

Title: Lenin as a Literary Theorist

Author(s): Stefan Morawski

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[In the following essay, Morawski explicates Lenin's writings on art and literature.]

Lenin's statements on literature do not constitute a system. We know that Lenin was not an esthetician, and that he never concerned himself for any long period with literary theory and criticism. Like Marx, however, he was very much interested in literature and art. Lunacharsky's reminiscences contain the following typical story. One night in 1905, at a colleague's house, Lenin picked up some popular books on the history of art. The next morning he told Lunacharsky that he had been up all night reading those books, and sighed: "What a wonderful field for a Marxist! Alas, I shall never be able to go into it."

Lenin was not an esthetician, but that does not mean that there is no Leninist esthetics. His philosophical works contain methodological directives, on the basis of which a Leninist esthetics could obviously be erected; the effort has already been made, and more than once.

It is not our purpose here to analyze what Lenin's esthetics might be said to be on the basis of his writings on philosophy and other topics. We shall confine ourselves to what Lenin wrote directly on literature and art. These utterances fall into three classes. First, there are his theoretical and critical remarks on a given writer or given literary works; then, his esthetic tastes, which he expressed occasionally in connection with other questions, and as a rule in connection with their social consequences; thirdly, his directives in the field of cultural policy, dating from the last years of his life and dealing with problems of the propagation of education and culture.

The question of his esthetic tastes is peripheral as compared to the other two categories, and yet essential for discussion of them. The fact is that those tastes were limited. He gave the first place to realistic literature, naturalistic painting of the second half of the nineteenth century, and emotionalist music, basing himself primarily on Russian works. However, he never made his personal tastes directives in the field of cultural policy. To a certain extent they influenced the scope and character of his remarks on literary criticism, if only in that he selected certain works and writers; at bottom, however, his choice was due to immediate political questions.

Because of the wealth of materials and the complex nature of the questions, the problems of modern art and of directives in cultural policy require special analysis.

Our discussion will relate to the remarks of Lenin on criticism and theory, chiefly dating from 1905-1911, e.g., his discussion of Tolstoy and the article **On Party Organization and Party Literature**. It will be necessary further to recall and make use of some later utterances dating from 1914, 1919, 1921, which are important supplements to the materials from the earlier period. The pieces on Tolstoy were written in 1908-1911. There are six of them, published in various party journals, from *Proletarii* and *Sotsialdemokrat* to *Zvezda*. The article **On Party Organization and Party Literature** appeared in the party journal *Novaya Zhizn* at the end of 1905. Before discussing them, it should be emphasized that there is a certain fragmentation in Marxist esthetics; its line of development is constantly being broken, and its fundamental theses are formulated anew at need, for a second or a third time. For example, Lenin did not have available to him a complete collection of the statements of Marx and Engels on art and literature. The first work of this kind appeared in 1937 in the Soviet Union, edited by Lifshits. If Lenin arrived at similar conclusions, the explanation is to be found in the method of Marxism, which led in that direction.

We now propose to discuss Lenin's articles on Tolstoy, but in order to see what Lenin accomplished, we must first take note of the historical background, starting with pre-Leninist efforts in the field of Marxist esthetics. This esthetics had various roots, the beginnings of which can be traced to the seventeenth century. One of its sources are the discussions of historicism deriving from Vico, Winckelmann and Herder and summed up in the work of Hegel, as well as the investigations into the typical, the individual and the general, which occur in classical German esthetics from Baumgarten to Hegel and his followers. Another source are the concepts of useful art and the democratization of esthetic thought that developed primarily in the first thirty years of the nineteenth century, as well as considerations on the social function of the work of art (chiefly literary), i.e., the French tradition going from Diderot and Mercier to the school of the "doctrinaires."

It is a striking fact that to a certain extent Marxist esthetics absorbed these basic problems of the first half of the nineteenth century, postulating a many-sided interpretation of the work of art: genetic, mimetic and functional. Genetic: it aims at explaining the work in the context of definite historical causes and conditions; mimetic: it considers the cognitive value of the art work; functional: it deals with the way in which works of art are perceived, what social class (group) it serves. The basic analysis in Marxist esthetic studies is a sociological analysis in the sense that the emphasis is on a class (ideological) interpretation of the art work; the outcomes, to be sure, vary. Furthermore, this sociological point of view does not, according to the guiding principles of Marxist esthetics, exhaust the analysis of an art work.

An assertion of the class character of a given work appears to be a simple matter but actual investigation shows that it entails a very complex and often controversial interpretation. If it is asserted that a work of art by X or Y is linked to

a given class, this is usually taken to mean that the writer is a representative (conscious or unconscious) of just that class. But we must examine how that happens; we must show that the fact that an artist represents a given class occurs either always or only sometimes. Such facts certainly exist. Marx and Engels, in many analyses on the basis of concrete examples, demonstrated that, and how, a given writer was linked with a given social class. Further analysis of this phenomenon, however, soon showed that this sort of simple functional dependence is not always present. For example, Lessing, Diderot and Hogarth support it, but the situation is different with Sterne and Watteau, say. The former came from and belonged to the petty bourgeoisie and represented it directly in their works; the latter were not determined by their class origin, and their ideological allegiances were a matter of some complexity. In the Marxist view, being born into a class is only a tentative indication. The essential factor is the ideological posture of the creator. It was soon found that analyzing this phenomenon requires prudence. In Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* we encounter a thesis that opened new horizons in sociological analysis. This is the well-known passage on the "shopkeepers" and their literary representatives. The latter are in a different social situation and are set apart from the former by their education, but still there is a certain parallelism in their views. The writer does not entirely "represent" (that is, express the way of perceiving, feeling and understanding the world) his own class or social group exclusively; he may have his origin in one class and be close to another ideologically: a related one or even a hostile one. He may even, as has often happened, express the ideology of more than one class, thereby manifesting the vagueness of his own view of the world, as well as the conflicts characteristic of the entire environment around him.

