



PROGRESS QUARTERLY

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FICTION

Stout Hearts (This Happened Near Rovno)

Dmitry Medvedev

Introduction to this Edition

The emotional climax of this book is a piece of German police paperwork.

Nikolai Kuznetsov — the intelligence officer who spent two years in Rovno in the uniform of a Wehrmacht lieutenant named Paul Siebert, who shot the Reich Finance Adviser Funk, kidnapped General Ilgen, and killed the deputy governor of Galicia in a Lvov street in broad daylight — disappears in March 1944. Medvedev does not know what happened to him. What he has, and what he prints, is a copy of an urgent telegram to Berlin found afterwards in the papers of the Lvov Gestapo:

"This agent (the German documents give his name as Paul Siebert) has been recognised. He is a Soviet partisan—a spy and wrecker, who was active for a long time in Rovno with impunity. Among other crimes he murdered Dr. Funk and kidnapped General Ilgen."

And, at the end of it: "A communication has been received from the Pritzmann field group that Paul Siebert and his two accomplices have been shot."

That is the whole of the evidence. The only account of Kuznetsov's death in this book is the one written by the people who say they killed him, in the vocabulary of the people who killed him — spy and wrecker, crimes, murdered. Medvedev quotes it without comment and writes the next sentence himself: "Thus died Nikolai Kuznetsov, our comrade-in-arms."

The edition

Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow. The half-title reads Library of Soviet Literature — which settles a question our own catalogue had left open, since the series attribution had been the Internet Archive cataloguer's and not the book's. It is the book's.

The credits leaf carries two lines:

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY DAVID

SKVIRSKY DESIGNED BY V. BELYUKIN

David Skvirsky is the editor of record on Polevoi's A Story About a Real Man elsewhere in this collection; here he is the translator. The house's English was made by a very small number of people.

And, for the third FLPH volume in a row, there is no date and no copyright line anywhere in the book. The last leaf gives the Russian title and "Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics", and nothing else.

Our catalogue says 1950. Two things in the volume say otherwise.

The first is that Russian title: ДМИТРИЙ МЕДВЕДЕВ, СИЛЬНЫЕ ДУХОМ (ЭТО БЫЛО ПОД РОВНО). Medvedev published Это было под Ровно in 1948 and then rewrote and expanded it as Сильные духом in 1951. The English title Stout Hearts (This Happened Near Rovno) translates the 1951 book with the 1948 title in brackets, exactly as the Russian title page does — so the translation is of the later version and cannot precede it.

The second is the back matter, which advertises four books, among them Yuri Pilyar's account of two years in Mauthausen and S. Smirnov, _Heroes of Brest Fortress_, of which the advertisement says: "The author spent several years tirelessly looking up the Brest Fortress heroes and studying material about them." Smirnov's search for the survivors of Brest was a public campaign of the mid-1950s. A volume advertising its results is not a volume of 1950.

Record the printing as undated. This is now the third FLPH book in this strand whose catalogue date has come from a library record rather than from the object.

The word that is not in the book

Now the count, and here it is very short.

NKVD: zero. Chekist: zero. State Security: zero. The letters do not appear. Neither does Stalin as a person: thirteen

occurrences, all of them inside Stalingrad. Lenin appears nine times, the Party thirty-two, Communist seven, Komsomol once.

What does the work instead is a pair of words. Moscow, eighty-one times, and "our Command" — with its variants, thirty-four. Men are sent, recalled, supplied, decorated and reported to by Moscow and by the Command, and the reader is never told what either of them is.

Here is what they were.

Dmitry Nikolayevich Medvedev (1898–1954) was a colonel of the NKVD. From June 1942 to September 1944 he commanded the special-purpose partisan detachment "Победители" — the Victors — of the Fourth Directorate of the NKVD, operating in the Rovno and Lvov regions; Nikolai Kuznetsov was one of the men dropped with it. Medvedev was made Hero of the Soviet Union in 1944. None of that is in this book. The English reader is given a commander, a detachment, an airfield at Tushino, fifty volunteers, and no institution at all.

This matters less as concealment than as a category claim. Stout Hearts is published in a series called the Library of Soviet Literature, as a book about partisans. Partisans, in the Soviet account and in most others, are a popular movement: people in occupied territory who take up arms where they live. The Victors were not that. They were parachuted in, trained, equipped, directed by radio, and tasked from Moscow, and their most celebrated member was not a partisan at all but an agent working under cover in enemy uniform. The book is a good operational memoir of a special-forces and intelligence operation, presented as a story of the people in arms.

Medvedev himself is not coy about the substance — he describes the radio traffic, the forged papers, the mobile groups, the running of agents inside Rovno — only about the name. And the effect on a reader who does not know the name is real: the volume reads as though a body of local volunteers had spontaneously produced a man who could walk into the Reichskommissar's headquarters in a German uniform.

What the book is good at

It is much better written than it needs to be, and it begins with a small, disarming scene.

Fifty selected volunteers assemble at Tushino airfield one morning in April 1942 for their first parachute jump. Medvedev notices them being noisy: "the uneasy looks these

'jovial' chaps cast about them eloquently betrayed what they really felt." Someone asks whether it is frightening. And the commander says, on the record, that it is: "There's nothing to be done. Frightening or not, we have to jump." The men are astonished to hear it, and he fills the remaining half hour with a story about his own first jump — off a shed, in 1907, aged eight, in a workers' settlement in Byelorussia, because there was nothing else to do while the grown-ups had their party.

That is a good opening for a book by a colonel of state security, and it is characteristic. Medvedev writes short chapters — there are forty of them, most between one and three thousand words — each built round one operation, one person, or one death. He is precise about logistics, about distances (a hundred and twenty kilometres from Rovno to the camp, forty-eight hours for a messenger on foot), and about the arithmetic of what his detachment did. His own balance sheet, delivered flatly from a hospital bed in Moscow:

In the battles and skirmishes with the enemy we had destroyed nearly twelve thousand officers and men. Compared with that figure our own losses were small: a hundred and ten killed and two hundred and thirty wounded.

He is also, in the chapter "A Ghastly New Order", one of the few writers in this collection to say plainly what happened to the Jews. "In every town and village the nazis forced all the Jews to register." The Jewish population of Rovno and the surrounding districts, he writes, "was exterminated at the close of August in strict conformity to a plan": taken out of the town in large groups, made to dig their own graves, shot, and pushed into the holes without anyone stopping to see who was dead. "The vandals spared nobody, neither old folks nor babes in arms." And then the detail that does the work of a page of argument: the Germans warned the population on pain of death against assisting Jews, and offered a reward for informers — "a kilogram of salt for every Jew betrayed."

Medvedev saw the 1946 documentary of the Nuremberg trial and records that it "showed me nothing I did not see in 1942" in the districts of West Ukraine. Readers of Polevoi's volume in this series will recognise the courtroom; Polevoi was in it, and built a novel out of what Goering said there. Medvedev's version is blunter and, on this subject, more reliable.

The afternoon with Koch

The centre of the book is a chapter called "Received by Koch", and it is worth setting out because it is the most extraordinary

thing in the collection.

In May 1943 Valya Dovger, a young woman working in Rovno as Kuznetsov's cover, receives word that Erich Koch, Reichskommissar of the Ukraine, will see her at four that afternoon about her application not to be deported to Germany — and that she should bring Senior Lieutenant Siebert, since the Gauleiter will want to see that a German officer is interceding for her. Kuznetsov has no time to ask Moscow for instructions; Valya asks whether they can go without permission, and he answers that he will take his decision on the spot. (Both scans mangle the contraction that opens his reply, so it is given here without quotation marks.)

They drive down Rovno's main street, renamed Friedrichstrasse. Kuznetsov is in new parade uniform with a Nazi party badge, two wound ribbons and two Iron Crosses, a pistol in the holster on his left side and a second in his pocket with the safety catch released. Valya wears a crêpe mourning band and carries a police certificate, supplied by the detachment, stating that her father was killed by partisans — which the reader knows to be a forgery, because the book has already described how Konstantin Dovger was in fact seized by nationalists, beaten for information, tied with barbed wire and drowned in the river.

On the steps Valya asks whether he will shoot. Kuznetsov's answer, as the volume sets it: "I'm sure I can kill him."

He is not allowed in. Valya goes first, alone, into a study where the desk stands at an angle in the corner, where two guards sit between her and Koch and a third stands at the window, and where an Alsatian lies at his feet — "Good lord, how the man's guarded!" she thinks. Koch, "a big, corpulent man with a Hitler moustache and long reddish eyelashes", tells her she has German blood and "To beat the Bolsheviks, everybody must do his bit."

Then Siebert is called in. What follows is an interview between the Reichskommissar of the Ukraine and a Soviet agent, and it runs on small talk. Where were the crosses won — France, and the Eastern Front. What is he doing now — supply, in his sector. Which sector: "The Kursk Front." Where was he born — East Prussia, forty kilometres from Königsberg. "Ah, we come from the same place." Have the recent events frightened many — "You mean Stalingrad? No, they have only fortified our spirits."

And then Koch, pleased with himself, tells him to bear in mind that the Führer is preparing a surprise for the Russians in his Kursk sector.

Kuznetsov did not shoot, and explains why afterwards in terms that are entirely professional: the curtains, the guards, "that damned dog at your feet. They would have seized me before I could move." Koch's "fate is sealed, but he will be destroyed without risk to the detachment, to you or to me." And then the line that is the whole point of the chapter:

"All in all, this meeting has been useful. Koch told me that Hitler is planning an offensive in the Kursk sector, and we mustn't forget that Koch has only just come back from Berlin. The news therefore is fresh. We must report it quickly."

Whatever one concludes about the book's silences, that is what the detachment was for, and Medvedev tells it without a word of self-congratulation. He also lets Kuznetsov have the joke: "To think that an East Prussian like Koch never dreamed he was talking to a Soviet partisan who has never been to Germany in his life."

The best sustained writing is the Kuznetsov material — the invention of Paul Siebert, the forged papers "better than genuine", the long nerve-shredding business of a Soviet officer going to dinner parties in Rovno with the men he intends to kill. And the best single paragraph in the book is the one about the radio bulletin from Stockholm. Medvedev, in hospital, hears at ten to midnight that two German officials have been shot in a Lvov street by an unidentified man in German uniform, and that the killer escaped. He knows instantly who it was. He tries to sit up, the pain forces him back, he rings the bell — and then stops himself:

This was all unnecessary: I should not have called anyone. A nurse entered. "Please bring me a headache pill," I said. She went out. There was nobody here who would be interested to hear my news.

A man in a secret service learning, in a public ward, that his friend is alive, and asking for an aspirin.

The parts that are hard

Three of them, and they should be read with the same attention as the good pages.

The first is the treatment of the Ukrainian nationalist insurgency, which the detachment fought alongside the Germans as a matter of daily routine and which the book handles entirely through the vocabulary of criminality. Nationalists appear as "spies and traitors" who "organised

gangs of kulaks and criminals"; German operations against the partisans are reinforced with "nationalist gangs of bandits". That the OUN and UPA collaborated with the occupation at various points, fought the Soviets, and carried out massacres of their own is not in dispute. But a reader is given no political account of them whatever — no programme, no social base, no history, not even a name. "Bandera" does not occur in the book. The largest armed movement in the territory Medvedev operated in is present only as banditry.

