LITERATURE

AND

MARXISM

A CONTROVERSY
BY SOVIET CRITICS

EDITED BY ANGEL FLORES

INDIA PUBLISHERS
ALLAHABAD
1945

90

CONTENTS

Mikhail Lifshitz LENINIST CRITICISM PAGE
Translated by Jules Law 1

V Kemenov THE SHAKESPEARE DEFORIERS
Translated by Louise Hiler 12

Mikhail Lifshitz A FORCED REPLY
Translated by Ralph B Winn 20

I Nusinov ON OBJECTIVE CLASS CONFUSERS
Translated by E Leda Swan 29

Mikhail Lifshitz HOW REFUTATIONS ARE WRITTEN
Translated by Ralph B Winn 42

Feodor Levin CHANGE THE COURSE OF THE DISCUSSION
Translated by Morris Spiegel 52

I Satz AN INSTRUCTIVE INCIDENT
Translated by N J Nelson 59

Feodor Levin THE ESSENCE OF THE CONTROVERSY
Translated by Jules Law 67

Mikhail Lifshitz LITERATURE AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE
Translated by Ralph B Winn 77

Mark Rosenthal VULGAR SOCIOLOGY AND METAPHYSICS
Translated by N J Nelson 91

LITERATURE AND MARXISM

LENINIST CRITICISM

By Mikhail Lifshitz

NOT long ago there was a remark in the *Literaturnaya Gazeta* about a teacher in the model school in Ulan-Ude This zealous man edified his students in the following characterization of Tolstoy: "Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy was a representative of the aristocratic, patriarchal, rural gentry which was not drawn into the bureaucratic apparatus of the autocracy, and which was doomed to gradual economic impoverishment."

One may laugh his head off at this description, but the fact is that the teacher from Ulan-Ude was merely repeating in a more platitudinous form one of the current dogmas of the so-called "literary science." What is interesting is the *origin* of this dogma The late Friche[1] defined Tolstoy's art as "the realism of the worldly gentry," and his numerous disciples embarked on a search for more minute subdivisions within this gentry. There can be no doubt that Friche himself took his definition from Plekhanov. For Plekhanov, Tolstoy was "the historian of the *nests of gentlefolk*" He reduced the great writer entirely to "the psychology of the artist-aristocrat."

As is well known, Lenin's approach to Tolstoy was entirely different. For Plekhanov the works of the great Russian writer served as another illustration of how the social environment of the artist's origin influences his psychology and directs his interests. To Lenin the materialistic formula "existence determines consciousness" had a more profound meaning. He did not seek in Tolstoy for the psychological influences of "the mores" of a certain social stratum. In general, he based his analysis not on the economic mores of the aristocracy, but on social existence in the broad

[1] V M Friche wrote extensively on æsthetics and literary history, and his *History of European Literature* has had wide circulation.—*Ed.*

historical sense—in the sense of the mutual relations and struggles of all the classes of society.

Wherein lies the significance of Tolstoy? "His world importance as an artist, his world renown as a thinker and a preacher reflect, each in its way, the world significance of the Russian Revolution," wrote Lenin [2] Tolstoy was not merely a master of the artistic word who will always be loved by millions of people. The very artistic greatness of his works rests in the fact that he "rendered with remarkable power the mood of the broad masses oppressed by the existing regime, he described their situation, expressed their spontaneous feeling of protest and indignation."[3] Thus Lenin wrote in 1910. How far removed from Plekhanov's evaluation! There we have "the historian of the *nests of gentlefolk*"; here is the artist in whose works are reflected the strength and the weakness of the peasant mass movement. "Whose point of view, then, was reflected in Tolstoy's preaching?" asks Lenin in the article "Tolstoy and the Proletarian Struggle" "Through his lips spoke the masses of the Russian people, those millions of men who had *already* come to hate the masters of today but who had *not yet* reached the point of waging a conscious, consistent, definitive, irreconcilable struggle against them."

Can an "artist-aristocrat" reflect the people's movement in his own country? From the point of view of Plekhanov such an idea is tantamount to the negation of Marxism. And indeed this view of Tolstoy's works does not accord with the *dogmatic* Marxism of the orthodox Mensheviks. Plekhanov conceived of the dependence of literature on social life as the *psychological dependence* of the artist on his environment. This side of the materialistic interpretation of history Plekhanov developed so onesidedly that he completely obscured the basic historical fact that

[2] Lenin: "On the Death of Tolstoy," Critics Group *Dialectics*, No 6, 1938, which also contains Lenin's other essays on Tolstoy —*Ed*

[3] *Ibid* —*Ed.*

art and literature are a *reflection of external reality*, or a mirror of objective all-sided human practice. In Lenin's analysis of Tolstoy's creative work, however, he proceeded from precisely that very fact.

The onesidedness of Plekhanov's "sociology of art" has exerted a sad influence on criticism and on the history of literature. Plekhanov laid the foundation upon which our vulgar sociologists build their schemes. There is a sociological principle to the effect that every artist merely organizes the fundamental psychological experiences imposed upon him by his environment, his upbringing and the interests of his social group. These experiences arise entirely involuntarily, automatically, like the feeling of pain when one cuts a finger. Each class leads an independent spiritual life: it is mournful, jolly, worried about its health, and in general is given to the most diverse moods. Art merely collects the moods of its class into special reservoirs called artistic productions. In this sense each artist is *irresponsible*. You can neither convince him nor dissuade him, and strictly speaking, it is even meaningless to praise or to curse him. He is the rightful psychological product of his environment. In the final analysis every artist can express only his own self, his own life, the life of his class, of his group, of his own stratum, his own dunghill. The more closely we link the artist to this dunghill, the *more exact* and the *more scientific* will be our analysis. Thus, or almost thus, argue numerous representatives of "sociology," more consistently than Plekhanov himself.