This is the line of another classical interpretation, which points out that the literal thesis of the artist as representing a class is only one among a number of possibilities: we refer to Engels' statements on Goethe. Goethe's internal contradictions, i.e. his Philistinism and his Olympian attitude (as with Schiller—radicalism along with escape from the world) describe not only himself but also his historical period. In Engels' interpretation, Goethe represents the contradictions of the Germany of his time. Now, the contradictions of an entire society can be explained by means of analysis of the literary texts and not by analysis of the artist's biography or his ideology taken by itself. It has to be kept in mind that artists, who are rarely fully aware of their ideological position *sensu stricto*, but most often react vigorously to psycho-sociological phenomena (myths, tabus, general sentiment, uncrystallized social trends, moral searchings, etc.) have by the very nature of their profession gone beyond the "one-class" point of view. One instance is the Romantics, who were against the entire world of the society of their time. They attacked both the defenders of official, bourgeois art and the supporters of republican-socialist art of revolt. A. Cassagne has given an excellent picture of their historical and theoretical adventures in his *La théorie de l'art pour l'art en France* (1905, Pt. I) and derived from their positions the subsequent conception of "art for art's sake." Soon after, Plekhanov (*Art and Social Life*,

1912, Secs. 1 and 2) showed that the “above-classes” posture of the Romantics was, to a great extent, specious.

Still another aspect of the sociological analysis was brought out by Engels' analysis of Balzac, in a letter written to Minna Kautsky in 1885. Balzac had pro-feudal sympathies, and yet what he presented in the *Human Comedy* was an affirmation of the ineluctable triumph of the bourgeoisie. The case of Balzac, Engels says, exhibits the internal collision between what may be called the objective truth of the work, that is, its artistic-cognitive content, and the writer's philosophy. Note that in the statements by Marx and Engels two meanings must be distinguished for the terms used synonymously by them, “world view” and “ideology.” In one acceptance, a world view is a system of concepts or judgments (commentary by the author, in whatever form) explicitly stated in the literary work; in the other sense, it is the entire set of artistic judgments contained in the work, or a cognitive generalization that can be derived from the conflicts, figures, contents, etc. that are presented. We do not mean the philosophical effects, the function of the work in question, which are linked with the varying reception of the work, but what is called its objective message. By the last concept, a rather nebulous one, is meant the view of the world presented by the very structure of the work, i.e. the construction of the content, the hierarchy of themes and figures, the outcome of the whole, etc. Obviously, different works are unequivocal (or ambivalent) in varying degrees; greater ambivalence enables them to have philosophical influence even in opposing directions. This fact, however, does not deny the existence of that “objective message” that has to be studied and analyzed. More than that, this procedure is the only effectual one. Accordingly, of the two senses of “world view” mentioned, the second is the essential one for esthetic analysis. Among the factors it takes into account is the fact that the artist so often depicts inter-class conflicts (i.e. real contradictions, as they appear at the given historical epoch) not directly from the position of a single class but somehow “from within.” From within—that is, from the position of a sensitive, intelligent and conscientious observer, on whom not so much the passion of the combatant, as the facts themselves, impose the side to take and consequently the position on some class-determined vector.

In the analyses of Marx and Engels, therefore, there occurs, in addition to the genetic aspect, the mimetic aspect, that is to say, the inquiry into the way in which the work reflects reality, whether it depicts the typical traits of the given individuality and the given society, or distorts or simply ignores those traits.

In the next phase of Marxist esthetics, running parallel to the sociologizing conceptions of the second half of the nineteenth century, Mehring and Plekhanov, its main representatives, narrowed and simplified analysis of the literary work. Plekhanov, for example, reduced it to socio-biographical interpretation; that is, he asked to what class the author in question belonged and what political ideology he showed. Mehring, in a discussion with Hauptmann, the author of *The Weavers*, applied essentially the same line of interpretation. That is, he measured the value

of the work not by its cognitive-artistic value but by the political ideology of the writer. In a different but equally simplified manner, Plekhanov explained the case of Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy, according to him, is a count, always and everywhere, in all his works. Plekhanov adds, however, that the working class likes him because of his moralistic position. He recognized the artistic genius of Tolstoy, of course, but the starting point, basis and main result of his analysis were Tolstoy's sectarian views, explained in relation to his origin and class position.

