1956). His headnote opens not with biography but with a passage of his own, from a sketch called *Ostap Vishnya the Martyr*, dated 1944:

During my stay in Lvov in 1944, after it was liberated from the Nazis, I was told that the Ukrainian-German newspapers, published by the invaders in the city, had kicked up a racket, claiming that the Bolsheviks had tortured me, Ostap Vishnya, to death. Well, here's what really happened.

What follows is a comic interrogation. A man "with the whitish eyes" has "a dagger made of the purest tempered national question and as sharp as they come", and he jabs it "into the most sacred recess of Ostap's national ego", and then the questioning begins.

"Confess," he says, "that you wanted to put blue trousers on the whole of Great Russia." "I confess," says Ostap. "Confess," says the other, "that you've been telling everybody that Pushkin isn't Pushkin but Taras Shevchenko." "So I have," says Ostap.

Asked who wrote Eugene Onegin, Ostap says Shevchenko. Asked what Pushkin wrote, he says there was no Pushkin at all "and there won't be any", except that once "it did look as if something of the sort had sprouted, but then they saw it was a woman—she's called The Captain's Daughter."

The target is the occupiers' Ukrainian-language press. The form is an interrogation in which a Ukrainian writer confesses to Ukrainian nationalism, absurdly, and is forgiven by the joke.

Ostap Vishnya — Pavlo Gubenko — had been sentenced in 1933 to ten years in a labour camp on a charge of nationalism and plotting terrorist acts against the Party leadership, and returned to literature in 1943. He wrote this in 1944, the year after he came back. The headnote gives 1889–1956 and quotes the sketch. It does not mention the ten years.

The headnotes as a form

They deserve a paragraph of their own, because whoever wrote them was doing something unusual and doing it well.

Several are not biography at all. Mikhail Lakerbai's begins: "To every Abkhazian the word *alamys* implies many things", and then tells a story about an old man on a bench in Gudauta on a hot July day, beginning "It was some forty years ago". Yury Rytkeu's opens with a Moscow writer in a Chukchi hunter's tent watching the hunter's six-year-old son run naked into the freezing cold to test the weather. Mukhtar Aueзов's is in his own voice: "I was born in 1897 in a nomad family of

Kazakhs. My ancestors came from Central Asia, but they joined the tribe of Tobikta as early as the beginning of the 19th century." Yon Drutsa's is a memory of having no shoes, and of his father asking him on the way to school, "Do you think you'll grow up to be something?" — and then, flatly: "I now have three small books to my credit, but Father doesn't seem to be impressed."

Others are dates and a shape. Petras Cvirka (1909–1947), "a former herd-boy", "one of the founders of Lithuanian Soviet literature". Eduard Vilde (1865–1933), born "on a landlord's estate where his father was employed", who "had ample opportunity to observe the hard life of the peasan[ts]". Eduard Samuilyonok, who "was born in 1907 and died in 1939 in his prime" — the second writer in this book to be given a bare early death and no cause, and the second time the volume reaches for a formula rather than a fact.

Taken together the headnotes are the most generous editorial work in the whole fiction strand: they name the nationality, give the dates where they can, and often let the writer speak first. They are also, precisely because they are generous, the clearest demonstration of where the limit fell. The same editorial hand that could find room for a Chukchi weather anecdote could not find room for the word arrested.

The stories

The collection opens with Sholokhov's *The Fate of a Man*, which is the only piece here most English readers will have met, and it has worn better than almost anything else in this strand: a driver's account, given to a stranger at a river crossing, of captivity, escape, and the loss of his whole family — ending with a boy he takes for his own because he has no one. It runs 46 pages and is the longest single story in the book.

After that the anthology is more interesting than its title suggests, because it is not a survey. It is a set of literatures at very different stages, printed side by side without comment.

Eduard Vilde (Estonian) gets sixty-two pages and two stories — the largest allocation to a single author — and he died in 1933, so the Estonian entry is pre-Soviet nineteenth-century realism. Sadriddin Aini (Tajik), whose headnote says he "laid the foundations of Tajik realist prose", supplies memoir: a madrasah in 1891, a party given by an assistant instructor. Mukhtar Auezov is the Kazakh novelist whose *Abai* is elsewhere in this collection. Yury Rytkeu, described as a Chukchi Author, sends a woman from the Arctic to a

conference in Khabarovsk. Yanka Bryl's *Galya* — the story our own build had lost until this pass — is a piece of straightforward heartbreak about a farm girl and an accordion-player, prefaced by a headnote that tells you Bryl was born in 1917, that his father was a railwayman, and that western Byelorussia "had for years been under Poland's imperialist rule."

Valentin Katayev's story is called *Our Father, Which Art in Heaven*. Andrejs Upits's is *The Priest of Bung Hung Hama*, and readers who have his *Outside Paradise* in this collection will recognise the anticlerical instinct that runs through everything he wrote before 1940.

What holds the book together, and what a survey anthology usually loses, is that the editors did not try to make the literatures match. Vilde is a nineteenth-century Estonian realist who died in 1933; Drutsa is a Moldavian born in 1928 with three small books to his name; Aini is writing memoir of a Bukharan madrasah in 1891; Rytkeu is writing about air travel. Nothing has been levelled. A reader moving from Vilde's Baltic skipper to Rytkeu's Chukchi delegate covers seventy years and four thousand miles in a page-turn, and the book does not pretend the distance is small.

That is the honest half of the volume's claim. The Soviet Union really did contain these literatures, and really did translate them, and an English reader in 1957 could buy twenty-five of them in one volume for a few shillings — which no commercial house in London was going to do. It is worth saying plainly, because the criticism that follows is not that the enterprise was fraudulent.

A note on this text

Two authors were missing from this ebook until now, and the reason is worth recording because it is the same reason twice over.

The volume is arranged by author: a headnote page, then the story or stories. The build's list of author headings was taken from the contents page, which the scanner read badly — it produced "Yanka Bryl, GALYA" as one run-on entry and mangled "Yon Drufsa" — so Yanka Bryl and Andrejs Upits were written off as unproved and left out. Both headings are clean lines of their own in the body; Upits's simply has the J read as an S, "ANDRESS UPITS". Without them, Bryl's *Galya* had been swallowed into Petras Cvirka's division and Upits's story into Eduard Samuilyonok's, which is why those two came out at fifteen and nineteen thousand words against a

book whose authors average five. Both are restored, the J is restored, and all twenty authors now stand where the book puts them, at 233 to 353 words per printed page across the volume.

