

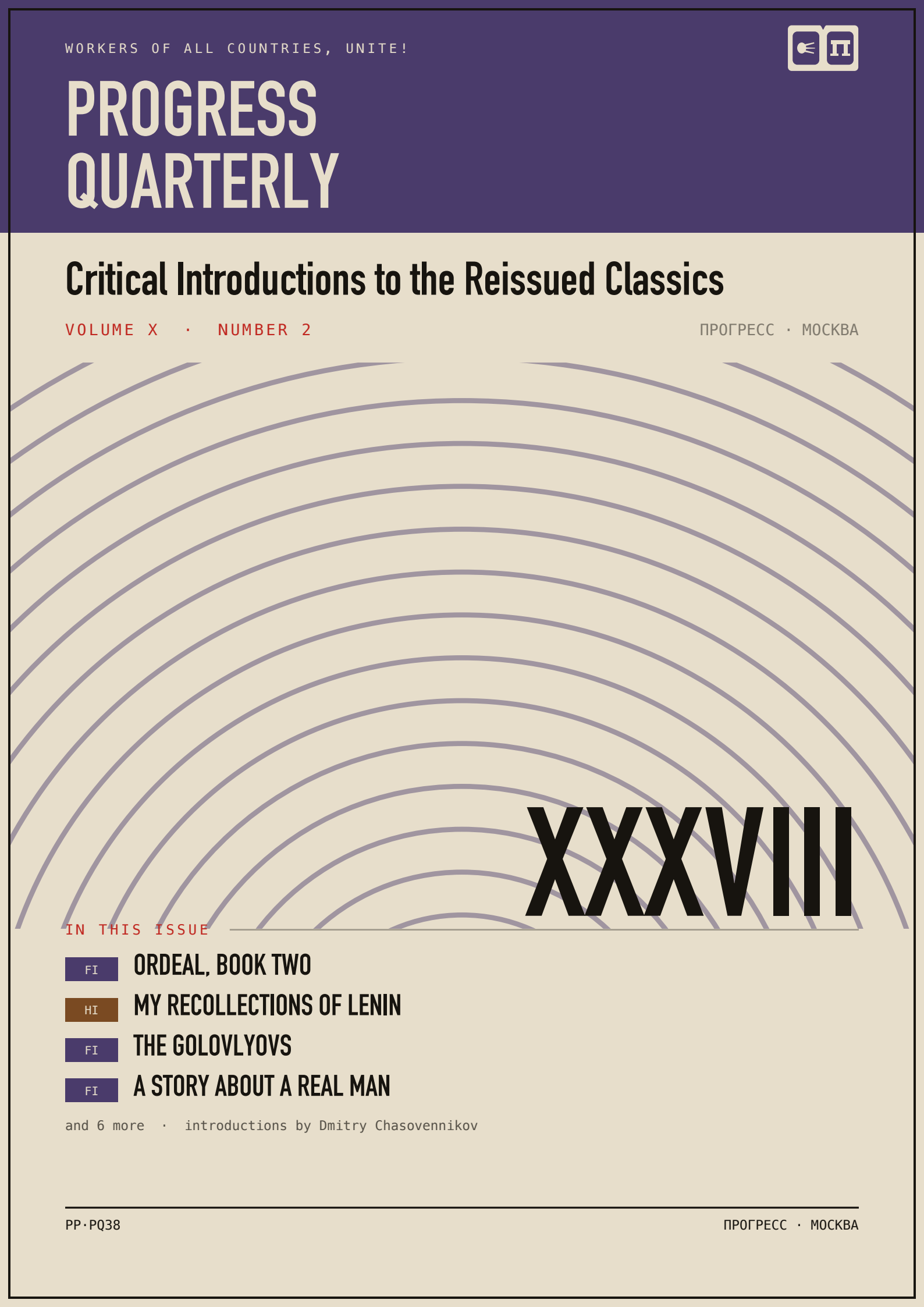


PROGRESS QUARTERLY

Critical Introductions to the Reissued Classics

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FICTION

Ordeal, Book Two: Nineteen Eighteen

Alexei Tolstoy

Introduction to the 1965 Edition

Here is how this novel describes the creation of the Red Army in the autumn of 1918. Read it once for what it says, and then read it again for what is missing.

...mobilized the staunchest Communists of Moscow, Petrograd and Ivanovo-Voznesensk, and dispatched them to the army. They travelled by train towards the fronts, breaking down any sabotage, both deliberate and unintentional, which they came across on the line. The stern regime of terror was established in the army, too. Disorganized and wilting detachments were transformed into regiments subordinated to the will of the Revolutionary Military Council. Valour and prowess became the order of the day. Cowardice was regarded as tantamount to treason. The Red front took the offensive. One sharp blow accounted for Kazan, and soon after, Samara fell. The White detachments fled in panic before the Red Terror. At Tsaritsyn, where Stalin was on the Revolutionary Military Council of the Tenth Army, a vast and bloody battle was going on against the White Cossack army of Ataman Krasnov, who had the aid and connivance of German headquarters....

Everything in that paragraph is true. Communists were mobilised from the cities and sent to the fronts. They did travel by train. A regime of terror was established in the army, and cowardice was treated as treason. Kazan did fall to a sharp blow in September 1918, and it was the turning point of the civil war. The Revolutionary Military Council did impose its will on detachments that had no discipline and no officers.

The Revolutionary Military Council had a chairman. He was the man who assembled the Communists, who lived on the train, who restored the death penalty in the army, who stood at Sviyazhsk through August and September and took Kazan back. His name was Leon Trotsky and it does not occur in this book.

We counted. In a novel of a hundred and twenty-eight thousand words about the year 1918, Lenin is named fifteen times, Stalin once — in the sentence above — and Trotsky not

once. The figures are identical in the 1965 printing.

That sentence about Tsaritsyn is doing a precise job. The paragraph describes Trotsky's work at length and attributes it to an institution: things are done by "the Revolutionary Military Council", in the passive, by a will without a person. Then, immediately, a name is supplied — and it is the name of the man who was a member of a different Council, of the Tenth Army, at a subsidiary front. Kazan happens to no one. Tsaritsyn happens to Stalin.

The edition, and why the dates matter

Alexei Tolstoy wrote this book in 1927 and 1928.

Those are not neutral years. In November 1927 Trotsky was expelled from the Communist Party. In January 1928 he was deported to Alma-Ata. In 1929 he was expelled from the Soviet Union altogether. The erasure in this novel is not a later retouching by a Soviet editor: it is contemporaneous with the event, performed by the novelist himself, in the months when it was being decided what the civil war had consisted of.

Tolstoy had returned from emigration in 1923. The Sisters, the first book of this trilogy, was finished in Paris in August 1921 and is an émigré's novel. This second book is the first written inside, and the change is not only political but formal: where Book One observes a society and declines to explain it, Book Two supplies the explanations, and this paragraph is one of them.

The volume in your hands is the Progress printing of 1965, translated — like the rest of the trilogy — by Ivy and Tatiana Litvinov, with book design by Y. Kogan and illuminations and tailpieces by V. Sveshnikov. It belongs to a matched three-volume set: The Sisters, Nineteen Eighteen and Bleak Morning were issued together in this design, and all three are reissued here.

Progress printed the same translation again in 1975, in the Soviet Authors Library, and that printing is also in this series. On the question above the two are identical — we have checked both. The removal of Trotsky from the account of the

civil war survived the Twentieth Congress, survived the removal of Stalin's body from the Mausoleum, and was still being set in type in 1975.

What the novel is

Nineteen Eighteen takes the four people of The Sisters and throws them across a continent coming apart.

Dasha is in Petrograd, then adrift; Katya is in the Ukraine under German occupation; Telegin is with the Reds; Roshchin, the officer who told Katya on the last page of Book One that revolutions calm down, is with the Whites. Husbands and sisters spend the book missing one another by a hundred miles. Dasha is named two hundred and eighty-two times, Katya a hundred and seventy-two, Roshchin a hundred and fifty-eight, Telegin a hundred and fourteen — the balance has shifted from Book One, and Roshchin's rise in the count is the measure of what interests Tolstoy now, which is a decent man on the wrong side.

The best writing is in the Ukraine. Makhno is named forty-nine times and Denikin eighty-two; the Germans occupy, the atamans raid, the villages arm, and nobody's authority extends past the next set of railway sidings. Tolstoy is very good on this — on the speed with which a countryside reverts, on peasants who have heard of Makhno as a rumour ("They say Nestor Ivanovich Makhno has a gang of twenty-five daredevils who raid the estates"), on the German command establishing order by requiring the village street to be swept on Saturday nights.

That detail is the whole occupation in one line. An empire arrives, and what it produces is a regulation about sweeping.

The plot at the centre, which is an assassination

The reason Lenin is named fifteen times is not that he appears. It is that he is a target.

The spine of this novel is Dasha's recruitment, in Moscow, by a counter-revolutionary conspiracy that intends to kill him. It is handled with great coolness. A young man in pince-nez edges up to her bench in a public garden, glances round, and opens:

"Did you spend the night in the Metropole?" ... "Good! I've got you a room. You can move in, this evening. Not a syllable to Zhirov! Now to business! Do you know Lenin by sight?"

She does not. He takes a bundle of photographs out of his pocket and stuffs them into her handbag. Then he takes her hands, which are lying lifelessly in her lap, gives them a shake, and delivers the argument:

"This is how matters stand.... Bolshevism is Lenin. Get that? We may crush the Red Army, but so long as Lenin is in the Kremlin there can never be victory for us. Is that clear? He's a theoretician, he's will incarnate — the greatest danger for the whole world, not just for us.... Think it over and tell me definitely: are you, or are you not, ready and willing?"

And Tolstoy gives Dasha the best line in the trilogy, which is only two words and a stage direction:

"To kill him?" asked Dasha, watching a half-naked infant which was staggering about bow-legged.

A woman is asked to commit a political murder and her eyes are on a baby learning to walk. No novelist who was merely executing a commission writes that sentence.

What follows is a portrait of White ideology going to pieces, and it is the most valuable passage in the book after the one we began with. Dasha's host works through the standard indictment — the sealed carriages, Bolsheviks "hired at enormous sums", the deliberate organisation of famine, "thousands of imbeciles hanging on Lenin's lips" — and then, unable to stop, crosses over:

"He is the Antichrist! Remember the prophecies? Everything coincides. The north will go to war with the south. The iron horsemen of death will appear — that's the tanks.... An evil star will drop into the source of waters — that's the five-pointed star of the Bolsheviks.... And he addresses the multitude as Christ did, only in reverse..."

Tolstoy had listened to this in Paris. He lets the man talk, does not interrupt him, and allows the political argument to slide into apocalypse under its own weight. It is a far more damaging account of the counter-revolution than any denunciation, because it is delivered in the speaker's own voice and he thinks he is winning.

What Tolstoy was willing to show

This matters for the charge we have made, so it needs stating in his favour.

Nineteen Eighteen is not a timid book about the Bolsheviks. It

says outright that "the stern regime of terror was established in the army" and that cowardice was treated as treason. It describes the Red Terror by name. And in one of its strongest episodes it puts on the page a Bolshevik military commissar, Broinitsky, who has come to the top after the taking of Rostov and rules by invoking Moscow:

"At the slightest word he shouts: 'Comrade Lenin knows my worth, I'll send a personal telegram to Comrade Lenin....' He's surrounded himself with the criminal element, who are continually carrying out requisitions and taking people out to be shot."

He is unmasked in front of a hall: "Nobody gave you power in Rostov, your mandate is forged, your references to Moscow, not to speak of Comrade Lenin, are insolent lies."

A forged mandate, a criminal retinue, people taken out and shot, and Lenin's name used as the warrant — published in 1928. Whatever else Tolstoy was, he was not a man who could not bear to show the revolution's underside.

Which is exactly why the silence we began with cannot be explained as caution. A writer prepared to show terror, famine, a fraudulent commissar and an execution squad was not squeamish. The omission of one name from the account of the Red Army is not timidity in general. It is an operation on a particular man, performed in the particular year that man was expelled.

The apparatus, and its absence

This 1965 printing carries almost nothing. No critical foreword, no afterword, no note on the author, no editorial matter of any kind: a half-title, the Russian title page, the translators' credit, and the novel. The reader is handed the book and left to it.

That is worth a paragraph, because it is unusual in this series and because it cuts two ways.

Against it: a foreign reader in 1965 received a novel about the founding of the Soviet state with no indication of when it was written, no mention that the trilogy's first volume had been finished in Paris by an émigré, and no hint that the years of this book's composition — 1927 and 1928 — were the years in which the losing side of a political struggle was being removed from the record. Silence is not neutrality when the text itself has a hole in it.

For it: the alternative, on the evidence of this series, would have been worse. The 1975 reissue of this same translation added a jacket panel headed "Writers about Alexei Tolstoy". Gorky praises a talent that is "simply a big, truly Russian talent, wise with Russian wisdom". Romain Rolland admires how the characters "form an inseparable part of the air, earth and light that surround and nurture them". Theodore Dreiser certifies, in one line, that "Alexei Tolstoy bore the name of his great predecessor with honor" — which settles the awkward question of the surname by making it a matter of honour rather than of relation.

A Frenchman and an American vouching for a Soviet novelist to an English-language reader, and a Russian vouching for his Russianness. Nothing in any of it is false, and none of it is about 1918.

A reader of this 1965 printing at least knows they have been told nothing. That is a lower form of honesty than the real thing, but it is a form of it.

What we owe the book, and what we do not

We are not going to pretend this is a bad novel, because it is not. The Ukrainian chapters are the best account in English fiction of what the civil war looked like from a cart, and Roshchin — a monarchist officer whom Tolstoy refuses to make contemptible, and whose journey is the moral spine of the book — could not have been written by a man who had never sat in a room with such people. Tolstoy had. He had been in Paris with them.