Lenin was familiar with Plekhanov's articles and accepted them, as is shown by his letter to Gorky dated January 3, 1911. It should be asked, however, what it was that he agreed with; actually, Lenin's analysis was essentially a polemic against Plekhanov's conception. Lenin shared the opinion that Tolstoy's work exhibits the contradictions between the artist and the thinker, and he accepted the attack on Tolstoyanism which he viewed as a rival ideology to Marxism. He explained the problem differently from Plekhanov, however. Before going into his discussion, we consider some other interpretations made at that time, to which Lenin reacted immediately. After Tolstoy's dramatic death at Astapovo station, all the newspapers set about discussing his philosophy. The theme was taken up by the government organs (*Russkoe Znamya*, *Novoe Vremya*, *Rech*) as well, which after years of applause for the 1901 excommunication (over *Resurrection*) suddenly discovered that Tolstoy was a great seeker after God, the conscience of his times. While these Black Hundred or Kadet journals confined themselves to commonplaces, the articles of Nevyadomsky and Bazarov in *Nasha Zarya*, the organ of the Menshevik-Liquidators, said on the one hand that Tolstoy's views represented the flabby Russian intelligentsia, and on the other that his world view was a great monolith, a great philosophical synthesis based on the conception of nonresistance to evil. It is noteworthy, in this connection, that all the above interpretations dealt with Tolstoy's ideological preachments, not with the artistic-cognitive value of his works.

The equivalent put forth by Plekhanov was socio-biographical, whereas the authors mentioned proposed the following substitutes: sociological (but with the intelligentsia taking the place of the rural nobility) and philosophico-religious-moral. The first of these, as in Plekhanov's version, at least linked Tolstoy's philosophy to a definite class or social group. Bazarov advanced the thesis of Tolstoy as the conscience of the "sprawling" intelligentsia, and used the thesis only as a propaedeutic to abstract considerations on Tolstoy as the ideologue of the conscience of all humanity. Thus, this interpretation, confined to philosophy and ethics, had an idealist character, similar to the one that prevailed in the school of *Literaturgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte*.

Lenin polemicized against both the idealist conception and over-simplification in interpretation based on materialistic principles. The methodological polemic does not emerge clearly in his remarks, but can be deduced from them. Even more apparent are the political motives that led Lenin to speak out on this matter.

In November 1910, workers and students in St. Petersburg demonstrated in the streets against the tsarist regime, in honor of the memory of Tolstoy. Lenin called attention to the fact, as evidence that the problem of Tolstoy was and is taken as a highly political one. Merely comparing the opinions stated in the various journals showed that against the background of Tolstoy (or by means of him) opposing political positions clashed, along with contradictory theoretical conceptions.

Lenin presented a conception that may be described as an attempt to return to Marx's standpoint. In the first place, he considered Tolstoy (and this was a stroke of genius) as the representative of the peasant masses. He started from the proposition that the works of the great writer were a reflection of the bourgeois revolution in Russia during the period 1861-1904, after the emancipation of the serfs but before the 1905 revolution, in which the proletariat was already the protagonist. In the period in question Russia went through its "birth pangs" and became a modern state. The peasantry, the basic mass of the society of the time, was in mutiny against the government, the church and the process of "primary accumulation." This protest was a manifestation of pain and despair, at the same time. The peasantry was unable to cope with the situation of the times; keenly aware of all the torments of the transition, it was still incapable of any constructive way out. At most there were regrets for the old patriarchal system, or dreams of some new religion that would bring about universal justice on earth. In his works Tolstoy exhibited these contradictions, latent in the Russian peasantry. In September 1908, in an article entitled ***Tolstoy as a Mirror of the Russian Revolution***, Lenin said:

On the one hand, an artist of genius, the creator not only of unrivaled pictures of Russian life but of works belonging in the first rank of world literature. On the other hand, the great landowner mad for Christ. On the one hand, the magnificent, powerful, immediate, frank protest against social hypocrisy and falsehood; on the other, the "Tolstoyan," i.e., the worn-out, hysterical sniveler known as the Russian intellectual, who beats his breast and bears public witness: "I am abject, I am revolting, but I am engaged in moral self-improvement, I do not eat meat and I nourish myself on rice cutlets." On the one hand, a merciless criticism of capitalist exploitation, an unmasking of the violence of the government, the comedy of government justice and administration, an exposure of the full depth of the contradiction between the growth of wealth and the achievements of civilization and the growth of poverty, barbarism and suffering by the mass of workers; on the other hand—the insanely bigoted cry of "nonresistance to evil." On the one hand, the soberest realism, the tearing off of every mask; on the other, the propaganda of one of the worst things in the world, namely religion.

Later Lenin explained these contradictions: "Tolstoy is great as expressing the ideas and attitudes that formed in the minds of millions in the mass of Russian

peasantry at the time of the advancing bourgeois revolution in Russia. Tolstoy is original in that his views, taken as a whole, express the very special character of our revolution as a *peasant* bourgeois revolution. From this point of view the contradictions in Tolstoy's views are an accurate reflection of the contradictory conditions under which the historical action of the peasantry in our revolution took place."

In the first three articles, in which Lenin spoke of these contradictions, he stressed the fact that they were present both in the system of Tolstoy's views and in the very structure of his works, i.e., in their artistic-cognitive content. He thus went beyond what Plekhanov had done. There the opinions of Natasha Rostov, Pyotr Bezukhov or Konstanty Levin had been interpreted as opinions of the author, without relation to the environment presented in the stories. Lenin called attention to the peasantry presented in Tolstoy's works and to the fact that the author, despite an occasional opinion placed in the mouths of aristocrats, took the position of the "naive peasant" and expressed their psychology in his criticism.