The second is a silence in the epilogue. Valya Dovger, the young woman who worked as Kuznetsov's cover and who was arrested after he left, is tortured by the Gestapo, tells them nothing, is taken out to be shot, is moved to Lvov and then to Germany. "V-Day found Valya in a concentration camp in Germany: from there she returned home." That is the whole of it. What returning home from a German camp meant for Soviet citizens in 1945 — the filtration, the suspicion, the careers foreclosed — is not a subject this book can approach, and the sentence walks straight past it.

The third is more general. The epilogue is a roll-call of former partisans settled into peaceful work: factories, collective farms, institutes, a deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the Ukraine, a boy who is now a car mechanic and wears his Partisan Medal First Class with pride. It is warm and, so far as it goes, true. It is also written in 1951 by an officer of the organisation that spent those same years filling camps, and it contains not one shadow of that. The men come home and the country receives them. Nobody in this book is ever afraid of Moscow.

Why it is in this collection

Stout Hearts is the first title in this strand that is not fiction and was not written by a writer, and that makes it the sharpest test of what the series is for.

The book's virtues are real and belong to its author: courage, competence, an eye, a refusal to inflate his own part, and a plain statement about the murder of the Jews of Rovno at a date when plain statements on that subject were becoming rarer in Soviet print, not commoner. Twelve thousand German casualties against a hundred and ten of his own dead is, if the figure is anywhere near right, an extraordinary return, and he does not boast about it.

The book's limits are institutional, and they are not the author's private failings. A memoir by a serving officer of state security, published by a state publisher, in a series of literature, for export, cannot say what organisation it is about, cannot

describe its enemies politically, and cannot notice what its own service was doing at home. The result is a document that is simultaneously honest and structurally incapable of telling the truth about itself — which is a fair description of a great deal of Soviet publishing, and the reason for reading these volumes with the apparatus in view.

A note on this text

The ebook was built, until now, with thirty of the book's forty chapters.

The printed contents runs over two leaves. The build's chapter list had been taken from the first leaf and stopped at "Retribution", so everything from "In a New Camp" to the "Epilogue" — printed pages 182 to 234, nine chapters including Kuznetsov's disappearance and the whole of the ending — was swallowed into a single division of nearly nineteen thousand words. A tenth chapter, "Marfa Strucinska", had been written off as unproved because the contents page OCR'd her surname as Strucitiska; the heading is set perfectly cleanly in the body. All eleven have been restored, and the volume now divides exactly as the printed contents does, with the text accounted for to within one part in two thousand.

It is worth saying where the error came from, because it is the same error twice: both times a contents page was trusted over the body of the book. The contents page is the worse witness. It is set in smaller type, it is full of leader dots, and it is the first thing a scanner gets wrong.

Reading it now

Read it for the Rovno chapters, which are the best account in English by a participant of what running an agent inside an occupied city actually involved.

Read "A Ghastly New Order" as testimony, and remember that the man writing it had been there in 1942 and was comparing it, in his own mind, to the film of the Nuremberg trial.

And read the last chapter with the Gestapo telegram in front of you. Medvedev's finest friend vanishes, and the only paper that survives to tell him what became of him is the enemy's. He prints it whole, in the enemy's words, because it is all there is. That is an act of documentary honesty, and it sits in a book that cannot print the three letters that would explain who Medvedev was.

FICTION

Vassili Tyorkin: A Book About a Soldier

Alexander Tvardovsky

Introduction to this Edition

The most widely read poem of the Soviet war opens with a drink of water and then talks about soup.

When the dust of war blows bitter, When it's hot or cold as hell, Nothing's nicer, nothing's sweeter— From the spring or from the well, From the faucet or from Nature, From the hoof-track in the dell, From the river, any river, From the pool in winter's spell — Than a drink of pure fresh water; If it's water, then all's well.

Then food, and then the cook, who "must know his onions". Twenty-nine sections later the Red Army is on the road to Berlin and the poem has still not made a speech. That is not an accident of taste. It is the whole method, and Tvardovsky spends the afterword of this volume explaining it.

The edition

Progress Publishers, Moscow, first printing 1975, in the Progress Soviet Authors Library. Translated by Alex Miller. Illustrations by Orest Vereisky, People's Artist of the RSFSR — and Vereisky matters here more than an illustrator usually does: he drew Tyorkin for the front-line press while the poem was appearing, and his soldier is the face several million readers first attached to the name.

The copyright line is exact about what is being claimed: "© Translation into English. Progress Publishers 1975." Not the poem. The poem is dated, at the end, 1941-1945.

And this volume is built in a way no other book in the series is: it is a facing-page bilingual edition, Russian verso, English recto, all the way through the poem. A reader with any Russian can check Miller against Tvardovsky line by line, which is an unusual amount of confidence for a state publisher to show in a translator, and an unusual amount of exposure. (The afterword, which is prose, runs in English only.)

There is no commissioned foreword. What there is instead is Tvardovsky four times over: the poem carries four sections

headed From the Author, in which the poet interrupts himself to talk to the reader, and it closes with a prose essay, How Vassili Tyorkin Was Written, dated 1951-1966. A footnote to its title reads, in its entirety: "Published in abridged form.—Ed."

That footnote is the only editorial voice in the book, and it is there to tell you that something has been cut and not what.

What the poem does not contain

Now the count, which in this case is the argument.

Across the whole of Vassili Tyorkin — four years of the Great Patriotic War, from the retreat to Berlin, in twenty-nine sections — the name Stalin does not appear. The two occurrences of the letters are both Stalingrad. The name Lenin does not appear at all. The word Party occurs once and the word Communist once, and both are in the same place: a translator's footnote on page 175, explaining that the initials in the text stand for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Alex Miller put the Party into this poem in 1975. Tvardovsky did not put it there in 1945.

Against that: Russia and Russian, seventy-seven times. Soviet, seven. Motherland, nine. God, three.

It is worth stating plainly what that means, because it cuts two ways and both ways matter.

It is why the poem is good. Tyorkin is not issued with opinions. He is cold, hungry, frightened, funny, competent and alive, and the poem never once pauses to certify him. Set him beside Polevoi's Mereshev in this same series, whose title is defined for him at a funeral — "It's the funeral of a real man ... a Bolshevik" — and the difference is total. Nobody in Tyorkin tells you what a real man is. The poem simply lets one be one for four hundred pages.

It is also the measure of what had happened to the Soviet Union by 1942. A war poem for a communist state in which the word communist never occurs, written by a party member for a party army, is not a neutral fact. The formation that could

not be named was fighting under a name it had not chosen: Russia, the Motherland, the fathers and grandfathers, the soldier-toiler with his flintlock musket. Tvardovsky, in the afterword, resists exactly that reading — and we will come to how he resists it, because it is the most interesting thing in the book.

The poem

Read "Crossing Over" first if you read nothing else.

Crossing over! Crossing over! Left bank, right bank of the river, Crusted snow and fringe of ice.... Some found memories, some found glory, Some, the water's dark embrace— Not a vestige, not a trace.

The platoons board the pontoons in the dark, one after another, and most of them do not come back. Before they go, Tvardovsky does the thing he does better than anyone writing at the time: he looks at them.

For the lads now standing near you Aren't the ones you used to know; Each is closer, each is clearer, Each is graver, starker, dearer Than he was an hour ago.

And then, without raising his voice, he sets them in a line that reaches back past the Revolution:

Theirs the road down which the Russian Soldier-toiler had to go, Flintlock musket on his shoulder, Some two hundred years ago.

Two hundred years puts you in the 1740s. The poem is placing the men in the pontoons in a succession that starts with serfs.

The other section to read twice is "Death and the Soldier". Tyorkin lies wounded in the snow after the fighting has moved on, and Death comes and bargains with him. She is female in Russian, and the translator has to tell you so in a footnote — "Death the Squint-Eyed. But female in Russian.— Tr." — which is one of the few places in this edition where you can feel the seam between the two facing pages. What she wants is a signature:

"Just a token of agreement That you're weary of this world, That you pray for Death to free you...." "Sign my name, then, in a word?"

He will not. "Go! I sell my life more dearly." And the line he keeps coming back to, three times in the chapter, is not heroic and not defiant; it is administrative, the answer of a man

correcting a clerk: "I am still alive, not dead."

There is no God in that scene and no Party either. There is a man declining to sign a document. It is the most Soviet thing in the poem and the doctrine has nothing to do with it.

The strangest section is "Tyorkin v. Tyorkin", in which our Tyorkin, in a crowded hut, hears a stranger claim his name — "Because I'm Tyorkin," / Said the other soldier's voice" — and has to argue for his own identity against a double who is, by every test the poem can apply, equally real. Tvardovsky had written a character who had escaped him into folklore, and he put the fact in the poem while it was still happening.

The rest of the book is built the same way: small, closed episodes, each complete, each about one thing — a wound, an accordion, a medal, a bath-house, an old couple's clock, a soldier who goes home and finds nothing. There is no plot, and Tvardovsky says in the afterword that he removed the one he started to build. Halfway through he was, he writes, "nearly seduced by the temptations of 'plot interest'" and had begun sending Tyorkin behind the German lines; he had published a version of "The General" in which Tyorkin says goodbye to his divisional commander before going. Then he saw that this was "reducing the book to a kind of personal history", cut everything to do with the enemy rear, redrafted the chapter, and went back to the plan. What he wanted was a poem that could be opened anywhere by a man who might be dead before the next instalment.

The afterword, published in abridged form

The essay is organised around three questions Tvardovsky says his post-bag kept asking: did Tyorkin exist, how was the book written, and why was there no post-war sequel. All three answers are more interesting than they need to be.

On the first he is blunt, and against his own interest: "No, Vassili Tyorkin, as he figures in the book, is an invention from start to finish, a product of the imagination, a creation of fantasy." He has just spent several paragraphs describing readers who wrote to Tyorkin rather than to him, and he declines to flatter them. (Polevoi, in this same series, answered the same question the opposite way, and built a doctrine of authenticity on it.)

On the second he tells a story a state publisher might have preferred to leave in the file. Tyorkin began in 1939 as a cartoon. During the Finnish war a team of writers on the Leningrad Military District paper, On Guard for the Homeland

— Tikhonov, Sayanov, Shcherbakov, Vashentsev, Solodar and Tvardovsky — wanted "a humorous section, or weekly skit", and needed "a cheerful, happy-go-lucky soldier, a kind of rough-hewn folk figure" with a name carrying "irreverent and satirical undertones". Tvardovsky reproduces one of the resulting strips ("How Vasya Tyorkin took a prisoner", six captioned frames) and gives his own verdict on the whole enterprise: "Quite justifiably, we didn't regard it as literature." The Soviet Union's national war poem began as a comic strip, and its author says so on page 378.

Then comes the sentence that ought to stop the reader. Explaining what he was after in the men he had met on the Karelian Isthmus, Tvardovsky quotes his own notebook:

"It is not this war, whatever it may be like," I wrote in my notebook, "that has made these people, but the greater thing that was before the war. The revolution, collectivisation, the whole way of life. And the war has been revealing these people's qualities, has been bringing them out into the clear light of day. True, the war has done something too."

That is the counter-argument to the count above, and it is Tvardovsky's own. The qualities the poem shows are not Russian and not martial; they were made by a social transformation, and the war only lit them up. It is the same move Polevoi made at Nuremberg, and Tvardovsky makes it in a private notebook rather than a public tribunal, which is why it has the word collectivisation in it.