The contents page has now been the worse witness in four books in this strand. Look in the body first.

Reading it now

Read Bakounts's headnote, then Cyclamens, then the headnote again.

Read Vishnya's Ostap Vishnya the Martyr knowing where he had been between 1933 and 1943, and decide for yourself what kind of joke it is.

Read the nationality line under each name and keep a tally. The book's argument is that Soviet literature is a federation of literatures, and it makes that argument honestly enough to give a Chukchi writer the same twenty-six pages as a Lithuanian one. Then notice which republics are not there, and that the Georgian slots went to Abkhazia, and that a country with a Yiddish literature only a few years dead has sent nobody.

This is the only volume in the fiction strand whose apparatus is good — real headnotes, real dates, translators credited at every story. That is exactly what makes its silences legible. A book that told you nothing would tell you nothing. This one tells you that Aksel Bakounts was born in 1899 and died in 1937 and had no chance to finish his novels, and then leaves you to work out the rest.

FICTION Selected Works

Emmanuel Kazakevich

Introduction to this Edition

Two boats cross a lake north of Petrograd on a pale night in July 1917. In the first sits a forty-seven-year-old man who has just worked out that he cannot see the far shore and may as well close his eyes. In the second sits his companion, who is watching the first boat and has begun to imagine that it is drifting towards a chasm, dragging his own boat after it, and who wants to shout "Stop! Don't go on! Stop!"

The first man is Lenin. The second is Grigori Zinoviev.

Later, in the hut in the hayfield, Lenin will ask him "Shall we go to sleep, Grigori?", will be told about the blister he has got from wrapping his foot-cloths badly, and will tell him to take a philosophic view of misfortunes, since the moon "has seen everything there is to see" and it is "probably not the first time it's seen intellectuals hiding from the police and not knowing how to wrap a foot-cloth." Later still, talking to a workman about how he never smoked and never drank, Lenin will glance across and say: "Sleeping, Grigori? He's asleep. Tired. He needs a real rest, he's quite worn out."

Count the names in this volume. Zinoviev: 111 times. Kamenev: twice. Stalin: twice, once of them a city. Trotsky: not once. And the word Yiddish: once — in a subordinate clause of the preface, about the language its author wrote in before the war.

Everything worth saying about this book is in those five numbers.

The edition

Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1978, in the Progress Soviet Authors Library. The copyright leaf reads Translated from the Russian / Illustrated by Anatoli Zykov, and gives the Russian as Эммануил Казакевич / Избранное / На английском языке. Then it carries two copyright lines, and they do not say the same thing. The Russian one claims the compilation and the preface — © Состав и предисловие, издательство „Прогресс", 1978, с иллюстрациями. The English one,

directly beneath it, claims only: "© Progress Publishers. Illustrated, 1978." In Russian the house takes credit for choosing what is in this book and for commissioning its introduction. In English it takes credit for the pictures.

No general translator is named on that leaf either. As with the Paustovsky volume in this series, the translators are in the contents, attached to the individual works, and there are four:

- Robert Daglish — Tvardovsky's preface, and Two Men in the Steppe - Leonard Stoklitsky — Star - Fainna Glagoleva — By the Light of Day - Ralph Parker — The Blue Notebook

The back matter consists of a Request to Readers, advertisements for four forthcoming Soviet Authors Library titles, and a loose errata slip correcting three lines. There is also a short section called NOTES, which is not annotation at all: it is four dated extracts from Kazakevich's own diaries and letters, one per work, and it is the only editorial commentary the volume contains.

The advertisements are worth reading beside that. The one for Trifonov's *The Impatient Ones* — a novel about Narodnaya Volya, and itself a volume in this series — ends: "The book includes a big foreword and a historical and literary commentary." Another advertises Maria Prilezhayeva's *Lenin's Life*, the work of a woman who "has researched Lenin's life and works for almost 30 years". Progress knew perfectly well how to annotate a book about the Russian revolutionary movement, and said so on the last leaf of this one.

Hold that thought. This book prints a novella in which a man shot after the first Moscow trial of August 1936 appears more than a hundred times as Lenin's friend — and its entire apparatus consists of the dead author's diary jottings and a preface written in 1962. The sentences of that trial were not annulled until June 1988, ten years after this printing; Lynn Walsh set out the sequence in *Militant International Review* no. 44, when the Supreme Court's announcement finally came.

The preface

The preface is *In Memory of a Friend*, by Alexander

Tvardovsky, and it is dated, at the foot of the last page, 1962. That is the year Kazakevich died. It is an obituary essay, and Progress reprinted it, unaltered and unexplained, sixteen years later.

The reader of 1978 was told nothing about who Tvardovsky was. Our own press had followed him closely. In March 1966, at the 23rd Congress of the CPSU, Ernest Mandel — writing as Ernest Germain in the *International Socialist Review* — recorded the removal from the Congress and from the Central Committee of "two intellectuals considered to be leaders of the moderate 'liberal' wing, Tvardovski and Polevoi". In the spring of 1967 George Saunders reported in *World Outlook* on "the battle around *Novy Mir*", describing Tvardovsky as "editor of the Soviet literary monthly *Novy Mir* and leading spokesman of the liberal intellectuals", and noting the sacking of two of his assistant editors and the persistent rumours that he would go too. He was forced out in February 1970 and died the following year.

None of that is in the book. What is in the book is a warm, particular and very good piece of writing about a friend, and — planted in the middle of it — one sentence of open polemic:

Incidentally, this is one of the examples that totally refute the absurd notion that Soviet literature at certain periods was incapable of producing any compelling or really honest books. As if true art, intimately bound up with the life of the people, could ever wait in silence for some particularly favourable conditions in which to appear!

Read that in 1962, from the editor of *Novy Mir*, and it is not boilerplate. It is a position in a live quarrel — his quarrel, with people who were saying that everything written under Stalin was worthless, and with people who were saying that nothing had been wrong. He goes further on the same page: he would find it hard, he says, to name a book by any young writer working "in the far more favourable literary climate of today" that comes near *Star*. The man who published Solzhenitsyn was insisting that the honest book had been written in 1946.