Nor do we say that Tolstoy was a liar who knew better. He may have. We have no way of knowing what a man thought in 1928 about a name he had decided not to write, and this series does not deal in imagined interior lives.

What we say is narrower and harder to answer. A novel published as history, by a house that presented it to foreign readers as the authoritative fictional record of the revolution, describes the founding of the Red Army in a paragraph from which the founder has been removed, and names instead the man whose reputation required building. That paragraph was written in the year of Trotsky's expulsion. It was still being printed in English, unaltered, forty-seven years later.

An introduction from this tradition cannot walk past that, and there is no need to be shrill about it. The paragraph is on the page. We have quoted it whole. A reader who knows who chaired the Revolutionary Military Council can see the shape

of the hole, and a reader who does not has now been told.

Roshchin, and the last page

Book One ended with Vadim Roshchin holding Katya's hand on a Moscow street and telling her that "the years will pass, wars will die out, revolutions will calm down, and only one thing will be left — your kind, tender, loving heart." A man with a paste pail was putting up notices saying the revolution was in danger, and he looked at them both with hatred.

Nineteen Eighteen is the answer to that sentence, and the answer is no.

Roshchin joins the Whites. Tolstoy neither excuses him nor makes him a monster: he gives him his reasons, his disgust, his decency, and then puts him on a burial mound beside an officer called von Mecke, watching a railway trolley come out of a cutting with six men on it.

"Reds!" said von Mecke. "I thought so!" He turned his head to the left: "Squad!" Turning to the right he cried: "Make ready! Rapid fire at a moving object. Fire!" The air around the mound was rent with a crackling sound, as of starched calico being torn.

Rapid fire at a moving object. The men on the trolley are an object. Roshchin, who believed that a loving heart would outlast the revolution, is lying next to the man giving that order, and Tolstoy leaves him there without comment.

And the novel ends by taking everything away. Telegin rides into Samara at the head of his regiment, past the monument to Alexander II "once more being hastily concealed with boards" — the city has changed hands so often that the statue's covering has become routine. He turns to the second house from the corner, and is on horseback, so he can see into the first-floor windows:

there was the walnut door, on the threshold of which Dasha had appeared, as in a dream, that time, and there the doctor's study, the bookshelves overturned and Mendeleyev's portrait on the wall, crooked, its glass smashed.... But where was Dasha? What had happened to her? There was no one to answer these questions.

1928

A smashed portrait of Mendeleyev, hanging crooked: the liberal, scientific, improving Russia of the Bulavin household, which produced both sisters, left broken on a wall and visible

only from the saddle. The book closes on a question nobody can answer and a date.

It is a real ending, by a real novelist. Hold it in mind alongside the paragraph about Kazan, because both are the work of the same hand in the same year, and the distance between them is the subject of this introduction.

What is living

The Ukraine, the carts, the atamans and the sweeping of the street on Saturdays.

And the erasure itself, which is the most valuable thing in the book for our purposes, because it is an artefact rather than an argument. Histories can be refuted. This is a novel, and novels work by what they find worth mentioning. Tolstoy wrote a hundred and twenty-eight thousand words about 1918 and mentioned Kazan, the Revolutionary Military Council, the terror in the army, the mobilisation of Communists and the trains — every component of one man's work — and left out the man.

Read the paragraph on the fall of Kazan again when you reach it. It is the most eloquent silence in this series.

HISTORY

My Recollections of Lenin

The source of almost everything quoted as "Lenin on women" or "Lenin on art" - three short memoirs by a founder of International Women's Day who argued with him as an equal.

Clara Zetkin

Publisher's Introduction

This slender book is where a great deal of what the twentieth century thought it knew about Lenin's mind actually came from. When people say "Lenin on the woman question" or "Lenin on art," they are, more often than not, quoting Clara Zetkin — these three short memoirs, written in the years just after his death, are the source of the most-cited conversations Lenin ever had. It is a book of enormous influence and modest length, and both facts are worth holding in mind, because a source this small carrying a load this large is exactly the kind of text a state learns to curate.

Zetkin had earned the right to write it. She was not a disciple who had met the great man once; she was one of the towering figures of the international socialist movement in her own right — the organiser of its women's international, the founder of International Women's Day, a leader of the German left through the SPD, the wartime opposition, and the founding of the Communist Party of Germany at the end of 1918. She came to Lenin as something close to an equal, and the recollections have the texture of that standing: she argues with him, presses him, records his impatience and his charm without awe. The long conversations of 1920 — the two famous talks on the women's movement, and the talk on art and culture — are set down with a novelist's ear, and they are the reason the book has never gone out of print in the movement. Here is Lenin insisting that the emancipation of women is a question of economics and politics before it is a question of the bedroom, impatient with the fashionable "glass of water" theory of free love, demanding that the drudgery of the private household be abolished and women drawn into public life on equal terms. Here is Lenin on the arts, admitting with disarming honesty that he could take no pleasure in expressionism, futurism and cubism — "I have not the courage to consider them the highest expression of artistic genius" — while insisting, against the proletkultists, that the new culture could only be built on the whole inheritance of the old. Whatever one makes of the opinions, the record is vivid and, by every internal sign, honest.

So read it first for that: a close, unhagiographic portrait of Lenin's mind at work, by a witness with the standing to draw it. But the reason it needs an introduction, and not merely a reprint, is the same reason it was so useful to the state that printed it. A handful of remembered conversations, once canonised, becomes doctrine — and doctrine that cannot be checked, because the only witness is dead and the interlocutor dead. Lenin's off-the-cuff remarks to Zetkin about futurism hardened, in official hands, into the Party's aesthetic line; his impatience with a silly theory of sex became the warrant for a deepening prudishness; his genuine insistence on the material roots of women's oppression was quoted in a country that was busy reversing the measures built on it. That is the first thing to watch. The book is a treasury of the radical Lenin on women and culture, and it was issued by a state that had abandoned most of what the radical Lenin proposed.

The reversal on the woman question is the sharpest case, because it is the book's most celebrated theme. Lenin tells Zetkin that there can be no real emancipation while the woman remains chained to "the petty, stultifying, drudgery of the kitchen," and that the answer is to socialise that labour and draw women fully into public production and public life. The young Soviet republic had gone further in that direction than any state in history. And then it turned back: the women's department of the Party, the Zhenotdel, was wound up in 1930; abortion, legalised in 1920, was recriminalised in 1936; and the family decree of 1944 rebuilt exactly the private household Lenin had told Zetkin must be dissolved. By the time this English edition appeared in 1956, the state publishing Lenin's demand for the abolition of the "domestic hearth" had spent twenty years restoring it and handing out medals to mothers of large families. The text was preserved; the programme in it was not. An honest reader keeps both facts in view at once.

Then there is what the framing does to Zetkin herself, which is quieter and, once seen, harder to unsee. Clara Zetkin's dearest friend and closest political comrade for a quarter of a century was Rosa Luxemburg. They were of the same left, the same temper, the same wing of the movement; when Luxemburg was murdered by proto-fascist officers in January 1919, with

the German Social Democracy's connivance, Zetkin lost the person nearest to her in politics and in life. But "Luxemburgism," by the time these memoirs were canonised in Moscow, had been declared a heresy — Stalin's letter to the journal *Proletarskaya Revolyutsia* in 1931 fixed Luxemburg in the catalogue of dangerous errors, and there she stayed. The apparatus that lovingly published Zetkin's recollections of Lenin had no comparable use for Zetkin's recollections of Luxemburg, or for the fact that its warm, authoritative witness to Leninism was, by formation and by love, a Luxemburgist. The Zetkin who is handed to us here, blessed by a foreword from Lenin's widow, is Zetkin the loyal Comintern elder — the woman who, dying, opened the German Reichstag in 1932 as its senior member with a last great speech against the Nazis. That Zetkin was real. But she is a curated Zetkin, with the most inconvenient of her loyalties left discreetly out of frame.

None of which is a reason to distrust the memoirs — it is a reason to read them with the frame made visible. Zetkin did not falsify Lenin; she recorded him with unusual fidelity, and the tradition from which this introduction is written has always valued her testimony precisely because she was too substantial a figure to flatter. What the Soviet edition adds is not distortion of the text but a selection of the woman: it takes the witness whose whole life bound her to the murdered leader of the German left and presents her as a pillar of the very orthodoxy that filed her friend under deviation. The foreword by Krupskaya — herself, by 1956, long since overruled and marginalised — completes the effect, two great revolutionary women enlisted, one living and one dead, to lend their authority to a canon that had made its peace with neither of their causes.

So take this book for the double thing it is. On its surface it is what the Foreign Languages Publishing House meant it to be: the affectionate, authorised record of Lenin's views, foreworded by his widow, fixing the line on art and on women. Underneath, for the reader who brings the history with them, it is the testimony of a Luxemburgist to a Lenin whose most radical demands the publishing state had quietly buried — a small book that preserves, better than the regime that printed it ever wanted preserved, the memory of what the revolution had once intended for half of humanity, and had not delivered.

FICTION

The Golovlyovs

M. Saltykov-Shchedrin

Introduction to the 1975 Edition

The eldest son has been sent home to die, and he knows it.

He walks up and down an unlit estate office because his mother will not give him candles:

A sickly languor lay heavy on Stepan's mind; in spite of his idleness his whole body felt unreasonably, unendurably tired; one fretting, gnawing thought alone obsessed him; that thought was — "This is my grave, my grave, my grave!"

He writes to her, through the bailiff, asking for boots:

the answer was that there were no leather boots to spare for him and that when the frosts came he would receive a pair of felt snow-boots. Arina Petrovna evidently intended to carry out her plan to the letter and do no more than keep him from starving.

Nobody in *The Golovlyovs* is murdered. Every one of them is administered to death — by a mother's household economy, by a brother's piety, by the correct application of family feeling. It is the coldest novel in Russian literature and one of the very greatest, and it was written by a serving official of the Russian Empire.

The edition

Mikhail Yevgrafovich Saltykov (1826–1889), who published as N. Shchedrin, wrote *The Golovlyovs* between 1875 and 1880. This is the Progress Russian Classics Series printing, first published in 1957 and reprinted in 1975, translated by Olga Shartse and illustrated by the Kukryniksy — the same caricaturist trio whose drawings accompany Gorky's *Foma Gordeyev* elsewhere in this series.

Shartse's decision on the central name is worth flagging at once, because it shapes the whole book in English. Porfiry Vladimirovich Golovlyov is called, in Russian, Iudushka — a diminutive of Judas, something like "Judas-dear". Shartse renders it flatly as Judas, three hundred and five times. The

English loses the horrible tenderness of the Russian suffix and gains a kind of hammering plainness. It is a defensible choice and a severe one.

The volume opens with a foreword of about four thousand words, "A Great Work of Russian Literature", by S. Makashin — Sergei Makashin, who spent his life on Saltykov and wrote the standard biography. This is the most scholarly piece of apparatus in the series.

The foreword, which does not do what you expect

Two things about Makashin's essay should be said plainly, because they cut against the pattern this series has been tracing.

First, it makes no attempt to annex Shchedrin. In four thousand words, Lenin is not mentioned and neither is Marx. Makashin describes his subject's politics precisely and without inflation: Shchedrin took "the ideological stand of a democrat and Utopian socialist". That is accurate — Shchedrin came out of the Petrashevsky milieu of the 1840s, read Fourier and Saint-Simon, and never became a Marxist because there was barely anything to become. A less honest foreword would have found the seeds of something.

Second, its historical framing is genuinely good:

For Russia this was an epoch of a decline of the serfdom system and all the ideologies built up on its basis, an epoch during which this enormous, backward country was drawn into the orbit of the capitalist industrial revolution.

That is the correct frame for this novel, and it is why *The Golovlyovs* matters more than any other title in the Russian Classics Series. It is not a novel about bad people. It is a novel about what happened to a class when the basis of its existence was withdrawn in 1861, and about the forms its decomposition took.

Makashin is also excellent on how the book got written, which almost no commissioned foreword bothers with. The *Golovlyovs* was not planned. It began as a story, "The Family

Court of Justice", thirteenth in a list of contents for a quite different cycle; the response decided the matter. Saltykov, Makashin notes, "was always prey to a lingering doubt in the plastic, artistic strength of his talent", called himself "a chronicler of the moment" and "a historian of the modern scene", and gave up his journalism for fiction only reluctantly. What changed his mind was praise from Turgenev and Nekrasov — one correspondent writing that he was "looking forward to the sequel — a description of 'little Judas's deeds'."

A novel now regarded as one of the summits of Russian prose exists because a satirist was talked out of thinking he could not write fiction.

What the foreword leaves out

There is one absence, and it is large.

Makashin tells the reader that Shchedrin's books were ones "for which he paid with an eight-year exile". True: in April 1848 Saltykov was exiled to Vyatka for a story, in the panic that followed the revolutions in Europe, and he was there eight years.

What the foreword does not mention is what he did during those eight years, or for the twenty after them. In Vyatka he was not a prisoner but an official: a senior official for special assignments under the governor, then an adviser to the provincial government. On his return he entered the Ministry of the Interior. In 1858 he was appointed vice-governor of Ryazan. In 1862 he moved to Tver, where he frequently acted as governor. He administered provinces. He signed things.

This is not a scandal and we do not offer it as one. It is the single most important fact about how The Golovlyovs came to be written, and its omission costs the reader something real.

The reason the novel's account of the Russian provincial world is unanswerable is that its author had run one. The estate management, the wrangling over souls and allotments, the deference of the bailiff, the exact mechanism by which a mother starves a son while observing every propriety — none of it is observed from outside by a literary man on a visit. Saltykov knew the paperwork. He had been the man to whom the petitions came.

The pen-name was not decoration. N. Shchedrin existed because Mikhail Saltykov, vice-governor, could not publish what he saw under the name on his commission. A foreword that presents its author purely as a writer persecuted by the

autocracy has told the truth and lost the interesting half of it: he was also, for most of his working life, the autocracy's employee, and the satire is the report of an insider.

