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# MULTINATIONAL LITERATURE AND ITS PROBLEMS

George S. N. Luckyj

SOVIET literature is, by Soviet definition, multinational. This attribute is always regarded as something positive, indeed as an achievement of the Soviet regime, unparalleled in history. The multinational Soviet literature, it is claimed, is the direct result of the happy solution of the nationality problem in the USSR and of the 'unbroken friendship of the Soviet peoples'. Here at the outset one runs into difficulties with the definitions and *a priori* assumptions which underlie Soviet thinking. There are still different nationalities in the Soviet Union, but there is, according to the official version, only one Soviet people and, by the same token, one Soviet literature. To be sure, it consists of many national literatures, but since all of them now develop according to the formula 'socialist in content and national in form', there is a great deal more that unites than divides them. Hence the unity (*yedinstvo*) of Soviet literature (or literatures) is taken for granted.

The history of national literatures in the USSR reveals that the road to 'multinational unity' has led over many serious obstacles; but today, when the goal seems to be in sight, grave doubts exist as to the course taken. These doubts exist not so much in the councils of the Communist Party, as in the minds of the non-Russian writers and literati to whom the 'multinational' cloak protecting the various cultures in the USSR appears to be of plain Russian cloth. The inordinately lengthy and at times acrimonious discussions on the subject of Soviet multinational literature recently appearing in Soviet journals and in the Academy of Sciences reports are but a few of the signs of renewed preoccupation with an old topic. It is old in the sense that the first formulation of the role of national, non-Russian literatures in the Soviet state was provided by Lenin. Underlying his well-known theory of the self-determination of nations was the acceptance of the right to independent cultural development of the non-

Russian nationalities. Yet, just as Lenin's proclamation of political self-determination turned out to be but a tactical weapon against the old order, so also his concept of national culture was tinged with utilitarianism, however well-disguised by Marxian terminology. Lenin wrote:

There are two nations in every contemporary nation. There are two national cultures in every national culture. There is the Great Russian culture of a Purishkevich, a Guchkov, or a Struve, but there is also another Russian culture, that of Chernyshevsky or Plekhanov. Two such cultures also exist among the Ukrainians, as well as in Germany, France, England, etc. In each national culture there are elements of democratic and socialist culture. . . . Following the slogan 'for an international culture of democracy' we take from every national culture only its democratic and socialist elements; we take them in opposition to the bourgeois culture, to the bourgeois nationalism of every nation.<sup>1</sup>

This strictly pragmatic and political concept of national culture became the corner-stone of the Leninist doctrine. It should, therefore, always be remembered that for Lenin a national culture was politically useful in the achievement of the socialist revolution—a means to an end. Following Marx's belief in the eventual establishment of an international communist society, Lenin also hoped that when such a society was created its culture and literature would be international rather than national. The process of fusing and transforming the national cultures into one international culture would, according to Lenin, be a very long one. He wrote that 'national differences will remain for a very long time after the realisation of the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale'.<sup>2</sup>

Whatever hopes in the completely independent literary development of the Soviet

<sup>1</sup> Lenin, *Sochineniya* (3rd ed.), XVII, 143.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* XXV, 229.



nationalities might have existed in the post-revolutionary days, these were totally unjustified in the light of Lenin's and, later, Stalin's pronouncements. Even less reason for optimism was afforded by the fact that the leadership of the Bolshevik party was always predominantly in the hands of the Russians, for whom, traditionally, the concept of Russia and Russian culture embraced non-Russian elements and often involved an attempt to absorb these elements into Russia. Yet hopes for an unfettered growth of national cultures and literatures in the USSR were high and stimulated many new trends. The Bolshevik reversal of the tsarist policy of russification, the granting of freedom to the non-Russian languages, the introduction of the national languages into official use, could not but add great impetus to the movements for national literary revival. These movements became apparent among the Ukrainians, the Belorussians, the Georgians, the Armenians and the numerous peoples of Soviet Central Asia. The 1920s was a period of remarkable progress in the non-Russian republics. Unfolding in the relatively liberal climate of the NEP, these cultural tendencies owed little to Russian influence and were nourished by national traditions and aspirations long repressed by tsarism. At times these new trends, whether represented by the older intelligentsia or by the new 'proletarian' writers, were hostile to Russia,<sup>3</sup> without ceasing to be internationalist.