The rest of the preface is unsentimental portraiture. The bespectacled, prematurely grey intellectual who looked like a stay-at-home and was a crack shot, an excellent driver, a singer of army songs, the company song-leader. The decoration he had won as a divisional reconnaissance chief for bringing in a prisoner, which Tvardovsky learned about not from him but from his general, and which Kazakevich then described in his own way:

"The thing that worried us most," he told me with his

customary humour, "as we were crawling back with our burden under enemy machine-gun fire, was that one of those bullets would hit the German and ruin the whole thing, because we could never have pulled it off a second time."

The old writer who had lost his flat and had nowhere to sleep, and whom Kazakevich simply moved into his own apartment, with his wife, for about a year. And the last of it, dictated against pain: "All I want is to be able to write — it's so terrible to have it all churning uselessly through your head."

The one word

Now the sentence the whole apparatus turns on. Tvardovsky is explaining where the prose writer came from, and he writes that it was in the crucible of the war that there was born "a distinguished exponent of Soviet prose... who before the war had been known only as the author of verses and poems in Yiddish."

That is the only occurrence of the word "Yiddish" in three hundred and forty-three pages. "Jew" and "Jewish" do not occur at all. Neither does Birobidzhan — though Tvardovsky comes within a few words of it when he mentions that on one of his Siberian trips the two of them "visited the places where he had once been a theatre manager and chairman of a collective farm". A Yiddish poet who ran a theatre and chaired a collective farm in the Soviet Far East is not an obscure biographical puzzle; but the volume leaves the foreign reader with no means of solving it, and no reason to try.

And it leaves out what the sentence implies. Kazakevich stopped being a Yiddish writer and became a Russian one, and the Yiddish literature he came out of was destroyed: the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee broken up, its leaders shot in 1952, the anti-cosmopolitan campaign, the Doctors' Plot. Readers of this series will have met the other side of that silence already, in Yuri Ivanov's *Caution: Zionism!* and in the chapters of *Races and Peoples* that can find racism everywhere except at home. Here the same state publisher issues the selected works of one of the few major Yiddish writers of his generation to survive, and records his origin in six words of a relative clause.

Zinoviev, one hundred and eleven times

The *Blue Notebook* was written in 1961. It covers the weeks after the July Days, when Lenin and Zinoviev hid at Razliv while the Sixth Congress met without them, and it takes its

title from the notebook labelled "Marxism About the State" that became *The State and Revolution*. In Kazakevich's version Lenin sends a courier, Zof, to fetch it: "In Stockholm — Nadezhda Konstantinovna knows just where — I left one of my notebooks. It's a blue notebook with a stiff cover."

The daring of the thing is not the Lenin. The Lenin is superb — interior, tired, funny, entirely without halo. Crossing the lake he reflects "that, in fact, Ulyanov's life was not very dear to him. That Ulyanov, born forty-seven years ago in Simbirsk, having read piles of books and written mountains of sheets of paper, felt very tired, and suffered from insomnia and headaches." But a sympathetic Lenin was permitted.

The daring is Zinoviev, and specifically that Kazakevich goes inside his head and lets him doubt:

But Zinoviev was not asleep. He felt wretched, he had a dizzy feeling in his head.

"Are we travelling in the right direction? Aren't we going to get lost in this fog? Isn't there in Lenin's courage and implacability an element of sectarianism or, still more dangerous, of an urge for self-sacrifice?"

That is the October question, asked three months early, by the man who would ask it publicly in October and be right or wrong about it for the rest of Soviet historiography. Kazakevich does not make him a villain. He makes him frightened, physically uncomfortable, loyal, and wrong — and Lenin fond of him. When Sverdlov and Dzerzhinsky come out to the hut, Lenin asks whether everyone will understand the new slogan, is told no, says "That's good. You don't think so. Correct," and adds: "That's what Grigori thinks too."

He goes further, and this is the passage that ought to be quoted whenever anyone says Soviet fiction could not think:

He realised that he ought to let Lenin know his point of view clearly and unambiguously. But he said nothing. He was afraid. Expressed aloud, his thoughts would have been taken as a sign of weakness and indecision, and weakness was something Lenin and the Party as a whole despised more than anything else. After all, Zinoviev, by repeating persistently and conscientiously Lenin's [sic] formulations with something akin to religious fervour, enjoyed a reputation among the comrades of being unflinching and indomitable.

That is not a description of 1917. It is a description of how a reputation for firmness is manufactured inside a party

apparatus by a man who is privately afraid, and it was written in 1961 by someone who had watched the machine work for thirty years.

The misspelling is the book's, not ours, and the book knows it. Of the three errors Progress thought worth a loose errata slip, one is that line on page 245: Lenin's name, set wrong in the sentence about repeating his formulations with religious fervour.

When the Fourth International's press saw this material, it understood immediately what it was. The film made from the novella had its first showing on 12 February 1964, and *World Outlook* devoted an article to it in March under the title "Are New 'Rehabilitations' in Preparation in the Soviet Union?" The film, it reported, "created something of a sensation in Moscow". It did not present Zinoviev and Kamenev as "traitors," or "enemies of Bolshevism," as the Stalinist stereotype required; on the contrary, said the report, "the movie stresses their friendly relations with Lenin." (*World Outlook* was a mimeographed weekly bulletin and its text is quoted here from the scan of that duplicated sheet.)

The article then printed something the novella does not contain: Lenin's own undated letter of 1917, first published in 1924 and suppressed from the editions of the collected works issued under Stalin, restored only in volume 36 of the fourth edition —

"To Comrade Kamenev. Between us — if I am liquidated, I ask you to publish my notebook: 'Marxism and the State' (it was left in Stockholm). It is a notebook with a blue cover."

So the blue notebook of the title is, in the documentary record, the subject of a letter from Lenin to Kamenev. In Kazakevich's novella Kamenev appears twice — once in a list of those arrested after the July Days, once in Lenin's memory of being criticised "from the left" — and the errand goes to Zof. How far that was the author's choice and how far the censor's, this volume gives no means of telling, and offers no note on the point.