Judas

Porfiry Vladimirovich is the greatest hypocrite in fiction, and what makes him unbearable is that he is not a liar.

He believes what he says, more or less, at the moment of saying it. He deploys endearments, proverbs, calculations of the household accounts and appeals to God's will in a continuous, unstoppable stream that has no object beyond its own continuation — and people die inside it. His brother Pavel dies while Judas sits by the bed discussing arrangements. His mother, who built the estate by forty years of accumulation, ends up dependent on him and is talked into the ground. Both his sons die: one shoots himself after Judas refuses to cover a gambling debt, with an expression of sorrow and a short homily on responsibility.

Here he is in full, and it is worth reading twice. His sister Anna has died, leaving two orphaned daughters. Arina Petrovna writes to her sons with the news. Porfiry replies:

"I am stricken with grief at the news that Anna Vladimirovna, my beloved sister and dear companion of my childhood, has departed this life, and my grief is all the greater at the thought that you, dearest Mamma, have been sent another cross to bear in the persons of the two orphans. Surely it should be enough that you, the benefactress of us all, are denying yourself in everything and, with no thought for your health, are devoting all your strength so that your family should be provided not merely with what are necessities, but with luxuries as well! Truly, sinful as it may be, one cannot help repining sometimes. And in my opinion the only comfort for you in your present trouble, dearest, is to recall as often as possible what Christ Himself had to endure."

Read what that letter does. A woman has died and two children have been orphaned. Not one word is spent on the dead sister beyond the epithets, and not one on the children except as "another cross" laid on their grandmother. The death is converted, within three sentences, into a compliment to his mother's self-denial and an advance argument against the expense of taking the girls in. It closes by recommending the Passion as a consolation — for her.

Every clause is unimpeachable. There is nothing in it a priest

could object to. And it is an act of violence.

Shchedrin's word for this in the novel is idle talk — the endless pious verbiage that stands in for every human relation. It is the exact literary equivalent of the administrative style: correct forms, applied without mercy, by a man who has never once had to look at what they do.

Nobody who had not written official minutes could have invented him.

The nieces, and the only exit

The two orphans Judas did not want to pay for are the novel's one movement outward, and Shchedrin makes their escape sound like freedom for exactly as long as it takes to read a letter.

Arina Petrovna pulls it out of her pocket and hands it to Judas:

"Don't send us any more fowls or turkeys, Grandmamma. Don't send us any money either, but put it in the bank. We are not in Moscow now, but in Kharkov; we have gone on the stage, and in the summer we will tour the fairs. I, Anninka, made my first appearance in Perichole and Lubinka in Pansies. I was called several times, especially after the scene when Perichole comes out slightly tipsy and sings, 'I am re-a-dy, I am ready, I am re-a-a-a-dy.' Lubinka too was a great success. The manager pays me a hundred rubles a month..."

It is a wonderful letter — brisk, competent, faintly boastful, and touchingly concerned that the grandmother should bank the money rather than send poultry. Two girls have got out of Golovlyovo and are earning.

What they have got out into is Offenbach at the provincial fairs, and Shchedrin follows it all the way down: the manager, the merchants who pay for supper, the officer who keeps one and then the next, the touring, the drinking. Lubinka poisons herself. Anninka comes back to Golovlyovo because there is nowhere else, and drinks.

We want to be careful here, because it would be easy to read this as a moral about the stage, which is not what it is. The girls' talent is real and their industry is real. What destroys them is that in the Russia of the 1870s a gentlewoman without property had precisely two markets, and the theatre was the one that paid a hundred rubles a month while quietly requiring the other. Shchedrin knows exactly what he is describing and

does not once say it outright. The class that could not keep its daughters and would not train them sent them to the fairs.

The ghosts

The thing that finally reaches Judas is not remorse in any ordinary sense. It is arithmetic.

Alone in the house with Anninka's drinking and her reminders, he begins to be visited:

The dead and injured seemed to creep out of every corner of that cursed house. Whichever way he looked, in whatever direction he turned, grey ghosts were stirring everywhere. There was his father Vladimir Mikhailich in a white nightcap, jeering at everyone and quoting Barkov; there was his brother, Styopka the blockhead, and beside him his other brother, the dull and quiet Pavel; there was Lubinka and there were the last scions of the Golovlyovo house, Volodenka and Petenka. All of them drunken, lecherous, tortured and bleeding.... And a living ghost was hovering above all those shadows — he himself, Porphiry Vladimirovich Golovlyov, the last representative of the derelict family.

Note the last clause. He does not join the dead as their killer; he joins them as another ghost, "the last representative of the derelict family". Even at the moment of reckoning, Judas arrives at himself through an inventory — a list of the house's casualties with his own name at the end of it.

Shchedrin will not grant him a conversion. He grants him a total, and the total is what walks out into the snow.

The last sentence

The family consumes itself. Stepan dies in the estate office; Pavel dies; Arina Petrovna dies; both of Judas's sons die; his nieces Anninka and Lubinka go on the provincial stage and are destroyed by it, and Lubinka poisons herself.

At the end Judas is alone at Golovlyovo with Anninka, who is drinking herself to death. Something — Shchedrin will not say what — reaches him one night in March. He gets up, walks about the room, stops in front of "the icon of the Redeemer in a crown of thorns lighted by a sanctuary lamp", and decides:

It is hard to say to what extent he was conscious of his own decision, but a few minutes later he stealthily walked to the hall and undid the front-door latch. A wind was howling

and a March snow-storm blinded the eyes with whirling masses of sleet. But Porphiry Vladimirovich walked along the road, stepping in the puddles, noticing neither the wind nor the snow and only instinctively wrapping his dressing-gown closer about him.

He is going to his mother's grave. He is found frozen next morning, a few steps off the road, in his dressing-gown.

And then Shchedrin writes the last sentence of the novel, which is the reason this book belongs in a series like ours:

Then another messenger was dispatched to Goryushkino, to Nadya Galkina (daughter of Auntie Varvara Mikhailovna), who ever since the autumn had kept close watch on all that was going on at Golovlyovo.

1880

A relative nobody has heard of, in a place nobody has been, who has been watching since the autumn. The Golovlyovs have annihilated themselves down to the last man, and the estate does not revert to anybody's better nature. It passes to the next watcher, who will do it all again.

That is not a moral ending and it is not a hopeful one. It is a structural observation: the rot was never in the family. It was in the thing the family was attached to, and the thing is still there when they are gone.

What is living

This is the Russian Classics volume that needs the least defending and the most reading.

The Golovlyovs does what almost no novel of decline manages: it refuses to make its dying class either wicked or tragic. Arina Petrovna is a formidable manager who spends forty years accumulating property for children who are worthless, and Shchedrin lets you feel the waste of her competence. Judas is a monster assembled entirely out of respectable materials — piety, thrift, family feeling, correct procedure. Nobody in the book breaks a rule.

And it was written by a man who had spent his life administering the system he was describing, published under another name because his own was on a governor's commission. The foreword to this volume does not tell you that, and we think you should know it before you begin, because it changes what kind of document you are holding. This is not an attack from outside. It is testimony.

FICTION

A Story about a Real Man

Boris Polevoi

Introduction to this Edition

A novel about the most decorated kind of Soviet courage opens with an animal that cannot read.

For several pages there is no human being in the book at all. Wolves go back into the thick of the forest to digest the night's kill; foxes leave winding tracks; a woodpecker taps so cleanly in the frost that it seems to be tapping a violin and not the trunk of a tree. A magpie cleaning its beak on an alder hears something big coming and goes. What comes is an elk, and the dogfight that has brought down the man this book is about is then described as the elk is obliged to take it — as weather, and insects, and a bird:

It was like the low droning of cockchafers circling among the leaves of a budding birch-tree. Now and again a short, sharp, rasping sound, like the evening croak of a corncrake in the marsh, was added to their droning.

The cockchafers come into sight, dancing in the blue frosty sky with glittering wings. One of them hurtles to the ground with outspread wings; the rest continue their dance in the azure. Then something enormous strikes the tree tops, the noise sounds like a groan, the powdery snow floats down sparkling, and out of the silence comes a man's groan and the crunch of snow under the paws of a bear that the war has driven out of its lair too early and left hungry.

It is the best writing in the book, and it is over in a few pages, and everything worth arguing about in A Story About a Real Man lies in the distance between that opening and the sentence the title comes from.

The edition

The copyright leaf of the Progress printing is unusually talkative, and worth reading before the novel.

The Russian is Повесть о настоящем человеке. The English is "Translated from the Russian by the late Joe Fineberg", edited by David Skvirsky, illustrated by Nikolai Zhukov. Then

a printing history: First printing 1949 / Second printing 1952 / Third revised edition 1957 / Fourth printing 1967 / Fifth printing 1973. A further printing is advertised on Progress jackets in 1979. This is one of the most continuously reissued Soviet novels in English, and the only book in this series whose publisher was still setting it up thirty years after the war it describes.

Two things in that history matter.

The first is the word revised. There is a 1957 state of this translation and there is a later one, and they are not the same text. The copy digitised for the present reissue is the Foreign Languages Publishing House "Third Edition" — the 1957 revision — and it is that text you are about to read. Set beside the 1973 Progress reprint, the wording moves. Where the 1957 has the men of ward forty-two listening to the wireless "fearing to lose a single word", the 1973 has them "afraid to miss a single word". That is not damage in a scan; it is an editor's hand. Nobody is told. Neither volume carries a note saying that the English has been worked over, still less what was done in the revision of 1957 — the year after the Twentieth Congress.

The second is the credit itself. Our own catalogue entry for this book recorded that no translator was named; that was wrong, and the correction matters, because Joe Fineberg is not an anonymous house hand. The same name stands on the English of Lenin's What Is to Be Done? in the Collected Works, and on much else that Moscow sent abroad in English; his dates we have not been able to establish. What the page says is "the late Joe Fineberg" — a translator dead long enough by 1967 for the adjective to be added, and then left standing through printing after printing. He is the only person in the apparatus of this book who is identified with any candour at all.

The foreword written by the evidence

The 1973 volume does something no other book in this series does. In place of the usual commissioned essay by a critic, and in place of Polevoi's own autobiographical Author's Note — which the earlier printing carries, and which is the front matter of the text you have here — it prints four pages headed

ABOUT THE AUTHOR — By Hero of the Soviet Union
ALEXEI MARESYEV.

The subject of the novel introduces the novel about himself.

Maresyev writes plainly and rather well. He describes the summer of 1943 at the Kursk Salient, climbing out of a cockpit tired and hungry and seeing a stranger among a group of airmen pointing in his direction. "What a bore. Another correspondent," he thought, and hurried off towards the canteen. The stranger caught him up and introduced himself: "I'm Boris Polevoi, Pravda war correspondent." They talked in the dugout until dawn, Polevoi filling notebooks, and on leaving he said: "I'll give this a write-up, Alexei. Definitely. I can't say how exactly but I'll certainly write the story." Four years later Maresyev switched on the radio and heard an announcer close a broadcast with the promise of the next instalment of *A Story About a Real Man* at nine the following morning.

Now turn to the back of the same volume. Polevoi's Postscript describes the identical night, and the two accounts do not agree about the one thing that matters. In Polevoi's version he says, "I would very much like to write about you in the Pravda," and the airman answers with no enthusiasm whatever — "That's up to you to decide" — and then, very sleepily, adds: "But perhaps you'd better not. Goebbels will get hold of the story and trumpet all over the world that the Russians are compelling footless men to fight, and that sort of thing.... You know what those fascists are."

These are not two memories of a night. They are two settlements with a fact. Maresyev's version has a writer who promised to tell the story; Polevoi's has a pilot who asked him not to, for a reason entirely about how the story would be used abroad. The novel exists because the second man overruled the first. That is worth knowing before page one, and the volume prints both without a word of editorial acknowledgement that they diverge.

The foreword has a further date problem. "Today Polevoi is 60," Maresyev writes — with the author's name misspelt in the printed text. Polevoi was born, as his own note says, on 17 March 1908. The piece was therefore written for the fourth printing of 1967, and Progress reprinted it unaltered in 1973, when he was sixty-five, and the book was advertised again in 1979. Nothing in this volume is later than 1968; its last dated line, at the end of the Postscript, is "Moscow, November 28, 1950". A book sold in 1973 as the living record of a living man is a sealed object from twenty-three years earlier with a

five-year-old preface glued to the front.

And yet the foreword contains the best joke in the book, and Maresyev tells it against the West. On a trip to the United States a well-known journalist, himself an ex-airman, told Polevoi that he could not believe the story of Alexei Maresyev, that "it was all the work of Polevoi's imagination". On a later visit Polevoi brought Maresyev with him and introduced him to the American as "material evidence". "But I don't think even that made him change his mind." The man exists; the man is standing here; the story is still not believed. Maresyev closes by turning the title round: were he a man of letters, he says, he would most certainly have written *A Story About a Real Man* about "a fine friend and a REAL MAN—of Boris Polevoi."

What the book does well

The novel is at its strongest where it is least ideological, which is in hospital.

Polevoi is very good on the mechanics of a body relearning itself, and exact about the thing nobody thinks of: that walking is a habit acquired in infancy, that artificial limbs set the old impulse at war with the new one, and that "Many people who have lost their limbs, if they lack sufficient will-power, never again learn the art of walking that we so easily learn in childhood." There is no miracle anywhere in it. Maresyev turns the toe of the artificial foot outward, rests on the heel, transfers his weight, and the leather creaks; he stands away from the wall swaying, arms out, not daring the next step, with a cold sweat breaking out on the bridge of his nose. When the old surgeon Vasily Vasilyevich catches him at it, what he says is exactly right for a doctor and exactly wrong for a hagiography: "Good going! Why are you alone, without a nurse or an orderly? Proud, I suppose.... But never mind. As in everything you do, the first step is the most important, and you've got over the most difficult part."