He does not say more, and that silence is worth marking rather than filling. Collectivisation appears exactly once in six and a half thousand words, in a list, as one of the things that formed a generation — no qualification, no cost, no dead. Tvardovsky was a village poet from the Smolensk country who wrote about the countryside before he wrote about the Army, and who says in this very essay that Army people were as dear to him "as the people of the collective farms in the country; but then, in the main, they are the same people". What the years around 1930 actually did to the villages he came from is not in this volume, and this introduction will not supply from memory what the volume does not print. What is here is the word itself, sitting in a quoted notebook entry, inside an essay the editors have already told you is abridged.

The third question — why no sequel — he answers with a flat refusal, quoting his own closing lines: "Now we need another song; / Wait, and it will come along." A book born of a unique moment cannot be continued with different material, he says.

The letters he quotes are wonderful, and the best of them is a complaint:

"Why has our Vassili Tyorkin gone and got himself wounded?" demanded D. Kaliberdy and others in a joint letter. "How did he end up in hospital? After all, he managed to shoot down a fascist plane without getting wounded. Has he landed up in hospital with a cold in the nose? That's not like our Tyorkin."

And one from a reader in the Smolensk Region who versified his demand and apologised for it: "I'm not a poet, but I was driven to it, just to get Tvardovsky working again."

But he had written a sequel, and the volume admits it in the smallest available type. A footnote — marked "Author's note", not editor's — mentions "Tyorkin in the Underworld, which was to be published many years later", and says that Tyorkin, "picked up half-dead on the battlefield, comes back to life from non-existence, from the 'other world', the description of which gives the theme of my 'second Tyorkin' its special contemporary significance." What that special contemporary significance was — a satire on the Soviet bureaucracy, conducted in the afterlife — the footnote does not say, and nothing else in the book says either.

The five pages about Yurasov

The essay ends somewhere no reader expects: five pages of controlled fury at an émigré writer.

A man named S. Yurasov had published in New York a book called *Vassili Tyorkin After the War*, subtitled "After A. Tvardovsky", taking Tvardovsky at his word that the poem was a work of collective authorship and rewriting it. Tvardovsky sets the two texts side by side, line by line, showing where his wording has been swapped out, and then quotes the stanza Yurasov inserted:

Been sent off to prison, maybe; Tyorkins these days are oppressed. Yes, in Forty-Five, they say he Made a bid to reach the West.

Progress printed that in 1975, in English, inside a denunciation. Tvardovsky's answer is that equating "a decent Soviet soldier and hero" with a defector's "contemptible history" can evoke "nothing but a revulsion"; he does not answer the factual claim, and the claim sits there on the page doing its work. He is on firmer ground when he objects that Yurasov quotes "stanzas, periods and whole pages of mine; but

nowhere does he use inverted commas". And he closes with a flourish that is worth reading twice, given who is printing it:

It is a telling fact that this man, who has gone over to the "service" of the bourgeois world where the supreme deity is private property, should have openly flouted the principle of literary property which, in our socialist society, is actually protected by the law, being essentially an ethical concept.

A Soviet poet, in a Soviet state publisher's edition, defending authorial property rights against the capitalist West. The last shot is the best one: the firm that published the plagiarism, he notes, had "no qualms about naming their firm in New York after one of the greatest and most noble of all Russian writers, Anton Chekhov."

The editor this book does not mention

Nothing in this volume tells the reader who Alexander Tvardovsky was by 1975, beyond the author of this poem. He had been dead for four years, and the last decade of his life is the reason his name meant what it meant.

The record is in our own press, written as it happened. In March 1966, on the eve of the 23rd Congress of the CPSU, World Outlook reported a collective letter from twenty-seven prominent intellectuals to the Central Committee asking that Stalin not be rehabilitated at the Congress; among the signatories it named "the writers Nekrassov, Simonov and Tvardovski". Later that year, in the International Socialist Review, Ernest Mandel — as Ernest Germain — recorded what followed: 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", noting that two of his assistant editors had been sacked over an attempt to print Simonov's war memoirs, and that there had been rumours for a year that Tvardovsky himself would go. He was forced out in February 1970 and died in December 1971.

Progress knew how to handle this, and had already shown how. Soviet Literature: Problems and People, which it published in 1970 and which is also in this series, discusses Tvardovsky at length and warmly, twenty times — always as the author of Vasily Terkin and Space Beyond Space, and never once as an editor.

This 1975 volume does the same thing by omission. It gives you the poem entire, in two languages, with the poet's own prose beside it, and it does not say that the man who wrote the afterword between 1951 and 1966 spent those same years publishing Solzhenitsyn and losing the fight.

Reading it now

Tvardovsky's own summary of what the thing had been to him is the best sentence in the essay, and it is a list of jobs rather than an artistic claim: "In the mutual relationship of writer and reader, Tyorkin was my poetry, my journalism, my song, my homily, my humour, my lore, my heart-to-heart talk, and my commentary on events."

Read the poem for itself. It survives the apparatus completely, because there is barely any apparatus to survive: nobody stands between you and it except Alex Miller, and the Russian is on the facing page if you want to argue with him.

Then read the afterword as a second poem, about how the first one got written and what it cost: the cartoon origin its author will not pretend away, the notebook entry with collectivisation in it, the footnote conceding a sequel it will not describe, the five pages of rage at a New York imprint, and the two words at the bottom of the first page that tell you the whole essay has been cut.

And keep one thing in view while you read about the crossing. Tvardovsky's claim in that notebook was that what made these men was not the war but "the greater thing that was before the war". If he was right, the qualities in this poem were produced by a revolution and can be produced again, and the poem is an argument. If he was wrong, they were Russian all along, and the poem is only a monument. The whole quarrel of this series is in that sentence, and the poet put it there himself, in a quotation, in an essay published in abridged form.

FICTION

Across the Lines

Victor Kin

Introduction to this Edition

The novel ends with a one-legged man being beaten to death by three Japanese soldiers in an empty town, and with a sentence that no socialist-realist novel would have been allowed to print twenty years later.

Matveyev, on crutches, fights all three. A crutch snaps. He spits blood and says, "I can't manage without crutches. One of them's broken." He is trampled; an officer tells the soldiers to drag him out. And then he sees his horse, "with the white heart-shaped mark on its brow", and swings into the saddle and rides down the long moonlit road:

"You see ... I'm ... not as bad as all that ..." he whispered as though in answer to a question someone had put to him in the past. His vanity was satisfied for the last time.

The horse is a dying man's hallucination and the book knows it. Under that last line stands a date: 1928.

The edition

This is the barest volume in the whole strand, and the bareness is the first thing to record.

The half-title reads LIBRARY OF SOVIET LITERATURE. The title page gives Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow. The credits leaf carries three lines:

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY RALPH PARKER AND VALENTINA SCOTT DESIGNED BY A. LIVANOV

Then a contents page listing twenty-one chapters. Then the novel, ending on page 252 with the date 1928. And that is all. There is no date of publication, no copyright line, no colophon, no printer's imprint, no advertisement for other titles, and not one word about the author. A reader who picks this book up learns the name Victor Kin from the title page and nothing else about him for 252 pages.

Ralph Parker is worth a note in passing: he is also the

translator of record for The Blue Notebook in the Kazakevich Selected Works of 1978, the novella in which Zinoviev is Lenin's companion at Razliv. The same English hand carried two of the most politically loaded texts in this collection, twenty years apart.

The author the book does not mention

Everything below comes from outside this volume, because the volume supplies nothing.

Victor Kin was a pen-name. He was born on 14 January 1903, worked as a Komsomol organiser in the Far East during the Civil War — the experience this novel is made from — and published По ту сторону in 1928. He was arrested on 3 November 1937 as an "enemy of the people" and shot on 21 April 1938. He was rehabilitated posthumously in 1956. (Sources differ in detail. A Russian biographical dictionary records only В 1937 Кин незаконно репрессирован — in 1937 Kin was illegally repressed — and has him dying in prison; the fuller account gives the arrest and execution dates above. Both agree on the shape of it, and both record the same fact about the book: С 1956 роман «По ту сторону» несколько раз переиздавался — from 1956 the novel was reissued several times.)

That last sentence settles something about the volume in your hands.

Our catalogue dates this printing 1950, on the authority of the Internet Archive cataloguer. The book itself is undated. But a novel by a man who had been shot as an enemy of the people, and who was not rehabilitated until 1956, was not in print in the Soviet Union between 1937 and 1956 — the Russian record is explicit that reissues begin in 1956. A Foreign Languages Publishing House translation into English, with the author's name on the cover, is therefore almost certainly from 1957 or later, and cannot be from 1950. The date should be recorded as unknown, and the 1950 dropped.

Which means this: the state that shot Victor Kin in 1938 put his novel into English and sold it abroad under his own name, and gave the foreign reader no biographical note of any kind.

Not a falsified one. None. The apparatus that would have had to say when he died simply was not printed.

What the counting shows, and why it means something different here

The vocabulary count in this strand has usually measured what a 1950s or 1970s editor left out of a book about the 1930s or 1940s. Here it measures something else, because the novel was written in 1928 and the text is the author's.

Stalin: zero. Trotsky: zero. Lenin twice, Marx twice, Communist five times. The Party appears twenty-six times. Komsomol, in this Komsomol novel, appears twice.

In a book written in 1928, those absences are not censorship; they are a young writer's sense of proportion. The Party is in the novel the way a workplace is in a novel — as the thing the characters do all day, argue with, get summoned by, are proud of and rude about. It is never invoked. The one place it turns up as a word of power is a joke, and the joke is at a Bolshevik's expense. Bezais, declaring himself:

"I love you very much — more than anything in the world. You're more important to me than anything on earth..."

And then the narrator, dryly: "But he was always a bit of a pedant." And Bezais, finishing the sentence: "..., except the Party," he added conscientiously."

She laughs at him. The novel lets her.

There is a second joke of the same kind, from the other direction. A doctor who shelters illegal literature but keeps out of things offers Bezais, with a bilious smile, "the address of one of your sort" — and then: "Just like you — always talking about the proletariat and the Party and doesn't know a thing about anything else. You Bolsheviks have no sense of humour, you're all alike." In 1928 you could print that. In 1948 you could not, and by then the man who wrote it was ten years dead.

The novel

Two Komsomol workers, Bezais and Matveyev, are sent from Chita to Khabarovsk in the Civil War in the Far East, and then across the lines into Japanese-occupied territory. That is the whole plot. What makes the book is the tone.

It opens with the two of them bored on a train. Bezais picks at

the putty on the window and complains: "There's another of those chicken-sheds over there. The train's going to stop near it and wait five hours until it's had enough." Matveyev sits on an upturned packing-case drawing five-pointed stars on his palm in indelible pencil. A bottle rolls about the floor for an hour until he gets up, swears, and throws it out of the door.

Two pages later they are given a carriage of their own, and the description of it is the best short account of 1920 I know in any of these books:

The outside of the carriage was decorated like a book for children. There were drawings of workers and peasants, of Negroes, of socialism, and of a big green snake with red eyes.

"Of socialism" — as one item in a list, between the Negroes and the snake. Kin was twenty-five and had actually travelled in those carriages, and he renders the agitational poster exactly as a bored young man would see it: as decoration, and slightly absurd, and his.

The landscape writing is the other surprise. The chapter called "Bezais and Romanticism" opens with a page on the Amur railway that has nothing to do with the plot: the paddle steamers that scared the duck out of the reeds, the wild bees over hollow trees, "enormous grey elks trod softly on the rotting carpet of pine needles", the salmon coming up to spawn until the river seethed, the clandestine gold-panning along the banks. And then the railway, in a single sentence: half-naked Chinese and shaven-headed convicts worked on it. (The scan damages the second adjective — one witness reads "shaven-hezded", the other "shaven-heided" — so it is given here without quotation marks.) They chop the scrub, "and clouds of mosquitoes whined over the bonfires". The romance and the cost of it, in consecutive paragraphs, without comment.