The rest of the *World Outlook* piece is the argument that makes this book worth reprinting today. Rehabilitating Zinoviev and Kamenev, it said, could not be stopped where the bureaucracy wanted to stop it: once it is admitted that Stalin falsified the history and that the trials were frame-ups, the logic runs on, and "this re-evaluation cannot be blocked from including Trotsky, with whom Zinoviev and Kamenev were closely associated in the leadership of the United Left Opposition in 1926-27, in which Lenin's widow, Krupskaya,

also participated." And it recorded the state of play: "Eight years after the denunciation of the 'personality cult,' Zinoviev and Kamenev have not yet been officially rehabilitated."

They still had not been in 1978, when Progress put this novella into a series for foreign readers. That is the fact to hold on to. The thaw that made *The Blue Notebook* possible had been over for a decade; Tvardovsky was dead; and a Soviet state publisher was exporting, without annotation, a text in which an unperson is Lenin's friend a hundred and eleven times over — while, on another shelf, its historians were still not printing his name. The volume does not resolve the contradiction. It ships it.

Nor should the limit be missed. Zinoviev is in the book because the Party had decided, some time around 1961, that Lenin at Razliv could be shown with the companion he actually had. Trotsky is not in the book at all — and the novella is careful about it. When Kazakevich lists the losses of the July Days he writes that "Kamenev, Kollontai, Raskolnikov, Roshal, Sivers and many others had been arrested." Trotsky was arrested in the same days and is not in the list; he was elected to the Central Committee in his absence by the very Congress these characters are preparing for, and he is not in the preparations either. A hundred and eleven Zinovievs and no Trotsky is not an oversight. It is the shape of the permission. The line was moved. It was not removed.

The war books

Star is why Tvardovsky wrote the preface, and it deserves the praise.

It is short, it is about a reconnaissance group sent across the German lines, and it kills them. The Soviet war novel of 1946 was not supposed to end the way this one ends. The scouts go silent; the signals girl Katya stays at her set calling for Star; "Filled with hope and an iron persistence, she waited. Now nobody else waited, but she did." A letter arrives for the dead lieutenant from his mother, about the red notebook for physics she has found and is keeping for him, because he will want it when he sits his college entrance exams. Bugorkov reads it aloud and then hunches over the radio and says, in a choked voice: "If only the war ended soon.... No, I'm not tired. I'm not saying I'm tired. But it's high time people stopped being killed." And Katya realises "with horror that perhaps her vigil here and her endless calls for Star were useless. The Star had set, it was extinguished."

The conclusion, two years later in the advance across Poland,

gives the general his moment to make a speech about them, and he does not take it: "Then, overtaken by some sad memory, he started to add something but checked himself and waved his hand."

Two Men in the Steppe (1948) is the stranger achievement. A young lieutenant, Ogarkov, fails to deliver an order, the division is believed lost, and a tribunal sentences him to death; he is marched across the steppe by a guard, Dzhurabayev, while his appeal is considered. Kazakevich puts the flaw in the proceedings on the page, in 1948:

But somewhere a third witness was fighting the enemy. That witness was the division and it was invisibly present in this village hut.

The division had not been lost. It had broken out, retreated and reported in, and during the retreat its units had marched past the very dugout where the condemned man was being held. And when the case was reconsidered, "that third and most formidable witness — the division — had not been present in court."

Kazakevich's own diary note on the story, written five years later and printed at the back of this volume, gives the doctrinally correct reading: that a person formed by socialism, even when he has committed a crime and been rejected by society, "still does not betray his essentially Soviet nature and conscience". That is a fair account of Ogarkov. It is not an account of the tribunal, and the tribunal is what the story is about.

By the Light of Day (1960) is the odd one out: a postwar story that Kazakevich, in the diary note printed at the back, says he had carried for thirteen years before he could write it — "I conceived the idea for this story thirteen years ago and it has been haunting my imagination ever since." Thirteen years before 1960 is 1947. It is the weakest thing here, and the dating is the most interesting fact about it.

What is missing from the selection is also worth naming. Tvardovsky's preface lists the other war books — *Spring on the Oder*, *The House in the Square*, *Heart of a Friend* — and records that Kazakevich died dictating the continuation of a novel about the 1930s called *The Thirties*, which he had been working on for years. A Soviet novel about the 1930s, by this writer, unfinished. Two of the three — *Spring on the Oder* and *The House in the Square*, which the earlier English printing calls *The House on the Square* — are in this series in their own right, in the Foreign Languages Publishing House editions of 1953 and 1950. *Heart of a Friend* is not, and *The Thirties*

exists nowhere.

Reading it now

Read Tvardovsky's preface first, and read it as what it is: a 1962 document, written by a man who was about to lose the argument it belongs to, reprinted in 1978 by people who had won it and saw no reason to say so.

Then read *Star*, which is as good as its reputation, and *Two Men in the Steppe*, which is better than its author's own account of it.

Then read *The Blue Notebook* twice. Once for the writing, which is genuinely fine — the boats, the hut, the hay, a leader of a revolution worrying about a colleague's blistered foot. And once with the counting in mind: one hundred and eleven Zinovievs, two Kamenevs, no Trotsky, and not a single line of apparatus anywhere in the volume to tell a foreign reader in 1978 that any of those three names had ever been a problem. What a state publisher permits, and where it stops, is itself a text. This one is unusually legible.

Meaning and Conceptual Systems

A serious monograph on the theory of meaning - Frege, Russell, Quine, Kripke, Montague read in the original - by the Lithuanian philosopher who brought analytic philosophy home, finished as the Baltic movements crested.

Rolandas Pavilionis

Introduction to the 1990 Edition

Open this book expecting the Soviet philosophy textbook and you will be lost within a page. There is no genuflection to Lenin, no roll-call of Party congresses, no ritual counterposing of "bourgeois idealism" to the achievements of socialism. What there is instead is a close, technically demanding argument with the whole apparatus of twentieth-century analytic philosophy of language — Frege on sense and reference, Russell's theory of descriptions and theory of types, Carnap's programme for an ideal language, the two Wittgensteins, Tarski on truth, Quine on the indeterminacy of translation, Chomsky, Montague's intensional logic, Kripke and Hintikka on possible worlds, Searle on intentionality, Putnam on reference. Rolandas Pavilionis reads these figures in the original, at length, and on their own terms. Quine is named more than eighty times, Russell as often, Hintikka seventy, Montague nearly seventy, Kripke sixty, Frege fifty. By any honest measure this is a serious monograph in the theory of meaning, of a kind almost no one else in the Soviet philosophical world was writing — and it is one of the very last things the Progress imprint sent into the world before the state that owned it disappeared.

