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THE ARTS IN THE SOVIET UNION

EMILY BRIDGERS

In Two Parts

Part Two



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## CHINESE CARAVAN

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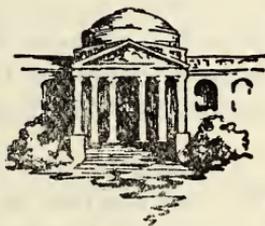
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## INTRODUCTORY NOTES

Discussion of the arts in the Soviet Union is necessarily limited by what is available in translation in this country. However, since the subject is nevertheless extensive, several of the arts have been omitted from this study, notably painting, architecture, stage design, and the plastic arts.

The interest in this outline is in creative output rather than in whether Russia's method is the wisest and best method to develop artists. The regulation of the arts has, therefore, been accepted with slight comment. Those who are interested are referred to Kurt London's full discussion of Soviet organization of the arts, and the relation of the Soviet Government to the arts, in his book, *The Seven Soviet Arts*. This book, published in the United States by the Yale University Press, is unfortunately out of print but is available in some libraries.

In using this outline, it should be remembered that the phrase "old Russia" refers to pre-1917 imperial Russia, and not merely to Russia prior to the reign of Peter the Great, the period which formerly was commonly termed "Old Russia."

For preparation of the chapter on "Soviet Poetry and Its Tsarist Background," our appreciation is due to Miss Elizabeth Lawrence, author of *A Southern Garden*, and of the Library Extension publication, *Gardens of the South*.

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## SOVIET FICTION

"The party cannot admit by decree or proclamation any legal monopoly of literary production on the part of any one group or literary organization. . . . The party cannot give this monopoly to any group, not even to the proletarian group itself. . . . The technical achievements of the old masters must be considered, and a corresponding form comprehensible to millions must be worked out."

—From The Resolution of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party, Spring 1925.

From 1917 to 1922 practically no fiction was written in the Soviet Union. With the Revolution of 1917 had come a complete cessation of literary activity. The new government had seized all printing presses, and literary reviews and pre-Revolutionary newspapers had either gone out of existence or ceased publication. Many writers had fled the country, and those who remained found in civil struggle, famine, and disease no incentive to creative work. Moreover, when life slowly took on a more normal aspect and interest in writing revived, older experienced writers found themselves in conflict with enthusiastic young Bolsheviks whose artistic perspective was limited by their faith in the new social experiment. To minds interested exclusively in the development of an original proletarian literature, annihilation of old art forms seemed only logical. In 1920 this urgent interest in a new culture for the masses actually manifested itself in the formation of the famous organization of the Proletcult, founded for the avowed purpose of fighting for a proletarian culture on an international scale.

For a number of years experiments flourished and schools of writing and literary movements came and went, leaving in their wake very little, if anything, of value. It became evident that a new literature could not be arbitrarily cut from whole cloth. Maxim Gorky, who had great influence, befriended the older writers. By 1922, a year which saw the revival of the book trade, the moderates had won the first round. Writers both old and young who were neither Communist nor from the ranks of the proletariat, but who were at the same time not inimical to the new society, were accepted by the Bolsheviks and became known

as Fellow-Travellers (*poputchiki*), a name bestowed on them by Trotsky.

The extremists were not entirely discouraged, however, for again in 1929 when the First Five-Year Plan was inaugurated they attempted to dominate literature. Seizing control of the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers, they inaugurated a program which declared that the Five-Year Plan and the class war were the only fitting subjects for Soviet literature. Writers who refused this program were not accepted in membership. But a second time the attempt was a failure and in 1932, again influenced by Gorky, the Government dissolved the Association of Proletarian Writers and an Association of Soviet Writers was organized which admitted all non-hostile writers whether or not they were professed Communists.

Influential in the victory of the moderates was the formation in Petrograd in 1921, under the patronage of Gorky, of a group of writers who called themselves the Serapion Brothers, most of whom were intellectuals and all of whom insisted upon the principle of creative freedom for the individual writer. Many of the Serapion Brothers and the *poputchiki* have since declared publicly in favor of the new social order. From among them have come a majority of the most accomplished writers in the Soviet Union. With time, however, more and more writers are developing within the ranks of the proletariat.

In the Soviet Union writing is a profession and writers, like all artists, must be at the same time both artists and teachers. Their aim—to reinterpret the past, create the truth of the present, and show the pattern of the future—is defined as “socialistic realism.” Prose style in fiction, however, by whatever name, although somewhat influenced by the symbolism of the early years of this century, has so far continued in the Russian realistic tradition. With the new approach to social problems has come, naturally, a change in expression and outlook. The grace and subtlety of the old masters have given way to a forthrightness in expression which at its best is vigorous, colorful, without sentimentality, and not lacking in a sense of beauty and movement. At the same time, perhaps in part consequent upon the violence and terror with which the new society so recently came into being, Soviet fiction is sometimes pervaded with a coarseness, a brutality, and an insensitiveness shocking to ordinary

sensibilities. Again, in the case of the literature of industrialization, Soviet writing is often technical and documentary to the point of tedium for any but the most enthusiastic follower of the Socialist State. Since, however, Soviet fiction deliberately finds its roots in current life, it is more than probable that given sufficient years of peace and stability Soviet writers will develop for the people a literature of depth, understanding, and moral quality.

For its own value and as a background for chapter 8, which is devoted to two representative Soviet novels, this chapter proposes to give, through short stories and passages from novels, a brief impression of the best prose fiction in the Soviet Union. Mikhail Sholokhov, the most considerable of the proletarian novelists, is not included, since his work is considered in the next chapter. Grouping of writers is of necessity more or less arbitrary. Readers who are interested in a detailed discussion of style are referred to Marc Slonim's essay on "The New Spirit in Russian Literature" (*Soviet Literature*, pp. 13-48). Simmons' *Outline* gives an excellent summary of the work of modern Russian writers, together with a selective guide to English translations.

#### 1. SERAPION BROTHERS AND POPUTCHIKI

The Symbolists in Russia, with their attention to the sound and rhythm of words (which cannot be judged adequately in translation), have had a marked influence on Soviet writers. For an impression of what Mirsky calls the "immaterial Ariel-like quality" of Andrei Bely (Bugayev; b. 1880), the most original and influential of the Symbolists, read selected passages from *Kotik Letaev* (Reavey), keeping in mind Mirsky's advice to the reader not to rack his brain to understand Bely's meaning. In contrast, read a selection from Alexei Remizov (b. 1877) (Reavey; Cournos), whose colloquial yet carefully wrought prose in adaptations of folk lore and legends has been distinctive in its influence on Soviet fiction.

S. N. Sergejev-Tsenski (b. 1876), a writer of excellence in pre-Revolutionary Russia, is now an outstanding Soviet novelist. In his story, "The Man You Couldn't Kill" (Cournos), there are evidences both of the traditional Russian compassion, simplicity, and exquisite humor, and of the new dispassionate recognition of brutality and death. Discuss, noting the qualities of exuberance and vividness in the writing.

Boris Pilnyak (Vogau; b. 1894), with a romantic love of the elemental was attracted by the chaos and barbaric actions let loose by the Revolution rather than by the hopeful ideology. His novel, *A Bare Year*

(published in America as *The Naked Year*), is an example of non-narrative, mass-hero writing. In this case, Russia is the hero. Do you find power and satisfaction in the selection (Reavey) from *A Bare Year*? Do you feel that it is "crude, unsweetened, and outspoken naturalism," indicative of the turbulent passions, starved mentalities, and unbridled misery and lust of the Civil War period? Note a like broad canvas and sweep of expression for the character impression in "The Human Wind" (Cournos).

Vsevolod Ivanov (b. 1895) has written brilliantly, in both fiction and drama, of the Civil War in his native Siberia and of peasant heroes, "simple and mighty as Nature," who "act rather than think or reason." His reminiscence, "When I Was A Fakir" (Cournos), is drawn out of his own wandering early life, as his stories of the Civil War (Reavey) are rooted in his experiences as a fighter in Turkestan and Siberia. Discuss his use of precise, pungent language, his fondness for color, and the effective contrast between his underwriting and his sensational material.

Isaak Babel (b. 1894), a Jewish intellectual, is famous for his stories of the Red cavalry, written from his experiences as a member of General Budyonny's Cossacks. William Henry Chamberlin says that "without revulsion, without sentimental glorification, with the blended pity and irony that one often finds in high literary art, Babel set down his more vivid war experiences." He cites especially "The Letter" and "Salt" (Cournos). Comment, noting particularly the economy of this writing. Do you find the same qualities in Babel's personal reminiscences (Reavey)?

Leonid Leonov (b. 1899), a man of true literary talent, in his novels and short stories, as in his plays, is primarily interested in the psychological approach. You recall his play, "The Orchards of Polovchansk," is in the Chekhovian tradition. Soviet critics consider his fiction a bridge between Soviet realism and the classics of the nineteenth century. Discuss the qualities in the story "Ivan's Misadventure" (Cournos) which clearly relate it in style and spirit to nineteenth century classics. Contrast with the quality of compassion in this story the social implications and the contemptuous class feeling in the selection (Reavey) from Leonov's novel, *Skutarevsky* (a story of large scale electrification, First Five-Year Plan). Note in both the short story and the excerpt the attention to detail, the use of color, the careful choice of descriptive matter.