Then there is the sentence that ought to be quoted whenever this book is mentioned.

In the chapter called "That Was a Six-Inch", Bezais does something violent on an impulse he cannot afterwards account for. Kin does not dramatise it and does not excuse it. He explains it:

Of course, it was one of those absurd, sudden impulses which make a man do the most awful things. He had drawn his revolver automatically, without thinking what he was doing. But he was too young to regard people as mere stuff, and had not learned to force himself to shut his eyes and

ears when necessary.

Had not learned to. The sentence assumes that learning to is what happens — that regarding people as mere stuff and shutting one's eyes and ears when necessary are acquirable skills, and that a man of Bezais's age has simply not acquired them yet. Kin was twenty-five when he wrote it, and he was naming, in the middle of a Civil War adventure story, the exact training the following decade would administer to his generation and that would kill him.

What follows is better still, because Kin then gives the other position its best possible statement. Bezais begins to justify himself — "It was stupid of me," he says much later, "but all the same, I must say ..." — and Matveyev stops him: "That's enough, that's enough." And then the narrator sets out Matveyev's creed, in free indirect speech, without a hint of irony:

A man's life is cheap and you should not worry about every individual. If you did, it was impossible to fight or, in fact, to do anything at all. You had to think of people as platoons and companies, not as individuals, but in the mass. It was not simply a question of expediency, it was just because you were taking a risk yourself; if you did not think about yourself you had the right not to think about others too. What does it matter to you who is shot or robbed or raped? You must think of your class — individuals will always look after themselves.

And the conclusion, in his own voice: "If you want to be a Bolshevik," Matveyev concluded, "you must first of all stop being a wreck."

Then four words: "But Bezais did not agree with him."

That is the argument of the book, and Kin refuses to settle it. The creed is stated at full strength and given to the character the novel most admires — the man who will die on his crutches at the end fighting three soldiers. The objection is given to the younger man and consists of nothing but disagreement: no counter-speech, no doctrine, no moral. The chapter moves on. A novel that could hold those two things in suspension was possible in 1928; by the time this translation was made, the question had been answered for everyone concerned, including its author.

There is a companion to it in the underground chapters. Bezais's contact in the occupied town is a man called Chuzhoi — the name means the stranger, or the other one — with a lean face and a slight squint, whom Bezais admires so much "that at

one time he mechanically began to squint himself", and whom he thinks "wonderful, clever and fanatical, the way Narodovoltsi should be." A young Bolshevik in 1920 measuring his hero against the People's Will, the terrorists of the 1880s: Kin lets the older revolutionary tradition stand in the book as the standard, without a word of the doctrinal correction that would have been compulsory later.

The middle of the book is a long comic-grim sequence about Matveyev's leg — a bone fracture, a doctor, an amputation, crutches — with chapter titles that read like a man refusing to dramatise his own disaster: "A Bone Fracture", "The Professional Approach", "The Leg", "People Don't Die of It". The last of those is the sentence people say to him.

And there is a love story that the novel treats as a nuisance and then takes seriously. Lisa tells Bezais what the order of things is: "The main things in life are, first, work, then food, then rest, and then love. You can't live without the first three but I can get along without your kisses." She is right about the order and wrong about herself, and the chapter in which that becomes clear is the one our own build had lost.

Look at the contents page as a list and the book's temperament is there before you read a word: "Too Much Nature", "All Men Dream", "That Was a Six-Inch", "The Middle-Aged Man", "A Thousand Rubles", "A Matter of Expediency", "A Bone Fracture", "The Leg", "The Clay Dog", "A Small Request", "No Need to Worry", "She Cried", "People Don't Die of It", "Performance Postponed", "I'm Not as Bad as All That". Not one of them is an abstraction, a slogan, or a promise. They are the things people actually say while something is going wrong. The Russian title, *По ры cropoxy*, is flatter still — on the other side — and the English *Across the Lines* is a little more military than the original.

A note on this text

Which is worth admitting, because it is the kind of error this project exists to catch.

The volume's contents page lists twenty-one chapters. The scan read the eighteenth as 'QSHE CRIED', and because the entry could not be matched it was written off as unproved — so the ebook was built with twenty chapters, and "No Need to Worry" ran on for fourteen printed pages carrying two chapters instead of one. The body heading is perfectly clean: a single line reading 'SHE CRIED' at the head of page 197, and the only such line in the book. It has been restored, and the volume now divides exactly as the 1957-or-later printing does.

The lesson has been written into the build notes: when a contents entry will not match, look for the heading in the body before writing the chapter off. The contents page is the worse witness.

What the silence costs

It would be easy to make this introduction a complaint about a missing biographical note, and that would be too small.

The point is what the note would have had to contain. Across the Lines is a novel about young communists who go into danger on the other side of a front line and mostly do not come back, written by a young communist who had done it, and its last words are a dying man's boast that he was not as bad as all that. Nine years after he wrote it, the state he had fought for arrested him; ten years after that, it shot him. Eighteen years after that it decided it had been wrong, and began reprinting the book. Then it translated it into English and sold it abroad with his name on the cover and no dates beside it.

A reader in London or Delhi in 1958 was given a good, funny, sad Civil War novel and no means whatever of knowing that. The omission is not an oversight in the way a missing translator credit is an oversight. It is the shape the rehabilitation took: the work returned, the man not accounted for. The Soviet state was prepared to un-ban a book and not prepared to print the sentence that would have explained why it had needed un-banning.

That is the same operation this series has now found in four other volumes, each time in a different register: Polevoi's novel revised in 1957 with Stalin's name scoured out and no note saying so; Paustovsky selected up to 1954 and no further, so that the years in which he defended Sinyavsky and Daniel disappear; Tvardovsky's afterword printed "in abridged form" with the abridgement unspecified; Kazakevich's Zinoviev printed a hundred and eleven times with no annotation at all. Here the method is at its purest, because here there is no apparatus to examine. There is only a book, and the absence of everything that would have placed it.

Reading it now

Read it as a first novel by a young man who was very good and did not get to become anything else.

The things to watch for are the ones a socialist-realist editor would have removed: the boredom of the opening, the pedant's "except the Party", the doctor's crack about Bolsheviks and

humour, the decorated carriage with socialism between the Negroes and the snake, the convicts under the railway, the flat refusal to make the amputation heroic. None of it is dissident. All of it is simply a writer noticing things, in a year when noticing was still allowed.

And read the last page knowing what it is. A man alone in an occupied town, beaten down by three soldiers, imagining a horse and telling someone who is not there that he was not as bad as all that — and a narrator who will not let him have even that, and writes "His vanity was satisfied for the last time."

Victor Kin was thirty-five when they shot him. The book is dated 1928 and the volume is dated nothing.

FICTION The Cause You Serve

Yuri German

Introduction to this Edition

There is no foreword to this book. There is no critic's essay, no author's note, no publisher's statement of purpose. Between the contents page and the first line of the novel there is one leaf, carrying two lines:

And never ending battle! Tranquillity is but a dream....
ALEXANDER BLOK

That is the whole apparatus. A Soviet state publisher sent a 474-page novel about a doctor abroad in English, and the only thing it put in front of the reader was a couplet by a Symbolist poet who died in 1921.

The lines come back three hundred pages later, in the mouth of a schoolgirl. Varya, who is in love with Volodya and cannot say so, recites "a line of Blok" to him in a whisper — "And never ending battle! Tranquillity is but a dream..." — and he asks what it is, and she recites the whole poem, and he listens with his eyes closed and repeats the words. That is how this novel handles its own epigraph: not as a motto stamped on the front, but as something one adolescent says to another on a walk.

The edition

Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow. The half-title reads LIBRARY OF SOVIET LITERATURE. The credits leaf carries three lines and nothing else:

ILLUSTRATED AND DESIGNED BY A. VASIN
TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY OLGA SHARTSE
EDITED BY ROBERT DAGLISH

Note the third line: this is a translation with a named editor, and the editor is Robert Daglish, who turns up across this whole strand — translating Tvardovsky's preface to the Kazakevich volume, translating Bondarev's *The Hot Snow* in 1971, and here, in the 1950s, editing Olga Shartse. The house's English was made by a small number of people working over decades, and the catalogue that records "translated from the

Russian" and stops has thrown away most of what is knowable about how these books were made.

Three corrections to our own record.

The series. Our catalogue lists this under the Progress Soviet Authors Library, on the strength of advertisements on the 1974 Paustovsky and Serafimovich jackets. The volume itself says LIBRARY OF SOVIET LITERATURE — the earlier FLPH series. Describe it as what it is.

The date. This volume carries no date and no copyright notice of any kind. The last leaf gives the Russian title, Дело, которому ты служишь, and the words "Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics", and nothing more. The only year printed anywhere in the book is 1956, in a back-matter advertisement for Sergei Antonov's *It Happened in Penkovo* (1956). The printing therefore cannot be earlier than 1956, and the "1955" attached to our file is the Internet Archive cataloguer's, not the book's.

The extent. The last printed page is 474, and the text ends with three words the catalogue does not record: END OF BOOK ONE. This is the first volume of a trilogy, and the volume says so.

Inside, the structure is unusual and worth noticing: fifteen numbered chapters, each of which is only a divider, and inside them fifty-two named sections — "Natural Sciences", "Mushrooms", "No Skeletons for Sale", "Old Man Pych", "I Drink!", "Black Death". The chapters carry no titles and the sections carry no numbers. The book reads like a serial, which is what its rhythm is built for.

What the novel is about

Volodya Ustimenko decides, in the ninth form, to become a doctor, and the novel follows him from that decision to a plague expedition in the Far East on the eve of the German invasion. It is a Bildungsroman about a vocation, and its subject is the difference between doing a job and serving a cause.

Around him the book assembles a hospital's worth of people: Aunt Aglaya, an Old Bolshevik who raises him; Varya, who loves him; Professor Zhovtyak, a careerist; Postnikov and Polunin, doctors of a different kind; Old Man Pych; the trader Markelov, who owns the ferocious dogs and asks the question that titles one of the best sections, "What Is the Purpose of Life?". Yuri German was a professional at this. The sections are short, each turns on a scene, and the prose gets out of the way.

Two things make it more than competent.

The first is that the novel takes medicine seriously as work. Volodya is not gifted; he is stubborn. The measure of him at the end is not a triumph but an audit. On the last page, riding out of Khara with the caravan, he weighs what he has done:

"A certain amount! Not very much, really," he was thinking. "But then did Professor Barinov's expedition mean so little? And I was a part of it. A tiny part of the whole, of my country."

And the novel's last sentence, with the war already burning beyond the mountains: "There, too, he would serve the cause to which he had dedicated his life." The title phrase occurs nowhere in the body of the book. It is the name of the final section and of the volume, and the novel never says it out loud.

The best single scene is the one the title-question names. Markelov is an Old Believer trader in the Far East, rich, dying, with chained dogs in the yard and a daughter whose fingers are "ablaze with diamond rings". He sends her out, drinks from a bottle kept behind a threadbare armchair, and delivers an account of his own upbringing that is worth more than any amount of class analysis:

"My ancestors came here, fleeing the persecutions of our father the tsar. They taught me their faith. 'Tell me, brother, who dies but rots not?' And very glibly I answered, 'The Mother of God, she died but rotted not, and was taken alive to heaven.'"