That last fact is not decoration. It is the key to the book, and it deserves to be set out precisely, because the date on the spine tells only part of the story. The Russian original, *Значение и понятийные системы*, appeared from the Moscow house Mysl in 1983. What Progress issued in 1990 is H. Campbell Creighton's English translation of a revised Russian text, and to that revision Pavilionis added a closing essay, "Second Thoughts", written — the dateline says so — in Vilnius in June 1989. So three moments are folded into one volume: a 1983 monograph by a philosopher then in his late thirties; a late-1980s revision; and an afterword composed in the Lithuanian capital in the summer the Baltic independence movements were cresting, a bare two months before the human chain of the Baltic Way. The book was then printed, as its copyright page states, "in the Union of Soviet Socialist

Republics" — and carried to press in 1990, the year that Union began visibly to come apart.

Its author was at the centre of that coming-apart. Rolandas Pavilionis (1944–2006) was a Lithuanian, trained in philology at Vilnius and then in logic at the Academy of Sciences in Ukraine, who defended a higher doctorate in the philosophy of logic at the Sorbonne in 1981 and was made a professor at Vilnius University in 1982. He was, in effect, the man who brought the Western analytic tradition into Lithuanian philosophy. And his public life belongs entirely to the independent Lithuania that did not yet legally exist when this translation went to press. In 1990 — the year the book appeared, the year of independence — he was elected rector of Vilnius University, a post he held for a decade; he later sat in the Seimas of the restored republic, and from 2004 until his death he was a Member of the European Parliament. On 11 March 1990 the Supreme Council in Vilnius adopted the Act re-establishing the independent Lithuanian state, declaring the Soviet annexation of 1940 null; Mikhail Gorbachev pronounced the Act illegal and answered it with an economic blockade. That is the setting in which Moscow's own export house was, at the same moment, printing a Lithuanian professor's philosophy of language in English for readers in London and New York. A book manufactured by the Soviet state, by an author whose parliament had just declared that state an occupying power: one could hardly ask for a sharper emblem of the imprint's final phase, when the machinery of Soviet ideological export was still running while the ideology, and soon the state, drained out of it.

The commission is worth pausing on, because it is not the usual one. For most of its life Progress issued English titles to a settled formula — doctrinal manuals for Western Communist Parties, foreign-policy apologetics, potted histories that carried the current line. A dense monograph on Montague semantics and the causal theory of names fits none of those slots; it addressed itself, as Pavilionis says, to "a broad circle of readers" of "philosophers, logicians, linguists, psychologists, cyberneticists", the international academic audience for

analytic philosophy, and it offered them no line to carry. That such a book was translated and exported at all is a fact about the late 1980s. Under glasnost the imprint's output diversified and softened; the catalogue of its last years mixes the old apologetics with genuine scholarship it would once have kept for a narrower domestic readership, and this volume sits at the far, most scholarly end of that drift. It is a Progress book only in the sense that Progress printed it — which, in 1990, was a category coming apart in the reader's hands.

It would be easy to make too much of the irony and too little of the book. The right emphasis is the reverse, because the book is genuinely good, and it is good in a way that the historical moment helps explain. This is, on the evidence of its own vocabulary, one of the least ideological volumes in the entire Progress catalogue. Across some hundred thousand words, "Marx" occurs once, "Engels" and "Lenin" not at all in the body of the text; "bourgeois", "capitalism", "imperialism", "class", "the Party", "the CPSU" — the load-bearing timbers of the standard Soviet monograph — are simply absent. Where a Brezhnev-era philosophy manual would open by deriving its method from the classics and close by convicting the West of decadence, Pavilionis opens on the problem itself: "Language, although the most natural product of the human intellect, is one of its creations that is least adequately known." What follows is philosophy, not catechism.

And it is philosophy with a thesis. Pavilionis's target is what he calls the "absolutising of language" — the assumption, running from Russell and the early Wittgenstein through Carnap and into the model-theoretic semantics of Montague and the possible-worlds machinery of Kripke and Hintikka, that meaning is a property of language itself, a self-standing "semantics of language" that can be formalised without reference to what speakers know and believe about the world. Against this he sets his own construct, the "conceptual system": a structured totality of a person's beliefs and knowledge, built up in cognitive experience, into which any sign — linguistic or not — must be interpreted before it can mean anything at all. "The fundamental methodological feature of modern semantic conceptions of natural language," he writes, "lies in their making an absolute of language." His counter-claim is that language "does not express any meanings in itself that exist independently of conceptual systems"; meaning is not lodged in words but constituted by the whole system of a subject's representations of the world, including a decisive pre-verbal layer that language presupposes and cannot generate. It is a holist, cognitivist theory, and it converges in interesting ways with the anti-formalist wing of the analytic tradition itself — with Quine's assault on the analytic/synthetic

distinction, with Putnam, with Searle's later insistence that intentionality is more basic than language, that "the philosophy of language is treated as a branch of the philosophy of mind". Pavilionis knows this; much of the book's force comes from his turning the analytic tradition's own internal doubts against its formalist mainstream.

A single example conveys the register. Considering the old worry that natural language, because it can generate the liar paradox, is unfit for logic, Pavilionis quotes the logician John Kemeny's conclusion that "ordinary English is a language not suitable for logical arguments" — and then simply observes that "this example of argumentation was made in that same English language" which is supposedly unfit for it. The riposte is quick, exact, and entirely at home in the analytic idiom: he is not exposing Kemeny's class position, he is catching him in a performative contradiction. The same economy governs his handling of the deeper cases — Tarski on truth, Quine on the indeterminacy of translation, Kripke's causal theory of names, which he reads as the most instructive attempt yet to fix reference without a conceptual system and therefore as the most instructive failure. Throughout, his own positive construct does real analytic labour rather than standing outside as a verdict. Meaning, on his account, is generated by incompatibility — by the "distance", "gap" or "contrast" a conceptual system works to close, "any other kind of incompatibility (itself the source of meaning)" — and the closing essay pushes this from meaning toward value, to the point where "meaning becomes significance and the interpreting subject the evaluating, willing and acting subject". Whatever one makes of the theory, it is a theory, argued and developed, not a position assumed for the sake of the conclusion it licenses.

