

historian M. P. Pogodin, in March 1868: "My thoughts about the limits of freedom and independence, and my views on history are not a mere paradox that has occupied me in passing. These thoughts are the fruits of all the intellectual efforts of my life, and they are an inseparable part of that philosophy which I have achieved, God alone knows with what striving and suffering, and it has given me complete calm and happiness." (*Literaturnyj post*, No. 10, 1928, pp. 64-65.)

There can be no doubt that Tolstoy's lapses in factual information and his distortions of characters, such as Kutuzov's, in *War and Peace* have contributed to the easy dismissal of his theory of history. History is not a science, he insisted, and sociology even less so. And he argued with some justice that no acceptable "laws of history" have been discovered and that the attempts to explain people and events in terms of causes, genius, or accidents were merely the result of ignorance. What troubled him most was the prevailing practice of historians to fix responsibility for what occurs in life upon individuals whom they call "great men" and endow with heroic virtues or vices. On the contrary, Tolstoy argues, there is a natural law which determines the lives of human beings no less than all the processes of nature itself. There is no free choice; all is ruled by an inexorable historical determinism.

With much illumination Mr. Berlin delves into the possible sources of Tolstoy's view of history, and in this respect he makes effective and original use of the influence of Joseph de Maistre's writings on him, especially of his *Les Soirées de St. Péterbourg*. But it is the particular merit of Mr. Berlin's penetrating treatment that he relates Tolstoy's view on history to the essential ambivalence that dominated his whole emotional, intellectual, and aesthetic life. In truth, this is the significant and unique contribution of the book. Mr. Berlin points out how the contrast between the universal but delusive experience of free will and historical determinism corresponds to the inner conflict in Tolstoy between two systems of values, the public and the private. Nor does Mr. Berlin neglect the purely psychological factors that contributed something to Tolstoy's concern with history. In this respect, perhaps more might have been made of Tolstoy's angry attacks on "great men." His irrational depreciation of greatness seems almost to have been motivated by a feeling of envy of the historical fame of Napoleon, just as his later depreciation of revealed Christianity seems to have been inspired by a feeling of envy of the perfection of Christ.

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EDWARD J. BROWN, *The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature, 1928-1932*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1953. xi + 311 pp. \$4.50.

This excellent work of scholarship and interpretation should destroy a widespread myth. The fairy story, which originated in official pronouncements of the Soviet literary hierarchy and has been consistently

perpetuated by both Soviet and non-Soviet commentators, goes like this: about 1929 a group of intellectual hoodlums seized control of the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP). Utilizing the favored position granted RAPP by the Communist Party, and taking advantage of the Party's desire to create ardor for the First Five Year Plan among the populace, this foul gang established a virtual literary dictatorship with the aim of twisting Soviet writing into a narrowly topical, utilitarian instrument of propaganda and agitation. After nearly four years of vulgarizing activity by this organization in the name of "proletarian" art, so the story goes, the Party became horrified at the monster it had spawned, and liquidated it. A later Soviet elaboration of the myth—not, however, widely accepted in the West—argues that the leaders of RAPP, and notably its strongest personality, Leopold Averbakh, were actually members of the Trotskyist apparatus which was allegedly uncovered in the purge trials of 1937.

In his extraordinarily thorough and closely documented account of the political origins, ideological lineage, and literary theory and practice of RAPP, Mr. Brown sharply and most convincingly disagrees with the traditional interpretation. It is true that he shares with other historians of that dark period a general antipathy toward the literary activity of the First Five Year Plan. But he insists—and marshals overwhelming supporting evidence—that the degrading force was not RAPP but the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Moreover, Averbakh and his cohorts, who are the villains of the traditional story, emerge in Mr. Brown's treatment as relatively liberal in an esthetic sense—a force for sanity in an era of brutal persecution of art. Adept at the politico-literary eye-gouging tactics of their time, they were ruthless and arrogant in dealing with their enemies. But at worst they were merely the frustrated and unwilling tools of a much more sinister central political authority. At best they were rebels against this authority, and fought to preserve a modicum of creative freedom for Soviet writers.

One of the most valuable features of this book is its careful and lucid tracing of the idea of "proletarian hegemony" in literature, from the time of the inception of the idea, through the intricate polemics of the twenties, to the moment when the idea was officially proscribed in the thirties. Esthetically naive as it may have been, the aspiration to create a purely proletarian art was in many respects ideologically legitimate and politically consistent with the aims of the October Revolution. In giving its blessing to RAPP, the Party endorsed one of the major trends in early Soviet Marxist thought. But in the battles which marked their rise to power, the leaders of RAPP, who were the chief theorists of the "proletarian" trend, had assimilated many of the fundamental literary principles of their enemies. Their most formidable opponent, the comparatively humane and sophisticated Marxist editor and critic Voronskij, had taught them much before they finally succeeded in crushing him. Voronskij's view of art as "cognition of life" came to play a no less

important role in RAPP thinking than the opposing view of art as primarily an instrument of the class struggle. As a consequence, the RAPP leadership was ideologically ill-equipped for the task of regimenting literature which the Party assigned to it. Mr. Brown points out, for example, that the slogan "for a Magnitostroi of literature," which is traditionally ascribed to the RAPP leadership, was actually inimical to RAPP theory, and he goes on to prove that this particular slogan was forced upon the reluctant organization by no less a personage than L. D. Kaganovič.

The term "proletarian episode" in the title of the book therefore takes on ironic significance. It is clear that the leaders of RAPP on the one hand, and the formulators of Communist Party policy on the other hand, meant two quite different things when they referred to proletarian literature. RAPP had a theory of literature—rudimentary, but nevertheless sufficiently wise to advocate considerable creative freedom for the artist and to demand psychological verisimilitude in a work of art. The Party, behind its elaborate Marxist façade, thought of current Soviet literature purely as a weapon, whose value should be judged solely in terms of political expediency. Politically, the "episode" marked the failure of Party policy and its chosen instrument; in the field of literature it marked the failure of an idea.

Until recent years it has been fashionable to describe the dissolution of RAPP as an act of liberation, which relieved some of the pressure that had been exerted on Soviet writers during the First Five Year Plan and permitted them increased latitude in their choice of themes and methods of writing. The "fellow-travelers," i.e. non-proletarian writers sympathetic to the Soviet regime, were supposed to have been particularly favored in this respect. Mr. Brown's book contributes importantly to the growing body of evidence which shows that this was not precisely the case. It is true that the formation of the Union of Soviet Writers and the reshuffling of editorial boards that followed that death of RAPP placed several fellow-travelers in positions of influence and bestowed nominal grace upon many writers whom RAPP had repeatedly and viciously attacked. But Mr. Brown's close analysis of RAPP's main periodicals, *Oktjabr* and *Na literaturnom postu* shows that in the first place the organization was never nearly as hidebound, in either its theoretical writings or its selection of literature for publication, as it is reputed to have been. And in the second place, the present book demonstrates that in crushing RAPP, the Party was merely stamping out a source of dissent against its own policies. The era of "socialist realism" which followed gave recognition to fellow-travelers, but the pressure for conformity continued unabated.

This book makes a new and original contribution to our knowledge of the Soviet Union. As a work of courageous and judicious scholarship, it deserves the highest esteem.

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