**T**HE Communist Party, although committed to support cultural self-determination, viewed these developments with grave apprehension. Did not Lenin himself, while promising freedom to the nationalities, express the strong belief that they would voluntarily stay in union with Russia?<sup>4</sup> Realising the danger, Stalin devised a formula which, at least for the Communist Party, provided a clear guide to the development of national literatures. This was the theory of literature as 'socialist in content and national in form', first fully explained by Stalin in 1925. Speaking on a subject which, after thirty-five years, is still topical—'the poli-

tical tasks of the university of the peoples of the East'—Stalin declared:

How is the building of national culture, the development of schools and courses in the native languages, and the training of cadres from the local people, to be reconciled with the building of socialism, with the building of proletarian culture? Is there not an irreconcilable contradiction here? Of course not. We are building proletarian culture. That is absolutely true. But it is also true that proletarian culture, which is socialist in content, assumes different forms and modes of expression among the different peoples who are drawn into the building of socialism, depending on differences in language, manner of life, and so forth. Proletarian in content, national in form, such is the universal culture towards which socialism is proceeding.<sup>5</sup>

In 1925 such a pronouncement was of little practical significance. NEP was in full swing, Stalin was not yet in full control of the party, which in the same year made concessions to the literary 'fellow-travellers' and admitted that the time was not yet ripe for a party monopoly in literature. Five years later, however, at the Sixteenth Congress of the party, when Stalin reiterated the slogan of Soviet literatures as 'socialist in content and national in form', the situation had changed radically. The Soviet Union was in the midst of the first Five-Year Plan, Stalin was the undisputed leader of the party, and the national literatures were being purged of 'bourgeois nationalists'.

This is not the place to relate in detail the losses which the non-Russian literatures suffered during the 1930s. Those accounts which have appeared of the Ukrainian and Belorussian literary purges<sup>6</sup> have proved conservative in their estimates of the losses which these literatures suffered during the era of terror. Thus, the present author's list of 113 Ukrainian writers and literary critics liquidated during the 1930s has been extended to twice that length by recent Soviet revelations during the rehabilitation (mostly posthumous) of writers who 'by force of circumstances beyond their control left the

<sup>5</sup> Stalin, *Works*, VII, 140.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Mykola Khvylovy, *Stories from the Ukraine* (New York, 1960).

<sup>4</sup> Lenin, XX, 534–535.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. George S. N. Luckyj, *Literary Politics in the Soviet Ukraine, 1917–1934* (New York, 1956); Anthony Adamovich, *Opposition to Sovietization in Belorussian Literature (1917–1957)* (New York, 1958).

literary career at the half-way mark'.<sup>7</sup> Some of the non-Russian literatures have never completely recovered from these ravages. Not only did they lose hundreds of talented writers and critics, but those writers who survived had to forsake their earlier credos and styles and conform to the dogma of 'socialist-realism' which, since 1934, has ruled supreme. It is difficult to know which had more disastrous results: the wholesale destruction of literary élites, or the acceptance of party controls by the 're-educated' remnants. It is often forgotten that of those liquidated, only a minority belonged to the fellow-traveller and non-proletarian groups; most were staunchly proletarian and even pro-communist, though tinged with nationalism. 'Bourgeois nationalism' as such was little known to the writers who perished as its alleged adherents. While it is true that during the 1930s Russian writers were also subjected to severe persecution, this was not conducted in an attempt to eradicate Russian chauvinism (which, incidentally, Lenin believed to be as pernicious as bourgeois nationalism) and was mild in comparison with the decimation of the non-Russian writers. The creation, in 1934, of the Soviet Writers' Union deprived the national literatures of the USSR of any possibility of following their own paths and put them under the strict control of the Union. In that body the non-Russian writers had no real power. Although, nominally, they formed separate branches of the Writers' Union in the individual republics, they had very little say in the counsels of the executive of the Union, where they were outnumbered by the Russians. The Russian writers, on the other hand, had, until 1957, no separate republican branch, but had an overwhelming majority on the Union's executive and played a decisive part in the implementation of the literary policy laid down by the party.