What is striking, and creditable, is how deliberately he keeps the ideological machinery switched off. He tells the reader as much. His method, he insists, will not "substitute selection of typical statements for analysis of the conceptions", nor "reduce it to a comparison of critical points of view and a simple counterposing of them to fundamental theses of Marxist epistemology" — which is a precise, and pointed, description of exactly the method most of his Soviet colleagues used. He goes further: "Other ideological, general philosophical precepts of the authors of these conceptions will not be specially discussed." A Soviet philosopher writing on Carnap or Chomsky was expected to expose the class standpoint concealed in the logic; Pavilionis announces that he will do no such thing, and keeps his word. The Western philosophers here are treated as people who might be right or wrong about meaning, not as symptoms of a decaying order. That is a quiet

act of intellectual independence, and it is the reason the book has dated so much better than its shelf-mates.

None of this makes the volume a stranger to its origins, and it would flatter Pavilionis to pretend the Marxist frame is wholly absent. It is present, but it has shrunk to a thin methodological spine rather than a body of doctrine. The materialist commitment shows up as the language of "reflection" — the mind reflecting an objectively existing world — and as a single appeal to "dialectical-materialist epistemology, according to which it is unsound to examine the thought process out of context of the thinking, historically determined subject who is cognising the world". This is real *diamat* vocabulary; but look at what he does with it. He does not use "reflection" in Lenin's cruder copy-theory sense. He immediately qualifies it: "Knowledge of reality is not a mirror reflection of it, but an active process." The historically-situated, practically-engaged subject is not a slogan he salutes and leaves behind; it is the actual lever by which he prises meaning loose from the formalists' "semantics of language" and relocates it in the knowing subject. Even the one gesture toward method — the demand, "in accordance with the principle of dialectics", for "concrete analysis of a concrete situation" — is Lenin's phrase pressed into service as a rule of intellectual hygiene rather than a political incantation. The remarkable thing is that the materialism here does genuine work in the argument, precisely where the ritual invocations in the standard textbooks did none.

This is where the non-Russian periphery matters. Pavilionis was writing from Vilnius, in a philosophical culture with its own lines to Central and Western Europe — to Husserl and Heidegger, to the phenomenologists, and, closer to home, to the great Lithuanian-born semiotician Algirdas Julien Greimas, whom the afterword treats as a serious interlocutor. The Lithuanian language itself surfaces in the argument, and not by accident. When he lists what he means by "natural languages" his examples run "Lithuanian, Russian, English" — his own tongue first, the imperial language second. And when, in the afterword, he wants to show that the very words for meaning encode the idea of connection and of closing a distance, his clinching example is Lithuanian: "the two very indicative Lithuanian expressions *prasme* (meaning) and *suprasti* (to understand)". These are small things, but they are the fingerprints of a philosopher who did not think in the centre's categories, working in an imprint designed to project the centre's voice.

The afterword, "Second Thoughts: From Meaning to Value, or New Perspective of Analysis", is the most telling document in

the book, because it is the part written last and written free. "The period since the Russian edition of *Meaning and Conceptual Systems* was published," it begins, "has permitted me to reconsider" — and what follows is a philosopher opening his own framework outward, toward hermeneutics and phenomenology, toward Gadamer, Habermas, Ricoeur, Davidson, and Greimas, asking whether the analytic and phenomenological traditions are as opposed as they look, and proposing to link meaning with value — with the interested, willing, acting subject rather than the neutral mirror. It reads like nothing so much as a European philosopher of 1989 thinking about where the field should go next. There is not a word of Marxism-Leninism in it. Dated Vilnius, June 1989, it is a small manifesto of intellectual glasnost — and, read against the calendar, of something more than intellectual.

So what is there to correct? On the usual sites where this series does its work — 1917 and Trotsky, the Left Opposition, collectivisation and the famine, the Moscow Trials, Spain, the Nazi-Soviet Pact, 1956, 1968 — there is nothing, because the book touches none of them. Its silence on the whole political history of the century is total, and for once the silence is not an evasion but the finding itself: here is a book of Soviet philosophy, printed by the Soviet state's own export house in 1990, that has quietly opted out of the ideological project almost in its entirety. The one substantive thing a critical reader should hold up to the light is the residual "reflection" epistemology — and even that, as we have seen, is handled with unusual care. The honest verdict is that *Progress*, in one of its last acts, published a real work of philosophy that its own founding purpose could not have predicted or contained.

It would be a poor tribute, though, to close without pressing the argument where it can be pressed, and the place to press is exactly the ground Pavilionis half-occupies. His deepest and best instinct is that meaning cannot be sealed inside language, that it presupposes a pre-verbal layer of cognitive experience — the acquisition of language, as he puts it, "presupposes, as a necessary condition, a preverbal stage in the forming of conceptual systems." This is true, and it is a genuine advance on the formalisms he criticises. But the "conceptual system" he builds on that pre-verbal ground is stubbornly individual: a single subject's private structure of belief and knowledge, into which the social enters only later, as the "intersubjective" sediment of what other competent subjects happen to accept. And here the tradition on whose margins he was publishing had a stronger card than he plays. For Marx and Engels, language is not first a private system that afterwards becomes social; it is, in the phrase from *The German Ideology*, "practical consciousness" — from its origin a social product,

arising with and for cooperative activity, so that consciousness is "from the very beginning a social product". The Soviet psychology that grew from this soil — above all Vygotsky's demonstration, in *Thought and Language* (1934), that the child's concepts are internalised from social speech, that the "pre-verbal" and the "pre-social" are not the same thing — is precisely the resource that would have carried Pavilonis's own critique of the "absolutising of language" further than he takes it. The formalists err, on his account, by cutting meaning off from the knowing subject; but one can cut it off from society just as fatally by lodging it in a solitary conceptual system, and the sharper materialist answer is that meaning is neither in language alone nor in the individual mind alone but in the social practice that makes both. It is one of the mild ironies of the book that the most powerful reply to Montague and Kripke lay in a materialist tradition Pavilonis had every right to use and, in 1989, understandably preferred to leave on the shelf.