Valentin Katayev (Zilberg; b. 1897) and Veniamin Kaverin (b. 1902) offer splendid examples of Fellow-Traveller literature of the First Five-Year Plan. Comment on the exuberance of the selection (Reavey) from Katayev's novel *Speed Up Time! (Time Forward)*, recalling a like gusto in his play, "Squaring the Circle"; and on the mellowness, humor, and human sympathies in Kaverin's "The Return of the Kirghiz" (Reavey).

#### *Special References:*

*A Treasury of Russian Life and Humor*, edited by John Cournos.  
*Contemporary Russian Literature, 1881-1925*, by Prince D. S. Mirsky.

*Soviet Literature: An Anthology*, edited and translated by George Reavey and Marc Slonim.

*An Outline of Modern Russian Literature*, by Ernest J. Simmons.

*Additional References:*

*Red Cavalry*, by Isaak Babel.

*Bystander; Magnet; Mother*, by Maxim Gorky.

*Armored Train*, by Vsevolod Ivanov.

*The Embezzlers*, by Valentin Katayev.

*Two Captains*, by Veniamin Kaverin.

*Road to the Ocean; Soviet River; Chariot of Wrath*, by Leonid Leonov.

*The Seven Soviet Arts*, by Kurt London.

*The Volga Falls to the Caspian Sea*, by Boris Pilnyak.

*Transfiguration*, by Sergei Sergeyev-Tsenski.

*Darkness and Dawn; Peter the Great*, by Aleksei Tolstoy.

## 2. PROLETARIAN WRITERS

### 1. Proletarian Writers

The works of Fyodor V. Gladkov (b. 1883), Sergei Semyonov (b. 1893), and Evgenyi Gabrilovitch afford excellent examples of the avowedly proletarian writer's approach to literature in the years culminating with the completion of the First Five-Year Plan in 1933. They tell of proletarian life in factory and on farm, of accomplishment, and of party responsibility versus human demands for individual happiness. Gladkov's phrase, "literary documents of the age of socialist construction," might be applied to the work of all of them. Discuss the selections in Reavey, calling attention to the parallel in subject matter and ideas between this writing and the plays of the same period.

Alexander Fadeyev (b. 1901), one of the most promising of proletarian writers, is often compared to Tolstoy in "fresh realism and clear psychological insight." His novel, *The Last of the Udegs*, 1928-1935 (published in America as *Time: Forward!*), is a study of the effect of revolution on a primitive nomadic tribe in Siberia and of the mainsprings of family life against such a background. The excerpt, "The Bandits" (Reavey), offers an example of his style. Read selected passages, commenting on the kinship between this period and our own Indian and Wild West days, and the correspondence between the virile, blunt style and the subject matter.

### 2. Humor, Wit, and Satire

Soviet humor in many cases is too topical to carry over successfully to readers in other countries. In translation it sometimes appears painstakingly labored (see "A Tale About Ak and Humanity," by Zozulya, b. 1891, Cournos), or perhaps somewhat silly (see "Drastic Action," by Victor Ardov, b. 1900, Cournos). But the good-humored hilarious satire of Ilya Ilf (1897-1940) and Evgeni Petrov (1903-1942)

and the smiling wit of Mikhail Zoshchenko (b. 1895) bring laughter in any language.

Explain the idea on which the Ilf-Petrov fun hinges in "The Thirty Sons of Lieutenant Schmidt" (Cournos); illustrate with selected passages the humorous but pointed satire of custom and character; compare with the rollicking humor of Gogol in "The Inspector General," and the biting satire of the nineteenth century novelist-journalist, Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin (1826-1889), (Cournos, pp. 415, 588; Guernsey; Seltzer).

Zoshchenko, one of the early members of the Serapion Brothers and a Fellow-Traveler, is today the people's humorist. Discuss the popular anecdotal quality of his work. Note the skilful criticism of Soviet abuses, foibles, and self-deceptions. If there is sufficient time, read one of the stories.

### 3. War Stories

Discuss and contrast the admiration, and, on occasion, tenderness expressed in these stories (Cournos, pp. 343, 355, 359, and *Stronger Than Death*) for the individual, ordinary Soviet citizen, with the mediocre quality of the stories as a whole, noting the fact that in this country very few really good short stories appeared during the war years.

#### *Special References:*

- A Treasury of Russian Life and Humor*, edited by John Cournos.  
*A Treasury of Russian Literature*, edited by Bernard Guilbert Guernsey.  
*Soviet Literature: An Anthology*, edited and translated by George Reavey and Marc Slonim.  
*Best Russian Short Stories*, compiled and edited by Thomas Seltzer.  
*An Outline of Modern Russian Literature*, by Ernest J. Simmons.  
*Stronger Than Death: Stories of the Russians at War*.

#### *Additional References:*

- The Nineteen*, by A. A. Fadayevev.  
*Cement*, by Fyodor V. Gladkov.  
*Diamonds to Sit On; Little Golden America*, by Ilya Ilf and Yevgeni Petrov.  
*The Seven Soviet Arts*, by Kurt London.  
*The Night of the Summer Solstice and Other Stories*, edited by Mark Van Doren.  
*Russia Laughs*, by Mikhail Zoshchenko.

#### *Magazines:*

- American Mercury* 56:311-18 (Mar. '43), "Russia Is Changing," by Vera Alexandrova.  
*Time*, Oct. 9, '44, pp. 99-102, "Engineers of the Soul," by John Hersey.

## TWO SOVIET NOVELS

"Human nature is imperfect, and therefore it would be strange to see on earth none but the righteous. To believe that it is the duty of literature to dig out 'pearls' from the heap of scoundrels is to reject literature itself. Fiction is called artistic because it draws life as it actually is. Its aim is absolute and honest truth."

—Anton Chekhov

Representative of the best Soviet writing are Konstantine Simonov's recent first novel, *Days and Nights*, about the defense of Stalingrad, and Mikhail Sholokhov's story of Cossack life, *The Silent Don*.

Now forty-one years of age, Sholokhov was born near Veshenskaya, a Cossack village in the rolling steppe eighty miles from a railway and close by the river Don. His father, a cattle dealer, farmer, and later manager of a mill, died in 1925. His mother, said to have been half Cossack and half peasant, was killed by the Germans in their advance into the Don region. Sholokhov was educated in the gymnasiums of old Russia, and during the recent war held the rank of colonel in the Red Army. He writes of the Cossacks among whom he lives and one of whom he married. In addition to *The Silent Don*, he has published one other novel, *Virgin Soil Upturned*, a story of the Cossacks' fight against collectivization. He is now at work on a third, *They Fought For Their Country*.

*The Silent Don* is the finest piece of literature yet produced in the Soviet Union, and one of the best novels written in any country in recent years. Though Sholokhov reached maturity after the Revolution of 1917, living and working in the Soviet socialist state, and is the foremost of the proletarian writers, his novel does not belong primarily to a revolutionary and socialist literature, but rather to the epic tradition of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, with which it is often compared. At the same time, particularly in its uncompromising, honest portrayal of the Cossacks, torn between tradition and the new ideas represented by the advancing Red armies, the book may be considered a notable example of "socialist realism."

*The Silent Don* was originally published in this country in two parts: the first, *And Quiet Flows the Don*, in 1934 and the

second, *The Don Flows Home to the Sea*, in 1941. It describes with utterly brutal realism, sound psychological insight, and poetic vigor the life of Gregor Melekhov and the Don Cossacks in the peace preceding the first World War, during that war, and in the civil wars. Fortunately for the reader, Sholokhov writes objectively, for otherwise the terror and bestiality of many of the scenes would be intolerable. In contrast, and to compensate, are the satisfying simplicity of character drawing, the delicate feeling for intimate human relationships, and the "restrained poetry" of the descriptions of the beloved countryside.

For perspective and full appreciation of its scope, this very long novel should be read in its entirety. Fortunately, however, the first section, *And Quiet Flows the Don*, is rewarding within itself. A short colorful account in Edgar Snow's *People On Our Side* of the Cossacks and their part in this war and the last is lively preliminary reading.

In contrast to Sholokhov's broad canvas and stimulating prose is Konstantine Simonov's fine, quiet story, *Days and Nights*. Without dispute a product of the Soviet, young and very close to his subject, in this novel as in his play, "The Russian People," Simonov has written with an emotional honesty which demands attention. Like the Soviet writer that he is, Simonov has put into his novel faith in the Soviet, hope for the future, and a moving admiration for the heroism of his countrymen in their fight for Stalingrad. But in its simplicity, fidelity to life, pity, and humanitarian ideals, the novel is in direct descent from nineteenth century fiction. Simonov's future as a Soviet writer should be fruitful. Now only thirty-one years of age, he is planning to write other novels out of his wide experience as a war reporter for *Pravda*.