The formula of national literature as 'socialist in content and national in form' must be seen therefore as a smokescreen for the ruthless centralisation and standardisation of culture and literature according to Russian models. The facts, confirmed after 1956 by Soviet ad-

missions, show that at the very time Stalin was telling the sixteenth CPSU congress how the party 'helped and promoted the development of the national cultures', a crushing blow was being dealt to the non-Russian literatures, though neither the writers nor their works could be labelled 'bourgeois nationalist'. It is clear that to those who decided that purges were necessary, the vague and specious formula was an instrument for a new policy which was to bar any further independent and anti-Russian tendencies among the national literatures.

A GREAT deal of ink has been spilled by Soviet literary critics and theoreticians on analysing and defining 'socialist content' and 'national form' and the 'dialectical unity' between them. To Marxist and non-Marxist aestheticians alike, such a separation of content and form would appear artificial, although for quite different reasons. Both would tend to look at a work of art as having content and form without necessarily determining where one ends and the other begins. To the non-Marxist, such a crass bisection into content and form is unthinkable; to a Marxist, on the other hand, it goes without saying that 'form is determined by content'.<sup>8</sup> Starting from the premiss that 'every national literature is a concretely class, a concretely historical category', the Soviet theorist logically concludes that—

it is no longer possible to talk of any unique national form since it does not exist. In reality there exists a literary form in different classes of a given people, which represents the dialectical unity with the content of the literature of this class or this people. . . . Therefore we should speak not in general about Russian, Belorussian, or Ukrainian national literature and national form, but of Russian aristocratic, bourgeois, or proletarian literature. . . . Similarly, we distinguish from each other the national proletarian literatures—according to their national forms. But here the specific form of, let us say, Russian proletarian literature, in contrast to the proletarian literature of the Ukrainians, Belorussians, Jews . . . or to the proletarian literatures of the Turkic peoples, is determined by the characteristics

<sup>7</sup> A. I. Kostenko, 'Na pershomu etapi ukraïnskoyi radyanskoyi poeziyi', *Iz poeziyi 20-kh rokiv* (Kiev, 1959), p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> I. Nusinov, 'Natsionalnaya literatura', *Literaturnaya entsiklopediya*, VII, 635.



of the entire history of the struggle of the Russian proletariat against its oppressors, in distinction to those specific historical conditions which dictated the struggle of the workers of the other peoples to overthrow the power of the landlords and bourgeoisie and who are now struggling to build socialism.<sup>9</sup>

This class concept of national literature and national form harks back to Lenin's pragmatic distinction between 'democratic' and 'reactionary' cultures within a culture. The theory was not applied consistently, for Lenin, while giving preference to the 'democratic' culture of a given nation, also believed in utilising and adapting the old, bourgeois literature to the needs of the proletariat.

After Lenin's death this policy was abandoned. The Soviet nationalities were declared by Stalin to be 'socialist nations' already weaned, despite the inequality of their historical development, from their 'bourgeois past' and ready to enter, all together, the era of socialism and hence the era of 'socialist-realism'. To understand the literary situation in the 1930s it is necessary to know not so much current official theories as their implications in actual literary politics. In the entire elaboration of the theory of national literatures as socialist in content and national in form, one question remains unanswered: Who is to define what, in content and in form, is permissible at any given time, what accurately reflects the given people's past 'struggle against their oppressors' and their present attempt to 'build socialism'? The decision, we must conclude, was never up to the writers, but up to the Party Central Committee, which openly claimed and exercised this authority, though not with any degree of consistency. How the official standards changed may be seen by comparing the national literatures during the second world war with the post-war period.

THE second world war brought a considerable relaxation of party controls over literature; this was reflected in the national literatures to the extent that nationalism was allowed to appear in both the content and the form of literary works. The reason may be sought, not

in any radical reversal of Soviet cultural policy, but in the temporary concessions to the national and patriotic feelings of Russians and non-Russians alike, and by the desire to inspire greater resistance to the German invaders. Historical themes and heroes were permitted to re-enter the novels and plays of Ukrainian and Belorussian writers, to rekindle love of the fatherland, not so much the socialist as the traditional-bourgeois one.