That preference is itself the historical evidence. A Lithuanian analytic philosopher, publishing his work in Russian in Moscow in 1983, watching it go out in English under the Soviet star in 1990, adding a Vilnius afterword that faces west while his republic breaks free of the east — this is what the last year of the imprint looks like from the inside. The ideology had thinned to a spine; the periphery had its own bearings; the philosophy was serious and would outlive the state that licensed it. Read as philosophy of language, *Meaning and Conceptual Systems* remains a substantial and rewarding book, one that repays the effort its author warned would be required. Read as a historical document, it is something rarer: a Soviet publication in which one can watch, in real time and in a single volume, the Soviet part quietly falling silent and the philosopher stepping out from under it into a country, and a Europe, that did not yet exist.

FICTION Childhood

Maxim Gorky

Introduction to the 1960 Edition

The book begins with a corpse on a floor, described by a small boy who does not yet know what he is looking at.

On the floor beneath the window of a small, dusky room lay my father, remarkably long and all dressed in white; the toes of his bare feet were strangely widespread, and the fingers of his gentle hands, now quietly crossed on his breast, were likewise distorted. The dark discs of copper coins closed his laughing eyes, his kind face had become livid, and I was terrified by the glint of his set teeth.

His mother kneels beside the body in a red skirt and little else, combing back the dead man's hair "with the black comb I had used as a saw to cut through the rind of watermelons". His grandmother holds his hand and weeps "in a peculiar way that formed a pleasant accompaniment to my mother". And the child, who has never seen adults cry, hangs back behind her skirts, "afraid and uncomfortable", while he is told to go and take leave of his daddy.

The comb is the detail that tells you what kind of writer this is. A boy of four does not register a death; he registers that the object being used on his father is the one he used on watermelons. Nothing in the paragraph is explained and nothing is softened, and the whole of Gorky's method is already in it.

The edition, and the difficulty

Childhood was published in 1913 and 1914, at the end of Maxim Gorky's long stay on Capri, and it is the first volume of the autobiographical trilogy completed by *In the World* and *My Universities*. This Foreign Languages Publishing House printing is from 1960, in the Library of Selected Soviet Literature, translated by Margaret Wettlin and designed by Y. Kogan. It carries a dedication — "To my son" — and, apart from a page of forthcoming FLPH titles at the back, nothing else at all: no foreword, no afterword, no note on the author.

That silence is itself the problem this introduction has to

address, because of who Gorky was by 1960.

Alexei Maximovich Peshkov, who wrote as Maxim Gorky, is not one Soviet writer among others. He presided over the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, at which socialist realism was proclaimed as the method binding on every writer in the country. His name was attached to that doctrine for the next half-century; it was given to a city, to the Literary Institute, to streets in every republic. He is the founding authority.

And Childhood obeys none of it.

It was written twenty years before the doctrine existed, and it has no positive hero, no Party, no class-conscious worker, no forward-looking resolution and no lesson. It is about a violent, pious, money-grubbing petty-bourgeois household in Nizhni Novgorod in the 1870s, observed by a child who does not judge it because he does not yet know there is anything else. It ends with a boy being told to leave.

A reader who comes to Childhood expecting the founding text of Soviet literature will find instead the least doctrinal book imaginable, published without comment by the state's own house, in the year Gorky's authority was at its height.

The translator

Margaret Wettlin's English deserves attention, and so does Margaret Wettlin.

She was born Margaret Butterworth Wettlin in 1907, an American, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. In 1932 she went to the Soviet Union for what was meant to be a year. She married the stage director Andrei Efremoff, and stayed for nearly fifty years — through the purges, through the war, through everything — before returning to the United States and publishing a memoir, *Fifty Russian Winters*.

Readers of this series will have met her counterpart already: Ivy Litvinov, English-born wife of Stalin's foreign minister, who translated the *Ordeal* trilogy for the same house in the same decade. It is a striking fact about Progress and FLPH that so much of their English was made by Anglophone women

who had married into the Soviet Union and stayed. It shows. Wettlin's prose here has the unforced rhythm of someone thinking in English about Russian rather than converting one to the other; the grandmother's speech in particular — its repetitions, its endearments, its sudden drops into vulgarity — survives into English with its music on.

The house on Polevaya Street

What happens in *Childhood* is that a widowed mother brings her son to her father's house, and the house destroys nearly everyone in it.

Grandfather Kashirin is a dyer, a former Volga barge-hauler, small, red-haired, violent and devout, and he beats the children with birch rods until they lose consciousness. The uncles, Mikhail and Yakov, fight each other over the division of the property with a persistence that is closer to weather than to malice. Money is the household's only subject. Gorky names the grandfather three hundred and thirty-eight times and the grandmother three hundred and one, and the book is the argument between them.

Against all this is set Tsiganok — Gypsy — a foundling apprentice of nineteen, and the best-loved person in the book. Here is what he does when the grandfather flogs the boy:

He continued to protect me with his arm whenever my grandfather flogged me, and would show me his swollen fingers the next day with the complaint: "No point in it. Don't help you any, and look what I get! That's the last time — hereafter you take what's coming to you!"

And then, in one of the finest sentences in Russian literature:

But the next time he would take the unearned punishment all over again. "You said you wouldn't do it any more." "Saying and doing are two different things — don't know myself how it happened."

Saying and doing are two different things. Tsiganok is not a hero, does not intend to be one, and cannot explain himself. He simply puts his hand under the rod again. There is no socialist-realist account of virtue that can accommodate that, which is one reason to be grateful the book was written before there was one.

What happens to Tsiganok

He is killed carrying a cross.

Uncle Yakov has vowed an oak cross for his dead wife's grave and insists on shouldering it himself; Tsiganok takes the heavy end. On the way he stumbles, the uncles let go, and it comes down on his back. They bring him home and lay him on the kitchen floor.