Lauterbach's description in *These Are the Russians* of wrecked Stalingrad, its defenders, and plans for its reconstruction, is of particular interest in connection with *Days and Nights*.

#### 1. THE DON COSSACKS

*And Quiet Flows the Don*, by Mikhail Sholokhov

Explain the origin of the Cossacks, describing briefly their characteristics and mode of life, and the part they played in the history of Russia. (See *A History of Russia*, by Bernard Pares.)

Summarize the immediate background of this novel.

Discuss the splendid handling of the broad canvas: the feeling of the infinite steppe and of boundless horizons; the sense of life in a whole people; the fluid conflict of ideas; the vista of a long past. Contrast with this the attention to detail in the slightest incident or scene, using passages to illustrate.

Comment on objectivity in presenting the point of view of White sympathizers, Red sympathizers, and those who envisioned an independent Cossack state. In this connection, discuss Sholokhov's simple yet penetrating development of the character of Eugene Listnitsky, the son of the landowner, of the Bolshevik Bunchuk, and of Gregor Melekhov, the Cossack.

The truth of relationships is especially admirable. Discuss that of Anna and Bunchuk, of Ilinichna and Pantaleimon, of Gregor and Aksinia, or of the women in the Melekhov family.

Comment on Anna's expression of faith in the joy and beauty of the future, noting that hers is a belief not in eventual evolution towards happiness and the better man, such as you found in "The Cherry Orchard" and "The Lower Depths," but a belief in the near future as conditioned by Socialism.

Point out especially interesting qualities in the writing: the direct yet imaginative approach; the unflinching depiction of reality; the vigorous development of so large a number of characters; the striking similes, particularly those from nature and the battlefield; the use of odor, color, and sound, not merely for poetic effect or beauty of expression, but as directed stimuli for characters and reader; the subtle humor of certain characterizations, such as those of Pantaleimon, Piotra, and old Grishaka Korshunov, combined with a penetrating realization of their inherent obstinate strength; the irony of characterizations such as that of Sergei Mokhov.

Do you find a thesis in this novel? Or is it carved out of life?

#### *Special References:*

*A History of Russia*, by Bernard Pares.

*People On Our Side*, by Edgar Snow, pp. 85-93.

#### *Additional Reference:*

*Virgin Soil Upturned*, by Mikhail Sholokhov.

## 2. FORTITUDE

*Days and Nights*, by Konstantine Simonov

Fill in the background of this story.

Give a brief account of the main characters and of the part each plays. Are these men of action convincing in their unrelenting determination to hold Stalingrad at all costs to themselves or others? Note their frank expression of fear in contrast to their strength of nerve. Though they are necessarily preoccupied with this fear of death, do

you find in them any tendency to the morbid conscience or philosophic questionings commonly associated with the Russian temperament?

Explain the officers' attitude toward their troops. Tell of Konyukov, that marvelous man.

Saburov's qualities are those of a good man of great personal integrity. Discuss these qualities, and show by what means Simonov has made the fortitude of goodness and integrity the very core of his book. Note Saburov's contribution, through his inherent decency, to Vassiliev's treachery.

Simonov writes with moving simplicity of love and death. Illustrate these qualities in his writing by a discussion of the relationship between Saburov and Maslennikov, and Saburov and Anya.

Comment on other characteristics of the writing: the economy with which the story is told, the dignity and seriousness of conception, the emotional sincerity and restraint, the strict relevancy in choice of material. Are the absence of heroics and sentimentality a source of strength?

Do you find evidences of propaganda? If so, point them out. Discuss the function and characterization of Matveyev and Vanin.

*Special Reference:*

*These Are The Russians*, by Richard R. Lauterbach, pp. 14-20, 241-245.

*Additional Reference:*

*No Quarter*, by Konstantine Simonov.

## SOVIET POETRY AND ITS TSARIST BACKGROUND

Russia cannot be known  
 By mind alone,  
 But Russia will impart  
 Her secrets to the heart.

"The tradition of imaginative writing in Russia is scarcely two hundred years old," Babette Deutsch and Avrahm Yarmolinsky write in the introduction to their *Russian Poetry*. In literature the early nineteenth century in Russia paralleled the Elizabethan age in England. "Energizing, liberal influences were in the air; fresh winds were blowing from widened horizons; men's pulses were stirred by the Napoleonic drama; a national self-consciousness came into being. And there was the same coincidence of favorable environment with the accident of genius. Yet while the English Renaissance found its expression in drama, it is notable that nascent Russian literature blossomed in poetry."

That Russian literature "blossomed in poetry" comes as a surprise to the American reader who has known Russia only through the great novelists and dramatists, to whom even Pushkin is a narrative poet given to long stories in verse, such as *Eugene Onegin*. But the authors have proved their point by their beautiful translations which show that not only did Russian literature blossom in poetry, but poetry blossomed in Russian literature. Moreover, it is understandable—if you agree with Poe that the only legitimate subjects of lyric poetry are love and death—that poetry should flower among a people so passionately preoccupied with those two subjects.

The first impression of Russian plays and novels is how Russian they are, but the first impression of the lyrics is how universal they are. A writer of any other age or nation might have said:

My little almond tree  
 Is gay with gleaming bloom,  
 My heart unwillingly  
 Puts forth its buds of gloom.

The bloom will leave the tree,  
 The fruit, unbidden, grow.  
 And the green boughs will be  
 By bitter loads brought low.

—Alexey Tolstoy (1817-1875)

Russian poetry is very sharply divided into two periods, the Renaissance and the Revolution, but the two are bound together by the recurring theme of social justice. The English-speaking reader is struck by the thought that Blake, with his melancholy, mysticism, and compassion, would have been very much more at home in Russia than in England. It is as if Blake's

"... little black thing among the snow,  
 Crying 'weep! weep!' in notes of woe!"

and Blok's little black man who ran through the town extinguishing the lanterns while "Dawn was approaching, white and slow," were one and the same, a symbol of all the poor and oppressed:

"Oh, how poor is the city with dawn at her windows lying!  
 Crouching outside, the little black man is crying."

#### 1. TSARIST POETRY

"Man remains, and the poet needs no more."

—Alexis de Tocqueville

The poets of Tsarist Russia were aristocratic landowners educated by foreign tutors, widely read in European literature and steeped in European culture, but their poetry was Russian, for Russia was their religion. They wrote of the countryside, of winter snows and summer storms, of seedtime and harvest, and of their joys and sorrows. They wrote for themselves, but because their poetry was simple and direct it has an appeal for everyone. It was more of the country than of the city, for the poets lived on their estates. To them the peasants were the Russian people. They loved them and suffered for them, but were prevented by autocracy, and by their own inertia, from carrying out social reforms.

Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837)

Although Pushkin stands out in Russian literature as Shakespeare does in English as a "mighty-mouthed inventor of harmonies," it is Byron who influenced his writing. But the influence goes no deeper than the subject and construction of his narrative poems. Pushkin was a classical rather than a romantic poet. His technically perfect lyrics are pure poetry unadorned with imagery and metaphor, depending for their beauty on the choice of the exact word, and on leaving unsaid more than is said. He "made poetry the highest activity of the human spirit," and "gave wings to the Russian language." Pushkin was more intimately connected with the people than any other Russian poet.

Turgenev said that the substance and qualities of his poetry are the substance and qualities of the nation.

Read: "Message to Siberia," "Three Springs," "Work" (Deutsch); "The Upas Tree" (Nabokov).

Mikhail Lermontov (1814-1841)

Lermontov took Byron for his model, not only for his poetry but for himself. From the age of thirteen he tried to behave and write like his romantic and self-centered hero. But hero worship did not lead to imitation. Lermontov was too much of a genius for that, and too much of a Russian. His romanticism was mixed with realism. Turbulent, unhappy, and disillusioned, he reflects the dark side of Russian nature as Pushkin reflects the bright side. He is primarily a poet of the Caucasus which he first visited as a child, and twice later as an exile. He interpreted the East to Russia.

Read: "A Sail," "The Cup of Life" (Deutsch); "Farewell," "My Native Land" (Nabokov); "Composed While Under Arrest," "A Thought" (Max Eastman).

Fyodor Tyutchev (1803-1873)

A drawing-room wit with the reputation of the most brilliant conversationalist in Russia, Tyutchev's real existence was an inner life in which he took refuge in darkness and solitude. He might be called the poet of silence and the night. Night fascinated and repelled him, and out of this love and fear he created his metaphysical conception of Cosmos and Chaos of which day and night are symbols. Cosmos is the tangible and familiar daytime world, Chaos is the uncharted darkness that man "like a homeless orphan" is left to face when night comes on. Tyutchev lived in both worlds, and perhaps, being Russian, the world of darkness was the more real to him. In his conception of nature he is a pantheist, "I in all, and all in me." These themes, with variations, were the burden of his song until he wrote so poignantly and passionately of his late and sad love.

Read: "The Journey," "Silentium," "Last Love," "The Abyss," "Tears" (p. 36) (Nabokov); "Twilight," "Autumn Evening," "Day and Night" (Deutsch).