Ward forty-two is the book's real achievement. Polevoi was a reporter by trade and he built the ward the way a reporter builds a story, out of people who get on each other's nerves: the sour, unsociable Kukushkin, who names the mortuary "ward number fifty"; Gvozdev, who knows about wireless sets; the vain Major Struchkov; and above all the Regimental Commissar Semyon Vorobyov, who arrives, lays out his tooth-paste and shaving tackle in neat stacks as though settling in for years, announces in a rolling bass that he is quiet and a non-smoker and will not be among them long, and then spends what is left of his life cheerfully bullying the others into living. "The Commissar died on the first of May" is as good a chapter

opening as Soviet war fiction produced.

The sentence the title comes from

The Commissar's funeral passes below the window. The men of ward forty-two crowd to watch; the major, whose legs are in splints, cannot see and demands to be told who it is. Kukushkin answers in a dry, cracked voice: "It's the funeral of a real man ... a Bolshevik."

And then the novel explains itself: "The expression: 'a real man,' sank into Meresyev's mind. A better description could not have been imagined."

There is the whole doctrine, and it is worth being precise about what it does. The phrase is not left as a character's opinion; the narrator immediately certifies it as the best description available. "Real", in the title of this book, does not mean genuine as against invented, nor fully human as against maimed — the two senses a reader naturally brings to the story of a legless pilot. It means Bolshevik. The title is a definition, and the definition is a membership.

That is socialist realism doing precisely what it was designed to do, and it is why the novel keeps tipping over. Everything Polevoi observed — the elk, the creaking leather, the sweat on the bridge of the nose — is evidence about a man. Everything he was required to conclude needs that evidence to certify a Party. The book is honest enough that the seam shows. After the funeral Meresyev's desire is not to recover, or to fly, but "to become a real man, like the one who had just been taken on his last journey"; the physical struggle that fills four hundred pages is quietly reclassified as an apprenticeship in correctness of soul.

The argument at Nuremberg, and what it gives away

The strongest pages Polevoi ever wrote are at the end of this book, and they are not fiction.

He sat in the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg on the day Hermann Goering's cross-examination was closing. Roman Rudenko, the Soviet Prosecutor, put it to him that in treacherously attacking the Soviet Union he had committed a most heinous crime. Goering, in a low voice, frowning and lowering his eyes: "It was not a crime, it was a fatal blunder." What they had failed to reckon with, he said, was not guns or aircraft or industrial capacity, all of which they knew approximately, but the people: "The chief thing we did not

know, nor understand, was the character of the Soviet Russians. They have been and remain a riddle."

Polevoi's answer to this is the one unambiguously Marxist sentence in the volume. He refuses the riddle. The Nazi account of the Eastern Front was racial and national — and so is the flattering version of it that a Soviet patriot could comfortably have accepted, the unfathomable Russian soul, opaque to foreigners since Napoleon. Polevoi will not have it: "How, indeed, could the inventors of the wretched 'theory' about the Germans being the Herrenvolk understand the soul and strength of a people reared in a socialist country?" Not Russians: a people reared in a socialist country. The property is social, and it was made, and what was made is makeable, and therefore anybody's. It was in that hall, he says, that he decided to write this book.

Hold that sentence against the novel it explains and the novel does not hold. Four hundred pages earlier, when a medical commission is astonished that a man with no feet proposes to fly, the narration reaches for the other register: "What couldn't a Russian do?" The Nuremberg pages know exactly what is wrong with that question. The fiction asks it anyway, more than once, and without discomfort. What Polevoi proved to himself in Nuremberg he could not hold for the length of a book, because the doctrine he wrote under had itself gone over to the national explanation during the war, and a man who had spent those years on Pravda was not placed to notice the substitution. His trial notebooks were published separately — the Progress list records them as *Final Reckoning: Nuremberg Diaries* — and on the evidence of these few pages the reportage is the better book.

The pairing is not accidental, either. The division that shoots Meresyev down on page twenty-two is the Richthofen, "manned by the finest aces in the fascist Reich", and it is "under the patronage of Goering himself". Goering puts the hero in the snow at the beginning and stands in the dock at the end. Structurally the novel is an argument with one man, and the argument is won in the Postscript, in Polevoi's own voice, and not in the fiction.

What has been taken out

Read the text, then count.

Stalin's name does not occur in this novel. It occurs thirty-three times inside the word Stalingrad, and not once on its own. The word "Party" appears three times in the whole volume, all three in Polevoi's Author's Note: it does not occur in the novel

at all. Lenin appears twice — once as the name of a medal, and once in a slogan.

The slogan is the give-away. The Commissar dies on May Day 1942 while the ward listens to the wireless. The announcer, whose voice "was known and listened to all over the world in those days" and who is not named, reads the Order of the Day of the People's Commissar of Defence; the men strain not to miss a word; and the passage quotes the order's closing line: "Under the invincible banner of Great Lenin—forward to victory!" The office of People's Commissar of Defence was held, in May 1942, by Stalin. The novel prints the office, quotes the order, and declines to print the signature.

We cannot prove from the two printings in front of us what the 1949 English said, still less the Russian that Polevoi began writing at Nuremberg; no honest introduction should pretend otherwise. What can be said is this. The volume you are reading is a revision made in 1957. A war novel begun in 1946, on Soviet radio by 1947, reaches the foreign reader with the most prominent name of its period scoured out of it down to a single unattributable Order of the Day. And not one line of apparatus in any printing admits that anything was changed. The reader is handed a monument to authenticity — "I think there is nothing extraordinary about this authenticity," Polevoi writes in the Author's Note; "Our socialist life... daily, hourly lays bare before a writer" its subjects — which has itself been rewritten at least twice, silently.

The author

Polevoi is not the villain of his own book, and it would be lazy to treat him as one.

The Author's Note printed here is the autobiography of a provincial newspaperman. Tver, renamed Kalinin; a barrister father dead of tuberculosis in 1916, remembered chiefly through the library he left; a mother who went to work in a factory hospital, so that the boy grew up among the workers' children at the Morozov mill. His spare time went on the Tmaka, "a grimy little factory stream", and on his dead father's books. "I liked Gorky best of all." His first collection of feature articles was sent to Gorky in Sorrento by friends at the Komsomol paper without his knowledge; Gorky replied on six pages of foolscap, going through the "immature composition" with attention and indulgence and telling him to learn from the masters to polish his style much as a "lathe operator polishes metal". He went into the dyeing-and-finishing mill of the Proletarka factory, became a worker-correspondent, joined the Party in 1940, and spent the war as a Pravda correspondent,

keeping a notebook of heroism — sixty-five entries in the end — because the editor-in-chief had told him that to keep it was "your civil duty. More, it is your duty as a member of the Party."

That instruction is the key to everything he wrote and to its limits. Polevoi's method was to take down what happened and alter the names as little as he could: the real man is Maresyev, the character Meresyev, one letter changed, and he says so. His honest conviction was that the material was so strong it needed no invention. It is a reporter's faith, and it produced the elk, the ward, the creaking leather. It also left him defenceless against the frame his material was poured into, because a writer who holds that reality supplies the meaning has no way of arguing with an editor who tells him what reality means.

The bureaucracy did not thank him for it. In March 1966, at the 23rd Congress of the CPSU, Polevoi and Tvardovsky — "two intellectuals considered to be leaders of the moderate 'liberal' wing" — were dropped from the Congress and from the Central Committee. Ernest Mandel, writing as Ernest Germain in the *International Socialist Review* that autumn, set it down as part of the ideological hardening that ran on from the Sinyavsky–Daniel trial. A year later, the man just removed as too liberal was fronted in his own most famous book by a Hero of the Soviet Union.

Reading it now

Read the forest, and the hospital, and the Postscript, and give the doctrinal passages the attention they deserve, which is the attention you give to a seam.

The book's afterlife has mostly run in the doctrinal register. It was on Soviet radio by 1947, exported in this translation for thirty years, and used as proof of a quality in Soviet people that could be admired abroad without ever being explained. Polevoi explained it once, in Nuremberg, in a single sentence, better than anyone who has used the book since. A people reared in a socialist country: which is to say that a society can produce a kind of person, that the kind of person is therefore an argument about the society, and that it can accordingly be lost. Everything in this volume that survives its own apparatus is contained in that.

The man in the snow knows none of it. He is being approached by a bear, and he is working his hand, very slowly, towards the pistol in his thigh pocket. Start there.

FICTION

Selected Works: Poetry and Prose

Taras Shevchenko

Introduction to the 1979 Edition

Look at the half-title page before you read a line of the poetry.

Progress issued five volumes of nineteenth-century verse and prose in the series this book belongs to, and we are reissuing all five. Four of them carry the same line at the head of the half-title:

PROGRESS · RUSSIAN CLASSICS SERIES

Turgenev, 1974. Saltykov-Shchedrin, 1975. Lermontov, 1978. Gogol, 1980.

This volume, 1979, reads:

PROGRESS: CLASSICS SERIES

One word has been taken out. Somebody in Moscow, preparing the Ukrainian national poet for foreign readers, decided that he could not be filed under Russian classics — and did not replace the word with Ukrainian either. The category was simply widened until it had no nationality in it at all.

We have checked this in both the scan's text layer and the printed page, and against the four sibling volumes. It is not a misprint, and it is the most eloquent thing in the book's apparatus.

Shevchenko

Taras Hryhorovych Shevchenko (1814–1861) was born a serf on a Ukrainian estate belonging to the Engelhardt family. He was a house-boy, then an apprentice to his owner's painter in Petersburg. His freedom was bought in 1838, when he was twenty-four, with money raised by selling a portrait — Karl Bryullov painted the poet Zhukovsky and the proceeds bought the serf.

Two years later he published *Kobzar*, and Ukrainian literature had a national poet.

In 1847 he was arrested with the members of the Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius, a small Kyiv society that wanted a federation of Slav republics and the abolition of serfdom. Shevchenko's punishment was the heaviest, because of the poems found in his possession. He was sent as a private soldier to the Orenburg garrisons, and Nicholas I added an instruction in his own hand: the prisoner was to be forbidden to write or to paint.

He served ten years. He was released in 1857, allowed back to Petersburg in 1858, and died in 1861 — a week before the manifesto emancipating the serfs was read out in the churches. He was reburied, as he had asked, on a hill above the Dnieper at Kaniv.

That is the life. Almost everything in this volume was written either under surveillance or under a ban.

The edition

This is the Progress printing of 1979 — a first printing — designed by V. Y. Pushkaryova, with the title page recording simply "Translated from the Ukrainian". The translators are named poem by poem in the contents; Olga Shartse and Irina Zheleznova carry much of it, and Shartse is the translator of "The Caucasus".

The foreword, "A Great Humanist Poet", is by Yevgeny Kirilyuk, the leading Soviet-Ukrainian Shevchenko scholar of his generation. It is informed and affectionate, and it quotes Ivan Franko on the appearance of *Kobzar*: "This small book instantly revealed to us a new world of poetry, and like a spring of pure, cold water it sparkled with a crystalline clearness."

"The Caucasus", and a comparison this series can make

In 1845 Shevchenko learned that his friend Yakov de Balmen, an artist who had illustrated his poems, had been killed in the Caucasus. He wrote "The Caucasus" and dedicated it to him, under an epigraph from Jeremiah: "O that my head were

waters, And mine eyes a fountain of tears, That I might weep
day and night For the slain..."

The poem is printed here in full, and it is one of the great anti-colonial poems in any language. It opens on the mountains:

*Mighty mountains, row on row, blanketed with cloud,
Planted thick with human woe, laved with human blood.
Chained to a rock, age after age Prometheus there bears
Eternal punishment — each day His breast the eagle tears.*

Then it names what is being done, in the voice of the empire doing it:

*'Twas there that We, the Gracious, found Poor freedom
hiding 'mid the crags (A hungry thing, and all in rags), And
sick'd our dogs to drag her down.*

And then Shevchenko takes the side of the people his own empire is conquering, in lines that need no gloss:

*And glory, freedom's knights, to you, Whom God will not
forsake. Keep fighting — you are sure to win! God helps
you in your fight For fame and freedom march with you,
And right is on your side!*

The last movement is the civilising mission, ventriloquised and destroyed:

*With us, it's different! We can read, The Gospel of the Lord
we know!... Come, learn from us! We'll teach you what The
price of bread is, and of salt! We're Christian folk; with
shrines we're blest, We've schools, and wealth, and we have
God! Just one thing does not give us rest: How is it that
your hut you've got Without our leave; how is it we To you,
as to a dog a bone, Your crust don't toss! How can it be
That you don't pay us for the sun! ... Just look at all our
vast domains — Boundless Siberia alone! And prisons —
myriads! Peoples — throngs!*

That you don't pay us for the sun. Written in 1845 by a former serf about the war his own state was fighting, and printed in English by that state's successor in 1979.

Now set it beside another volume in the same series, which this house issued the year before. Lermontov's Selected Works (1978) is the work of a Russian officer who fought in that same war and died in it. Its foreword, by Sergei Narovchatov, runs to four thousand words and mentions the Caucasus five times — and the words mountaineer, conquest, colonial and

Shamil not once. The Lermontov volume reproduces the poet's own painting of the battle of Valerik, his sketch of the fighting, a portrait of him drawn in a tent afterwards, and a photograph of his manuscript of the poem about it. It does not print the poem.

Here, in the Shevchenko volume, the poem about that war is printed entire, and Kirilyuk's foreword says plainly that in it the poet "demanded freedom not only for his own Ukrainian nation but for all the peoples belonging to the Russian Empire".

Same house. Same war. One year apart. The difference is which side of the empire the poet stood on. When the poet is a Ukrainian ex-serf, the apparatus can say the peoples belonging to the Russian Empire. When the poet is a Russian officer, the mountaineers have no name.