And then, in the same breath, what else they taught him: "to put myself above the local people, because another newcomer of another nationality might put himself above me and bleed the local people drier than I could"; to sharpen his fangs, "for man, they said, is like wolf to man"; to make the vodka that cost next to nothing and sent the local native "round in circles"; to smoke sable skins darker so they would fetch three times the price; and "how to make a quiet end of a heathen in the taiga if that unbeliever became difficult". All this while "a

visiting canoness of the old faith kept mumbling about the divine virtues, humility, understanding, abstinence, charity, brotherliness, concord, and love of your neighbour."

He cannot square the two, and he knows it. "I spilt no native blood myself, it sickened me to, but my late parents were smeared with that blood, plenty of it, and now it is crying out. That is why my brains are twisted and all upside down. Is there an illness like that?"

"Not that I've heard of," Volodya replied. "You will."

Then the question: "What is the purpose of man's existence?" A colonial merchant on the Soviet frontier, asking a young doctor whether there is a diagnosis for inherited guilt. German gives him the better lines, and gives Volodya no speech at all in reply.

The second is Spain.

Spain, and what the novel does with it

A third of the way through, Volodya's father — a flyer — disappears on an assignment whose destination the family is not told. The novel handles it as a conspiracy inside a household. Aglaya asks straight out, "To Spain?", and is lied to, badly; and then she buys herself a map of Spain and studies it at night with the door locked against her nephew, while the children keep their own map in Varya's room.

What she hears while she looks at the map is the song her brother Afanasy and her husband Grisha had both loved:

*We're out to fight the bankers, the landlords and the rest,
We'll seal the doom of kulaks, the damn blood-sucking
pests. We, Red Army soldiers, are fighting for the poor, To
give the people freedom and make their lives secure...*

Grisha is dead; the novel does not say how, and Aglaya's certainty that "her own husband would certainly have been too" in Spain is the nearest it comes to telling us. And what she thinks over the map is the best passage in the book, an elegy for a generation:

*She knew that generation of Bolsheviks well, loud-voiced
lads who had gone through fire and water and never said
die. Practically illiterate in the years of Civil War, they
were now graduates of academies. There was nothing they
couldn't do, those men of steel.*

Read that in 1956 and count what is missing. Aglaya is

remembering Bolsheviks who fought the Civil War and then took degrees — the cohort that was destroyed between 1936 and 1938. The novel puts them in Spain, where a great many of them did in fact go, and where the ones who came back were frequently arrested for having been there. It says none of that. It says "men of steel" and moves on.

The Spain material itself is unusually concrete for a Soviet novel of the period. Volodya, half asleep, follows the war through the press: the *torreros* of Seville who gave in to "Queipo de Llamo, the insurgent general" [sic — the book's spelling of Queipo de Llano]; the island of Minorca; the Valencian expedition aboard the *Almirante Miranda*; the Iviza landing that the newspapers will not explain. Varya starts wearing a Spanish cap, and asks Volodya whether the Spanish drink tea, "and there was no one to answer her question". And when she is trying not to cry in the street she talks too fast about the day's news:

"Have you read about that wonderful brigade forcing a crossing over the Ebro? It was the battery named after Ernst Thaelmann."

A few pages later the two of them go to the cinema and the newsreel is Spain: "Germans in the Thaelmann battalion singing the 'Carmagnole'", the insurgents' tanks at Jarama, volunteers moving up at the Segovia bridge, "Huge, black 'Junkers'" overhead. The section that follows is titled FATHER IS DEAD.

International Brigades, named; German communists fighting fascism in Spain, named; the Ebro and Jarama, named. In a Soviet novel published in Moscow in 1956, for export. That is not nothing, and it is worth saying why it could be there at all: Spain was the one internationalist commitment of the 1930s that the post-1956 Soviet state was prepared to remember warmly, because the men who went could be honoured without asking what happened to them afterwards.

What is not in it

Now the count, which in this strand has become the most reliable instrument we have.

Stalin: zero. Not once, in a 474-page novel that runs from the Civil War to June 1941, whose characters argue about the news every week, who follow Spain in the papers, who listen to the radio. Lenin appears nine times, the Party twenty-six, Marx five, Communist three, Komsomol eleven. Spain, twenty-three.

A 1956 novel could have gone either way. In February 1956 Khrushchev made the secret speech; this printing is from that year or later, and the man whose name had been in every Soviet book for twenty-five years has simply been left out. Not attacked — left out. It is the same manoeuvre we found in the Polevoi volume, where a 1946 novel reprinted from a 1957 revision contains the name nowhere except inside Stalingrad, and where an Order of the Day is quoted without its signature.

What is there instead is more interesting than an absence, and Yuri German put it at the front of the book, in a portrait of a marriage in 1919.

Stepanov is a young commissar working himself to pieces at a railway junction. In his sleep he grinds his teeth and shouts: "Saboteurs! I'll get you shot, you dirty sharks, it'll be too late then." His wife Alevtina lies beside him and weaves her ambitions:

He would climb the ladder, to the very top, and stand alone above all the rest, and everyone would be afraid of him, and then she, Alevtina, would take a ride through the town in a red, powerful car with great big headlights, the kind of car that once used to be brought to the door for Mrs. Gogolev, the barrister's wife.

She dresses her child in velvet and lace collars like the barrister's children, serves carrot-brew in Dresden cups, draws more than her ration at the stripped Petrograd warehouses, and learns the register that gets results: "And a commissar's wife can just go and starve, eh? Never mind, I'll go to the Cheka and everybody'll get it hot."

Two pages. A man who dreams in the vocabulary of the show trials fifteen years before the show trials, and a woman who has already worked out that the revolution has a ladder and that fear is what it is made of. German published that in the Soviet Union in the middle of the 1950s, at the front of a book whose hero is a doctor, and then never returned to it.

The novel also thinks hard about fascism, which is rarer in this fiction than one would expect. One character runs through the evidence like an analyst: why Hugo Eckener flew his airship to the United States, why the Bremen took the Blue Riband outbound and not homeward, the flyers and the boxers and the films — "German strength demonstrated everywhere, German victory, German superiority, the German fist" — and then the list that matters: "Thaelmann is in prison — what does it imply? The 'Thousand-Year Empire' — what does that imply? The German delegation has left Geneva — why? Now they've founded an Anglo-German corporation in London". A Soviet

novelist writing in the mid-1950s remembering, accurately, what the mid-1930s looked like to someone who was paying attention, and remembering that the City of London was in the story.

The shape of the silence

It is worth being exact about what this novel does and does not do, because the temptation with a book like this is to over-read it.

It is not a dissident novel. Volodya is a good Soviet man, Aglaya is a good Bolshevik, the villains are careerists and traders and time-servers, and the state is never wrong about anything that matters. The plot does not go near a purge. Of the two occurrences of the word "arrest" in the whole book, one is a drunk and the other is a quarantine.

But it declines to do several things that a 1949 novel would have had to do. It does not name Stalin. It does not give its hero a moment of doctrinal certification — nobody tells Volodya what a real man is, as Polevoi's ward tells Meresyev at a Bolshevik's funeral. It takes its motto from Blok rather than from a Congress. It gives the careerist's psychology to a commissar's wife rather than to a class enemy. And it puts a generation of Old Bolsheviks on a locked-door map of Spain and then stops the sentence, which is a different act from never having written it.

The best single index of the book's politics is its structure: fifteen empty chapter-numbers and fifty-two named scenes. There is no thesis holding it together, only a vocation.

Book One

The last words are END OF BOOK ONE, and that is the frame the reader should keep.

German went on to complete the trilogy, and where he ended up can be watched inside this very collection. By 1980, Felix Kuznetsov's *Of Human Values* — a Progress book, also in this series, written by the First Secretary of the Moscow Writers' Organisation — was conducting a tour of Soviet prose in which every writer's conscience is certified as having come out where the Congress said it should. German is not in that book, but the machinery is, and it is the machinery that received this trilogy. A novel that begins with Blok and a boy deciding to be a doctor ends up, two volumes later, inside a genre whose official critics knew exactly what it was for.

For the reader now, what survives is the first volume's stubbornness. Volodya is right about almost nothing except that the work matters and that most of the people around him are not doing it properly. "A certain amount! Not very much, really." That is a strange sentence to find at the end of a Soviet novel of the 1950s, and it is the reason to read this one.

Reading it now

Read the sections as they come; they are built to be read that way, and the best of them stand alone — "Mushrooms", "Old Man Pych", "A Nocturnal Conversation", "What Is Happiness?"

Read the Spain chapters against the calendar. The father goes out, the maps come into the house, the newsreel shows the Thaelmann battalion singing the "Carmagnole", and then the section called FATHER IS DEAD. Nothing in the book says what the year is or what was happening in Moscow while Varya was learning where the Ebro runs.

And read the two pages about Alevtina twice. The man shouting "Saboteurs!" in his sleep in 1919, and the wife who has already understood that the point of the ladder is that everyone below it is afraid — those pages are the part of this novel that its author could not have published under the name of analysis, and did publish under the name of a marriage.

FICTION The House on the Square

Emmanuel Kazakevich

Introduction to this Edition

Somewhere in the middle of this novel a Soviet lieutenant-colonel, unable to sleep, writes out fifteen numbered rules for governing a conquered country. He heads the page MEMORANDUM OF A SOVIET COMMANDANT, signs it, and dates it Lauterburg, 1945.

"1. Self-interest is the worst failing a commandant can have. However brilliant an administrator he may be, however well he may know his district, if he is mercenary by nature he should be removed from his post at once."

"3. A man cannot be an angel, but a commandant must be the nearest thing to it. He must live strictly within his means, drink only at home, and never look at any other woman except his wife."

"10. The commandant must see to it that the citizens of the area under his jurisdiction blame him personally if things go wrong, and credit Moscow for all the good."

"14. The commandant is always right inasmuch as he has the army behind him. Hence he must see to it that he is always in the right."

"5. A commandant is a revolutionary inasmuch as he represents a state and social system brought into being by revolution; as a revolutionary, it is his duty to uphold law and order, to respect and guard the customs of the given country, in order to rid the people of that country which is not yet ripe for revolution, of all fear of revolution."

"8. The commandant must be a diplomat, but only in his dealings with enemies. In his dealings with the population he is obliged to be brutally frank."

And the last of them, which is the one a reader is likeliest to remember:

"15. The commandant is the master of the house, strict at times but always just." "At the same time the commandant is also a guest, and as such he must respect his hosts who

have been temporarily deprived of the right to manage their own affairs. He must remember that this was done for the sole purpose of helping them to regain that right."

His friend Chokhov finds the pad and reads it twice. Lubentsov comes in, goes scarlet, and snatches it away: "Dash it, you mustn't read that rot!" Chokhov says quietly, "It isn't rot." Lubentsov insists it is — "The result of insomnia. 'The Confessions of a Second-Rate Commandant.' All right, forget it." And Chokhov: "No, I shan't forget it."

That is the best thing in the book and, in its way, the most surprising document in this whole collection: a political theory of military occupation, set down by a fictional Soviet officer, which its author gives us in full and then has the officer disown in embarrassment.

The edition

Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow. The half-title reads Library of Soviet Literature.

And then — for the fourth FLPH volume in a row in this strand — the credits page is missing. There is no date, no copyright line, no colophon, no printer's imprint. This one goes further than the others: there is no translator's name anywhere in the book. Kin's volume named Ralph Parker and Valentina Scott; Medvedev's named David Skvirsky; German's named Olga Shartse and Robert Daglish. This one names nobody. Somebody turned 150,000 words of Russian into serviceable English and the house did not record who.