Nikolai Nekrasov (1821-1877)

This poet called his Muse the "Muse of revenge and of grief." Through his poems "generations of young Russians learned to hate oppression, to abominate autocracy, to understand the common people, and to sympathize with the toiler." It is hard to believe that the poet who wrote so compassionately of the sufferings of the people was also a social snob, and an unscrupulous publisher who drove a hard bargain with his contributors.

Read: "The Capitals Are Rocked," "My Poems," "Last Evening," "The Salt Song" (Deutsch); "The Unmown Strip" (Cournos).

#### *Special References:*

*A Treasury of Russian Life and Humor*, edited by John Cournos.

*Russian Poetry*, chosen and translated by Babette Deutsch and Avrahm Yarmolinsky.

*A History of Russian Literature*, by Prince D. S. Mirsky.  
*Three Russian Poets*, translated by Vladimir Nabokov.

## 2. SOVIET POETRY

"The principle of equality does not, then, destroy all the subjects of poetry: it renders them less numerous, but more vast."

—Alexis de Tocqueville

The poets of Soviet Russia are the people, and the people are the workers. They live what they write. Theirs is the positive and dynamic verse of writers whose vision finds an outlet in action as well as in thought. The center of attention is no longer the peasant and the countryside. It has shifted to the mechanic and the factory, and to the noise and bustle of the city. It has no longer an overtone of sorrow and despair, but is full of self-confidence and optimism.

### POETS OF THE REVOLUTION

In 1917 some of the poets went into exile, some were mute, and some embraced the Revolution, regarding it as fundamental and inevitable and considering themselves evangelists of the new era. Blok, Mayakovsky and Yesenin, the three great poets of this period, wrote before and after the Revolution, and form a transition between the old and the new.

Alexander Blok (1880-1921)

Blok was an aristocrat and a visionary who found in the Revolution a "cleansing fire to purify the soul of Russia."

Read: "The Twelve" (Deutsch).

Vladimir Mayakovsky (1894-1930)

The son of a Caucasian forester, and member of the Bolshevik party from the age of fourteen, Mayakovsky became the poetic mouth-piece of the Revolution, and personification of the new order, maintaining that what was needed was "not a dead temple of art, but a living workshop of the mind." In reaction to the classic forms of the "dead temple of art," he wrote for the man of the streets, not for the literary, introducing free verse forms, crude jazz rhythms, and vulgarisms of everyday speech. He has been compared to Vachel Lindsay, though his verse is declamatory, not musical. He insisted upon the communal function of verse, glorified the masses, and satirized their enemies. A spectacular and rebellious figure, he ended by taking his own life.

Read: "Our March" (Deutsch); "Command No. I" (Reavey).  
 Sergey Yesenin (Essenin; 1895-1925)

Yesenin was a peasant who was at his best when he wrote of rural life. He was better known for his spectacular marriage to Isadora Duncan than for his fine lyrics. He embraced the Revolution with joy which turned to despair when he found that the "Iron Messiah" of the

proletarian poets was to take the place of the "peasant paradise" that he had dreamed of in his mystic poems.

..... Irrevocably  
 I have forsaken my native fields.  
 No longer with their winged foliage  
 Will the poplars tinkle above me,

he wrote, and at thirty hanged himself.

Read: "Upon Green Hills" (Deutsch); "The Tramp," "The Last Village Poet" (Reavey).

### PROLETARIAN POETS

The Russian workers published verse even before the Revolution, but it was only afterward that their efforts had public support. The organization of the Proletcult was founded in 1920 to direct proletarian culture, and under it groups were formed for writing, studying, and mutual criticism. Out of these groups came a great bulk of work and a few outstanding poets. The first group, the Petrograd Proletcult, spread through the provinces and became nationwide. "The Smithy" group, formed in Moscow, stood for epic and monumental art. The "October" group stood for romanticism. These groups were educational as well as creative. They believed that poetry is a "form of social activity" (Bukharin), and held to the creed that the "statement of a definite and noble attitude toward life is the necessary ingredient of a new and lasting work." Because their hope for the future depended upon industrialism, the voice of the machine and the flowering of metal take the place of the change in the season and the scent of the fields. The poet Aseyev wrote an ode to a steel nightingale in which he preferred the mechanical bird to the real one. (I wonder if he had read Hans Christian Andersen's fable of the nightingale.) The poets of this period believe that the new industrial era requires a new technique in versification. Their contribution to poetry is technical diction, the invention of new labor images and similes, and a fresh and unexpected approach to the subject matter. They remind us very much of some of the modern English and American poets. Compare Kazin and Gerasimov with Stephen Spender and Carl Sandburg.

Boris Pasternak (b. 1890)

Son of a painter academician, and student of philosophy, Pasternak is "the most considerable living Soviet poet." He is an individual and non-political writer, compared with Donne as being a poet's poet, obscure and difficult, exact in imagery, and writing with great emotional intensity. (He reminds me more of T. S. Eliot.)

Read: "Weave This Shower," "May Life Be Always Fresh," "The Poet" (Reavey).

Vladimir Kirillov (b. 1889)

Read: "We" (Kaun, p. 102); "The Iron Messiah" (Cournos).

Vasily Kazin (b. 1898)

Kazin is also a non-political writer, although he wrote hymns on the October Revolution. His theme is the poetry of work, and the beauty of the world.

Read: "The Bricklayer," "The Carpenter's Plane" (Deutsch).

Mikhail Gerasimov (b. 1889)

Read: "I Am Not Tender" (Kaun, p. 133); "I Have Broken Friendship With The Free Wind" (Cournos).

#### RECENT PERIOD

Folklore: Tell the story of Marfa Kryukova (b. 1876) and her life of Lenin, and read the passage from the death of Lenin (Kaun, pp. 190-191).

The War: Read the description of Nikolay Tikhonov's reading of his poem "Kirov Is With Us" to the workers of the Kirov plant (Kaun, pp. 198-200), and "Poem" from "The Horde" (Reavey). Tikhonov (b. 1896), a Red Cavalry officer of the Petersburg group, is objective and tense. Some of his best poems are ballads of the Civil War. He is of the opinion that a writer of our day must write politically.

#### *Special References:*

*A Treasury of Russian Life and Humor*, edited by John Cournos.  
*Russian Poetry*, chosen and translated by Babette Deutsch and Avrahm Yarmolinsky.

*Soviet Poets and Poetry*, by Alexander Kaun, chaps. 3-6.

*Soviet Literature*, edited and translated by George Reavey and Marc Slonim, "The New Spirit in Russian Literature," sec. 3 (pp. 17-23); and "Poetry," pp. 333-388.

#### MIKHAIL LERMONTOV

##### COMPOSED WHILE UNDER ARREST

When waves invade the yellowing wheat,  
And the saplings sway with a wind-song brief;  
When the raspberry plum in the garden sweet  
Hides him under the cool green leaf;

When sprinkled with lights of limpid dew,  
At rose of evening or gold of morn,  
The lilies-of-the-valley strew  
Their silver nodding under the thorn;

When the brook in the valley with cooling breast,  
Plunging my soul in a cloudy dream,  
Murmurs a legend of lands of rest  
At the rise of his happy and rapid stream;

Then humbled is my heart's distress,  
 And lulled the anguish of my blood;  
 Then in the earth my happiness,  
 Then in the heaven my God.

(Translated by Max Eastman)

#### A THOUGHT

I gaze with grief upon our generation.  
 Its future black or vacant—and to-day,  
 Bent with a load of doubt and understanding,  
 In sloth and cold stagnation it grows old.  
 When scarcely from the cradle we were rich  
 In follies, in our fathers' tardy wits.  
 Life wearied us—a road without a goal,  
 A feast upon a foreign holiday.  
 Toward good and evil shamefully impassive,  
 In mid-career we fade without a fight.  
 Before a danger pusillanimous,  
 Before a power that scorns us we are slaves.  
 Precocious fruit, untimely ripe, we hang,  
 Rejoicing neither sight nor touch nor tongue,  
 A wrinkled orphan runt among the blossoms,  
 Their beauty's hour the hour of its decay.

The hues of poetry, the shapes of art,  
 Wake in our minds no lovely ecstasy.  
 We hoard the dregs of feelings that are dead,  
 Misers, we dig and hide a debased coin.  
 We hate by chance, we love by accident;  
 We make no sacrifice to hate or love.  
 Within our minds presides a secret chill  
 Even while the flame is burning in our blood.  
 A bore to us our fathers' gorgeous sporting,  
 Their conscientious childish vast debauch.  
 We hasten tomb-wards without joy or glory,  
 With but a glance of ridicule thrown back.  
 A surly-hearted crowd and soon forgotten,  
 We pass in silence, trackless from the world,  
 Tossing no fruit of dreaming to the ages,  
 No deed of genius even half begun.  
 Our dust the justice of the citizen  
 In future time will judge in songs of venom. . . .  
 Will celebrate the weak and squandering father  
 In bitter mockery the cheated son.

(Translated by Max Eastman)

Copied from *An Anthology of World Poetry*, edited by Mark Van Doren, Albert & Charles Boni, New York, 1929.