That is worth more than any general argument about Soviet publishing, and a reader can verify it by putting the two volumes side by side.

"Haidamaki", and what a gloss can flatten

The volume also prints Haidamaki (1841), Shevchenko's long poem about the Koliivshchyna, the peasant and Cossack rising of 1768 against the Polish landlords of right-bank Ukraine — including its central section, "Gonta in Uman".

Kirilyuk's foreword describes it as a poem "about the heroic uprising of the peasants, supported by the Zaporozhian Cossacks, against the Polish feudal lords in 1768", and then adds: "The young poet's internationalism found its first expression in 'Haidamaki'."

The text the volume prints is a good deal harder than that.

The rising at Uman was a massacre. Shevchenko does not hide it and does not enjoy it. He gives the aftermath in full — "The Poles / Were left unburied, food for wolves, / Until the heavy winter snows / Concealed their bones" — and calls what happened by its name:

*The raging snow-storms did not stop The vengeance worse
than hell*

And then, in the middle of his own poem, he stops and turns on the people he is writing about. Spring comes, the larks sing, the earth is beautiful:

A heaven truly! And for whom? For people. Yes, but they?

They do not even want to look... They want it tinted up with blood And brightened with a blaze... What they mean is: too little hell! Oh people! Will you e'er Be satisfied with what you have? Oh, people, you are queer!

To blood and human savagery Spring did not bring a halt. It's terrible.... Yet 'twas the same In ancient Troy, recall, And will be in the future, too.

That is not internationalism and it is not a celebration. It is a poet who believes the rising was justified and cannot bear what it did, saying both at once and refusing to resolve them — and then widening it to Troy and to the future, which is to say: this is what people are.

We are not accusing the foreword of censorship. The poem is here, uncut, massacre and all; the reader can see for themselves. But "the young poet's internationalism found its first expression in Haidamaki" is a sentence that would leave a reader entirely unprepared for the poem they are about to read, and the gap between the gloss and the text is where the real Shevchenko is.

"Katerina", and the dedication

The volume's first long poem is Katerina (1838), and before a line of it there is a dedication that contains Shevchenko's whole relation to Russia:

To V. A. Zhukovsky in memory of April 22, 1838

That is the date of his emancipation. Zhukovsky — poet, tutor to the imperial family — had sat for the portrait by Bryullov that was raffled for 2,500 roubles to buy a serf out of bondage. The poem is Shevchenko's thank-you.

And this is how the poem opens:

O lovely maidens, fall in love, But not with Muscovites, For Muscovites are foreign folk, They do not treat you right. A Muscovite will love for sport, And laughing go away; He'll go back to his Moscow land And leave the maid a prey To grief and shame....

A Ukrainian village girl is seduced by a Russian soldier quartered in her village, left pregnant when the regiment marches, driven out by her parents and the villagers, and walks to Muscovy with the child to find him. The refrain returns, hammered, a second time within twenty lines: Muscovites are foreign folk, / They leave you in a plight.

Consider what is on that page. A poem whose opening stanza warns Ukrainian girls that Russians are foreigners who will ruin them, dedicated in gratitude to a Russian court poet, written by a man whose freedom Russian money had purchased three months earlier — and printed, in English, in Moscow, in 1979, by the publishing house of the Soviet state.

Nothing about that is simple, and Shevchenko did not intend it to be. He owed particular Russians his liberty and he owed the Russian Empire ten years in a garrison with a ban on his hands. Both facts are in this book, on facing sides of a single dedication.

Shevchenko is also merciless about his own people here. It is not only the Muscovite who destroys Katerina. It is the village — "the village gossips meanwhile hissed: 'A girl of ill repute!'" — and it is her parents, who put her out of the house. He gives her one of the loneliest images in the poetry of any language: she goes to the well at midnight rather than in daylight "so that she won't by foes be seen", stands under the snowball-tree and sings.

A national poet who writes his nation's suffering and his nation's cruelty in the same poem is a harder possession than a monument, which is one reason both empires that have claimed him have had to do some editing.

"Testament"

The most famous poem he wrote is here, in Irina Zheleznova's version, and so is a reading of it that deserves examination.

Oh bury me, then rise ye up And break your heavy chains And water with the tyrants' blood The freedom you have gained.

And it closes:

And in the great new family, The family of the free, With softly spoken, kindly words, Pray, men, remember me.

Kirilyuk glosses the ending like this: the poem "ended on a hopeful note that one day the peoples of the Russian Empire would become united into a big, free family".

Shevchenko wrote in the family, free and new. Whether that family is the Ukrainian nation freed, or a federation of Slav peoples of the kind the Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius was broken up for proposing, or all humanity, the poem does not say — and the vagueness is doing work in the poem, as such endings do.

Reading it as the peoples of the Russian Empire united is one available interpretation. It is also, conveniently, a description of the state publishing the book. A reader should notice that the gloss arrives at the present arrangement, and should feel free to decide that a poem calling for tyrants' blood was not principally a prophecy of federal union.

The prose, and the other language

The volume closes with work most English readers will not know: the novella *The Artist*, excerpts from the *Diary*, and the play *Nazar Stodolya*.

The Artist is autobiography at one remove — a serf boy who grinds pigment and paints floors and fences, and who is bought out of bondage into the Academy of Arts. It opens by measuring him against Thorvaldsen:

The great Thorvaldsen began his brilliant artistic career by carving ornaments and tritons with fishes' tails for snub-nosed Copenhagen ships. My hero began his not so brilliant but nevertheless artistic career by grinding ochre and mummy between millstones, and painting floors, ceilings and fences. A dismal, hopeless beginning. But are there then many of you, fortunate artistic geniuses, who began otherwise?

One fact about this prose belongs in any honest introduction and is not on the title page. Shevchenko wrote his poetry in Ukrainian and his prose in Russian — the novellas and the diary alike. Kirilyuk's foreword mentions in passing that the poem "The Wake" was "written in Russian", and leaves the larger pattern unremarked.

It was not a preference. Ukrainian prose had almost no outlet and, after 1847, Shevchenko had none at all; the novellas were written in exile, for a market that existed only in Russian, by a man forbidden to write anything. That a national poet's prose survives in the imperial language is not a betrayal and not an irony. It is what a ban on a language does, and it is visible in the contents page of this book if you know to look for it.

What is living

A serf who was bought out of slavery with the proceeds of a portrait, who was forbidden by an emperor's own hand to write or draw for ten years, and who used his freedom to write the best poem in the Russian Empire against the Russian Empire's colonial war.

Read "The Caucasus" first, and then read it again next to the Lermontov volume in this series. Read *Haidamaki* whole, including the passage where its author turns round and calls his own subject a vengeance worse than hell. Read "Testament" and decide for yourself what family he meant.

And keep the half-title page in view. Four volumes in this series say *Russian Classics*. This one says *Classics*, and the word that went missing is the whole subject of the poetry inside it.

FICTION

Andromeda: A Space Age Tale

Ivan Yefremov

Introduction to the 1959 Edition

A starship is running out of fuel somewhere beyond Tucana, and the novel opens by looking at its instruments:

In the faint light emitted by the helical tube on the ceiling the rows of dials on the instrument panels had the appearance of a portrait gallery — the round dials had jovial faces, the recumbent oval physiognomies were impudently self-satisfied and the square mugs were immobile in their stupid complacency.

A crew is dying of exhaustion and the author's attention is on the faces of the dials. That is Ivan Yefremov: a palaeontologist by profession, a man who had spent his working life reconstructing whole animals from fragments, and who wrote science fiction the way a scientist daydreams — with the physical detail loving and exact, and the social arrangements sketched in confident broad strokes that repay a much closer look than they were meant to receive.

Andromeda is the strangest book in this series and in some ways the most revealing. It is the only one that tries to describe the destination.

The edition

Туманность Андромеды — The Andromeda Nebula — appeared in Russian in 1957. This English translation by George Hanna, designed by N. Grishin, was published by the Foreign Languages Publishing House in Moscow in 1959 and is marked on its title page First Impression.

Those dates matter more than usual. Sputnik went up in October 1957, a few months after the novel appeared; Luna 2 reached the moon in September 1959. The book therefore arrives in English at the precise moment when the Soviet future looked, to a great many people who were not communists, like the likeliest one on offer. FLPH knew exactly what it was doing. This is the USSR's account of where it was going, published in English in the year of its maximum prestige.

George Hanna's translation deserves a word, because it had an unusually hard job. Yefremov invented a technical vocabulary — anameson fuel, the Tibetan experiment, colour-tone notation for music, the Great Circle itself — and Hanna had to carry it into English without either explaining it away or letting it turn into gibberish. He mostly succeeds by refusing to flinch: the terms arrive unglossed, in the middle of ordinary sentences, exactly as the furniture of a real future would. The volume also carries a glossary, which tells you the house expected readers to need help and decided to give it at the back rather than in the text. That is the right decision and a rarer one than it sounds.

It is also a Thaw book. Stalin had been dead four years and denounced three; Andromeda belongs to the brief period in which it was possible to imagine the Soviet future as something other than a larger version of the Soviet present.

What it imagines

The novel is set roughly three thousand years from now, in what it calls the Era of the Great Circle. Earth is a single society. The nations are gone, and so thoroughly gone that the characters' names are synthetic and unplaceable: Darr Veter, Veda Kong, Mven Mass, Erg Noor, Chara Nandi, Renn Bose. The extraterrestrials are Goor Hahn and Zaph Phthet, Director of External Relations of the planet of 61 Cygni.

The Great Circle itself is the book's best idea and its most attractive one. It is a communications network linking the inhabited worlds of the galaxy — messages taking centuries, civilisations announcing themselves across unbridgeable distances, an interstellar commons of knowledge with no centre and no authority. Humanity's arrival in it is presented as the real coming of age, more important than any political event. For an internationalist tradition there is something genuinely moving in that image, and it is not accidental: the Great Circle is what solidarity looks like when it is scaled past the point where power can organise it.

Yefremov's periodisation is his own invention and worth setting out. History runs through the Era of Disunity — our own, "when there were numerous large and small nations that

were in constant conflict owing to the economic and ideological hostility that divided their countries" — whose last century is the Fission Age; then the Era of World Unity, the Era of Common Labour, and finally the Great Circle.

And the novel is quite clear that the future has stopped caring about political history:

People living in the Era of the Great Circle were not interested in lists of destructive wars and horrible sufferings or the so-called great rulers that filled the ancient history books.

What they are interested in instead is "the development of productive forces and the forming of ideas, the history of art and knowledge and the struggle to create a real man".

The expedition, which is where the book began

None of the above should suggest the novel is an argument with scenery. Its opening third is straight adventure of a high order, and it is what made *Andromeda* the most widely read Soviet novel of its decade.

The starship *Tantra*, returning from Vega, finds its course fouled by what the astronomer identifies in one word: "An iron star!" — a dead, unlit, unmapped mass that no instrument had warned them of. Caught by it, low on anameson fuel, the crew put down on a lightless planet circling it.

What they find there is one of the best monsters in the literature. In the dark, by the flashes of their own lamps, they make out shapes:

huge flat jelly-fish, floating low over the ground with a dense fringe waving in the air below them.... The acute-angled corners of the rhomboid body each had two feelers of much greater length. At the base of the feelers the biologist noticed huge bladders that glowed inside and seemed to be transmitting the star-like flashes along them.

Then Ingrid's voice arrives in the helmet telephones, cheerful, from the ship: "Hullo, observers, why are you switching the light on and off? Are you in need of help? The storm's over and we're going to begin work. We're coming to you now." And Erg Noor: "Stay where you are," ordered the commander. "There is great danger abroad. Call everybody!"

A dead star, a dark planet, luminous predators the size of rooms, and a commander deciding what to say over the radio. Yefremov constructs the sequence with real economy, and the

solution — dragging a planetary motor forward on an automatic car to use its exhaust as a weapon — is the kind of engineering answer that this genre exists for.

It is worth remembering that these chapters are the reason the book was read. The society described in the later chapters reached its enormous audience inside a good adventure story, which is how the most effective political fiction has always worked.

What is missing from it

Now the count, which is the reason this novel belongs in a series with critical introductions.

In a hundred and twenty-seven thousand words describing the communist future, written in the Soviet Union in 1957:

- Marx is named zero times. - Lenin is named zero times. - The word proletarian does not occur. - Soviet occurs once; capitalist, once. - "Communist" occurs five times; "dialectically" twelve.

The doctrine survives as a method — history is "dialectically contradictory", social development obeys "basic laws" — and as a destination, "the mighty tree of communist society that flourished throughout the planet". Its founders and its agent have both disappeared. The class that was to make the revolution is not mentioned in the account of the society the revolution produced.

We do not read this as cowardice; there was nothing dangerous about naming Lenin in 1957. It is something more interesting. Yefremov is imagining a future that has outgrown the vocabulary, in which the questions that produced Marxism have been settled so completely that the names attached to them have gone the way of the names of the great rulers the future no longer studies. It is a tremendous compliment to the doctrine and, at the same time, the most thorough act of depoliticisation in this series. There is no Party in the Era of the Great Circle. There is no state to speak of. There is an Astronautical Council, there are Academies, and there is science.

That is a real utopian tradition and an old one, and it is not Marx's. It descends from Saint-Simon and from Wells: the rule of the competent, arrived at by the growth of knowledge rather than by the self-emancipation of anybody.

The Astronautical Council

Before the island, a chapter that shows both halves of this book at once.

The Council meets in an egg-shaped hall with a parabolic ceiling, its walls panelled in dull gold and hung with relief maps of the solar system on one side and of neighbouring stars on the other, with diagrams of inhabited systems received from the Great Circle under a pale-blue dome. Under the planet maps are mottoes, and they are the best statement of Yefremov's creed:

Look how we are surrounded by facts that we do not understand — they thrust themselves upon us but we neither see nor hear the great things hidden in their faint outlines and awaiting discovery.