Efforts were also made to foster the theme of the 'indestructible friendship of Soviet peoples', to counteract any possible centrifugal tendencies. The magazine *Druzhiba narodov* (Friendship of Peoples), started in 1939, stressed that the peoples of the USSR were attracted by the cultural riches of the Russian people, and made it clear that the amity of the Soviet nationalities was to be coupled at all times with a veneration for Russian culture. This magazine marks an important landmark on the road to multinationalism. Similar ventures had been known before 1939 (especially *Sovetskaya strana* and *Tvorchestvo narodov SSSR*, sponsored by Gorky), but *Druzhiba narodov*, published in Russian, was to be, and still is today, the experimental melting pot of Soviet literatures. Apart from translating the finest examples of socialist-realist writing from all the republics, it provided a forum for the discussion and formulation of the theory of multinationalism on the one hand, and of national form and socialist content on the other.

In the drive for ideological literary unity Gorky played an important, if somewhat ambivalent, role. During his lifetime he often expressed a nationalistic pan-Russian attitude (cf. his letter to the Ukrainian writer Slisarenko questioning the need for translating his own works into Ukrainian), tempered with some concern to make good the injustices which the non-Russian nationalities had suffered before 1917. Gorky's true sentiments on this subject are best revealed in a letter he wrote to A. S. Shcherbakov in November 1934, in connection with the preparation of multinational literary almanacs:

The main purpose of the almanacs is to unite all national literatures into one—pan-union! Further beyond this union there is an outline of the merger of all races into one, not only ideologically, but also physiologically, by

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 638.

means of the constant intermixing of persons. I speak precisely of a merger—not swallowing up, not of a physical but of a biochemical conglomerate, which will then create a new culture. . . . It has been stated that in principle ‘the almanac will print only new works by contemporary writers’. But in the past the idiocy of autocracy and bourgeois politics inflicted many heavy injuries on the national minorities, the pain of which is still felt, and the church has taught the illiterate and semi-literate people to treat those of a different faith as second- and third-class people. National insults have not disappeared, nor has the haughty and disdainful attitude of Russians to non-Russians disappeared. . . .

I believe that it is unnecessary to keep silent about the insults of the past, and we would gain a great deal in the eyes of readers from the national minorities if, in the almanacs, our writers were to publish brief, well-written studies based on the material of the tragic conquest of the Caucasus, the construction of the Trans-Caspian railway, Skobelev’s expeditions into Akhal-Teke, the facts about the forced baptism of the Kazan Tatars, their participation, together with the Bashkirs, in the rebellion of Pugachev, the national movement of the Volga Mordvinians in the 40s, the pillaging of the Siberian tribes, etc. The risk of falling into a tone of repentance is nonexistent, since the proletariat is not responsible for the actions of tsars and merchants.<sup>10</sup>

Gorky’s advice about exposing pre-1917 Russian imperialism and exploitation was never taken, but his hope for a merger of Soviet cultures and peoples was brought a little closer to fulfilment. In his speech at the first Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, Gorky glorified ‘multinational Soviet literature’, but he reserved for national literatures the right to ‘different creative devices and aspirations’.<sup>11</sup> Ironically enough, after his death in 1936, the Soviet authorities created a cult of Gorky in the literatures of the non-Russian peoples of the USSR, emphasising *ad nauseam* their indebtedness to the Russian writer and to Russian literature in general. Startsev’s bibliographical guide to the literatures of the peoples of the

USSR<sup>12</sup> lists, for the period 1940–54, over 50 books and 400 articles, in Russian alone, devoted entirely to the ‘friendship of Soviet literatures’; in most of them Gorky figures prominently.

During the second world war many novels, short stories, and poems were written specifically for the purpose of describing and reinforcing the friendship of Soviet peoples. One of them, possessing literary and not only propaganda value, is the short novel *Vztyatie Velikoshumska* (translated into English as *Chariot of Wrath*) by the well-known Russian novelist Leonid Leonov, whose characters, drawn from several nationalities, ‘were meant to be representative of the basic unity of Russia’.<sup>13</sup> Leonov, in this and other novels, is, in the words of a Soviet critic, ‘interested, above all, in the Russianness of the Soviet man’,<sup>14</sup> a preoccupation which, to many non-Russian writers interested in their own national characteristics, proved to be perilous.

