

cathedral as impostors) reads like an unconscious imitation of a passage from her husband's own writings. This is not to ascribe literary pretensions to Anna Grigorievna; she does not, after all, attempt a critical biography. But once the reader accepts her obvious and self-proclaimed limitations, he can derive much pleasure and knowledge from her reminiscences. Beatrice Stillman has provided a proficient translation, has revised the notes to suit the needs of a non-Russian reading audience, and has included a useful biographical glossary.

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SMERT' VLADIMIRA MAIAKOVSKOGO. By *Roman Jakobson* and *D. Sviatopolk-Mirskii*. Series Practica, 70. The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1975. 48 pp. 16 Dglds., paper.

Mayakovsky's suicide on April 14, 1930 sent a heavy seismic shock wave through the Russian literary world. In the politics-obsessed USSR, where the motive for such an act was at once assumed to be political, an immediate cover-up was undertaken, designed to prove that *this* suicide had nothing political about it. Among Russian émigrés, who had always tended to confuse Mayakovsky's politics with his poetry, the common reaction was equally political, though with the value signs reversed: "Serves him right for siding with the Bolsheviks! Anyway, he was a Communist versifier, not a poet." Nowhere through the political din, it seemed, could be heard the genuinely nonpolitical, literary, human response: one of Russia's great poets was now silenced forever, and the world was the poorer for it.

As it turned out, this, the only valid response of Russian literature to the tragedy, was articulated not in the prestigious *tolstye zhurnaly* of either Moscow or Paris, but in two places only: the magnificent cycle "Maiakovskomu" by Marina Tsvetaeva, published in Prague in *Volia Rossii*, and in a little brochure published in Berlin in the last pre-Hitler year. Without introduction or explanation, the latter contained an unpublished variant from 150,000,000 and only two essays: "On a Generation That Squandered Its Poets" by Roman Jakobson, and "Two Deaths: 1837-1930" by D. S. Mirsky. Of Mirsky's piece the less said the better. Now terribly dated, it seems a pathetic effort on the part of that brilliant mind to manipulate the categories of what passed in those days for Marxist criticism—in this case, to define the "class contradictions" that rent the souls and ultimately caused the deaths of both Pushkin and Mayakovsky. Circuitous and wordy, it elaborately gets nowhere. Read retrospectively, Mirsky's piece seems as suicidal as Mayakovsky's bullet: an intellectual castration performed on himself by a man who afterward voluntarily put himself in the hands of Stalin's hangmen. Jakobson's essay, on the other hand, has become a classic. At once personal and clear-eyed, grief-stricken and profound, it expressed fundamental truths about Mayakovsky as man and poet and about the tragic fate of his generation of poets—one of the most extraordinary bursts of talent any country has produced—in an age of turmoil and revolution. It has been the infinitely fertile seed from which countless articles, dissertations, and books have sprung. It is a major milestone of Russian criticism, and it certainly needs no further praise or comment from me.

It is, however, a pleasure to take note of this reprint, forty-four years later, of the original Russian brochure. Those who knew the Jakobson piece only through the famous (abridged) German translation (in *Slavische Rundschau*) or, more recently, in Edward J. Brown's skillful English version (in *Major Soviet Writers: Essays in Criticism* [New York, 1973]) can now experience the immediacy and vigor of the Russian original, which no translation can fully recapture.

It seemed a pity, however, that this new edition, welcome as it is, was published without any preface that would place the essays in their historical context or recall the circumstances of their composition. I therefore wrote to Professor Jakobson, asking if he would be willing to share his recollections of these events, and he has most kindly permitted me to quote his reply, dated October 1, 1976, which I present here in my translation from the Russian original.

"Thanks for your appreciation of my pages of long ago, about which Mandelstam once said 'Biblical words' and Lilia Brik, 'You perceived what no one noticed.' Mayakovsky's death shook me to my bones with its unexpected realization of something long foreseen. In letters that followed from Elsa Triolet (with the opening words 'They bungled') and from Ehrenburg, there was talk of the frenzied hounding and unendurable spiritual isolation of Mayakovsky in the last phase of his life. I felt it my duty to say something about the wasted generation; and completely shutting myself away for several days, I wrote without interruption. When I had finished, I called together some Russian friends who either lived in Prague or were passing through, and read them what I had written. Bem and Hessen and Savitskii and Číževsky were speechless, and the first to break the general silence was Bogatyrev, who shouted: 'You will never write anything more powerful or more profound!' Il'ia Ehrenburg, who received a typewritten copy, responded similarly. The abbreviated German translation was made by a Ukrainian named Hekter, who worked for *Prager Presse* and *Slavische Rundschau*, and it was printed in that magazine. My idea was to publish a collection of articles and reminiscences about Mayakovsky by Russians living in the West, and I wrote to Ehrenburg, Elsa Triolet, Pougny, Al'tman, Larionov, and, I think, David Burluk, and Mirsky; but for various reasons no one except Mirsky ultimately sent anything; and, having with some difficulty come to an agreement with Kaplan, the Russian publisher in Berlin, I had no alternative but to publish a mini-collection of only two articles, a booklet that later, through the efforts of the Hitlerites and the Stalinist censorship became an extreme rarity."

*Habent sua fata libelli.*

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IN STALIN'S TIME: MIDDLECLASS VALUES IN SOVIET FICTION. By Vera S. Dunham. Introduction by Jerry F. Hough. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976. xvi, 283 pp. \$16.95.

Vera Dunham has achieved a rare distinction: she has written a literary study which one greatly prefers to the works themselves. True, Stalinist "middlebrow" fiction is not known for its aesthetic or intellectual value, but it is a measure of her accomplishment that she has drawn so much of interest from such tedious material. In the preface she states: "If lasting poetry and prose had been examined, the source material would have lain altogether outside the regime's set of values." This sentence defines the book's methodology as well as its theme—to examine Stalinist social values as reflected in a literature devoted to their propagation.

The topic is a complex one since no writer, not even Iu. Kapusto, can produce in total conformity to a political tendency that is inconsistent with revolutionary rhetoric and subject to frequent change. Nevertheless, in some one hundred works of fiction, poetry, and drama, Dunham reveals a pattern of relationships—the "Big Deal"—between the regime and the class of bureaucrats and technicians which supports the regime. She chooses to concentrate on works written after the war, during a