And, further to the left:

The curtain hiding the unknown cannot be lifted easily — it is only after persistent labour, retreats and deviations that we begin to fathom true meanings and new boundless horizons open up before us. Never try to avoid that which at first seems useless and inexplicable, incomprehensible....

Never try to avoid that which at first seems useless. A palaeontologist wrote that, and it is worth more than most of the novel's sociology.

Over the rostrum hangs an old painting, restored several times. A violet-black sky; the crescent of an alien moon; an ancient spaceship wrecked, stern in the air; a man in a light spacesuit dragging his feet through sand and looking back at the bodies of his companions. The artist has put into the eyeglasses of his mask, which reflect only the setting sun, "an expression of the hopeless despair of loneliness in a strange world". Something "living, formless and disgusting" is crawling over a nearby hummock. The title, in big letters, is Left Alone!

A society three thousand years advanced keeps that canvas above the chair of its highest scientific body, and restores it when it fades. It is a marvellous invention — a civilisation that hangs its worst possible outcome where the people who authorise expeditions have to look at it.

Then, in the same chapter, this:

Not a single unattentive face, not a single person occupied with his own thoughts, could have been found amongst the hundreds in the hall. A tactful attention to everything was a

typical feature of the people of the Great Circle Era.

Yefremov means it warmly. Read it once more. In a hall of several hundred people, nobody is thinking their own thoughts, and this is offered as a characteristic achievement of the future.

There is one further detail in the hall, and it is the kindest thing in the book. The chairs, desks and barriers are made of real African wood, and Chara Nandi notices that "nobody today would waste so much time and effort on something that could be cast and polished in a few minutes" — and then strokes the arm of her chair, finding the wood "warmer and more full of life than plastic". Yefremov allows his perfected future one nostalgia, for handwork, and lets a young woman feel it without being corrected.

The Island of Oblivion

Which brings us to the chapter that settles the matter, and that we would ask you to read twice.

The future society has a problem it has solved. Not everyone can keep up. The remedy is a tropical island, separated from India by a strait that geology has conveniently deepened, and Yefremov describes it without a flicker of unease:

The Island of Oblivion was also a happy asylum for those who were not attracted by the feverish activity of the Great World and who did not want to work on the same level as other people. Here in the lap of mother nature, they lived out their years in the peace and calm known to the ancient cultivator of the soil, fisherman or herdsman.

And then:

Although mankind had given their weaker brothers a large area of wonderfully fruitful land, the primitive economy of the island could not fully guarantee the population against famine.

Their weaker brothers. And famine — in a communist utopia, on Earth, three thousand years hence, as an accepted feature of the arrangement.

Set that beside the sentence in which the future's founding insight is summarised. Having understood that their misfortunes came from a social structure "that had originated in times of savagery", the people of the Fission Age also came to understand:

the necessity to train people in the spirit of strict social

discipline, something that became of greater importance as the population of the planet increased.

Strict social discipline, increasing with population; and for those who cannot bear it, an island where they may go hungry among the coconuts. The novel intends both of these as benign. They are presented as generosity — nobody is compelled, the island is a paradise, the weaker brothers are provided for.

A tradition that takes "the free development of each" as the condition for "the free development of all" cannot read that chapter as the author meant it. A society that must classify a portion of its members as weaker and settle them elsewhere has not abolished class; it has renamed it and given it a beach. The most humane version of the managed future still requires somewhere to put the people who will not be managed.

What is living

A great deal, and we do not want the paragraphs above to obscure it.

The Great Circle is one of the finest images socialist literature has produced: knowledge as a commons across three thousand light years, with nothing to enforce it but the desire to be heard. The physical writing is superb — Yefremov's dying star, his deep-sea horse, his descriptions of exhaustion and vertigo and the mechanics of a ship with no fuel are the work of a man who knew how matter behaves. The book's confidence that human beings will be larger, calmer and better at things than they are now is not naive; it is the necessary opposite of the century that produced it, and it was written by someone who had lived through that century's worst decades in the country that suffered them most.

And Andromeda is a document of the Thaw at its most hopeful — the moment when a Soviet writer could imagine the future without a Party in it and be published, translated and sold abroad by the state's own house within two years.

Read it for the stars. Then read chapter eleven again, and ask who is on the island, and why the future needed one.

FICTION

Ordeal, Book Three: Bleak Morning

Alexei Tolstoy

Introduction to the 1965 Edition

This is the third and last volume of a trilogy written across twenty years, and the three books together record something no history of the period records as plainly: the manufacture of a reputation, in real time, by a novelist who was revising his sense of what had happened as the official version changed around him.

Here is the whole of it, in two rows of figures. We counted the names in all three books.

| | The Sisters (1921) | Nineteen Eighteen (1927–28) | Bleak Morning (1940–41) | ---|---|---|---| | Trotsky | 0 | 0 | 0 | | Stalin | 0 | 1 | 6 |

Leon Trotsky founded the Red Army, chaired the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic throughout the civil war, and lived on an armoured train between its fronts. In four hundred thousand words about that war his name does not occur once.

In Nineteen Eighteen, written in the year of his expulsion from the Party, Stalin is named a single time, in passing, at Tsaritsyn. In Bleak Morning, written twelve years later at the height of the cult, he is named six times — and this is what he does in them.

He issues timely warnings: "Stalin told us only the day before yesterday to be on the lookout for this."

He saves Perm. The Whites have taken it, the foreign press has proclaimed "the mailed fist raised over Bolshevik Russia", and then:

But Commissar Stalin — he who had twice routed Krasnov at Tsaritsyn that autumn — was sent to the banks of the Kama from Moscow (this the Whites learned through their Intelligence Service), and immediately took radical measures.

He drafts the strategy that wins the war: "the vast strategic plan drawn up by the new command of the Southern Front. Copies

of this plan, typed on bluish paper and signed by Stalin, were sent to all army commanders, commanders of corps, divisional commanders, brigade commanders and regimental commanders."

He signs the decisive order, with a title:

"The order is signed by Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Southern Front, Stalin, General Headquarters, Serpukhov."

And in the last pages, at a lecture in Moscow, he is pointed out across a hall: "the thin one at the end, with a black moustache is Stalin, the one who crushed Denikin."

Read those five together. A man warns, is despatched, takes radical measures, drafts the plan, signs the orders as chairman of a Revolutionary Military Council, and crushes the enemy. Every function in that list belonged, in fact, to the man who is not in the book. Nineteen Eighteen performed the removal. Bleak Morning completes the substitution.

We are not asking you to take this on our authority. The five passages are quoted above and you will meet them in the text.

The dates

The trilogy's composition dates are printed at the end of each volume, and they are the most useful thing about this edition.

The Sisters is dated August 1921 and was finished in Paris, where Alexei Tolstoy was living as an émigré. It contains neither name, which in 1921 was merely accurate: it is a novel about 1914 to 1917.

Nineteen Eighteen is dated 1928. Trotsky was expelled from the Party in November 1927 and deported to Alma-Ata in January 1928.

Bleak Morning is dated 22nd June, 1941 — the day the German army crossed the Soviet frontier. Tolstoy finished his civil-war trilogy on the morning the next war began.

So the three books are not merely a narrative sequence; they

are three soundings taken at three moments in the Soviet state's relationship with its own history, by a writer who was inside that state for two of them and outside it for the first. Whatever else this trilogy is, it is an instrument that registered the change.

What the novel is

It would be a poor introduction that left you thinking Bleak Morning is only an exhibit, so: it is the best of the three as a novel, and by some distance.

The four people of The Sisters are dragged across the last years of the civil war and, improbably, brought back together. Katya is named two hundred and seventy-three times now and Roshchin two hundred and thirty-seven; the balance has shifted decisively from Dasha's book to theirs, and the reason is that Roshchin's story is what Tolstoy actually wanted to write.

Vadim Roshchin, the monarchist officer who told Katya at the end of Book One that revolutions calm down and a loving heart outlasts them, spends this novel crossing over. Tolstoy takes it slowly and does not make it easy or flattering. It is the most sustained piece of character work in the trilogy, and its interest for readers of this series is that it is an honest account of something that really happened to thousands of officers, told without triumph.

And there is Makhno, who is named a hundred and twenty-nine times — more often in this volume than Denikin. The Ukrainian anarchist movement is a continuous presence here rather than a rumour, as it was in Book Two, and the chapters set in its orbit are the liveliest writing Tolstoy ever did. He is not sympathetic to Makhno. But he gives the movement room, energy and a logic of its own, and a reader who knows only the official Soviet account of the makhnovshchina will find rather more on these pages than that account allows.

Makhno at Gulyai-Polye

The Ukrainian chapters deserve their own paragraph, because they are the part of this trilogy most likely to surprise a reader who expects a Soviet novel of 1941 to be uniform.

Tolstoy is hostile to Makhno and makes no secret of it. But hostility here takes the form of portraiture rather than denunciation, and the portrait is unforgettable:

Makhno was on a spree. Attiring himself in a school uniform which he had acquired after a raid on Berdyansk, he showed off by riding all over the town on a bicycle, or, together with his aide, Karetnik, he roved the streets singing to the accordion; another time he would put in an appearance at the market, pale and irritable, trying to pick quarrels; but everyone kept out of his way, knowing the alacrity with which his revolver was prone to fly out of his trouser pocket.

A man in a stolen schoolboy's uniform, on a bicycle, with a revolver loose in his trouser pocket. It is a caricature and it is also, unmistakably, seen.

The movement gets the same treatment. Its capital at Gulyai-Polye is rendered through a fairground roundabout: two ragged men turning it by main force, two accordion players "stretching out their instruments as far as they would go, as if to fill them with all the breadth and audacity of the soul of the Makhno freemen", riders bellowing "Faster!" in peremptory bass voices until one man's cap flies off and another draws his sword and brandishes it "as if cutting off the head" of an imaginary foe — and then the onlookers drag the riders off their wooden horses and it becomes a brawl.

The anarchist utopia as a roundabout that somebody else has to push. The judgement is severe, but it is delivered as an image rather than an argument, and it leaves the reader free.

Best of all is a peasant on a stalled train, staring at the sparks, working through the succession of authorities:

"We changed the tsar for the Rada, the Rada for the hetman, and who are we going to change the hetman for? For Makhno? There was once a fool who set out to make himself a ploughshare. He kept the iron on the fire till half of it melted away, so he decided to make an axe. But half of the iron that was left melted, too, and now only enough remained to make an awl. And he banged it with his hammer until there was nothing left but a splinter."

Tsar, Rada, hetman, Makhno: ploughshare, axe, awl, splinter. That is the Ukrainian revolution of 1917 to 1920 in a folk parable, and no analysis in this series improves on it.

Roshchin's crossing

The other reason to read this volume is Vadim Roshchin, and Tolstoy does not let him off.

The turn does not come as a revelation. It comes as disgust, in

a hotel room in White-held Ekaterinoslav, where Roshchin lies with his hands clasped behind his head and listens to himself:

"I can't go on like this," he said softly, hating the unnatural sound of his voice. The way he said it made him feel sick.... "Why 'can't' I? What does 'can't' mean? There's nothing one can't do! For that matter, one can fasten one end of one's leather belt to the door handle, and the other round one's neck.... Come on, now, Roshchin, be honest! Why all these airs and graces? You're just a beast like all the rest."

And then, "with vengeful fury", he goes over what he has been living among: women "bearing the traces of continual evacuation on their countenances, still clinging to the pitiful remnants of their dignity, wandering from one hotel to another, offering for sale all sorts of trifles 'hallowed by their associations'"; generals without commands; a whole society liquidating itself in hotel lobbies.

You're just a beast like all the rest. The conversion of the trilogy's most sympathetic reactionary begins with him refusing himself the consolation of being better than his surroundings — the same consolation he had offered Katya on the last page of Book One, when he told her that a loving heart would outlast the revolution. Tolstoy is settling an account with his own earlier ending, and he knew it.

The last scene

The trilogy ends in a lecture hall in Moscow, at a meeting on the electrification of Russia — a map, a lecturer with a cue, an audience in overcoats.

Dasha is imagining a house: "we'll live in a log house, as clean as clean, with drops of resin, and big windows.... There'll be a big fire in the grate on winter mornings."

And Roshchin — the officer who once promised Katya that all this would pass — leans over and whispers to her:

"Do you realize the significance this gives to all our efforts, to the blood that has been shed, the unknown, silent sufferings....? The world will be rearranged for the common welfare.... Everyone in this hall is ready to give his life for this.... It's not just an idea of mine. They could show you scars and the bluish spots left by bullets.... And this — in my native land, and this is Russia..."

Then the man at the map, leaning on his cue "as on a spear", speaks the last words of four hundred thousand:

"The die has been cast," said the man at the map, leaning on his cue, as on a spear. "We are fighting at the barricades for our own rights and the rights of the rest of the world — to put an end once and for all to the exploitation of man by man."

22nd June, 1941

It is a fine ending and it is also, precisely, the problem. Roshchin's conversion is completed in the vocabulary of the nation — "in my native land, and this is Russia" — and the internationalist sentence that closes the book is given not to a Bolshevik but to a lecturer at a map. The trilogy that began with a stranger wanting to smash Petersburg ends with the promise to end the exploitation of man by man, written on the day the exploitation of man by man arrived from the west with tanks.

How to read the three together

This is the last volume, so a word on the whole.

Read in order, Ordeal is not one book in three parts. It is three books by three men who happen to share a name and a set of characters.

The first was written in Paris by a count who had left Russia, for readers who had left with him. It describes a society without explaining it, gives the impulse to smash Petersburg to any disaffected visitor, and ends with a bill-sticker looking at two members of the gentry with hatred. Nothing in it is resolved and nothing is certain.