**S**TALIN’S victory toast to the ‘Russian people—the most prominent nation of all nations in the Soviet Union’, proposed in 1945, was not a good augury to the non-Russian writers. Many who, during the war, were encouraged to write patriotic poems and historical plays, have since been declared ‘bourgeois nationalists’. Zhdanov’s pronouncement in 1946, reiterating the principle of *partiinost* in literature and denouncing apolitical, cosmopolitan, and bourgeois nationalist writers, had serious repercussions in nearly all the republics, beginning with the Ukrainian and ending with the Turkmenian, everywhere uncovering nationalist deviations. Known for his policy of russification in the Ukraine, Khrushchev, speaking to the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR in 1948, declared that ‘to be friends with the great Russian people means to march in the first ranks of the most progressive movement of peoples’. There followed outpourings of gratitude by hundreds of non-Russian writers to the Russians, whose cultural leadership and

<sup>12</sup> I. I. Startsev, *Khudozhestvennaya literatura narodov SSSR: 1934–1954* (Moscow, 1957).

<sup>13</sup> Marc Slonim, *Modern Russian Literature from Chekhov to the Present* (New York, 1953), p. 329.

<sup>14</sup> B. Bursov, *Zvezda*, 1959, 8, p. 202.

<sup>10</sup> *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 1960, V, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> M. Gorky, *Sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1953), XXVII, 296.



superiority were extolled with unparalleled obsequiousness. The campaign, in which the slogan of 'elder Russian brother' was frequently used, could be regarded as being up to a point successful; this could be seen later, when the Stalinist controls were considerably relaxed after 1953.

In comparison with Russia, where Stalin's death precipitated waves of unrest in literature, described as the 'thaw' or even as an 'interval of freedom', the ferment in the non-Russian literatures was mild. Some calls for greater creative freedom were heard, but these were more timid than those of Ehrenburg or of the contributors to *Literaturnaya Moskva*, and usually echoed earlier Russian protests. In one respect especially did the thaw affect national literatures, awakening memories and stirring doubts as to the success of the 'friendship of peoples'. This was the partial rehabilitation of writers who had perished during the era of Stalin's 'cult of personality'. In Russia, rehabilitation affected only a small number of writers and was not granted to all (e.g. Lunts, Pilnyak, Zamyatin). In the non-Russian literatures, where the purges had been much more severe, a larger number of writers was reinstated (mostly posthumously) but, on the other hand, more of them were left condemned. Moreover, their 'sins' were often different from those of the Russians, and absolution, which could not be granted without revealing the sin, no matter how euphemistically disguised, had a different effect.

It is difficult to know the principles which were applied in the rehabilitation of writers. Coming as a result of the decisions of the Twentieth Party Congress, rehabilitation was intended, in the first place, to reinstate those communist or pro-communist writers in the USSR who had been unjustly condemned and whose works were banned during the Stalin era. However, it is interesting to note that among those rehabilitated were some non-communist or even anti-communist writers, while several communist writers who perished in the 1930's were left on the index. In the national republics rehabilitation proceeded by fits and starts, perhaps because no clear agreement could be reached as to who should be included. There is reason to believe that in each of the

republics forces were at work which wished for a more sweeping rehabilitation, not only of Soviet writers but of the pre-Soviet ones too, and that these forces were opposed by the executives of the republican Writers' Unions, which were in favour of gradual and slow reinstatements. Considering the brief period in which rehabilitation took place (February 1956–May 1957), it is noteworthy that several hundred writers and literary critics were readmitted to literature. Some were reinstated before 1956 and a few after 1958; of those whose works have been republished and whose names again appear in Soviet bibliographies, the list of writers who died between 1934 and 1942 is long indeed (71 in Ukrainian literature alone).