This was a subtle analysis. In the case of great works, such as Tolstoy's, the artist cannot be treated as the representative of (or as expressing the interests of) merely his own class. Tolstoy represented all of the reality of the time, bringing out its internal contradictions. Thus, analysis from the mimetic point of view dominates the narrowly conceived genetic analysis. The gnoseological equivalent (obviously, artistic knowledge differs from scientific) prevails over the sociological equivalent. The decisive factor in interpreting the "world view" of the work is its immanent content and not the "bare" ideology of the writer, which often derives directly from his class origin. This procedure obviously does not exclude the question of the class genesis of the work. There the genetic and mimetic analyses are closely interwoven. In the case of Lenin's remarks on Tolstoy, this is immediately evident. The class point of view appears precisely by means of the parallel between the views of the writer and those of the peasant masses. This was brought out clearly by Lunacharsky in the discussion mentioned above.

In the other three articles, the functional analysis dominates, especially in ***Tolstoy and the Struggle of the Proletariat*** (December 1910). There, the accent is on the system of conceptions, on the ideology per se, rather than on the artistic-cognitive content. In the January 1911 article ***L. N. Tolstoy and His Epoch***, the critic was interested in *Lucerna*, *Anna Karenina* and the *Kreutzer Sonata* chiefly for the philosophical theses presented there. Lenin dealt almost exclusively with the way in which Tolstoy's works were received by the working class, and what they give that class. Obviously, he did not doubt that Tolstoy's works were of permanent value. He often repeated, as we see from the reminiscences of Gorky and Krupskaya, that there was no other writer to compare with Tolstoy. But in 1911 Tolstoy interested him not only as artist, as mirror of a past epoch, but also as a thinker, as educator of the working and peasant masses. On this Lenin reacted just as Plekhanov had. Tolstoy is not the teacher of life, as the liberals

assert, Lenin wrote, but “by penetrating into the works of Leo Tolstoy the Russian working class knows its enemies better; and by analyzing the doctrine of Tolstoy, the entire Russian people will be able to realize where the weakness lay that had prevented it from carrying its emancipation through to completion. And this has to be realized in order to go forward.”

Thus, Tolstoy's doctrine, although so critical of Tsarism, yet so utopian and so reactionary in its principles, must be rejected by the proletariat where it harms the socialist movement.

The functional analysis, it will be seen, is far from being complete here. At this point, Lenin was not interested in the way Tolstoy was received by various social groups but, what was most important, in the reception of the artistic-cognitive content of his works. The analysis confined itself to an investigation of the class function of Tolstoy's philosophy at the given historical moment. By and large, it was a political point of view. If that were all that Lenin had to say, it would not have gone beyond the interpretation that Mehring made of Hauptmann. But Lenin gave a well-rounded point of view; for that reason, his interpretation was and is of extreme interest. At that time Lenin was the only person in the Marxist movement capable of giving such an analysis, since only in his philosophical work was there a well-developed theory of “reflection,” one aspect of which was the mimetic analysis. The interesting thing is not merely that Lenin went back to the propositions of Marx, but above all that it was a true analysis, that is, that it corresponded to the artistic-cognitive and *sensu stricto* ideological content of what Tolstoy wrote. We know that with *Anna Karenina* (1870-1877) there was a turning point in his writing. As early as in *A Landowner's Morning* and *Polikushka*, in the 1860's, he was already taking the peasant's view. In *Three Deaths* the coachman dies calmly, like a peasant, with dignity, in harmony with nature. Closer to Tolstoy the individualist, as Plekhanov always referred to him, was the agitated, dramatic death of the aristocratic woman, but the reader is touched by Fyodor, rather than by her. Mention should also be made here of the figures of Platon Karataev, Karp and Vlas in *War and Peace*, representing the peasant masses, the personification of their (fatalistic) wisdom and their patriotism. Identical themes can be traced in the *Power of Darkness* and *Master and Servant*. Along with the peasant way of looking at things went a bitter criticism of the system, which is already to be seen in *Anna Karenina* but reaches its peak in *Resurrection* and Tolstoy's journalism (*Confession*, *The Kingdom of Heaven Is Within Us*, *I Can Not Remain Silent*). However, the critical attitude was blurred by the “new” religion that *inter alia* prevented the great writer from understanding the social and political situation of the time.

In *Resurrection* Tolstoy described the populists (*Narodniki*) with warm sympathy, but Kondratyev, the worker, reading Marx, is treated with ironic condescension. The same attitude recurred in the story *Divine and Human* (1905). Thus, Lenin's interpretation brought out the essential, intrinsic cleavage in Tolstoy's work, and remains to this day the basis for discussions of theoreticians and critics.