## SOVIET MUSIC

"Music is a most revealing art. It requires integrity and genuine feeling. A composer who doesn't believe in the things that inspire his work cannot compose."

—Dean Dixon

From earliest known times music has been a component part of Russian life. As folk and fairy tales, epic songs and religious ballads, were transmitted orally, so choral dances and songs to celebrate the seasons of nature and events in the life of man were handed down from generation to generation. Songs and dances were part of the games of childhood; there were special choral dances and songs for marriages and funerals, for holidays, for each season of the year, for sowing and harvesting; there were songs for robbers and songs for soldiers, historical songs and religious songs. The Russian life has been, in fact, patterned with song and dance, and today this love is a characteristic for which the Russian is famous.

As a result, and in line with Communist interest in culture, music—both professional and folk—has been carefully fostered in every republic in the Soviet Union. Not only are professional musicians given every consideration, but the Soviet peoples are encouraged to take an active part in the musical life of the country, with the result that music is not confined to the cultural field but is a part of the life of the various peoples. Nearly every city and town has its choirs and choruses; the Cossacks have theirs; there are numerous children's choirs; the Red Army ensemble is famous. In peace time, in an effort to discover and encourage young musical artists, the Peoples Commissariat of the USSR sponsors all-Union musicians' contests in which choirs, choruses, and soloists, and young musicians from all sections of the Union, participate. Immediately following the peace after the recent war, plans for such a contest—the third since the formation of the Union—were got under way, and in December, 1945, nearly 1,000 singers, violinists, pianists, cellists, and harpists met in Moscow in the third round of a contest, the first two rounds of which were held in the capitals of the various republics. The musical backbone of these contests is the varied and ancient folk music of the nationalities, some of it of fascinating Oriental

origin, and much of it very beautiful. Sir Bernard Pares considers the Cossack folk songs probably the most beautiful in the world.

Considering the Soviet absorption in the development of regional folk culture, it is not surprising that it is to folk music that Soviet musicians most frequently turn for motifs. Nor is it surprising that the most noted musical pedagogue in the Union, and one to whom folk themes are dear, Myaskovsky, is a survival from pre-Revolutionary Russia with its brilliant nationalist musical tradition. For it is interesting to note that since the Revolution pre-1917 composers of a nationalist bent, such as Gliere, Myaskovsky, and Prokofieff, have associated themselves with the new society.

Of the quality of Soviet music, since critics naturally disagree, each must decide for himself. In the case of Prokofieff, Katchaturian, and Shostakovich this should not be difficult as their music is included in broadcasts by outstanding symphony orchestras, and good victrola recordings are easily available. Unfortunately, the works of other Soviet composers are not so easily heard in this country, though Knipper, Kabalevsky, and Alexandroff, among others, have been performed in concert in New York City. It is perhaps safe to say that more modern American composers are represented on Soviet programs than Soviet composers on American programs. The music of George Gershwin, Jerome Kern, and Roy Harris is particularly popular in the USSR. Other composers whose works have been heard in the Union include Aaron Copland, Elie Siegmeister, Walter Piston, Sam Barber, and Wallingford Riegger.

Not a great deal has been published in this country about Soviet music, and much of that has been in newspapers and magazines, copies of which are difficult of access. The biography of Prokofieff is fortunately an illuminating account of the composer's musical life, interestingly presented from a Soviet point of view. The biography of Shostakovich leaves much to be desired but gives a fairly satisfactory account of events in the composer's life. The three critics represented below, Winthrop Sargeant, Nicolas Nabokov, and Olin Downes, afford a good cross section of critical opinion of Soviet music in the United States. Born in Russia in 1903, Nabokov is best known in America for his ballet, "Union Pacific," based on a text by the poet Archibald

MacLeish. Following the Revolution of 1917 Nabokov lived in France. He is now living in this country, and was at one time director of music at St. John's College in Annapolis. Sargeant, author of *Jazz: Hot and Hybrid*, has served as music editor of the *New York American* and the magazine *Time*. Downes is, of course, best known as music critic for the *New York Times*.

### 1. A LIVING ART

"... music, as every art, is a genuine requirement of man."  
—Dmitri Shostakovich

#### 1. Background of Soviet Music

Sketch in the background, mentioning the very short musical tradition of Russia, and telling in some detail of the purposes of the Russian nationalist composers.

#### 2. Music and the People

Discuss the State's interest in the propagation of professional musical culture, with especial reference to interest in musical compositions and writings of great Russian composers of the nineteenth century, development of national schools of music, research into the folk music of the various peoples, and encouragement of native composers. Give example of the peoples' widespread participation in musical activities, and their genuine interest in their folk music.

#### 3. Music and the Composer

Sum up the critical opinions of Downes, Sargeant, and Nabokov on the quality, scope, and significance of contemporary Soviet music as a whole. Compare with Nabokov's opinion of the effect of state control on musical composition the Soviet critic's opinion of the work of the *émigré* Russian composer divorced from his natural environment, and of contemporary Western music in general (Nestyev, pp. 121 and 123, for instance). Discuss in some detail Sargeant's explanation of the new musical party line following the "esthetic purge" of 1936.

Mention the outstanding composers and tell something of the work of several, other than Prokofieff and Shostakovich, whom you find most interesting. If you are familiar with any of their music, describe your own reactions.

#### 4. A Great Musician: Serge Prokofieff

Prokofieff is a vigorous musical link between Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union of peoples. His emergence as a genuine Soviet artist has intrigued world musical circles. Much of his most beautiful music makes exciting use of folk lore and folk melody.

Tell something of Prokofieff's life, his colorful personality, his distinctive characteristics, and his tastes as a composer. Note specifically his interest in pure sound and his preference for simplified harmonic texture and a clear-cut melody.

Discuss the broad range of his creative work and describe some of his most famous compositions. Sum up the critical opinions of Nabokov, Sargeant, Downes, and Nestyev. If you are familiar with Prokofieff's music, tell of your own impressions.

#### *Special References:*

- Voices of October: Art and Literature in Soviet Russia*, by Joseph Freeman, pp. 292-300, 304-314.  
*Sergei Prokofiev: His Musical Life*, by Israel Nestyev.

#### Magazines:

- American Mercury* 58:429-33 (Apr. '44), "Russia Takes the Lead in Music," by Winthrop Sargeant.  
*Atlantic Monthly* 169:92-99 (Jan. '42), "Music Under Dictatorship," by Nicolas Nabokov; 170:62-70 (July '42), "Sergei Prokofiev," by Nicolas Nabokov.  
*Etude*, Sept.-Dec. '41, "Russian Nationalist Composers," by Edward Burlingame Hill; Jan.-Feb. '42, "Music: A Life Ideal in War-Torn Russia," by Sidney Fox.  
*Musical Quarterly* 30:421-27 (Oct. '44), "War Years: Autobiography," by Sergei Prokofiev.  
*Soviet Culture in Wartime*, No. 3, 1945, "Notes on Music," pp. 31-34.  
*Theatre Arts*, May '41:390, "Folk Opera in the USSR."

#### Newspapers:

- Christian Science Monitor*, Weekly Magazine Section, Jan. 27, '45, "The 'Ugly Duckling' of Russian Music," by Nicolas Slonimsky.  
*New York Times*, Dec. 23, '45, Sec. 2, p. 6, col. 1, "Composing in Wartime Russia," by Olin Downes.

#### *Additional References:*

- Eight Russian Composers*, by Gerald Abraham.  
*Symphonic Masterpieces*, by Olin Downes; "Peter Ilyitch Tchaikovsky, 1840-1893," pp. 184-201; "Nicholas Rimsky-Korsakoff, 1844-1908," pp. 208-213; "Igor Stravinsky, 1882-," pp. 281-294.  
*Catalogue of Works Published in USSR and Composed Since 1917*, compiled under direction of Dorothy Lawton.  
*The Seven Soviet Arts*, by Kurt London.  
*My Musical Life*, by N. A. Rimsky-Korsakoff.  
*Stravinsky: An Autobiography*, by Igor Stravinsky.  
*The Diaries of Tchaikovsky*, translated by Vladimir Lakond.  
*Tchaikovsky*, by Herbert Weinstock.

**Magazines:**

- Musician*, June '45:113, "See New Trends in Soviet War-Time Music," by Igod Boelze.  
*New Republic* 104: Mar. 31, '41, 436-38; Apr. 7, '41, 469-71, "Music in the USSR," by Nicolas Nabokov.

**Newspapers:**

- New York Times* Mar. 11, '45, Sec. 2, p. 5, col. 1, "Russia's Musical Life Today," by Olin Downes; Dec. 2, '45, Sec. 2, p. 4, col. 1, "Composing in Wartime Russia," by Serge Prokofieff. Also files to date.

**2. DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH**

"There cannot be greater joy for a composer than to be conscious that through his work he contributes to the great impetus of the Soviet musical culture, which is called upon to play a role of the first importance in remolding the human conscience."

—Shostakovich

It is generally conceded that Shostakovich is the most gifted of the composers who have matured under the Soviet influence. A stormy petrel in Soviet music, and an earnest defender of the Soviet State, he has aroused widespread interest in the United States.