The effect of these disclosures on literary life, and especially on the younger generation of writers, must have been profound. The official explanation, that they perished as the result of the 'cult of personality', was totally inadequate. The hypocrisy with which the prefaces to new editions of their works have been composed, mentioning only in passing the 'old fighters, whose names were unjustly forgotten, rejoining the ranks', added insult to injury. Finally, the rehabilitation of writers was not complete; in most cases only a few works by a writer were republished and only in very few instances was there a full and genuine reappraisal of his work.

The fact that, on Khrushchev's orders, rehabilitation was suddenly stopped in 1957, suggests the possibly disturbing effect it had on the national literatures. The effect, to be sure, cannot be accurately measured, since its manifestation was mute, but the revelation of the losses literature suffered at the hands of the NKVD, must have reinforced doubts about the party's wisdom in guiding literature.

**T**HE thaw provided fresh stimulus for the re-examination of the theory of national literature as socialist in content and national in form. In almost every issue of the monthly *Druzhba narodov* there was some discussion of this formula. But not until January 1957 did discussion become controversy. The spark was provided by A. Bocharov, who questioned the

very foundation of this theory.<sup>15</sup> According to his argument, to describe Soviet culture as socialist in content and national in form is correct only with reference to the 'principles of Soviet nationality policy'. However, he continues, this thesis has been

mechanically transferred to the phenomena of literature and art and has recently come to be regarded as an all-embracing characterisation of our culture, our art, as an expression of their specific merits, as an aesthetic category. . . . Is it not time to pause and ask how scientific and hence how true is this formula in the role of an aesthetic category? Let us free ourselves from the cult of this magic phrase, let us attempt to analyse what it means.

Bocharov then proceeds to show the absurdity of the division between content, which is supposed to express socialist ideology, and form—the manifestation of a national language and distinctiveness (*svoeobrazie*). He comments plainly that 'form and distinctiveness are different things; the manifestation of a way of life and customs is that aspect of literature which ordinary readers usually regard as content'. All attempts, therefore, to extract and to define national form as separate from content are, in his opinion, doomed, for 'what is customarily called form is like moisture in the soil; you don't see it if it is there, only when it disappears does the soil become arid and sterile. Just as it is impossible to separate moisture from the soil, so it is impossible to divide national content and form'. Finally, Bocharov condemns the preoccupation with national form of the non-Russian literatures and the habit of always comparing these literatures to the Russian. 'There are no works on contemporary Russian national form. . . . It is obvious that Russian literature, as the most developed one, is regarded at times as the measure of the "uniform socialist content" and of the future "socialist form", and that literary historians try to assess the national form of other literatures only by distinguishing it from the Russian.'

Coming, characteristically enough, from a Russian, this article raised a real storm. It was

roundly condemned by most opponents (among them the Georgian Lomidze, the Ukrainian Novychenko, and the Latvian Kraulin), but it was still sending out ripples of discontent, despite the appearance of Lomidze's *Yedinstvo i mnogoobrazie* (Unity and Diversity), written late in 1956 and published in 1957, and now regarded as a standard work on the subject. Since the author now holds an important position as head of the department of the literatures of the USSR at the Gorky Institute of World Literature, his views cannot be ignored.

Lomidze acknowledges that 'some distinguished representatives of national culture, having served their country well, were slandered and placed in the category of "enemies of the people"'. Such a fate befell the popular Ukrainian playwright and novelist I. Mikitenko, the prominent Armenian poet E. Charents, the Tatar writer G. Ibragimov, the Georgian writers M. Dzhavakhishvili, T. Tabidze, P. Yashvili, the Latvians L. Laitsen, V. Knorin and others. In this way the cultural and national heritage of these peoples was being artistically impoverished, and books of considerable aesthetic merit were withdrawn from circulation.'<sup>16</sup> He reassures his readers that no such violations are likely to occur in the future because the party is following the Leninist principle of allowing the national literatures to develop as socialist in content and national in form. The latter, according to Lomidze, implies much more than language; it reflects the distinctiveness of a people and their national character, but these, in turn, have to correspond to the real interests of the people and, in a socialist society, show not so much the differences between the various nationalities as their common features, developed in the struggle which unites all the workers of the Soviet Union. What the real interests of the people are is plainly determined by the party; hence Lomidze maintains that under socialism the national character of the Soviet peoples has radically changed (sometimes, as in the case of the Bashkirs, propelling them from a semi-nomadic to a modern society), and the interests of these new socialist nations require that more attention be paid in

<sup>15</sup> A. Bocharov, 'K voprosu o natsionalnoi spetsifike literatury', *Druzhba narodov*, 1957, I.