Not long ago, J. Vidmar (a Yugoslav critic) and M. Lifshits (a Soviet writer on esthetics) engaged in polemics on this subject, namely, the relation of philosophy or world view to artistic truth. Vidmar held, using Tolstoy as his example, that there is a contradiction between what the writer represents (which is a permanent value) and what he thinks of reality (which is an ideological illusion and has only transitory value). Lifshits in reply showed—and tellingly—that the contradictions in Tolstoy's works were both artistic and philosophical. The cleavage is apparent in the writer's whole point of view, and his artistic turbidities are a parallel to it, or rather a reflection of it. Even if we grant that Lifshits is correct in this case, it is not quite true that this is always so. A number of articles in the Soviet Union recently have pointed out that there is always a concordance between a writer's world view and the artistic-cognitive content of his work. E. M. Khrapchenko, in a discussion entitled "World View and Creative Work" (in *Problemy teorii literatury, shornik statei*), polemicizes not only against such contemporary writers on esthetics as Lukacs and Nedoshyvin but essentially against Engels as well, asserting categorically that a false philosophy inevitably leads to artistic-cognitive failures, viz., to an unrealistic picture of reality. Engels had expressly stated (see his letter to Margaret Harkness of April 1888) that Balzac was a realist, despite his legitimist views.

There is no doubt that creative work is dependent on the world view, but the assertion that there must be a concordance between them is something else again. What is meant by the world view in this connection is not quite clear. Khrapchenko means by it "the ensemble of views ... on natural and social phenomena," as contrasted with the "artistic method," i.e., the embodiment of general views in the fabric of the narrative. Lifshits means by a view of life, apparently, the "artistic method," i.e., the ideas contained in the work, derived from its guiding themes. Between the writer's world view (in Khrapchenko's sense) and his creative work, a contradiction can certainly arise. Prior to socialist realism, at least, this was endemic with respect to many outstanding works. If we take the meaning that Lifshits gives to the concept of "world view," there too we find a conflict within the artistic fabric itself; but this is a case of less frequent occurrence.

In Lenin also we find, outside his articles on Tolstoy, a methodological criterion for interpreting literature that stands in contradiction to the apodictic verdicts of Khrapchenko and his colleagues. Lenin asserted that the philosophy of the artist, as a system of concepts or judgments, may be in glaring contradiction with the artistic truth contained in the work in question, and that in that case the essential thing for literary criticism is what the artist presents, not what he thinks. In a letter to Gorky dated February 25, 1908 (a very grave period, with inner-party disputes and efforts to win the writer over to the Bolshevik side), Lenin said: "In my opinion, the writer can gain a great deal from any reading in philosophy that he does. I agree fully and unconditionally that all kinds of books are needed for our work as writers and that starting from *that* kind of view [Lenin had in mind

empiricism—S. M.], from one's own artistic experimentation and *even from idealist philosophy*, it is possible to arrive at conclusions that are of great value to the party....”

This was written with reference to Gorky's *Mother*, which Lenin considered to be a party novel. The statement is significant, but usually goes unnoticed by commentators. It was not, as some would have it, merely an occasional remark, bound up with the needs of the moment and the tactics of the fight to win Gorky. A similar interpretation is to be found in Lenin's remarks in 1921 on a book by A. Averchenko (a White emigré in Paris), *Twelve Knives in the Revolution's Back*. Lenin pointed out how vividly it presents the atmosphere of the Russia of the landowners and industrialists. We cite the conclusion of the article:

In the last story, *Fragments of an Exploded World*, we find a former senator in the Crimea, at Sevastopol—“he had been rich, generous, well-connected,” “now he was working as a day laborer in an artillery magazine, unloading and sorting shells”—and a former manager of “huge steel mills, which counted as the largest in the Viborg district. Now he is a clerk in a commission agency and recently has even acquired some skill in evaluating second-hand ladies' coats and children's plush teddy bears, left for sale.”

The two old timers recall the good old days, the sunsets in St. Petersburg, the streets, the theaters and, of course, the visits to the “Little Bear,” “Vienna” and “Little Yaroslav,” etc. Their reminiscences are broken into by cries: “What did we do to them? Whom did we interfere with? ... What harm did that do them? ... What have they done to Russia?”

Arkadii Averchenko cannot understand why. The workers and peasants, apparently, had no trouble in understanding why, and do not need any explanations.

Some of the stories deserve reprinting, in my opinion. Ability has to be supported.

The eloquence of this way of interpretation is obvious. Lenin is defending the “objective truth” of Averchenko's book. The writer is seething with hatred of the Soviet Union, but by writing the truth about himself and his class he undermines his own philosophy. Hence, the artistic-cognitive is the decisive factor in literary criticism, although, of course, not the only one.

If what we have said is correct, then the analysis of M. Merleau-Ponty in his *Les aventures de la dialectique* ... is incorrect, according to which Lukacs contrasted his interpretation of realism to the narrow, purely ideological method proposed by Lenin. The position of Merleau-Ponty *contradicts* the historical facts concerning

Lukacs' theory of realism as set forth in his *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (1923), alleged to deviate from "Leninist orthodoxy." Actually, Lukacs, with Lifshits and others, defended realism, in the sense of Lenin's propositions and on the basis of them, during the 1930's.

Lenin's position on objective truth is in line with other marginal remarks of his on the characteristic nature of literature and art. A complete presentation of these theses of Lenin would call for a reconstruction on my part of a view he expressed in only fragmentary form. Since I would like to avoid any such procedure, Lenin's ideas are given directly here, even though in a rather disconnected way. I feel that this is preferable, as being closely linked to the materials presented up to now.

