
NEWS OF THE PROFESSION

MARC SLONIM, 1894–1976

Marc Slonim, who died in Geneva on May 8, 1976, was born in Novgorod-Seversk. His father was a lawyer and his mother was the sister of one of the best-known Russian prerevolutionary literary critics, Iulii Aikhenvald—something Slonim was always both pleased and proud to recall. He received his education in Odessa, at the University of Florence (before 1914) and the University of Petrograd (1915–18). As a young man he joined the Socialist Revolutionary Party, and in 1917 was elected to the Constituent Assembly, becoming the youngest member of that ill-fated body. Under the auspices of his party, he took part in the anti-Bolshevik movement in Eastern Russia and in Siberia, emigrating, in 1919, through Japan, to Western Europe. In 1920, he completed his interrupted studies at the University of Florence. His first émigré publications were of political-historical nature: *Russkie predtechy bol'shevizma* (Berlin, 1922); *La rivoluzione russa* (Bologna); *Il Bolscevismo visto da un russo* (Florence, 1920; also in French); *Da Pietro il Grande a Lenin: Storia di movimento rivoluzionario in Russia: 1700–1917* (Milan, 1922; also in French and in Czech); *Spartaco e Bela Kun* (Florence). Much later he also published an informative survey of the Soviet Union: *Les Onze républiques soviétiques* (1937). In 1920, he settled in Prague, becoming one of the editors of the Socialist Revolutionary periodical *Volia Rossii* (1920–32) which started as a newspaper but soon became a major political and literary monthly. Slonim was its literary editor and its principal literary critic. To him goes the main credit for giving much space in its pages to such writers as Remizov and Tsvetaeva, as well as for launching a number of young, previously unknown writers, both in prose and in verse, who were later to make a name for themselves in Russian émigré literature. As a literary critic, he became one of the pioneers, among his fellow émigrés, in the study of contemporary Soviet literature. It led to the publication, in 1933, of his own volume of perceptive critical studies of thirteen Soviet writers (*Portrety sovetskikh pisatelei*; translated also into Serbo-Croatian) and, jointly with George Reavey, of an anthology of Soviet literature in English (later published also in French and in Italian). Settling in 1932 in Paris, Slonim took an active part in Russian literary life there, sponsoring, among other things, a young writers' club called *Kochev'e*. He also published a book of Czechoslovak impressions (*Po zolotoi trope*, 1928) and some translations, both from and into French (Duhamel, Stendhal, Lavrenev, Shklovsky). World War II, the defeat of France, and the Nazi occupation forced him to become, once again, an émigré: after a rather adventurous and long trip, involving an internment in Morocco, he reached the United States and, from 1941 on, made his home there. In 1943, he began teaching Russian and comparative literature at Sarah Lawrence College. After retiring in 1962 he became its director of foreign studies, with headquarters in Geneva. He was, for many years, a regular contributor to the *New York Times Book Review*.

During his American period, Slonim published several major books about Russian literature, some of which went through more than one edition. Only one of them was in Russian: *Tri liubvi Dostoievskogo* (1953; later translated into English). The others were: *The Epic of Russian Literature: From Its Origins*

through Tolstoy (1950; 2nd ed., 1964); *Modern Russian Literature: From Chekhov to the Present* (1953); *An Outline of Russian Literature* (1958); *Russian Theater from the Empire to the Soviets* (1963); *Soviet Russian Literature: Writers and Problems* (1964, 1967). He also edited *Modern Italian Short Stories* (1964); contributed numerous articles to American, Russian, and other periodicals; and, especially in the last years of his life, prepared material for Radio Liberty broadcasts.

Slonim will be best remembered as a literary critic of considerable acumen and understanding. One may regret that he did not write a companion volume to his *Portraits of Soviet Writers* about Russian émigré writers. Since he was himself part and parcel of émigré literature, it was surprising and unfortunate that in his *Modern Russian Literature* he said disproportionately little about it, spoke of it rather slightingly, and made several gross factual errors—something I could not help noting in reviewing the book (in *Opyty*).

Slonim was a man of many interests. He was widely read in several European literatures, a good writer (he also had the reputation of a good teacher and lecturer), and an interesting interlocutor. Partly because of certain political disagreements in his pre-American period, and partly for purely geographical reasons, we first met personally rather late in our lives. In 1963, we both took part in an international symposium on Soviet literature in the sixties, held under the auspices of the Munich Institute for the Study of the USSR, at Bad Wiessee, and found ourselves in full agreement on most of the issues. After the symposium we corresponded fairly regularly. In 1972, at his invitation, I stopped in Geneva on my way to Israel, to give a talk to the Cercle Russe, and enjoyed his and his wife's (Tatiana Vladimirovna) hospitality. I shall always cherish a pleasant memory of our personal contacts and our friendly correspondence. He seemed to bear me no grudge for my unfavorable review of one of his books.

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