<sup>16</sup> Georgi Lomidze, *Yedinstvo i mnogoobrazie* (Moscow, 1957), p. 14.



their literatures to contemporary themes than to past traditions.<sup>17</sup>

None of this adds much to the earlier Soviet definition of national form; it is based on *a priori* assumptions as, for instance, that Soviet nationalities are guaranteed the right of national self-expression while in the West the national characteristics of a culture disappear under the pressure of cosmopolitanism. Still, Lomidze's book contains some new ideas, and despite its bias is, on the whole, free from a blind veneration for Russia. In fact, Lomidze makes this unusual admission (p. 280):

The names of Gorky and Mayakovsky have been canonised and made icon-like. It is difficult to find a single study or article in which the influence of their works on the development of national literatures is not mentioned. . . . Is it not time to stop chewing the accepted truths? Is it not time to approach serious problems more seriously and thoroughly? All one hears is [their] influence and influence!

THE winds of doctrine blew colder after Khrushchev's speech 'For a Closer Alliance of Literature and Art with the Life of the People' in May 1957, and put an end to the thaw. In his book, *The Multinational Soviet State; Its Characteristics and Paths of Development*,<sup>18</sup> published in 1958, I. Tsameryan proclaimed that the national character of 'socialist nations' has come to reflect the new, socialist conditions of their lives and shows their 'spiritual drawing together'. 'The characteristic feature of this process', he continues, 'is the tendency of approximation (as yet not merger) of the national forms of the culture of socialist nations, in contrast to the process of alienation of nations from each other which takes place in a national bourgeois culture'. 'The cultural achievements', he concludes, 'of each nation of our Fatherland are the property of all nations and represent a contribution to the common and unified socialist culture of the Soviet people'.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31, 150. Some hope of re-appraising the old 'epic works of the peoples of the Soviet East, unjustly labelled "anti-popular"', is offered by L. Klimovich in his *Iz istorii literatur sovetskovo Vostoka* (Moscow, 1959), pp. 27-28.

<sup>18</sup> I. Tsameryan, *Sovetskoe mnogonatsionalnoe gosudarstvo, evo osobennosti i puti razvitiya* (Moscow, 1958).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 153, 246, 268.

In a special article, *Pravda* (29 September 1958) declared party policy in the field of multinational Soviet literature to be a complete success and called Soviet writers the missionaries of socialist culture abroad. It welcomed the forthcoming conference of Asian and African writers in Tashkent as an event of major importance and anticipated an even greater interest at home and abroad in the Soviet brand of multinationalism. In October 1958, the meeting in Tashkent took place, attended by 170 writers from fifty countries in Asia and Africa. Hailed as the 'literary Bandung', the conference declared itself in favour of complete national independence for all peoples and of the abolition of colonialism. However, it also pleaded for the unity of all nationalities and no break with the West. The Russian hosts, keeping well in the background, made it plain that this unity could be modelled on the ideological solidarity of Soviet literatures while conceding the right to a 'national form'.

On the home front the trend was not towards a more liberal approach to the nationality problem but, on the contrary, towards greater russification. In December 1958, the new school reform made it possible for a non-Russian republic to omit the teaching of the native language in favour of Russian if the parents of the children so desired. The proposal stirred wide protests, especially among the writers, against what many regarded as an abrogation of the Leninist principle which made the teaching of the republican language compulsory in that republic. The protest was particularly strong in Azerbaijan and Latvia. However, in the end the proposal was accepted.

In January 1959, the results of the Soviet census dramatically revealed to the non-Russian intellectuals the extent of russification in the union republics. The Russians now account for 54.8 per cent of the total population. The losses suffered by the Ukraine, Belorussia, and the Baltic republics cannot be explained by the war; similarly the high proportion of Russians in the Kirgiz Republic (30.2 per cent; 11.7 in 1933), Turkmenian Republic (17.3 per cent; 7.5 in 1933) and, above all, in the Kazakh Republic (42.7 per cent; 19.7 in



1933; the Kazakhs are now a minority (30·0 per cent) in their own republic) confirm the denationalisation of these areas.