There is, however, a jacket blurb, running to two flap pages, and it is worth reading because it does two things.

The first is that it quotes the novel's central parable — the waxen idol that melts beside the fire in which pottery is being baked. "Why are you so cruel to me," the idol asks the fire, "to pottery you impart strength but me you destroy?" And the fire replies: "You have only your own nature to blame. I am always the same." The flap explains: Lubentsov, "like a purifying flame", is "intent on melting the idols of time-honoured prejudice".

It also drops something. In the novel the parable is not the professor's own: he introduces it as "an all but forgotten fable by Heinse", and he tells it to Lubentsov's face as a compliment and a warning — remain true to yourself, "bringing joy to noble clay and striking fear in the hearts of the waxen idols of all shades and hues." The flap keeps the parable and loses both the attribution and the point.

The second thing the flap does is what the Paustovsky jacket in this same series does. It prints, inside quotation marks, a sentence the book does not contain. The flap has Lubentsov writing: "The commandant is always right, because he is backed by armed force. That is why he must see to it that he is really always right." The book has: "The commandant is always right inasmuch as he has the army behind him. Hence he must see to it that he is always in the right." A house that could not find room for the translator's name found time to rewrite him for the cover.

The flap also tells the English reader what else is available: "The English reader has had the opportunity of reading three books by E. Kazakevich in English. These are: Star, Spring on the Oder, Heart of a Friend." Star and Spring on the Oder are in this collection. Heart of a Friend is not, and this is the only place in the strand that records it existed in English at all.

The contents page lists three items and no more: PART ONE. Journey to the Harz (p. 11), PART TWO. The Land (p. 203), PART THREE. The Ordeal (p. 381). The seventy numbered chapters, the three unnumbered interludes called The Tale of the Six Soldiers, and the closing section Two Letters are not listed anywhere. A reader who wants to know the shape of this book has to read it.

The date, which is wrong

Our catalogue records this as FLPH 1950. It cannot be.

Дом на площади was first published in Russian in 1956, in the almanac Литературная Москва — the two-volume collection that was one of the defining publications of the thaw and that was attacked and stopped after its second number. An English translation therefore postdates 1956; the volume itself, carrying no date at all, gives us no way to say by how much.

There is internal corroboration. The novel closes with two letters, and the first is signed and dated: "With Victory Day greetings, Yours truly, V. Chokhov. May 9, 1950." A novel whose epilogue is set five years after the war was not printed in English in 1950.

This is now the fourth title in this strand whose catalogue date came from a library record rather than from the object, and the fourth FLPH volume found to carry no date at all. The pattern should be treated as the norm for this series, not the exception.

Goethe, untranslated

Before the first line of the novel stands an epigraph, and the house left it in German:

*... Du hast nicht oft Zu solchen edeln Tat Gelegenheit
Versagen kannst da's nicht; Gewähr es bald. "Iphigenie auf
Tauris." Goethe.*

No translation, no footnote, no gloss. An English-language book about the Soviet occupation of Germany, published in Moscow for readers in London and Bombay, opens with four lines of German verse and assumes you will manage. It is, in its small way, the novel's thesis stated as a production decision: the German inheritance is not the enemy's property.

Kazakevich makes the same point inside the book, as a joke. The commandant's office is furnished with a T-shaped conference table "so beloved of bureaucrats", a green baize desk, and "Portraits of Lenin and Stalin hung on the wall to the left of the desk." Then Voronin, the driver, fetches two more from the Soviet Military Administration:

*he considered it highly appropriate that the portraits of
these two great Germans, the connecting links, as it were,
between the ideological life of both countries, should hang
in the office of the Soviet commandant.*

Marx and Engels as two great Germans, hung in a German town hall by a Red Army driver with an eye for decor.

What the counting shows

The apparatus count in this strand usually measures an editor's silences. Here it measures a novelist's proportions, and they are unusual.

Stalin: three. One is a portrait on an office wall; one is a rumour heard in the town; one is a fragment. In a novel of 150,000 words published in 1956 about the Soviet administration of Germany in 1945, the General Secretary is a picture. Lenin: seven. NKVD: zero. Against that, Party 65 and Communist 55 — which is far more than any other book in this collection, because here the words are doing real work: the novel is about German Communists, the merger of the parties

in the Soviet zone, the elections, the land reform, and who is to run a town.

German occurs over five hundred times; American a hundred and forty. This is the only novel in the strand whose subject is the frontier between the two.

The occupation, and the thing the novel is honest about

Lubentsov is a wartime reconnaissance scout — a man from Kazakevich's own trade, and the same figure as the hero of Star — made commandant of the small town of Lauterburg in the Harz. The novel is about administration: water supply, electricity, coal, the burgomaster, the school, the denazification files, the professor who will not leave.

Its moral position is stated against a cynic, which is the right way to state it. Lubentsov's interpreter, a young woman of twenty-four with violet shadows under her eyes, explains what she has learned about Germans: "the harsher the better." They respect the British, she says, "because the British look down on them and treat them like dirt". They respect the Americans less. And the Russians not at all, "because they're always being democratic in the wrong places" — and then, bitterly: "It's funny to see Russians, after all they've been through, slapping Germans on the back like old pals. Even Russian Jews do it, I've seen them myself."

That sentence, in a novel published in 1956 by a writer who had begun as a Yiddish poet, is the only substantive appearance of Jews in the book, and it is a sneer put into the mouth of a character the hero corrects. Lubentsov's answer is four words long and is the whole novel: "There are all sorts of Germans," he says, and then, "Besides, it's very pleasant to be generous."

Readers who have the 1978 Selected Works in this collection will recognise the silence around this. Tvardovsky's preface there names The House in the Square among the war books, records in a subordinate clause that Kazakevich "before the war had been known only as the author of verses and poems in Yiddish", and says no more; the word "Yiddish" occurs once in that whole volume and "Jew" not at all. Here, in a book set in occupied Germany in 1945 and written by that same man, the Jews of Europe appear once, in a remark about backslapping.

It is not evasion by the author so much as the shape of what could be printed. But it is the thing to notice, and it is why the

novel's real subject — whether a conquering army can make itself trusted — is being argued at one remove from the thing that made the question unanswerable.

The best scene in the book follows that conversation, and it is quiet. The commandant's platoon puts on its first amateur concert; the hall rocks with laughter; passers-by stop in the street to listen and melt away when they catch sight of "Oberstleutnant Davai" — Lieutenant-Colonel Give-Us, which is what the town calls him — watching them from the window. Tanya and Chokhov go back inside, and Lubentsov is left alone at the glass:

Watching the lights being turned on in the city, Lubentsov realized that the incredible had happened—he had fallen in love with Lauterburg, its streets and gardens, the paving stones of its squares, its tiled roofs and old alleys, the green hills round it and the people—most of them, but certainly not all—inhabiting it.

That parenthesis is the measure of the book's honesty: most of them, but certainly not all. And what he says next, half to himself, is the only thing a man in his position could say — that they must never think of attacking us again.

Part Three

The last part is the best-judged and the least consoling. It opens on the demarcation line through the Harz, which at first runs "through the bracken, past small mountain waterfalls" and is "barely noticeable", and then

gradually it began to bristle with barbed wire, road blocks, and sentry boxes, to be guarded on one side by Soviet patrols, and on the other by British and American—in the hills by Scots in kilts, and further south by Yanks in steel helmets and baggy trousers. Slowly but surely it was assuming all the features of an international frontier.

Written in 1956, about 1946, this is a novelist watching a line in the woods turn into Germany's border for the next forty-three years, and saying so plainly. The Cold War arrives in this book not as denunciation but as fencing contractors.

And the ending is deliberately small. No summation, no speech. Lubentsov, Tanya and Voronin on a train going east, the trees casting dappled shadows over the compartment; and then two letters, five years later, in which we learn that Lubentsov is in his last year at the Frunze Academy and rents a room near Zubovsky Square, that Chokhov commands a

battalion in the Transcaucasus and has a daughter called Tanya, and that Voronin "works at a shoe factory in Ivanovo. He is married now and has two children, I believe."

The last words of a novel about the government of a defeated nation are a shoe factory in Ivanovo and a man who is not quite sure how many children his old driver has.

A note on this text

This ebook has been rebuilt twice in this project and is worth a warning to whoever comes after.

The scan lost nine of the seventy chapter numerals outright, promoted a folio to a chapter heading, and left all three part titles and all three Tale of the Six Soldiers interludes unmarked, because their pages carry no text the scanner could read. None of that showed in a word count — no text was missing, only its divisions — so the automatic audit passed the book while it was in four pieces instead of seventy-five. Every position has since been fixed against the page, using the PDF's own letter-spaced text layer as a second witness where it preserved a numeral our derivation had lost. In this pass the closing section Two Letters, which the scan ran on to the last word of chapter 19, has been given its own heading, and a stray 'Q' — the ghost of a worn numeral on page 77 — has been removed from chapter 8's title.

There is no contents page to check the result against, because the book's own contents lists only the three parts. The structure printed in this edition is the structure of the 1956 text as the scan attests it.

Reading it now

Read the Memorandum. It takes four minutes and there is nothing else quite like it — a serving officer's fifteen rules for occupying a country, including the instruction to read Saltykov-Shchedrin "for he was a vice-governor himself and hence familiar with shortcomings in administration". (The Golovlyovs is in this collection, and the joke is better if you have read it.)

Read the fifth rule twice, because it is the argument the novel exists to make: that a commandant "is a revolutionary inasmuch as he represents a state and social system brought into being by revolution", and that his duty as a revolutionary is "to uphold law and order, to respect and guard the customs of the given country, in order to rid the people of that country which is not yet ripe for revolution, of all fear of revolution."

Whether the Soviet Union did that in Germany is a question this book cannot ask. That its best officer thought it was the job is worth knowing.

And read the last page for what it does not say. The man who wrote it had been a Yiddish poet before the war — and, on the evidence of the preface to his *Selected Works*, a theatre manager and a collective-farm chairman in the Soviet Far East — then a divisional reconnaissance chief, then a Russian novelist; he published this in the most contested Soviet literary publication of 1956; and he died six years later. This volume tells you none of that, does not date itself, and does not name the person who put it into English.

FICTION

Selected Works: Poetry and Prose

Taras Shevchenko

Introduction to the 1964 Edition

This volume has a second title page, facing the English one, and it is not in Russian.

It is in Ukrainian. Taras Shevchenko · Vybrani tvory · Poeziya ta proza — selected works, poetry and prose — Ilyustratsii z oryhinaliv T. Shevchenka, illustrations from originals by T. Shevchenko. And at the foot, the publisher's own name in Ukrainian: Vydavnytstvo Prohres, Moskva.

Every other volume in this strand, including Progress's own later Shevchenko of 1979, carries its facing title page in Russian. This one is in Ukrainian, down to the publisher's own name. That tells you what kind of book it is before you have read a word, and the editorial note inside confirms it:

This volume has been prepared especially for the 150th anniversary of the birth of Taras Shevchenko. Sponsored by the Ukrainian Shevchenko Jubilee Committee, the book aims to comprehensively acquaint the English-language reader with the life, works and ideas of the great Ukrainian poet.

This is a jubilee edition, made in Kyiv's interest and printed in Moscow, for the hundred and fiftieth anniversary in 1964. It matters, because it produced the most scrupulous piece of editorial apparatus this series has met.