In 1914 Lenin got from Inessa Armand a book by Winnichenko entitled *The Commandments of the Fathers*. He did not like the book because it was a "collection of the merest horrors." Obviously, said Lenin, crimes occur, diseases, pathological phenomena, etc. However, representing the world only in that version is a false method. In this judgment there was implicit an anti-naturalistic program. The cognitive value of literature is not constituted by realia taken independently of any generalization, and still less by realia subordinated to a false, superficial generalization. Accordingly, it is impossible to defend the artistic and cognitive value of a work of art merely by the plea that facts like those described "simply occur in real life." Lenin, although he did not write on realism as Marx and Engels did, went in the same direction. In a letter to Inessa Armand dated January 24, 1915 on the subject of free love, he pointed out *inter alia* that a story is based on an individual instance, a unique situation and individual characters, in whom and through whom, however, typical traits are manifested. These ideas are in a way a theoretical commentary on his articles on Tolstoy, the remarks in his 1908 letter to Gorky and his ironical evaluation of Averchenko's book. Everywhere, the leitmotiv is the problem of artistic truth.

Following up Lenin's suggestions concerning the nature of art, they can be carried still further. In reading Feuerbach's lectures on *The Essence of Religion*, Lenin noted with approval the statement that "Art does not require that its works be regarded as reality." Here we approach the limits of legitimate interpretations of Lenin's text. It appears, however, that it is possible, in the context of the analysis presented hitherto, to state Lenin's thought as leading to the recognition of the relative autonomy of the work of art. This is justified by the methodological considerations scattered in his ***Philosophical Notebooks*** concerning the relative independence of the various spheres of social consciousness. In a certain sense we are authorized to do this by the dialectical genius of Lenin, between the thesis of the politically immediate function of the work of art and the investigation of its rights, which are internal but obviously not autarkic. But this puts us once more at the threshold of reconstructing Lenin's esthetics on our own account. We must, therefore, return to the task we set ourselves at the outset: an analysis of what Lenin himself said; we proceed to a second problem: the party nature of the literary work.

This is a problem that should be treated along with the previous one, since it is directly connected with it. The artist, consciously or unconsciously, in dealing with a given theme and reflecting reality truly or falsely, always assumes some party position or other. However, with a view to an orderly exposition of Lenin's theses and the need for clarifying the terms, it seems desirable to divide the problem. The problem of the party nature of literature was posed by Lenin in the 1905 article cited above. Since the term is understood in differing ways, we must distinguish three meanings contained in Lenin's text. Lenin himself never made this *distinguo*, but consciously, i.e., for polemical reasons, used the three meanings, stressing what he had in mind in the given context.

The central meaning of the adjective "party" relates to *belonging to an organization*. The author of the article assigns the literary man the same kind of position as any other member of the party. There is nothing surprising in the fact that this problem appeared in Lenin's time, when the party of the Bolshevik type took form and established itself. Artists and literary men expected that they would be in some sense *legibus soluti* (above the law). Lenin pointed out with emphasis, both in the furious struggles within the Social Democratic movement and in the battle with enemies outside it, that party discipline is the same for everyone.

In another sense, "party nature" is the same as *committed in idea*. That is, anyone who commits himself in idea, or is in any sense tendentious, has thereby chosen some party. In this sense, the individualistic writer is likewise a partisan, if he takes his abstract and specious independence from any considerations as his creed and contrasts himself to the frankly engaged writer.

The third basic meaning of the adjective "party" is that of *being committed on the side of the proletariat, on the side of socialism*. The artist who is partisan in this sense need not necessarily be linked to a party organizationally. In this sense, "party-ness" is the same as what is currently defined as a revolutionary attitude.

Lenin's propositions have Marxist tradition behind them. After 1848, in connection with the discussion with Heine and Freiligrath, the problem was raised by Marx and Engels in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. Marx gave the concept of "party-ness" the last of the above meanings. Later, in his correspondence with Freiligrath in 1860, he stated that a party writer is one who declares himself on the side of communism, without necessarily being a member of the Communist League. This theme was taken up by Mehring at the end of the century; he distinguished proletarian writing (the first sense) from party writing (third sense). If a shift in definition took place in Lenin, this was due to clearly political causes. Accordingly, it is in order to describe the situation in which the article appeared at that time.

In 1904 and 1905 the opinion was expressed in some party newspapers and in milieux connected with them, that socialism could be consistent with decadentism. Minsky, in the *Proletarii* and *Novaya Zhizn*, put forth the slogan of tolerance for the hyperindividualism of creative individuals. Representatives of the modernism

of the time came forward with similar slogans. One magazine, *Polarnaya Zvezda*, wrote in a statement of policy: "In our philosophico-political world view, we start from the premise that the individual is the vehicle and the creator of all spiritual values. For us, individuality is sacred, in and of itself. In that sense, we are absolute individualists." This was written by S. Frank, but identical ideas were advocated by Bryusov, Merezhkovsky and Berdyaev. An editorial in the magazine *Zolotoe Runo* (which succeeded *Mir Iskusstva*, the organ of the symbolists) asserted that the times were perilous, since the bloody social conflicts were intruding on the fringes of art as an eternal value. The platform of the magazine proclaimed the following as truths: "Art is eternal, art is not bound to anything that is transitory.... Art is something unique, the spirit is unique in its source. Art is symbolic, since it always bears within itself a symbol, i.e., that which is eternal, and rejects that which is transitory. Art is free, since it arises from inspiration." Bryusov and Berdyaev protested that they could only recognize socialist ideas to the extent that socialism respects the basic principle of their world view: the unconditional independence of the artist.