The second was written five years after its author went home, in the year the opposition was crushed. It still has the first book's eye — the German occupation administering a village by ordering the street swept, a White conspirator sliding from politics into the Antichrist, a fraudulent commissar shooting people in Lenin's name — and it has, for the first time, a paragraph in which history is explained, and the explanation has a name cut out of it.

The third was written thirteen years later, finished on the morning the Germans invaded, and it completes the operation: the missing man's functions are distributed to another man, six times, by name and title.

The trilogy is therefore worth more than the sum of its parts, and worth more than its author intended. It is a record of a gifted, adaptable and not especially brave writer being carried

from one account of the revolution to another over twenty years, with the carriage visible in the text. Very few documents of the period let you watch that happen inside a single mind and a single set of characters.

And a warning against the easy reading. It would be comfortable to conclude that Tolstoy simply got worse — that the émigré was honest and the laureate was bought. The books do not support it. Bleak Morning contains the best writing of the three: the roundabout at Gulyai-Polye, Makhno on his bicycle, the ploughshare-to-splinter parable, Roshchin refusing to let himself off in a hotel room. A man does not write those passages with his eyes shut. He wrote them in the same years, in the same book, as the sentences about Perm and the bluish paper.

That combination is the actual subject of these three introductions. Not a writer who went blind, but one who could see extremely well and had learned exactly where not to look.

What is living

The Makhno chapters, Roshchin's crossing, and the last page.

And the three-book arithmetic at the head of this introduction, which is the most useful thing this series has found. Histories can be argued with. A novelist's choices about whom to mention cannot be argued with; they can only be counted. Tolstoy wrote four hundred thousand words about the Russian civil war across twenty years. The name of the man who organised its winning side appears in them zero times, and the name of the man who needed to have organised it appears once in 1928 and six times in 1941.

That is not a polemic. It is a tally, and the reader can check it.

FICTION

Selected Stories

Konstantin Paustovsky

Introduction to this Edition

A storm is coming down off the Caucasus onto the Colchis marshes, the excavator has broken down, the canal will overflow in ninety minutes, and the engineer Gabunia needs a bearing cast and has no bronze. There is a flash of lightning.

The swift glare caught the bust of Lenin, on its rough wooden shelf. Lenin's eyes were screwed up in the faintest smile. He was looking quizzically at Gabunia.

Gabunia stares. Then: "Bronze! What a fool I've been!" He picks the bust up, laughing, while the hydrologist Nevskaya watches him, afraid he has gone mad. "It's got to be melted, cast, and turned. That will take more than three hours, but there's nothing else we can do," he says — and Paustovsky adds the stage direction that makes the scene: gently fingering the bust. Then: "He'd have done the same, in my place." Nevskaya asks who would. He does not answer. He walks to the workshop and drops the bust carefully into the furnace, and the two Mingrelian mechanics glance at him and turn away.

That is from Colchis, published in 1934, and it is the single most extraordinary page in this book. A writer in Stalin's Soviet Union put an image of Lenin into a furnace to make a machine part, and made it an act of piety.

The edition

The apparatus of this volume is thin, and every thin thing in it says something.

The title page is Progress Publishers, Moscow. The copyright leaf reads Translated from the Russian / Illustrated by Vladimir Noskov, gives the Russian title as Избранные повести и рассказы, and records First printing 1970 / Second printing 1974. The cover price on the back flap is 2 roubles 19 kopeks.

Note what the copyright leaf does not say. It names no translator. The translators are in the table of contents instead, attached to individual pieces, and there are four of them:

Kathleen Cook, who did fourteen of the seventeen items including the author's introduction; Helen Altshuler, who did Colchis, the longest thing in the book; Leonard Stoklitsky, who did Snow and A Night in October; and Vladimir Talmy, who did The Telegram. A reader who skips the contents page will finish this book without knowing that anyone translated it.

That is worth naming plainly, because it is not a trivial oversight. Kathleen Cook made this book in English: the introduction, the Meshchora pieces, the Levitan and Mikhailovskoye sketches, the late travel writing, fourteen items of seventeen. Progress recorded her the way a table of contents records a page number. The illustrator, by contrast, gets a line of his own on the copyright page, and he has earned it — Vladimir Noskov's black headpieces, a silhouetted figure and a rip of white for each story, are among the best pieces of book design in this series.

The series claim is on the final leaf, and it is worth quoting because it dates the volume's membership rather than the volume:

In 1973, Progress Publishers commenced publication of a new series entitled Progress Soviet Authors Library, which includes works by the most distinguished representatives of Soviet multinational literature. For the first time, the foreign reader will have an opportunity to gain a comprehensive picture of Soviet literature over the last fifty years in its many forms — novel, short story, poem and drama.

The book was first printed in 1970. The series began in 1973. Paustovsky was therefore enrolled into the Soviet Authors Library retrospectively, three years after this collection was made and five years after he died, and the 1974 reprint carries the series flash on the jacket and the 1974 list on the back — Avizius, Aitmatov, German, Yefremov, Serafimovich, Shaginyan, Sholokhov.

And the jacket flap carries a sentence in quotation marks:

"I have always lived the lives of my characters, always tried to find their good points...."

Turn to page 21 and you will find what the book itself prints: "I have always shared the life of my characters and always tried to show their good features, to reveal their true nature and their uniqueness, which is not always immediately apparent." The flap has paraphrased the inside of its own book and put inverted commas round the paraphrase. Beside it, Vera Panova is quoted: "I think the reading public likes Paustovsky because he so generously dispenses good.... A person can fight for good in many ways. One way of serving it is by cultivating the finer feelings. This is the way Paustovsky chooses."

One more small thing, which is not small. At the foot of the author's own essay, on page 21, his name is set as KONSTANTIN PAUSTOUSKY. The publisher misspelt him under his own signature, and the error survived into a second printing.

The introduction the author wrote

There is no commissioned foreword here. Instead the volume opens with fourteen pages by Paustovsky himself, *Some Random Reflections*, which he calls, in the middle of it, "this introduction to my writing".

It is the best front matter in this series, and the reason is worth naming exactly. Count the vocabulary. In roughly four thousand three hundred words of autobiography and aesthetics by a Soviet writer in a Soviet state publisher's series, the word *Party* appears not once. Neither does *class*, or *Marx*, or *Marxism*, or *bourgeois*, or *imperialism*. *Socialism* occurs once, in the final sentence. *Revolution* occurs twice, both times naming a month. *Lenin* occurs twice — Paustovsky heard him speak, and later wrote about him. Against that: *Russia* and *Russian* together, sixteen times.

What he writes about instead is craft, geography and honesty. He describes the family breaking up when he was thirteen and having to pay for his own schooling by coaching. He describes reading in an old newspaper that both his brothers had been killed on the same day at different parts of the front. He describes tram-driving in Moscow, a metal works at Yekaterinoslav, a boiler factory at Taganrog, a fishing artel on the Azov Sea, and Odessa, where he first fell in with Ilf, Babel, Bagritsky, Shengeli and Slavin. He describes deciding, after an evening at the newly opened Moscow planetarium, that everything he had written so far was "as unreal as the sky on the concrete dome" — and burning several stories.

Then he sets out a position. He distinguishes the exotic from the romantic: "The exotic as such is divorced from real life,

whereas the romantic is firmly rooted in life and feeds on its rich sap. I abandoned the exotic, but I did not abandon the romantic and never will." And then, quietly, he refuses an instruction:

I think that one of the most distinctive features of my prose is a tendency towards romanticism. This reflects my character, of course. It is ridiculous to expect anyone, least of all a writer, to renounce this tendency. Anyone who makes such a demand does so through ignorance.

He ends that passage by noting, with a politeness that is itself a report, "And I am very pleased that after the heated controversy among critics not so long ago romanticism has resumed its rightful place in our literature." A foreign reader in 1974 was given no help whatever in identifying the controversy, the critics, or the outcome.

His statement of what a writer owes is the sharpest sentence in the book:

But at that time I did not realise that writing also demanded an enormous expenditure of time and energy, that even the smallest grain of truth concealed by the author from his readers was a crime against his own conscience for which he was bound to pay dearly.

There is one more count worth making, and Paustovsky makes it for us. On page 21 he lists the people he has written about: apart from separate works on Levitan, Kiprensky and Shevchenko, he names Lenin, Gorky, Chaikovsky, Chekhov, Lieutenant Schmidt, Victor Hugo, Blok, Pushkin, Hans Christian Andersen, Maupassant, Prishvin, Grieg, Gaidar, Charles de Coster, Flaubert, Bagritsky, Multatuli, Lermontov, Mozart, Gogol, Edgar Allan Poe, Vrubel, Dickens, Grin and Malyshkin. Twenty-five names. One Bolshevik, one mutineer of 1905, and twenty-three writers, painters and composers, roughly half of them foreign and most of the rest dead before 1917. Then he says where he actually preferred to be: "But most of the time I have been happy writing about simple unknown people, artisans, shepherds, ferrymen, forest wardens, buoy keepers, watchmen and village children — my bosom friends."

And the essay closes, after all that, with the one doctrinal sentence in it: "My country, my people and the new truly socialist society which they have created are the noble masters which I have served and continue to serve with each fresh word." It reads like a receipt stapled to a document.

What is not in the book

Now look at the dates. Progress prints the year at the end of each story, and the run is this: 1926, 1934, 1936, 1936, 1937, 1937, 1938, 1938, 1943, 1944, 1946, 1946, 1950, 1953, 1954. The only later item is the closing travel sketch Ilyinsky Waters, which is undated here and belongs to the European cruise of the early sixties.

Paustovsky died in 1968. This collection, first made in 1970 and reissued in 1974 as part of a series promising "a comprehensive picture of Soviet literature over the last fifty years", contains essentially nothing from the last fourteen years of his life.

Those are the years that made him a public figure. Story of a Life, the six-volume autobiography that is his major late work, is not represented; the reader learns it exists only because Paustovsky mentions it in his own introduction and says he is still writing it. Tarusa Pages, the 1961 anthology he edited and filled with young writers, is not mentioned anywhere in the volume. Neither is the speech he made in Moscow in 1956, nor the letter he sent to a defence lawyer in 1966.

The apparatus does not hide these things. It is more effective than that. It selects a writer whose subject is birch woods, provincial railway halts, buoy keepers and watchmen, and then tells the foreign reader on the jacket that what he "generously dispenses" is "good", and that his way of fighting for it is "by cultivating the finer feelings".

What our own press knew at the time

The record exists, and it is in the press of the Fourth International, written while he was alive.

In the summer of 1964 the International Socialist Review ran a review of the first volume of Story of a Life by George Saunders, under the title "Revolt Against Stalinism". Saunders places Paustovsky precisely: one of the writers who, in the absence of a political opposition destroyed in the thirties, had become "the nearest thing to popular spokesmen", and who had "especially gained note for his defense of young, nonconformist writers against the 'neo-Stalinist' official critics". He notes that Tarusa Pages sold out its 75,000 copies in two days.

He also notes something else. In 1935, in the Diary in Exile, Trotsky recorded his impressions of a short novel by Paustovsky that he happened to read:

"A gifted man," he wrote, "technically superior to the so-called 'proletarian writers.' He paints nature well; you can discern the sharp eye of a seaman. At times, in his description of Soviet life (in the Transcaucasus) he reminds one of a good gymnast with his elbows tied. But there are some stirring pictures of work, sacrifice and enthusiasm."

Saunders does not name the book and neither can we; but a short novel of Soviet life in the Transcaucasus, published the year before, full of stirring pictures of work, sacrifice and enthusiasm, with a seaman's eye for water and weather, is a very exact description of Colchis, the second item in this volume. The reader can test the judgement directly. The Kakhiani speech at the end — "I thank you, in the name of the Bolshevik Party", "We shall add it all to the furnace of our socialist ideals", "Long live the Soviet subtropics!" — is a required set-piece, delivered word-perfect. And Paustovsky gives it to a man who has just told the assembled workers, of the antique statue dug out of the swamp, "I'm no judge of sculpture. I'm a land reclamation expert, not a Michelangelo or an Antokolsky." The elbows are tied, and the gymnast has arranged for you to see the rope.

Saunders also quotes at length from Paustovsky's speech at the Moscow writers' rally called in 1956 in defence of Dudintsev's Not By Bread Alone, using the novel's villain Drozdov as a name for a whole stratum:

The problem lies in the fact that in our country there exists — unmolested and even to some extent prospering — an entirely new social stratum, a new caste of petite bourgeois. This is a new group of acquisitive carnivores, a group which has nothing in common either with the revolution, or with our regimen, or with socialism.

And, on where they came from: "They are the result of the cult of personality — a term by the way which I consider extremely euphemistic."

Ten years later, in March 1966, World Outlook reported from the Sinyavsky–Daniel trial that Paustovsky, "one of the best-known and most respected writers in the Soviet Union", had sent a letter to Sinyavsky's attorney taking a strong stand for the defendants and against the trial. He wrote that he saw nothing "anti-Soviet" in the works published abroad as Tertz and Arzhak; that he did not care for them artistically; that their publication was a matter of personal conscience; and that to try the two men on criminal charges was a grave affair that would injure the prestige of the Soviet Union. The report adds that the court did not read the letter aloud as part of the record.

That is the writer Progress was selling in 1974 as a cultivator of the finer feelings.

The stories

None of which would matter if the work were not good. It is.

Colchis is the centre of the book and the most interesting failure in it: a land-reclamation novella in which the reclamation argument is won by the engineers and the writing argument is won by somebody else. Its real debate is a conversation over a feast table. Pakhomov explains what the ancients meant by a golden fleece — an ordinary sheepskin spread at the bottom of a gold-bearing river, weighted with stones, and the grains of gold collected in the wool. "It's very simple," said Kakhiani. "No poetry about it. A primitive method of gold washing, that's all." And Pakhomov, amicably: "There's lots of poetry about the simplest things," followed by "Legends contain the seed of the future. It's man's aspiration to lofty ideals that gives rise to legend." Asked what the fire-breathing bulls of the Jason myth are now, Gabunia calls out, chuckling, "Tractors." That is the whole quarrel of the 1930s in half a page, and Paustovsky lets the romantic have the last word without ever saying so: it is Pakhomov, not the engineer, who gets the closing argument, that "technology is also an art" and that men must put their faith in it "as the Greeks put their faith in Orpheus' lyre".