Shevchenko

Taras Hryhorovych Shevchenko (1814–1861) was born a serf on an estate belonging to the Engelhardt family. He was a house-boy and then apprenticed to his owner's painter in Petersburg. In 1838 his freedom was bought: Karl Bryullov painted a portrait of the poet Zhukovsky, the portrait was raffled for 2,500 roubles, and the money bought a man.

Kobzar followed in 1840, and Ukrainian literature had its national poet.

In 1847 he was arrested with the Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius, a Kyiv society for a federation of Slav

republics and the abolition of serfdom. His sentence was the heaviest of the group, because of the poems found on him: service as a private soldier in the Orenburg garrisons, with an instruction added by Nicholas I in his own hand that the prisoner be forbidden to write or to paint. He served ten years.

He was released in 1857 and died in 1861, a week before the emancipation manifesto was read in the churches. He is buried, as he asked, on a hill above the Dnieper at Kaniv.

The editorial remarks, which are exemplary

Most volumes in this strand carry a commissioned foreword that tells the reader what to think. This one carries a foreword too — "The Bard of the Ukraine", by Yevhen Kyrlyuk, the leading Shevchenko scholar of the period, who would write the foreword to Progress's 1979 edition as well. The translators are credited individually, and one name is worth noting: the diary is translated by John Weir, the Canadian-Ukrainian communist and translator who spent much of his life carrying Ukrainian literature into English. But the volume also carries something rarer: a set of General Editorial Remarks that explain what the editors did and where they failed.

They are candid about the shortfall:

It will not detract from the successes achieved in this undertaking to state quite candidly that the translations still fall short of the rare richness of Shevchenko's poetry.

They are candid about an omission — "Unfortunately, it has not been possible to include one of his plays" — which is more than the 1979 volume manages about the several things it leaves out.

And they state plainly the fact about Shevchenko's two languages that the later edition leaves for the reader to notice:

All of Shevchenko's poems included in this volume were written in the Ukrainian language and are either translated directly from the Ukrainian or have been checked with the original. Shevchenko wrote his autobiography, his novels and his diary in Russian and the translations were made

from that language.

That is the whole linguistic situation of a colonised literature in two sentences, set down without embarrassment. The poetry is in the mother tongue. The prose — written in exile, for the only market that existed — is in the imperial one. The 1964 editors tell you which is which and translate accordingly.

Then there is the transliteration policy, which is the single most Ukrainian-conscious paragraph in this entire strand:

Ukrainian names have been retained as they are pronounced, except in cases where a different spelling is already established in English.... The absence of a separate letter for the "g" sound in the Ukrainian alphabet has presented some difficulties. Ukrainians usually sound "h" where Russians, English and others use "g"...

Editors in Moscow in 1964, preparing a book for English readers, stopping to explain that Ukrainian has h where Russian has g and choosing to follow the Ukrainian. It is a small thing and it is not nothing.

What the volume contains

The selection is large and the shape of it is the argument.

The poems run from "The Bewitched" and "Katerina" through Haidamaki entire — including "Gonta in Uman" — to the late lyrics and "Testament". There is "The Caucasus". There is "A Dream", the satire on Nicholas I's court. There is "To N. Kostomarov", written to a fellow prisoner of the Brotherhood.

Then, under PROSE: the Autobiography, the novel The Artist, and the Diary.

Then apparatus most Progress volumes do not attempt: General Editorial Remarks, a section called The Historical Background, and forty pages of notes.

That last inclusion deserves comment. The Historical Background exists because, as the editors say, "a number of Shevchenko's poems here included are on Ukrainian historical themes and others contain references to the past of the Ukraine", and they judged it better to give the history in one place than scatter it through the notes. An English reader in 1964 could not be assumed to know anything about the Hetmanate, the Zaporozhian Sich or the Koliivshchyna, and this edition simply tells them.

It also tells them something else, and here the ideology is

visible:

The second largest of the Slavic nations of Europe, the Ukrainians are historically, linguistically and culturally close to the Russians and Byelorussians. All three Eastern Slavic nations developed from common ancestors, the ancient Rus, who a thousand years ago established a great and flourishing early feudal state with Kiev as its capital.

That is the standard Soviet formula of the three fraternal East Slavic peoples descending from Kyivan Rus. As history it is defensible in outline and heavily freighted in use: a shared origin is a fact about the tenth century and an argument about the twentieth. A reader should register that the historical sketch preceding these poems begins by establishing closeness, and that the poems themselves are frequently about the opposite.

The Autobiography

Shevchenko wrote his life in the third person, and it is funnier than anyone expects.

Taras Shevchenko, the son of a serf peasant, Grigory Shevchenko, was born on February 25, 1814, in the village of Kirilovka, Zvenigorod district, Kiev Province, on the estate of the landowner Vassily Vassilyevich Engelhardt. When he was going on eight years of age, having lost his father and mother, he found refuge with a church sexton in a school as his pupil-drudge.

The sexton discovers the boy can read, and puts him to work:

The sexton, realising that his pupil-drudge had the ability, used to send him in his stead to read prayers for the souls of serfs who had passed away, for which he paid him every tenth kopeck in remuneration.

Every tenth kopeck. And then the orphan takes his revenge, in a sentence that is worth the price of the volume:

But despite such flattering attention from his strict Spartan teacher, on one of the many days and nights when the Spartan teacher and his friend Iona Limar were dead drunk, the pupil-drudge, baring the buttocks of his mentor and benefactor, without a twinge of conscience gave him a good dose of the rod. Having avenged himself to the full and purloining a book with pictures, that very night he ran away...

An eight-year-old serf orphan flogs his drunken schoolmaster, steals a book with pictures in it, and runs. Shevchenko tells it

about himself, in the third person, with "mentor and benefactor" placed exactly where the sarcasm will do most damage.

This autobiography is not in Progress's 1979 Shevchenko. It is one of the reasons to have this edition.

The Diary

The other reason is the diary, and its first entry should be read by anyone who wants to know what a ban on writing actually costs.

Nicholas I had ordered that the prisoner be forbidden to write or to draw. Shevchenko obeyed for ten years. On 12 June 1857, with release in sight, he began a notebook — and this is the first thing he thought worth recording:

The first remarkable event to be entered in my notes is that while trimming this first notebook for those notes, I broke my penknife. The event would seem too trivial to be mentioned as something extraordinary in this motley book. If that incident had taken place in the capital or even in a sizable provincial city, it would not, naturally, have found its way into my memorandum book. But it occurred in the Kirghiz steppe, i.e., in the Novopetrovsk fortress, where for a literate person, such as I, that item comes dear; and what's most important, it cannot always be acquired even for a considerable sum of money.... Now it is clear why in the Novopetrovsk fortress the loss of a penknife is an event that deserves to be recorded. But let them be — both the fortress and the knife; soon, God willing, I will break out of this boundless prison.

The next day he explains why the diary does not cover the ten years:

I ought to have started my journal when I was first pressed into the armed forces, namely, in 1847. By now it would have been an exceedingly thick and an exceedingly boring notebook. Recalling those past ten sad years, I am heartily glad that the happy thought to provide myself with a notebook did not strike me at that time. What would I have jotted down in it? It is true that during those ten years I saw things gratis which not everyone manages to see even for money. But how did I see all this? As a prisoner sees a gay marriage procession through a grating.

As a prisoner sees a gay marriage procession through a grating. That is the sentence, and it is worth all the forewords

in this strand put together. The decade is not described because a man forbidden to write does not become a witness; he becomes someone watching other people's lives happen on the other side of a grating.

There is no sentence like it in the 1979 volume, because the 1979 volume does not print the autobiography and prints less of the diary.

The poems against the frame

Because what this volume prints, at length and uncut, keeps declining to be fraternal.

Katerina — dedicated, in gratitude, to the Russian court poet whose portrait bought Shevchenko's freedom — opens by telling Ukrainian girls that "Muscovites are foreign folk", and repeats it twenty lines later. The Caucasus takes the side of the mountaineers against the empire that is conquering them and ends by inviting the conquered to admire "Boundless Siberia" and "prisons — myriads!" A Dream — subtitled, flatly, A Comedy — takes the reader to the imperial capital to look at the Tsar. It carries an epigraph from the Gospel of John about "the spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it seeth him not", and it opens by sorting humanity into its occupations:

Each man on earth has his own fate, ... This one builds up, that one lays waste, And that casts greedy eyes O'er all the globe, to find somewhere A land not yet enslaved, Which he could conquer and then bear With him into the grave.

A land not yet enslaved, which he could conquer. That is the third couplet of the poem, and it is aimed at an empire the poet was a subject of. Manuscripts of A Dream were among the papers found on Shevchenko in 1847, and they are a large part of why his sentence was heavier than those of the other members of the Brotherhood.

And Haidamaki gives the 1768 rising in full, including the part where Shevchenko stops the poem to call what his own people did "the vengeance worse than hell" and asks, "Oh people! Will you e'er / Be satisfied with what you have?"

None of this is censored. It is all here, in a book sponsored by a Ukrainian jubilee committee and printed by the Soviet state's own house, with an introductory essay establishing how close the three East Slavic nations are. The volume contains its own contradiction and does not attempt to resolve it, which is more honest than resolving it would have been.

Which edition, and why we are reissuing both

Progress issued Shevchenko twice in English, and this series reissues both printings, because they are different books.

This one, 1964, is the Ukrainian jubilee edition: Ukrainian title page, Ukrainian sponsorship, the autobiography and the diary, the historical sketch, the notes, and an editorial statement that explains its own decisions and admits its own failures.

The 1979 Selected Works is a Moscow Classics Series volume: Russian facing title page, a slimmer apparatus, and no general editorial remarks. It has one distinction of its own, and it is a strange one — four other volumes in that series head their half-title "PROGRESS · RUSSIAN CLASSICS SERIES", while the Shevchenko reads only "PROGRESS: CLASSICS SERIES". Somebody removed a word rather than replace it.

Between them the two printings record fifteen years of the same house deciding, twice, how to hand a Ukrainian national poet to English readers — once from Kyiv's side and once from Moscow's. Read the 1964 for the apparatus and the prose. Read the 1979 for the later selection. Read both for what the difference tells you.

A note on reading the two together

A reader who acquires both Shevchenko volumes in this series will find a good deal of overlap in the verse and almost none in everything else, and the difference is not a matter of length.

The 1964 edition was made to answer a question: what would an English reader need in order to understand this poet? Its answer was an autobiography, a novel, a diary, a historical sketch of Ukraine from Kyivan Rus onward, forty pages of notes, a statement of translation policy, and an admission that the translations fall short. The 1979 edition was made to fill a slot in a series.

Neither is dishonest. But the earlier book treats its reader as someone who needs equipping, and the later one treats its reader as someone who needs introducing. That is a real change in what a state publishing house thought foreign readers were for, and it happened in fifteen years.

What is living

A serf bought out of bondage with the price of a portrait, forbidden by an emperor's own hand to write or draw for ten

years, who produced the strongest poetry against empire written inside that empire in the nineteenth century.

And an edition made by people who cared enough to explain why they had put an h where a Russian would have put a g.

FICTION

Fathers and Sons; A Nest of Gentry

Ivan Turgenev

Introduction to the 1974 Edition

A word enters the language at a breakfast table.

"What is Bazarov?" Arkady looked amused. "Shall I tell you what he really is, Uncle?" "Please do, nephew." "He is a nihilist." "A what?" Nikolai Petrovich asked, while Pavel Petrovich stopped dead, his knife with a dab of butter on the tip arrested in mid-air.

The butter on the knife is why Turgenev is Turgenev. A generation is being announced, and what the novelist watches is a middle-aged gentleman's hand stopping in the air above his toast.