The opinions of the Russian symbolists were a reflection of French Symbolism and Parnassism. At its base is the Romantic theory of art, derived from Novalis and F. Schlegel, according to which the artist is a Brahmin. (At the same time, a trend in Romanticism stressed the social obligations of the artist, e.g., Shelley in *Defence of Poetry*.) This apolitical tendency in Romanticism was inherited by the representatives of the idea of "art for art's sake." Baudelaire wrote, in the *Hymne*: "Que tu viennes du Ciel ou de l' Enfer, qu'importe, o Beauté." Flaubert thought: "Aimons-nous en l'art comme les mystiques s'aiment en Dieu" (*Correspondance*, Vol. II, 1983). The Goncourts wrote in their *Journal* in 1886 that only "pure literature" is a matter of life and death. And we are continually coming across statements in their writings concerning the eternality of the "truly beautiful," the independence of the artist, his superiority and disdain towards his clients and customers. Baudelaire wrote about Poe, and Gautier about Baudelaire, that the glory of the poet is his holding himself aloof from utopians, philanthropists, socialists, etc. Flaubert, speaking for all estheticizing poets, declared that "la morale de l'art consiste dans sa beauté même" (*Correspondance*, Vol. III).

But there is an important historical difference between the representatives of "art for art's sake" and Bryusov and Berdyaev. The former revolted against the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois Philistine, hostile to all ambitious art (cf. Marx's statements in Vol. I, of the *Theories of Surplus Value*). The Russian Decadents were not attacking the "bourgeois" alone, but also, and perhaps at that time mainly, the masses of the people in hopes of a new art that would open up horizons hitherto closed to them. The artists' fear of the masses dates from late Romanticism (cf. Heine's preface to the French edition of *Lutetia*) and continues down to the time of Benois and Merezhkovsky. In 1912, Roger Fry gave it symptomatic expression in his essay on *Art and Socialism*, read at the Fabian Society. But the antagonist of the poets in the 1840's and 1850's was a different

one from that of the early twentieth century. At the earlier epoch, socialism was a "specter," while in Lenin's time it was a real, fertile historical force. It could be regarded as such from the point of view of the artists as well.

But not everybody at the time accepted the Decadent ideas. F. Makovsky and V. Stasov attacked by the Symbolists, appealing to the civic conscience of the creative, but their voices were regarded as outdated. Writers and critics linked with the social democracy carried most of the weight of the polemics. Their articles preceded Lenin's statements, e.g., Plekhanov's discussion of eighteenth-century French drama and French painting and his article on the proletarian movement and bourgeois art. Then there was Lunacharsky's article on "Marxism and Esthetics" in Number 9-10 of *Pravda*, and Maxim Gorky wrote his "Remarks on the Petty Bourgeois" in *Novaya Zhizn*. These articles asserted the social nature of art, demonstrated its class origin, content and function, attacked formalism for its absence of ideas, laid the foundations of a Marxist esthetics, lined up behind the proletariat in their struggle for social emancipation (and cultural revolution), exposed the fetishism of the eternal, absolutely beautiful and artistic individualism, showing its petty-bourgeois source. This was the background of Lenin's article on **Party Organization and Party Literature**. His first basic thesis asserted that "literature must be a part of the general cause of the proletariat, a 'gear' in the single, solid, massive mechanism of social democracy powered by the entire conscious avant-garde of the working class." Lenin added at once that every comparison limps, and reinforced the assertion above in the following manner: "There is no doubt that literature is the last thing in the world to lend itself to mechanical leveling and uniformity, to the subjection of the minority by the majority. There is no doubt that in this field great freedom must be assured to individual initiative and personal inclinations, great freedom of thought and fantasy, form and content."

This fundamental thesis was aimed in a definite direction, at Minsky and his supporters. But it is an important fact, which will have to be returned to, that Lenin, in formulating a pointed political postulate, did not overlook the problem of the nature of art.

Another fundamental thesis of the article was addressed to Berdyaev, Benois, etc. Lenin punctured the declamations of the Decadent writers concerning absolute freedom. He said: "Now this absolute freedom is a bourgeois, i.e., an anarchist phrase (for anarchism as a philosophy is the bourgeois world view turned inside out). It is impossible to live in a society and be free from society. The freedom of the bourgeois writer, painter or actress is only masked (or hypocritically concealed) dependence on the purse, on bribery, on fees."

This conclusion led further, to a proposition going beyond the framework of literature organically linked to the party. Lenin interpreted freedom of art as follows: "Literature will be free to the extent that new forces are recruited into its ranks, not for personal advantage or a career, but for the idea of socialism and

sympathy for the working people. Literature will be free when it serves, not the jaded heroine, not the bored and pudgy 'top ten thousand,' but the millions, the tens of millions of working people, who are the flower of the nation, its power, its future."