**1. Background and Training**

Sketch in the essential facts in the composer's life, commenting especially on revolutionary elements in his background, the character of his grandfather Kokaoulin, and literary and musical influences. Describe his appearance and mention his outstanding characteristics.

**2. Musical Credo**

Discuss the composer's conception of the function and necessary content of music, including his opinion as to the social content and value of the work of Wagner and Beethoven. Note the arguments of opposition thought as represented by Nabokov.

**3. Compositions**

Discuss amount and wide variety of music produced by the composer, tracing general stages of his writing to date: the freshness and tenderness of his earlier works; the brilliance, trenchant wit, and boisterous jocularly of "The Nose" and "Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District"; the serious, almost tragic, sometimes profound writing following the "esthetic purge" of 1936 and during the war years; and the simplicity and gayety of the *Ninth Symphony*.

Tell briefly of the conditions under which the *First*, *Fifth*, *Seventh*, and *Ninth* symphonies were written. Describe the composer's intent

in each instance, and in general the distinguishing qualities of each symphony.

Sum up the divergent critical estimates of Shostakovich's music as represented by Nabokov, Seroff, Downes, and Sargeant. If you are familiar with the music, include your own comment.

#### 4. The Composer and the State

Indicative of the strength and sincerity in Shostakovich's character was his reaction to official action in the case of his opera, "Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District." Tell of this instance of Communist Party authority. Compare Seroff's explanation (pp. 226-229) of the Government's purpose with that offered by Sargeant. Does a reading of Leskov's story lend humor to *Pravda's* accusations, particularly to the claim that "The music quacks, grunts, and growls, and suffocates itself"? Compare *Pravda's* reactions with those of other critics in the USSR and in America.

#### *Special References:*

"Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk," by Nicolas Leskov, in *A Treasury of Russian Literature*, edited by Guilbert Guernev.

*The Life and Background of a Soviet Composer*, by Victor Seroff.

#### Magazines:

*American Mercury* 58:429-33 (Apr. '44), "Russia Takes the Lead in Music," by Winthrop Sargeant.

*Harper's* 186:422-31 (Mar. '43), "The Case of Dmitri Shostakovich," by Nicolas Nabokov.

*Soviet Culture in Wartime*, No. 3, 1945, "Notes on Music," pp. 31-34.

#### Newspapers:

*New York Times*, Dec. 2, '45, Magazine Section, "Shostakovich's 'Classical' Ninth," by Robert Magidoff.

#### *Additional References:*

*Eight Russian Composers*, by Gerald Abraham.

*Catalogue of Works Published in USSR and Composed Since 1917*, compiled under direction of Dorothy Lawton.

*The Seven Soviet Arts*, by Kurt London.

#### Magazines:

*Musician*: Apr. '42, pp. 55+, "Pens Victory Symphony During Darkest Hour," by D. Rabinovich and S. Shlifstein; Sept.-Oct. '42, p. 133, "Shostakovich and His Seventh Symphony," by Alan Hovanes; June '45, p. 113, "Sees New Trends in Soviet War-Time Music," by Igor Boelze.

## CHAPTER XI

### Part I OPERA AND THE BALLET

"We now demand from a musical theatre operas which are capable of exciting the spectator of the working class by their present-day subjects and by a music corresponding to these subjects in its intensity."

—V. O. K. S.

"My hope is to see our opera as alive, as responsible to the new world as the drama... To better understand, to more deeply appreciate the new in music, the Soviet spectator must be acquainted with the old. He must have a basis for comparison."

—Sharashidze, Regisseur, Bolshoi Theatre

In one sense opera and ballet have been the great disappointment of Soviet cultural leaders. In another, they are an adornment and a glory to Soviet life. For while efforts to develop a distinctively Soviet opera and ballet and a new idiom for the modern dance have so far been more or less unsuccessful, opera in the classic spectacular tradition, and subtle, gay, technically admirable ballet, are tremendously popular throughout the Union, where companies are not confined to the cities but go on tour even to remote regions.

Of traditional Russian ballet little need be said, since its beauty and fascination are familiar to all. Fortunately for the present day world, the exquisite technical and esthetic traditions of the Russian imperial ballet, without question the finest dance organization the world has known, still live in Soviet ballet schools, chief of which is the Leningrad Choreographic School, now more than two hundred years old.

Of the operas by Soviet composers, three are distinctive: Shostakovich's "Lady Macbeth of the Mzensk District," Dzerzhinsky's "The Quiet Don," and Prokofieff's "War and Peace." Though Shostakovich's opera is already recognized in America as the work of a composer gifted in the operatic field, it is interesting to note that, on the basis of the composer's delicate and shrewd skill in characterization, London thinks "his talents for opera are almost greater than for symphonic works," and for the latter most critics are now agreed Shostakovich is highly endowed.

The thirty-seven year old Dzerzhinsky's less startling but nevertheless effective opera, "The Quiet Don," has of necessity suffered severely by comparison with Shostakovich's more brilliant talent. Yet on the morning following the first presentation of "The Quiet Don" in New York City, Olin Downes reported (*New York Times*, May 28, 1945) that, written in broad melodic lines and in the folk style, both libretto and score went over the footlights, and that the entire work was fundamentally practicable for the lyric theatre. The previous day, in illuminating comment on the novel and the opera, Downes had expressed the opinion that in general Dzerzhinsky "has gone out-and-out for a 'quickie' technique that slaps in and pounds home music to accentuate, in however obvious and unsubtle a manner, the doings on the stage."

Prokofieff's "War and Peace" will be staged in the United States by the Metropolitan Opera, but only after the première in Moscow, which has for some reason been delayed, perhaps for further rehearsals. (Rehearsals in Moscow in the case of stubborn operas have been known to cover a period of a year.) Meantime, the work, in concert performance in Moscow, has been received with mixed opinion. One critic blames the opera for a "blasphemous combination of sensitive lyricism and naturalistic prose," prose which, of course, was practically all taken or adapted directly from Tolstoy's novel. Another finds the music original, mature, and rich, and feels that in the melodious recitative, the predominant musical idiom, Prokofieff "attains a height of dramatic expressiveness worthy of the fine traditions of Russian classical music." According to *Pravda* (quoted in the *Musical Courier*, Jan. 15, 1946), the "opera is replete with melody that is plastic, rich and yet simple and vivid. While adhering to his usual style of sketching details (which at times spoils this new opera) Prokofieff nevertheless has composed a work of profound inspiration and significance." Downes, after examining the work made the interesting comment (*New York Times*, Jan. 2, 1944) that "It is meant not as esthetic theory, but bloody reality, and as a document of crisis which is not a kid glove affair. . . . And of course emphasis is laid upon the criminal futilities of intended conquerors and terrorists, and the certain retribution awaiting those who would despoil and enslave the Russian people."

## IN THE TRADITION

## 1. Opera

Tell of the search for satisfactory operatic material for the new proletarian audience, of early experiments in re-writing classic operas to fit current ideas in the new state, of the valuable contribution to operatic art of Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko through their musical studio work, and of the dearth of good Soviet operas and the wide popularity of world and Russian opera classics. Compare the situation in this country in the search for native operas, and note re-writing for audience enjoyment, for instance re-writing "Carmen" in the "up-to-date" version, "Carmen Jones," streamlined for an all-Negro cast.

Review briefly the story of opera in pre-1917 Russia and tell of the most interesting classic Russian operas which are today popular in the Union: "A Life for the Tsar," "Russlan and Ludmilla," "Eugene Onegin," "The Queen of Spades," "Boris Godunov," "Prince Igor," "The Snow Maiden," "The Golden Cockerel," etc. As evidence of trends in Soviet opera and of a developing Soviet opera repertory, cite material in above introduction.

## 2. Ballet

Ralph Parker says that a young Russian's first experience of the ballet "Swan Lake" is as momentous as his first reading of "Hamlet." Discuss the importance of ballet in Soviet life and describe a typical Moscow ballet audience as to composition, behavior, critical faculty, etc. What does this audience demand of ballet?

Describe the choice of programs offered by different ballet theatres in Moscow, mentioning the favorite classical ballets, ballerinas, and male dancers, and telling briefly of experiments in ballet in early years after the Revolution, and of several revolutionary and modern ballets.

Describe training of children as dancers, and outline Guseff's career, noting particularly his interest in distinctively national dances.

Tell the story of Tamara Khanum, quoting generously from the beautiful and vivid prose.

*Special References:*

*Voices of October: Art and Literature in Soviet Russia*, by Joseph Freeman, pp. 301-04.

*The New Spirit in the Russian Theatre*, by Huntly Carter, pp. 169-73, 241-44, 253, 312, 314.

*Moscow Rehearsals*, by Norris Houghton, pp. 212-14.

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*Theatre Arts*, Nov. '34:829, "Tamara Khanum: Soviet Asia's Greatest Dancer," by Langston Hughes; Apr. '46, pictures of folk dancing.

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*New York Times*, Magazine Section, Jan. 24, '43, p. 16, "Despite All, Russia's Ballet Goes On," by Ralph Parker; Oct. 8, '44, p. 18, "In Moscow It's Swan Lake, Too," by Diana Aldridge.