Fathers and Sons was published in 1862, the year after the emancipation of the serfs, and it did something very few novels have done: it named a political type that did not yet know it had a name, and the type took the name up. Within months "nihilist" was in the newspapers, in the police reports, and in the mouths of the young men it was supposed to describe. No Russian novel has ever been fought over harder, and the fight began at once — Pisarev in *Russkoye Slovo* claiming Bazarov as the portrait of a new man, Antonovich in *Sovremennik* denouncing the book as a slander on the younger generation. Both were reviewing the same pages.

The edition

This Progress volume, in the Russian Classics Series, carries two novels: *Fathers and Sons* (1862) and *A Nest of the Gentry* (1859). Both are translated by Bernard Isaacs and illustrated by Konstantin Rudakov. The copyright leaf records a first printing in 1951 and this second printing in 1974 — a translation already twenty-three years old when it was reissued, which is worth knowing, since Isaacs's English has the slightly starched quality of the early fifties and renders Bazarov's slang more politely than Turgenev wrote it.

The jacket sells the book like this:

Today, just as a hundred years ago, readers derive an

inimitable delight from Turgenev's novels... Another amazing thing is Turgenev's ability to raise his readers to a higher moral plane.

And it quotes Saltykov-Shchedrin: after reading Turgenev "one breathes more easily, believes more readily, and feels more warmly."

Note what is not there. No class, no emancipation, no 1860s, no nihilism. The most politically contested novel in Russian literature is offered to the foreign reader as a source of moral uplift and easier breathing. That is a choice, and we will come back to it, because the volume's own preface does something a great deal more interesting.

The preface, which is better than the jacket

The volume opens with eleven pages headed "Ivan Turgenev", signed Yuri Mann — a real scholar, best known for his work on Gogol, and not a hack. What he does in his first paragraph is the most sophisticated move this series has yet met in a commissioned preface.

He begins with Turgenev's own statement of method:

"...To achieve a reproduction of the truth, the reality of life accurately and powerfully is the greatest happiness for a writer, even if this truth does not coincide with his own sympathies."

And then Mann:

This statement was not just a declaration, for in striving for the truth Turgenev sometimes came up against his "own sympathies" — both political and social — and overcame them.

Readers of this series should recognise that immediately, because it is Engels. In the 1888 letter to Margaret Harkness, Engels argued that Balzac — a legitimist, a monarchist, a man whose sympathies lay entirely with the doomed aristocracy — nonetheless "was compelled to go against his own class sympathies and political prejudices", saw "the necessity of the

downfall of his favourite nobles", and described them "as people deserving no better fate". That, said Engels, "I consider one of the greatest triumphs of Realism, and one of the grandest features in old Balzac." The writer's honesty about what he sees defeats his own politics. (The letter is in Marx and Engels On Literature and Art, also reissued in this series, where a reader can check the argument at its source.) Lukács built a career on the idea. It is a genuine and powerful piece of Marxist criticism, and Mann deploys it properly rather than decoratively.

Applied to Turgenev it does real work. He was a liberal gentleman of the landowning class, a Westerniser, temperamentally appalled by the young men of the 1860s — and he produced in Bazarov a figure so much larger than his author's distaste that the radicals claimed him. Mann is entitled to the argument and makes it well.

So this introduction is not going to complain that the preface is crude. It is going to ask what the argument leaves out, which is a different thing.

What the Engels move settles, and what it does not

Here is Mann on why Bazarov achieves nothing:

Bazarov was by no means against the progressive ideas of his time, as some readers imagined. But the standards he set were so high and his nature was so restless that he was always finding himself in the position of a maximalist whom no concrete political slogans could satisfy: neither the liberal's hope in reforms (he saw the narrowness and emptiness of liberalism), nor the idea of peasant communes (he saw what was behind this, and knew that a commune was anything but a cell of socialism, as the Utopists believed), nor enlightening propaganda (which he considered insufficient). Maximalism doomed Bazarov to idleness.

Read that carefully, because it is doing something under cover of praising him.

Every rejection Mann lists is correct. Liberal reform was narrow; the peasant commune was not a cell of socialism, and the Populists who thought it was were wrong; propaganda alone was insufficient. Bazarov is right about all three, and Mann concedes it. Then the conclusion: "Maximalism doomed Bazarov to idleness." His failure is attributed to his nature — to being a maximalist, restless, pitched too high.

But the reason a man in Russia in 1859 who had correctly rejected liberalism, the commune and mere propaganda had nothing left to do was not his temperament. It was that the thing he needed did not yet exist. There was no organised working class in Russia in 1859 and no party; there were a few hundred students, some émigré printing presses, and the peasantry. Bazarov is idle because history had not yet supplied the instrument, and Turgenev — to his enormous credit — shows exactly that and refuses to invent one.

To call this maximalism is to make a political vacancy into a personality defect. And the reason a Soviet preface of 1974 might prefer the psychological explanation is not hard to see: the historical one raises the question of what a revolutionary is to do when no instrument exists, which is a question with a considerable afterlife.

There is one more sentence of Mann's worth holding up, because it gives the whole game away in parentheses:

As though to prove to the revolutionary youth how unbiased he was (and actually suppressing his class prejudices and sympathies) Turgenev readily and with great feeling portrayed revolutionaries...

Actually suppressing his class prejudices. The Engels argument says the writer's honesty defeats his sympathies without his intending it — that is what makes it a triumph of realism rather than a change of mind. Mann's parenthesis converts it into something Turgenev did deliberately, which is a claim about his politics rather than his art, and a much weaker one. The apparatus cannot quite leave the writer alone with his own achievement.

Bazarov

He is named four hundred and seventy-six times, and he is one of the few characters in fiction who genuinely changed how people behaved.

His creed arrives in pieces, thrown across drawing rooms. On art: "A decent chemist is twenty times more useful than any poet." On the Russian people, to Arkady, who has just accused him of a bad opinion of them:

"What's the odds! The one good thing about the Russian is the rotten opinion he has of himself. What really matters is that two and two make four, the rest is nonsense."

That is not a line a Soviet edition would have chosen for its

jacket. It is also, as anyone who has read Russian nineteenth-century literature knows, uncomfortably well observed.

And then the sentence everything else hangs on. Arkady, gazing at fields in low evening sun, asks whether nature is nonsense too:

"Yes, nature is nonsense, too, in the way you understand it. Nature's not a temple but a workshop, and man in it is a workman."

It is the most famous sentence Turgenev wrote and it became a slogan for two generations — printed on posters, quoted in engineering schools, set as an examination question. What is almost never quoted is what Turgenev does with the next line. A cello starts up in the house:

Somebody was playing feelingly, if inexpertly, Schubert's Expectations, and the sweet melody floated silver-toned on the air. "What's that?" Bazarov said in amazement. "It's my father."

The workshop is announced, and the temple answers from an upstairs window, badly played, by a decent middle-aged man. Turgenev does not adjudicate. He simply puts the cello immediately after the slogan and lets the reader hold both. That is the novel's method throughout, and it is why both sides could claim it in 1862.

The duel, and what Turgenev thought of both sides

There is a duel in *Fathers and Sons*, between Bazarov the nihilist and Pavel Petrovich the Anglophile dandy, and it is the most quietly devastating thing in the book because neither man is allowed to be ridiculous alone.

Pavel Petrovich, who has spent the novel defending principles, aristocracy and the necessity of form, provokes it over a servant girl and conducts it with immaculate correctness. Bazarov, who has spent the novel declaring that two and two make four and the rest is nonsense, accepts — and then, having shot the man, immediately turns doctor and dresses his wound. The materialist's professional reflex overrides his politics within seconds. The aristocrat's code survives his own blood being spilt for it.

Turgenev lets both of them keep their dignity and takes it from both of them at once. A duel in 1862 was already an anachronism and both men know it; they fight anyway, because the one has no way to express contempt except

through the forms he despises and the other has nothing left but forms. Neither position survives contact with the other, and the novel does not tell you which loses.

This is where an introduction from our tradition has to be careful. It is tempting to read the duel as the aristocracy's obsolescence, and it is that. But Turgenev gives Bazarov no better instrument than a pistol either, and the scene is as hard on the negation as on the thing negated. He is not writing the funeral of one class from the standpoint of another. He is writing two men who cannot do anything with each other except shoot, in a country where nothing else was yet available.

The death

Bazarov cuts himself dissecting a typhus case and dies of it — a death with no meaning at all, which is the point.

Turgenev gives him a last request to the woman he loves and cannot have, and then five words:

"That's all!" he murmured and sank back on his pillow. "Now ... darkness...."

And then the scene that settles what kind of writer Turgenev was. The dying atheist is given the last rites:

During the ceremony of Extreme unction, when the consecrated oil was applied to his chest, one eye opened and it seemed as though, at the sight of the priest in his vestments, the fumes of incense rising from the censer and the candles in front of the icons, something akin to a shudder of horror flitted across the livid face of the dying man.

One eye opened. The materialist is anointed while unconscious, by parents who love him, and his body objects on his behalf. Turgenev is not scoring a point for religion or against it. He is recording that a man's convictions do not protect his corpse from his family, which is true, and that the family's love is not made less by it, which is also true.

A Nest of the Gentry

The second novel in this volume is three years older and a quieter thing altogether: Lavretsky returning from abroad to an estate, a woman he cannot marry because his wife is not dead after all, and a renunciation.

It is worth reading here for a specific reason. Written in 1859, two years before the emancipation, it is the fullest portrait Turgenev made of the class he came from — its cultivation, its uselessness, its self-knowledge — and of what that class did with its remaining time, which was mostly to feel things exquisitely. Read it before *Fathers and Sons* and Bazarov's contempt stops being a pose. He is looking at these people.

And the class content is not buried, whatever the jacket says about moral planes. The novel's finest single line comes when Lavretsky, in a Paris hotel, discovers that his wife has been unfaithful. What rises in him is not the injured husband of French drama. It is his pedigree:

he wanted to go to them and say: "You shouldn't have played jokes on me; my greatgrandfather used to hang the muzhiks up by their ribs, and my grandfather was a muzhik himself" — and then to kill them both.

Great-grandfather hanging serfs by the ribs; grandfather a serf. Both in one bloodline, both available as a threat, surfacing together in a rented room in Paris in front of a wife and her lover. That is the Russian gentry explaining itself in a single sentence, and it tells you more about what the emancipation was about to undo than any amount of breathing more easily.

Turgenev then does the characteristic thing. Lavretsky does not say it, does not kill anybody, writes a letter instead, and spends a paragraph pleased with a phrase he has composed. The violence stays in the bloodline where it came from, and what comes out is a well-turned sentence. Nobody has ever been harder on that class, and he was of it.

What is living

The refusal to resolve.

Fathers and Sons survives because Turgenev would not do what both his critics demanded, which was to declare. Pisarev read it and found a hero; Antonovich read it and found a libel; Mann in 1974 reads it and finds a triumph of realism over class sympathy. All three are reading a novel that declines to tell them which it is, and that declining is the achievement.

For our tradition the book is useful in a way neither the jacket's moral uplift nor the preface's Engels quite captures. Bazarov is the record of a correct negation with nothing to attach itself to — a man who saw through liberalism, populism and propaganda in 1859 and had, in consequence, nothing whatever to do. Every movement has produced such people,

and what becomes of them is not a matter of temperament. It is a matter of whether there is an organisation for them to join.

Turgenev could not supply one, and had the honesty not to pretend. He gave Bazarov a scalpel cut instead, and the cello playing upstairs.