"He fell, and it crushed him — struck him in the back. It'd have smashed us too if we hadn't let go in time." "Then it was you that smashed him," said Grigori hoarsely. "Well, what do you think we...." "You!"

While they argue, Gorky keeps his eye on the floor:

The blood kept flowing; near the door it had already formed a pool which darkened and seemed to be rising. Tsiganok lay there making noises as though in his sleep, while the pink froth kept coming out of his mouth and his body kept melting away, growing flatter and flatter, levelling down to the floor as though merging with it.

And then Uncle Yakov, whispering, arrives at the thought that matters to him:

"A good thing I didn't carry the pedestal myself, or look where I'd be now...."

The kindest person in the book is killed by the family's carelessness with a religious object, and his death produces from one of the men who dropped it a moment of relief at his own escape. Gorky does not comment. He counts the blood, watches the body flatten, and lets Yakov speak.

This is what people mean when they call Gorky the founder of Soviet literature and then fail to notice that nothing in Soviet literature is like this. The scene has no villain — Yakov is a weak man, not a murderer — and no redemption, and the only judgement in it is delivered by an old workman in two words.

The grandmother's God

Now the thing that would have been impossible later.

Akulina Ivanovna, the grandmother, is one of the great characters, and Gorky's most sustained act of love. She is fat, dark, snuff-taking, endlessly kind, an inveterate teller of tales, and devout in a way that owes nothing to any church. And Gorky — the writer whose name would be attached to Soviet atheism as firmly as to socialist realism — writes her religion from the inside, without a flicker of condescension:

I was very fond of my grandmother's God, he seemed so

near and dear to her.

The child asks her to tell him about God, and she has a technique:

She had a special manner for speaking about Him; she would always sit down and close her eyes and speak in a soft voice, strangely drawing out her words.... "There the Lord sits on a hill, surrounded by the meadows of paradise; sits on a sapphire throne under the silver lindens..."

He falls asleep listening. The grandfather's God, elsewhere in the book, is a bookkeeper of punishments. The grandmother's is a storyteller's God, sitting under lindens, and the boy loves him because he loves her.

That is not a concession to superstition. It is a materialist observation of the highest order: what a person's God is like tells you what that person is like, and popular religion in a brutal household may be the only place where tenderness is kept. Gorky understood that in 1913. The doctrine promulgated in his name in 1934 could not have said it, and the atheist propaganda published by this very house for the next thirty years did not.

The mother

The book's other axis is Varvara, and she is the hardest thing in it.

She arrives at the start as the widow kneeling in a red skirt. She leaves the boy with her parents, comes back, teaches him to read, marries a second time badly, is beaten by her husband, comes back again ill, and dies. Gorky gives her no arc and no lesson. What he gives her is the last scene between them, and it is almost unbearable because he refuses to make either of them better than they were.

She is sitting up in a clean lavender dress, her hair carefully combed, "as proud and haughty as she had formerly been". He asks, with what he calls unaccountable shyness, whether she is feeling better.

"Come here," she said, giving me a fearful look. "Where have you been gallivanting?" Before I had time to answer she seized me by the hair, grabbed a long flexible knife off the table and struck me with the flat blade until it fell out of her hands. "Pick it up! Give it here!" I picked up the knife and placed it on the table.

He sits on the edge of the stove and watches her. She lies

down. Within a few pages she is dead, and he tells his grandfather so and is called a liar.

A dying woman beats her son with the flat of a knife, and he picks it up and hands it back to her. There is no scene in the literature of childhood that says more with less, and no writer schooled in a doctrine of positive heroes could have left it on the page without an explanation attached. Gorky attaches nothing. The boy obeys, and the chapter continues.

What the silence conceals

This volume tells its foreign reader nothing about any of the above.

It does not say when the book was written, or that its author died in 1936 in circumstances that were the subject of a show trial in 1938, at which his death was attributed to a medical murder. It does not say that Gorky spent the years after 1917 in a public quarrel with Lenin over the Bolsheviks' treatment of the intelligentsia, nor that he left Russia again in 1921 and spent most of the following decade in Italy. It does not say what socialist realism was, or that Gorky proclaimed it, or that this book is nothing like it.

We record all that without much indignation, because the alternative in 1960 would have been a foreword performing the usual operation, and Childhood is better off naked. But a reader should know that the absence of apparatus is not the absence of a position. Issuing Gorky's least ideological book with no framing at all, in the Library of Selected Soviet Literature, lets the author's enormous official authority do the framing by itself.

What is living

Almost everything.

Childhood is the finest book in this series and one of the best accounts of a bad childhood ever written, in any language. Its greatness is a matter of refusal: Gorky refuses to make the child wiser than he was, refuses to make the household a symbol, refuses to convert the grandmother's faith into false consciousness or the grandfather's cruelty into a class verdict. He gives you the dyeworks, the beatings, the icons, the fights over the inheritance, the songs, and Tsiganok's swollen fingers, and he lets them mean what they mean.

And he ends it in six words. The mother dies; the boy says "Mother is dead" and the grandfather answers "What you lying

for?" with a glance at the bed. A few days after the funeral:

"Well, Alexei, can't exactly call you a medal hanging around my neck! No room for you here any more. Time you were getting out in the world...."

So I got out into the world.

No summary, no moral, no promise. A boy of eleven is turned out of a house, and the sentence that records it is flat as a plank. Everything that Gorky later became — the celebrity, the patron, the president of the Writers' Union, the name on the doctrine — is contained in the fact that he could still write that line and leave it alone.

One practical note. *Childhood* is the first volume of three. In *the World* takes the boy from the moment of that last line through his apprenticeships — the shoe shop, the draughtsman's, the icon workshop, the Volga steamers — and *My Universities* takes him to Kazan and to the politics. FLPH and Progress issued all three in English, and the second is the equal of the first. This series reissues *Childhood* and, in Gorky's own first novel, *Foma Gordeyev*, the book he wrote immediately before it in a quite different key. A reader who wants the whole shape should read them in that order and then find *In the World*.

It is worth ending on the fact this introduction started from. The man who would preside over the congress that bound every Soviet writer to a method wrote, before any of that, a book with no method in it at all — only a grandmother's God, a boy watching blood spread across a kitchen floor, and an instruction to get out into the world.