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*Symphonic Masterpieces*, by Olin Downes, "Igor Stravinsky, 1882-," pp. 281-92.

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*New York Times*, July 31, '32, "Opera in Soviet Russia"; Jan. 29, '33, "Difficulties of Soviet Opera"; Jan. 7, '34, "Moscow Opera Contest"; Feb. 4, '43, "Land of Miracles"; June 13, '43, John Martin's column on the dance; Jan. 2, '44, "War and Peace," by Olin Downes; May 27, '45, "The Quiet Don," by Olin Downes; May 28, '45, review by Olin Downes of production of opera, "The Quiet Don"; Dec. 2, '45, "Composing in Wartime Russia," by Serge Prokofieff.

## Part II

### THE SOVIET CINEMA

"The Soviet cinema, then, is a cultural instrument serving the cultural aims of the Soviet State."

—Serge Eisenstein

The film industry in the Soviet Union has developed in the last thirty years from the preparation of propaganda films for the men at the front to the creation of an intensely interesting film art. In part this development is due to the substantial technical base which was provided for the industry during Five-Year Plans, but chiefly it is due, in the opinion of observers, to native histrionic talent, to an inspired choice of subjects for scenarios, and to the organizing and imaginative genius of leading Soviet producers.

These producers have told the story of their country in a series of film classics remarkable for their powerful realism and wonderful detail. Among the finest producers are the Ukrainian, A. Dovshenko, who brought to films his experience as a painter, and whose moving picture, "Earth," Kurt London calls a "wonderful film-poem . . . the hymn of the kolkhozes"; the Vassiliev brothers, praised in this country for their exciting picture, "Chapayev"; Michael Romm, famous for his films on the life of Lenin; V. I. Pudovkin, recognized as "a master of revolutionary symbolism and irony," and associated in America with his films, "Storm Over Asia" and "Mother," the latter based on Gorky's novel of the same name; and Serge M. Eisenstein, who, coming to the films from the stage, made film history with such pictures as "Potemkin" and "Alexander Nevsky." Unfortunately, Soviet films reach the screen of theatres in the United States only in larger communities, if at all, but a number of the finest films so far produced are in the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, where they are shown periodically in the Museum's theatre.

True to the Soviet cultural policy, films are produced in the native language of the particular republic, in studios located throughout the Union. The best of them, ranging from slapstick through comedy and musicals to historical, biographical, and popular scientific and other educational films, are distributed in thousands of negatives and exhibited extensively in all sections

of the country. They are delivered to inaccessible communities by air and by dog team, and are shown in itinerant cinemas to isolated communities from the northern forests of Siberia to the Alpine meadows of the Caucasus. Incidentally, American films are exceedingly popular in the USSR, particularly Charlie Chaplin's films and Walt Disney's cartoons, Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck leading the field.

The next step for Soviet cinema will be three-dimensional films and screens, which have already been developed to the point where it is reported spectators unconsciously dodge birds and airplanes shown on the screen, or reach out to catch flowers or to brush off confetti. Stereoscopic pictures now in preparation include "Robinson Crusoe," and films featuring a popular Moscow clown and the May Day parade of the Red Army. Meanwhile, in the larger studios and at State institutes in Moscow and Leningrad, producers, operators, scenario writers, actors, technicians, and other studio artists of the future are receiving from the State their training and actual experience under tutelage of the finest film workers in the Union.

#### FILM ART AS A CULTURAL INSTRUMENT

Outline the Communist idea of the function and importance of the cinema in the life of the masses, and describe Eisenstein's "Potemkin" or Pudovkin's "The End of St. Petersburg," as an example of a film made in accordance with this concept.

Explain the division of duties between the theatre and the cinema in the USSR as Huntly Carter sees it. Aside from its value in the field of propaganda and education, would such complementary cooperation of two art forms tend to enlarge and enrich public experience?

Discuss at some length the type and range of subject matter chosen in the Soviet Union, with emphasis on the deliberate use by minor nationalities of subjects drawn from their own traditions, local history, and contemporary life.

Tell of the effort to develop really good educational films, and the interest in the possibilities of the news reel as an art form. Mention our own "March of Time" and documentary films such as "The River" and "The Plow that Broke the Plains," and war documentaries.

Summarize Eisenstein's remarks on: the advantage of social centralization and monopoly, with particular reference to the cinema; art properly used as a social weapon; the educational and ethical value of living problems as themes for the cinema; the collective effort of experts, cameramen, scenario writers, actors, and directors to satisfy the collective mass demand; the cinema's close contact with the life of the Soviet Union. Note the concrete instance of the application of his ideas in the film, "Old and New."

Do you agree with C. A. Lejeune's concept of the film as an international medium? Discuss with reference to the Russian film in the world today. If you have seen any Soviet films, tell of your experience.

*Special References:*

*The New Spirit in the Russian Theatre*, by Huntly Carter, chap. 20.

*Voices of October: Art and Literature in Soviet Russia*, by Joseph Freeman, chap. 4.

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*Additional References:*

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*The Seven Soviet Arts*, by Kurt London.

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## ART FOR CHILDREN

"This growing generation of Soviet youth, the luckiest in the world, is the proper soil from which should flower in the next half-century the most individual minds of the future."

—Kurt London (1937)

Development of an art program for children in the Soviet Union is based on two excellent ideas: that both the creation and the enjoyment of art should contribute to the normal education and to the emotional, intellectual, and physical development of the child; and that only good art should be made available to young people.

With Soviet thoroughness in planning, artistic training begins in the *crèche*, where, through toys and games specifically selected and manufactured, through use of color, and the sound and rhythm of music, an infant is taught "to see, hear, and feel art on the smallest scale imaginable." In the kindergarten to which he transfers in his fourth year the child is encouraged to develop his artistic inclinations. If he shows a particular talent, he is included in a circle of similarly endowed children directed and led by a young expert. Such groups for the development of budding musical, literary, and dramatic talents, or for the study of the arts and crafts, drawing, or the plastic arts, exist throughout the Union. From them come the children who enter public competitions, both in their home republics and in the All-Union Children's Olympiad in Moscow.

Since 1936 gifted children, when they leave kindergarten, may at the State's expense enter special lower schools, where in addition to the usual studies each one receives instruction in his own art. From these schools young folk of proved talent enter, still at the State's expense, institutes devoted to their especial arts. For those who complete the course and who wish to continue their studies three additional years are provided at special academies.

Child training in the arts is not confined, however, to school and study. Through the "Pioneers," the Communist Party-sponsored organization to which all children of good character and study habits are eligible, Soviet youth is not only trained in Soviet ideology but is afforded an opportunity to develop

culturally in beautiful and exciting surroundings. Into the furnishing, equipment, and decoration of Pioneer Houses throughout the Union goes the same careful thought that is given to youths' education. Kurt London in *The Seven Soviet Arts* tells of specially designed furniture in the Palace of the Moscow Pioneers, in sizes adapted to the youngsters who will use it; of gay educational frescoes by good Soviet artists; of carefully selected pictures, beautiful lighting fixtures, and thick tufted carpets. There are toy rooms for little Pioneers and chess rooms for older ones, studios for young painters and sculptors, a library for readers, laboratories for youthful scientists and rooms equipped with machinery for juvenile machinists. In the rest homes to which Pioneers are sent for vacations and recuperation they are not only encouraged to create for themselves music, drama, etc., but are afforded the best of suitable drama, music, cinema, and circus.

In addition to special schooling, to circles and clubs, to higher academies, and to Pioneer Houses, the Soviet plan includes in centers in each republic Houses for the Artistic Training of Children, which serve as laboratories for developing the best educational methods in such training, and to which teachers, circle leaders and others may apply for advice and assistance. The Central House for the Artistic Training of Children, known as Bubnov Institute, was established in 1931. Here no art is neglected. Studies are made, for instance, in amateur dramatics, marionette theatres, and theatres of the "Bi-Ba-Bo" doll (a puppet doll that slips over the hand); plays, chosen with consideration of the effect of their ideology on the growing child, are staged by circles and later published in the monthly children's paper; literary circles study the Russian classics and the history of literature in foreign countries. To any of these Houses children may themselves write for information and advice, and to them they do write by the thousands.

The education of children to appreciate good art and to create for themselves is not, however, the whole story. In each of the arts much thought and effort is given by mature artists to the creation of really good art which shall be accessible to the child's understanding. Musicians compose music designed to be performed by both adults and children, and music for young people's theatres and films; special studios make films adapted to the

tastes and understanding of different age groups; writers give their talents to books, and playwrights to plays, which will meet the requirements of the young mind without insulting its intelligence; the State publishers issue in the millions of copies books for young readers: fairy and folk tales; Russian classics; translations from foreign languages—notably the works of Dickens, Mark Twain, and Jack London; popular works on the sciences, travel and geography.