Thus, he appealed to all artists to whom the people's cause was dear to take part in the struggle for social justice. It was an appeal for realistic and optimistic creativity, oriented toward the future. Lunacharsky supported these theses in an article on "Problems of Social Democratic Artistic Creativity" in the magazine *Vestnik Zhizni* (1907, No. 1). Bryusov and Berdyaev answered him, defending anarchism as the indispensable attitude of the artist, and inspiration ("the mystic principle") as the source of creative process. The discussion continued, and is still going on, as we know.

We return to what Lenin said, in order to bring out the extraordinary scope of his view of the problem raised here. Lenin accented the importance of the ideas of the creative work, and fought for a direct bond between the artist and the party. These were natural arguments to occur in the writings of the leader of a political party that shaped the history of the twentieth century. But Lenin also stressed the special nature of the work of the writer. This motif, by no means a sensational one, is linked with the fact that the statement was earlier than his conception of artistic truth, and with his later declarations. Lenin's struggle to win Gorky over to the communist view was at the same time a constant struggle not to interfere in any way with this creative writing. Lenin continually stressed that Gorky's personal authentic view of reality was a priceless gift for the party. In just the same way he defended Demian Bedny; but he held it against him, and the fact is symptomatic, that he sometimes merely repeated what the party had already established and society already knew. In Gorky's reminiscences we read that Lenin, without questioning the agitational value of Demian's works, added: "He is crude, he follows the reader, whereas what is needed is always to be a little ahead."

Thus, Lenin expected from the writer *a personal position, an individual penetration into reality, a treatment of problems and positions that the party, perhaps, had not yet got to*. Lenin was for the artistic individuality disclosing its own truth and going along with the party in its daily work; he was against excrescences of individualism.

Lenin's statements on the party quality of literature justify, as I see it, the following generalizations. Absolute freedom of the artist is an illusory freedom. Artistic work is inevitably entangled in the ideological battle. Conscious choice is always better than unconscious commitment. And in our time, there is no possible choice that is more humanistic than alliance with the people struggling for a communist society. What that alliance will be like is, another matter. It may be party writing in the sense of the public advocacy of communist ideas; but it may also be an approach to those ideas via categorical criticism of the capitalist system.

Developing these ideas of Lenin's, we could also say that this alliance may appear in creative work that directly attacks the central problems of ideas of our times, but it may also take the form of active participation in the process of democratization of esthetic culture (e.g., in the sphere of architecture and the applied arts). The alleged absolute independence of the artist is a fictional freedom; true freedom is every development and extension of esthetic values that are valuable from the point of view of the cultural needs of socialist society. Conscious commitment to the battle for socialism, with varying emotional coefficients and varying intellectual orientation, is always at the same time a battle for artistic de-alienation. The artist then not only communicates his own truths to others, but also gets truths from them, which lays a common foundation and makes it possible for everyone to determine his "place on earth." The artist who arrives in his own way at the world view that the communist party represents, not only has the right constantly to orient himself in the world, always to seek to reject the false and assert the truth, but simply feels that as an inner necessity. This applies as well, or rather, primarily, to the artist who is a member of a party. He is bound by the same party discipline as any other person, but he is also bound, as is every party intellectual, every, creator, to independent thought and the expression of his own view of reality. The party gives him a vote of confidence, *inter alia*, for the reason that he has enriched socialist culture by his individual vision, as Gorky did with his *Mother*. Lenin learned that lesson in the case of the great presocialist writers, including Tolstoy. They were discoverers of truths, and not agents carrying out preestablished orders. Socialist writers continued and are continuing that attitude, which is partisan through and through.

It is a striking fact that Lenin, a politician and revolutionary of great genius, an outstanding philosopher and economist, also showed some outstanding traits in his literary criticism. This is a case of the irradiation of genius, since those *dissecta membra* that the materials I have cited represent indicate clearly that this was a field of knowledge with which Lenin occupied himself only marginally, either for political motives, and immediate ones at that, or out of fondness for certain writers and certain works. In other cases he made his judgments only as occasional remarks, not attaching any particular importance to them and certainly never expecting that his tastes or casual criticisms would ever become a palimpsest from which the outlines of a Leninist esthetics would be derived.

Lenin's return to postulates established at one time by Marx and Engels, with which he was never acquainted, is a very significant fact, but what is most interesting to us is his dialectical view of artistic problems. In what he says, the work and the creator always appear in relation to social, political, party matters, and at the same time he endows them with relative autonomy. Such is this rich heritage, despite the meagerness of the theses. Today's Marxist esthetics tries to take up the heritage of Lenin, opposing on the one hand simplifications that reduce the work of art to a product of the given social situation, and on the other



hand, conceptions that divorce literature and art from their social basis.

In conclusion, I should like to call attention to two qualities of Lenin that appeared in his esthetic writings as in everything he did: his genius and his modesty. Not being a specialist in matters of art and esthetics (a fact which he recognized) he submitted to the decisions of experts. At the same time, as a politician and a philosopher, he put forth ideas and suggestions that laid a foundation for the specialists. In his work as a literary critic, Lenin showed two conjoined qualities that characterized him as a man, a leader of the Bolshevik party and a scholar—revolutionary make-up and humanism.

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