Encouraged by this progress and by Khrushchev's emphasis on 'the link between literature and the people', Soviet theorists have recently put out an even more advanced multinational slogan: *narodnost*. Two ingenious Ukrainian exponents<sup>20</sup> of this principle add the following supplements to the 'socialist in content and national in form' theory: (a) The national character is connected with the present, not with the past (this, after the usual assurance that no one treasures national traditions more deeply than the Communist Party). (b) The national distinctiveness of literature is determined not so much by language, customs, and nature as by its 'ideological kinship with the people'. (c) National characteristics which are the result of the uneven development of Soviet nations should disappear. Hence, the 'young Kirghiz literature would hardly be sorry to see the disappearance of the differences between it and Russian literature which still existed some decades ago'.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, L. Klimovich claims (p. 22) that 'Russian literature was instrumental in destroying the traditions of patriarchal, tribal, and national limitedness'.

Finally, in January 1960, the Gorky Institute of the Academy of Sciences devoted a special session to the study of the 'relationships and influences of the national literatures'. Partly designed to oppose the bourgeois 'comparativist school' abroad, it proceeded to lay the foundation for the preparation of a new, conclusive, and exhaustive work on the theory and practice of Soviet multinational literature. As the director of the Gorky Institute, I. Anisimov, declared, 'we cannot be satisfied by studies in which this or that literature of one of the peoples of the USSR is treated in isolation from the process of development of the multinational Soviet literature'.<sup>22</sup> This portends yet another all-out effort to forge one mould for Soviet literature; yet does it not also betray a surrender to utopia?

<sup>20</sup> N. Shamota, *Khudozhnik i narod* (Moscow, 1960); M. V. Honcharenko, *Problema narodnosti literatury v marksystsko-leninskiy estetytsi* (Kiev, 1959).

<sup>21</sup> Shamota, *op. cit.* pp. 284, 295, 300.

<sup>22</sup> *Izvestiya Akademii Nauk SSSR, Otdelenie literatury i yazyka*, XIX, 3 (Moscow, 1960), p. 266.

THE never-ceasing and continually intensified campaign for the 'one and indivisible' Soviet literature is itself an admission that the forces resisting it are still powerful. Despite russification and assimilation, the national languages show today a renewed vigour. Although the Ukrainian journal *Movoznavstvo* (Linguistics) envisages in the period of transition from socialism to communism an even greater 'intensification of the role of the Russian literary language as the medium of international communication',<sup>23</sup> it contains a wealth of new linguistic material showing that research in dialectology and the Ukrainian language in general is being continued on a wider scale than before 1956. The ancient Kirgiz epic masterpiece, *Manas*, still captivates modern Kirgiz writers (Tokombaev). Above all, in spite of the 'freeze-up' after 1957, conditions in literature and criticism have remained far more liberal than they were under Stalin. The drive for a multinational literature is still on, but the iron discipline which used to be behind it seems to be lacking.

It is difficult to believe that the primitive festivals (*dekadas*) of national art and literature organised each year in Moscow in the best Stalinist tradition can be regarded by the intellectuals and writers of the non-Russian republics as anything but evidence of their cultural vassalage. Although less patronising than before 1953, Soviet literary policy towards the non-Russians still aims at submerging them in the Russian sea. Despite and perhaps because of the economic and educational opportunities which the Soviet regime offers non-Russian intellectuals, the reduction of their literatures to a carbon copy of Russian socialist-realism and of their art to folksiness, may no longer satisfy them. Recent literary developments in Poland and Yugoslavia, so contrary to Soviet policy, are bound to influence the national republics, especially those on the periphery of the USSR with either strong pro-Western traditions or a still vital Moslem heritage. As long as the present controls in Soviet literature continue to operate the trend to multinationalism will continue. But the dialectic of this policy is still in doubt—and so is its outcome.

<sup>23</sup> I. K. Bilodid and O. S. Melnychuk, *Movoznavstvo*, 1959, XV, p. 17.

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