The following sections are given to a survey of the theatre for children in the USSR and an examination of some of their books. Those who are particularly interested in the subject of art for children in the Soviet Union are advised to secure a copy of London's book, *The Seven Soviet Arts*, which contains an excellent discussion and from which the above information was for the most part taken. It should be noted that the entire program was drastically interrupted by the German invasion of the USSR.

### 1. THEATRE

#### "FOOD FOR THE HEART AND FOR THE MIND"

##### 1. Foundation and Growth

Natalia Satz founded the first permanent children's theatre in the world. Review her work and discuss her vision for the Moscow Theatre for Children. Note particularly the Theatre's realistic objective, its study and organization of the young audiences, the "activizing" principle on which the work is predicated, the cooperation of theatre, schools, and parents. Mention Madame Henriette Pascal and the work of the State Children's Theatre with the "wild children" of Russia, following the first World War.

Tell of the growth, under Government sponsorship, of theatres for children and young people throughout the Union, and of the high seriousness with which theatrical people regard this work.

##### 2. Play and Audience

Discuss the Soviet approach to the development of a repertory for children. Comment on the wide range of subject matter: Russian and Soviet fairy and folk tales; tales by classic Russian, and modern Soviet, writers; works by Dickens, Mark Twain, Jules Verne, Molière; themes from history, from the present, from science, industry, daily living. Tell of one or two works prepared especially for Soviet youth—"The Fisherman and the Fish," for instance, Schwartz's delightful play, "The Shadow," or Alexandra Brushtein's Civil War story, "Solo Fighter"—and of the delight in Obraztsov's work with the Central Puppet Theatre.

*Special References:*

*The New Spirit in the Russian Theatre*, by Huntly Carter, pp. 173-177, 247.

*Theatre in Soviet Russia*, by André van Gyseghem, chap. 12.

*Moscow Rehearsals*, by Norris Houghton, pp. 227-233.

*Actors Cross the Volga*, by Joseph Macleod, chap. 13.

*The New Soviet Theatre*, by Joseph Macleod, pp. 70-78.

## 2. LITERATURE

## THE WONDER AND THE RADIANCE

## 1. "Tell what's in your heart of hearts": Russian Fairy Tales

"The Little Magic Horse" is child literature, gay, tender, hilarious, enchanting. Read it to your favorite child and tell of his pleasure in the good sense, the magic of little Humpty; the marvelous fancy of the trip to visit Mistress Moon; the wit of the tale of the Wonder Monster whale; the ribald humor in the picture of the tsar; the delightful buffoonery; the mixture of logic and fantasy; Johnny's endearing dependence on his little horse; the delight of the fairy tale ending.

Russian fairy tales, straight out of the life and hearts of the people, are lively, dramatic, witty, robust, and filled with the most delightful fancy and folk imagery; they are also quite often cruel, vulgar, and full of horrors. Discuss, comparing the tales in like respects to Grimm's and to Hans Christian Andersen's.

Jakobson notes that the animal tales and anecdotes are "based preponderantly on dialogue." Illustrate with as many of the very short tales as there may be time for. Note the symbolism, and the vigorous horse sense in many of them.

The use of color in the fairy tales, their "fanciful ornamentation" and "ceremonious style," are fascinating beyond compare. Select passages to illustrate. Note that fairy and folk tales, transmitted for generations and to this day by skilful tellers of tales, were significant in their influence on the great classic writers of nineteenth century Russia, notably Pushkin and Gogol.

## 2. "Fairy Stories Without Fairies": Soviet Tales for Children

Read *A Ring and a Riddle* to a quick witted child and note his solution of the riddles. Present the riddles to the grownups, and for their amusement compare their record with the youngster's.

Do you agree with Paul Radin that *How Man Became A Giant* is well written to appeal to "a child's sense of the realities"? Explain the book's general plan, and discuss the clever challenge to youth's vivid interest and sense of drama: the choice of salient fact and concrete example; the lively prose; the imaginative touches; the intriguing

similes; the constructive optimism. If there is time read a typical passage.

### 3. The Simplicity of Art: *Peter and the Wolf*

Read the fairy tale, playing on the piano the theme for each character, and mentioning for each the corresponding instrument in the orchestra. Discuss the work as a device for teaching children to recognize the various musical instruments and arousing their interest in good music. If a victrola and an orchestra recording are available, play the entire composition. Do you find in the story, even with piano accompaniment alone, the enchantment of childhood?

#### *Special References:*

*Little Magic Horse*, by Peter Ershoff.

*Russian Fairy Tales*, translated by Norbert Guterman.

*How Man Became a Giant*, by M. Ilin and E. Segal.

*A Ring and a Riddle*, by M. Ilin and E. Segal.

*Peter and the Wolf*, by Serge Prokofieff.

#### *Additional References:*

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*How the Automobile Learned to Run*, by M. Ilin.

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*Turning Night Into Day*, by M. Ilin. (The story of lighting.)

*What Time Is It?* by M. Ilin. (The story of clocks.)

*The Seven Soviet Arts*, by Kurt London.

*Chemical Elements*, by I. Nechaev. (The discovery of chemical elements from oxygen to radium.)

*Old Peter's Russian Tales*, collected by Arthur Ransome.

*Tolstoi for the Young*, translated by Mrs. R. S. Townsend.

*The Russian Story Book Containing Tales From the Song-Cycles of Kiev and Novgorod and Other Early Sources*, collected by Richard Wilson.

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| Guerny, B. G.         | <i>A Treasury of Russian Literature</i> 1943. (3, 7, 10)      | Blakiston     | 1.98   |
| Guterman, Norbert     | <i>Russian Fairy Tales.</i> 1945. (12)                        | Pantheon      | 7.50   |
| Houghton, Norris      | <i>Moscow Rehearsals.</i> 1936. (5, 11, 12)                   | Harcourt      | 2.75   |
| Ilin and Segal        | <i>How Man Became a Giant.</i> 1942. (12)                     | Lippincott    | 2.00   |
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| Kaun, Alexander       | <i>Soviet Poets and Poetry.</i> 1943. (9)                     | U. of Calif.  | 2.50   |
| Kozlenko, William     | <i>The Best Short Plays of the Social Theatre.</i> 1939. (6)  | Random        | 2.50   |
| Lauterbach, R. E.     | <i>These Are the Russians.</i> 1945. (2, 8)                   | Harper        | 3.00   |
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Note: Two invaluable books from England on the theatre of nineteenth century Russia and of the Soviet Union were received too late for inclusion in Part I of the published outline.

One of them, Joseph Macleod's *Actors Cross the Volga*, published by Allen & Son, London, (16s, 1946) contains material unavailable in English so far; a detailed report of the evacuation of the theatres to the East during the war, and a loving and colorful history of the pre-Soviet theatre, with penetrating comment on "The Inspector General" ("Revizor"), "The Lower Depths," and "The Cherry Orchard." *For Part I, chaps. 4, 5, 6.*

The second, *Theatre in Soviet Russia*, by André van Gyseghem, published by Ryerson (\$3.75, 1943), is especially valuable for its discussion of the theatre in relation to the Soviet State: financing, organization, training, the place of personal initiative (chaps. 5, 6, 11); also for its description of dynamic productions for new theatre ideas (chaps. 1, 2, 14, and pp. 138-145).

*For Part I, chaps. 4, 5.*

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- American-Russian Institute, 56 W. 45th St., New York 19.  
Blakiston Co., 1012 Walnut St., Philadelphia 5.  
Brentano's, 586 Fifth Ave., New York 19.  
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Pantheon Books, 41 Washington Sq., New York 12.  
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# SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

## Part One (In October 1946 issue)

### *First Meeting: OLD RUSSIA*

1. Serfdom
2. Revolution

### *Second Meeting: "A NEW CIVILIZATION"*

1. The State
2. The People

### *Third Meeting: SHORT STORIES OF OLD RUSSIA*

1. The Truth of Humanity
2. Clear Minds and Warm Hearts

### *Fourth Meeting: THREE CLASSIC PLAYS OF OLD RUSSIA*

1. Brilliant Comedy
2. A Play of Subtle Fragrance
3. The Quality of Music

### *Fifth Meeting: THE PEOPLE'S THEATRE*

1. A Great Experiment
2. Socialist Realism in the Theatre

### *Sixth Meeting: REPRESENTATIVE SOVIET PLAYS*

1. Instruction Through Drama
2. Peace and Patriotism

## Part Two

### *Seventh Meeting: SOVIET FICTION*

1. Serapion Brothers and Poputchiki
2. Proletarian Writers

### *Eighth Meeting: TWO SOVIET NOVELS*

1. The Don Cossacks
2. Fortitude

### *Ninth Meeting: SOVIET POETRY AND ITS TSARIST BACKGROUND*

1. Tsarist Poetry
2. Soviet Poetry

### *Tenth Meeting: SOVIET MUSIC*

1. A Living Art
2. Dmitri Shostakovich

### *Eleventh Meeting: OPERA AND THE BALLETS; THE SOVIET CINEMA*

1. In the Tradition
2. The Film as a Cultural Instrument

### *Twelfth Meeting: ART FOR CHILDREN*

1. "Food for the Heart and for the Mind": Theatre
2. The Wonder and the Radiance: Literature

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