The Telegram, dated 1946, is the finest thing here and the least explicable by the doctrine of its year. Nastya, in Leningrad, is doing useful and creditable work organising an exhibition for a sculptor, and does not go to her mother in the village, and her mother dies. There is no reconciliation and no redemption. She arrives two days after the funeral, weeps all night in the cold room, and leaves before anyone can see her: "It seemed to her that no one but Katerina Petrovna could absolve her of her irreparable guilt, her unbearable burden." That story was published in the year the Zhdanov decrees came down on Zvezda and Leningrad.

Look also at where the dates cluster. Six of the seventeen items are from 1936, 1936, 1937, 1937, 1938 and 1938. What Paustovsky published in the years of the Terror was: a story about hunting dogs, a life of the landscape painter Levitan, a description of the Meshchora woodlands, a visit to Pushkin's estate at Mikhailovskoye, a story called Lump Sugar, and a boy from Little Lake. Isaak Levitan opens in a Moscow of the eighteen-eighties, with a drunk painter's hands shaking over a glass of tea and his pupil listening: "Russia hasn't got its own spokesman," Savrasov was saying. Written in 1937, that is a

sentence with more than one address.

The nature writing — Meshchora Country, Lyonka from Little Lake, A Night in October, Ilyinsky Waters — is what made him loved, and it is not an escape from anything. It is the ground of the claim he makes in the introduction: that romanticism is "inherent in everything particularly in learning and knowledge", that ignorance makes a person indifferent, and that indifference "is like a cancerous growth in that it develops slowly but surely". A man who thought that about indifference was always going to write that letter in 1966.

A note on this text

The scan behind this ebook is short at the end. The last story, Ilyinsky Waters, breaks off in the middle of a sentence at the foot of printed page 333 — "Yellow plane leaves rustled beneath our feet. They had" — because the final leaf of the copy is missing. Nothing has been supplied or invented to cover the gap. It is recorded here so that the reader knows the ending is absent rather than abrupt.

Reading it now

Read the introduction first, and read it as a document rather than as throat-clearing. It is a man of seventy-four explaining, to a foreign reader he will never meet, that romanticism is not a failure of political seriousness and that a concealed grain of truth is a crime against conscience. Both propositions were arguments he had been having at home for forty years, and he states them here without naming a single opponent.

Then read Colchis for the bust in the furnace, and The Telegram for what he could do when nobody was requiring anything of him, and the Meshchora pieces for the thing he was actually best at.

And keep the dates in view. The book stops in 1954. What Paustovsky did between 1956 and 1966 — the Drozdov speech, Tarusa Pages, the letter the court would not read out — is not in this volume, was not going to be put in this volume, and is the reason the volume exists in this shape. A publisher can make a writer harmless by choosing which fourteen years to leave out.

HISTORY

Reminiscences of Lenin

Lenin at home and in exile, by the woman who shared the life - the bicycles, the chess, the safe houses and the smuggled papers - and one of the best inside histories of Russian Marxism.

Nadezhda Krupskaya

Publisher's Introduction

This is the most intimate book ever written about Lenin, by the person who knew him best, and it is haunted by everything she could not say. Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya was Lenin's wife for a quarter of a century and his political comrade for longer — secretary of Iskra, a Bolshevik in her own right before she was ever a Bolshevik's wife, and after the revolution one of the founders of Soviet education. She wrote these reminiscences at the turn of the 1930s, and they carry a warmth and an ordinariness that no official Life could counterfeit: Lenin cycling in the Geneva hills, losing his temper over a chess game, poring over library catalogues, learning to skate, arguing half the night and then insisting everyone go to bed. For the daily texture of underground and émigré Bolshevism — the smuggled newspapers, the split-hair polemics, the poverty, the codes and safe houses and endless moving on — there is no better witness, because there was no closer one.

Read it first for that, because the value is real and it is large. Krupskaya is not a hagiographer by temperament; she is a precise, unsentimental woman describing a life she shared, and the precision is the charm. She records the arguments as arguments, not as scripture descending; she lets Lenin be wrong, be tired, be human. The book is also, incidentally, one of the better political histories of Russian Marxism from the inside — the fight with the Economists, the 1903 split, the years of reaction, the war, the road to October — told by someone who was in the room for most of it and did the filing for the rest. A reader who wants to know how Bolshevism actually lived, day to day, before it became a state, will find it here as nowhere else.

Now the haunting, because it is the reason this book needs an introduction and not merely a reprint. Look at where the memoir stops. It carries the reader with enormous care from 1893 to the October Revolution and then, in a thin and guarded Part Three, to 1919 — and there it halts. The last four years of Lenin's life, the years Krupskaya lived through at his side, are

simply not here. And those were the years that mattered most for the fate of everything the book describes: the years in which Lenin, dying, turned against the apparatus he had helped build, fought Stalin over the bureaucracy and over Georgia, and dictated the Testament that begged the Party to remove Stalin from the post he was already abusing. Krupskaya carried that Testament. She was its keeper and, in December 1922, its immediate occasion: it was Stalin's crude abuse of her — a phone call in which he cursed her for helping the paralysed Lenin with his correspondence — that provoked Lenin's final, furious break with him. She knew all of it. She wrote none of it. The memoir goes silent exactly where the truth had become lethal, and the silence is not an absence of material but a presence of fear. By the time these pages were published, the men who filled them — Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, a whole generation of Lenin's colleagues named here as comrades — were being prepared for the dock or were already dead. Krupskaya wrote a book about Lenin's friends in the years when naming them truthfully could kill you.

She had reason to know it better than anyone, because she had already lost the one fight that mattered to her. When Lenin died in January 1924, Krupskaya asked the country, in Pravda, not to do the thing it was about to do. "Do not let your grief for Ilyich," she wrote, "find expression in the outward veneration of his person. Do not raise memorials to him, name palaces after him, hold magnificent celebrations in his memory. To all this he attached so little importance in his life; all this was so burdensome to him." It was the plainest possible statement of what Lenin himself would have wanted, from the person with the most right to say it. The state did the opposite of every clause. It embalmed his body and laid it in a shrine on Red Square; it renamed a city for him; it raised the statues and named the palaces and manufactured the celebrations; and it built out of the dead man a religion, "Marxism-Leninism," with its own scripture, its own liturgy, and its own inquisition. Krupskaya opposed the mummification and was overruled. She lived another fifteen years as the widow of a god she had asked them not to make.

That is the cruel symmetry this edition exists to name. The

same book that gave the cult its human warmth — the affectionate "Ilyich," the tender domestic detail that made the icon lovable — was written by the one mourner who had publicly begged that no cult be built at all. And its author was, by the time it circulated, a defeated woman. Krupskaya had joined the opposition to Stalin in 1925 and 1926, alongside Zinoviev and Kamenev, and had been broken and made to recant; the story ran, and rings true to Stalin's method, that he had told her the Party could always appoint someone else as Lenin's widow. She was kept on as a figurehead of Soviet enlightenment, her educational ideas increasingly ignored or reversed, her protests filed and forgotten, until she died in 1939 on her seventieth birthday. The apparatus that revered her husband's corpse had every reason to prefer her quiet, and quiet is largely what her later years were made to be.

None of this is a mark against the book; it is the book's deepest meaning, once you know how to read it. Krupskaya was not a liar. She was a truthful writer working in a space that had been made too small for the truth, and the shape of what she left out is as eloquent as anything she put in. The Fourth International, which held that the Soviet state under Stalin was not the continuation of October but its bureaucratic betrayal, could read her silences from the outside: Trotsky, who had stood with her in Lenin's last fight and lost, wrote of Krupskaya with a comradely pity, as of someone trapped inside the machine, unable to speak and unwilling to lie outright, and reduced at last to holding her tongue. Her memoir is the record of a revolutionary who could still tell the truth about 1902 but no longer about 1922. Set her 1924 appeal against the mausoleum she could not stop, and you have, in miniature, the whole tragedy of the revolution's degeneration — told, against her will, by the woman the regime most wanted to speak for.

So read *Reminiscences of Lenin* as a double document. On its surface it is exactly what the Foreign Languages Publishing House meant it to be when it sent this English translation into the world in 1959: an affectionate, authoritative, orthodox portrait of the founder, fuel for the cult and the "Lenin and Stalin" continuity the state was still selling. Underneath, for the reader who brings the missing years with them, it is something the publisher never intended — the testimony of a woman who knew where the revolution had gone, said what she safely could, fell silent where she could not, and whose one public act of resistance was to ask that her husband not be turned into the idol this very book helped to gild. Honour the memoir for its warmth and its witness. Honour its author more for the sentence the state spent forty years pretending she never wrote: do not raise memorials to him.

ARTS & LETTERS

Lenin and Gorky

Gorky's portrait of Lenin, the source of the Appassionata story, with two decades of their letters - assembled without the newspaper articles in which Gorky called the October seizure of power a crime.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Maxim Gorky

Publisher's Introduction

Some of the most quoted words ever written about Lenin are in this book, and the man who wrote them had, a few years earlier, called Lenin's revolution a crime. That tension is the whole interest of the volume, and it is precisely the tension the Soviet edition was designed to smooth away.

The centrepiece is Maxim Gorky's memoir of Lenin — the affectionate, novelist's portrait that, more than any official Life, fixed the human image of the founder in the popular mind. Here is the Lenin who loved to laugh, who played with children and stroked cats, who was plainly, disarmingly kind; and here, above all, is the most famous anecdote in the whole literature, Lenin listening to Beethoven's Appassionata and turning away from it: "I know nothing greater than the Appassionata... but I can't listen to music often, it affects my nerves, I want to say sweet nothings and stroke the heads of people... But today we mustn't stroke anyone's head or we'll get our hand bitten off; we have to hit heads, hit them without mercy." No propagandist invented that; Gorky heard it, and set it down, and it has done more to humanise Lenin — and, read another way, to reveal the cost of his politics — than any speech Lenin gave. The correspondence that fills the first half of the book is genuinely valuable too: two decades of letters in which Lenin coaxes, scolds, argues theology and philosophy with a great writer he admired and could not control, and worries about his health and his money. As a record of a real and difficult friendship between the revolution's leader and its most famous literary sympathiser, it is without equal.

So read it for that. But then notice what is missing, because the omission is the point. Maxim Gorky was not, in 1917, a Bolshevik cheerleader. He opposed the October seizure of power, and he said so at length, in public, week after week, in his own newspaper Novaya Zhizn, in the articles later collected as *Untimely Thoughts*. He called the insurrection a reckless gamble with the lives and culture of the Russian people; he denounced the closure of the opposition press, the early terror, the contempt for the educated; he accused Lenin

and Trotsky to their faces of conducting "a cold-blooded experiment" on the Russian working class, of poisoning it with the "rotten venom" of unlimited power. "Lenin," he wrote, "has no pity for the mass of the people... he works like a chemist in a laboratory, with the difference that the chemist uses dead matter, while Lenin works on living material." This is the same Gorky. These are the thoughts he was thinking in the very years the fond letters were being exchanged. And *Untimely Thoughts* is not in this book. The Progress edition gives you the friendship and withholds the quarrel; it prints the man who wrote the Appassionata story and suppresses the man who called the revolution a laboratory experiment on living flesh. The selection is the argument, and the argument is that Gorky was always, simply, Lenin's loving friend.

The truth was darker and more interesting, and it did not end well. Gorky made his peace with the Bolsheviks, worked heroically to save writers and scientists from starvation in the famine years, and then — sick, disillusioned, and increasingly at odds with the regime — left Russia in 1921 for a long exile in Italy. He came back under Stalin, and the terms of his return were the terms of his canonisation: he became the official founder of "socialist realism," the first president of the Union of Soviet Writers, the living saint of Soviet letters, lending his enormous prestige to a state that was, as he returned, opening the camps. He praised the White Sea Canal, built by slave labour, in a notorious collective volume. And then, in June 1936, on the eve of the Great Terror, he died — and his death itself became an instrument of the Terror. At the Bukharin trial of 1938 the state charged that Gorky had been murdered, medically assassinated by the "Right-Trotskyite bloc," and several defendants were shot in part for killing a man the regime may well have killed itself; the truth has never been established, and that uncertainty is its own indictment. The genial memoirist of the Appassionata was, by the end, a prisoner of the cult he had helped to build, and possibly a victim of it.

None of this makes the memoir false. Gorky's Lenin is drawn from life, and the affection in it is real; the tradition from which this introduction is written has never doubted that Lenin

could be, to those he loved, exactly the man Gorky describes. What the Soviet edition does is not to forge the portrait but to frame it — to take the most authoritative literary witness the revolution ever had and present only the half of him that flatters, editing out the half that, in 1917 and 1918, said in plain Russian what the anti-Stalinist left would spend the next seventy years saying: that a dictatorship unrestrained by any law would consume the freedom it promised, and the people in whose name it ruled. Gorky recanted that warning and was rewarded with sainthood and, perhaps, silenced with a syringe. The warning was right.

Read Lenin and Gorky, then, as two books at war inside one cover. On the surface it is what Progress Publishers meant it to be in 1973: the warm, authorised record of a great friendship, the humanising memoir that made Lenin lovable, literature enlisted as reverence. Underneath, for the reader who brings *Untimely Thoughts* along in memory, it is the story of how a state takes a critic, keeps the affection and burns the criticism, turns the man into a monument, and — when he has served his purpose — leaves even his death an unsolved question. The *Appassionata* is still the greatest thing Gorky ever recorded about Lenin. So is the sentence about hitting heads without mercy. This edition wanted you to hear only the first.