What is literature? A reflection of reality, a picture of the objective world surrounding the artist, his class, his social stratum? Not at all. "Literature is an imaginative form of class consciousness." It is "a special form of class consciousness, expressing itself by means of verbal images." Such is the explanation given to the readers of *The Literary Encyclopædia*. Thus, the contents of literature are taken not from the external world, but from the depths of a

definite class psychology. Some historians of literature went even further along this path and made the deduction that, in general, the artist can portray nothing but his own class. Hence when Gogol, for example, wrote about the Dnieper Cossacks, the discerning eye knows that they are not Dnieper Cossacks at all, but petty noblemen like Gogol himself, disguised in Ukrainian dress and warm overcoats.

Each literary work is thus converted into a coded telegram, and the entire history of art into a collection of rebuses and symbolic figures hiding certain class meanings. We have to decipher these hieroglyphics in order to determine their "sociological equivalent." Hence that mania of vulgar sociology to catch the writer red-handed just at the moment when he accidentally babbles out the primary tendencies of his class consciousness. If Shakespeare's Juliet, for example, exclaims:

O, break, my heart! poor bankrupt, break at once!

the shrewd sociologist will unfailingly seize on this plaintive plea to link the great dramatist with the interests of the London merchants, the commercialized noblemen, or the "bourgeoisified landowners."

Leninist criticism has nothing in common with such pettifogging. People are sane. Their consciousness is not just a psychological symptom of some subjective point of view. It gives a picture of the objective world; it reflects external reality. Writers and artists show this reality in a more or less correct and artistic form. The principal shortcoming of this widespread sociological theory lies in the fact that it replaces Lenin's *theory of reflection* with *class symbolism*, and in this most important point it breaks with Marxism.

But how can one combine the theory of reflection with a class point of view? Wonders the vulgar sociologist. If literature reflects external reality, what falls to the lot of class analysis? These fears repeat the fears of the Economists in their time, and, later, of Plekhanov and the Mensheviks with regard to Lenin's

famous work *What Is To Be Done?* As is well known, they accused Lenin of idealism and of forgetting the class nature of consciousness.

Dogmatic Marxism understands by class analysis the establishment of primary social-psychological types and styles of thought, truthful from the point of view of their own classes, and false from the point of view of the opposing classes The sociologist merely *explains* these types. He reasons like Voltaire's Doctor Pangloss: "Everything is as it is, and cannot be otherwise."[4]

Leninism demands something entirely different. The class nature of spiritual phenomena is determined not by their subjective coloring, but by their depth of comprehension of reality. From this objective world comes the subjective coloring of class ideology. It is a *conclusion* and not a *premise*! A man who is capable of rising to hatred of oppression and falsehood in *all* their manifestations and forms in the social life of his epoch, becomes an ideologist of the revolutionary class. A man who is completely immersed in his individual existence, in his basic isolation, remains for ever under the influence of reactionary ideology. In contrast to the dogmatic Marxism of the Mensheviks and the Economists, Lenin proved that class consciousness does not originate automatically. No one is born an ideologist of a definite class; he *becomes* one. Proletarian ideology, *i.e*, Marxism, is not a simple deepening of the psychology of the worker, not a spontaneous consequence of factory conditions. Real class consciousness develops only from observation of the life of all classes of society in all its manifestations—mental, moral and political

On the other hand, from the point of view of bourgeois sociology, from Plekhanov to Sombart, Max Weber, Troltsch, Mannheim, Hausenstein and others, class ideology is all the *purer* the more it is blind and locked within itself, the more it is limited and ignorant of the surrounding world. It is undoubtedly true that

[4] Voltaire · *Candide*, Chapter V.—*Ed*

each limitation *leads* in the last analysis to the defense of definite class interests, and particularly the interests of reaction. But the toiling masses themselves remain under the domination of the reactionary ideology of the ruling classes until they begin to comprehend their surrounding social conditions *Through this comprehension of the outer world*, they come to understand their own historical role, that is, they *become class-conscious* Lenin says:

> The knowledge of man does not follow a straight line, but a curved line which infinitely approaches a system of circles, the spiral. Every fragment, every segment, every bit of this curved line can be transformed (transformed one-sidedly) into an independent, complete, straight line which, if one does not see the wood for the trees, leads us directly into the mire, into clericalism (which is strengthened by the class interests of the ruling class) [5]

Conscious revolutionary thought, as well as conscious or unconscious defense of obscurantism and falsehood, is to be found in all ages But besides this simple and clear class opposition, there are always millions of people who, having *already* risen to indignation against their oppressors, have *not yet* reached the stage of conscious and systematic struggle This objective class confusion, this inadequate distinction of classes (as in Russia between 1861 and 1905, and in France and Germany between 1789 and 1848), and the consequent vacillations on the part of the masses, best explain the contradictions of the great writers, artists and humanists of the past The confusion of revolutionary and reactionary tendencies in the consciousness of the great representatives of the old culture is an established historical fact. Revolutionary ideals have seldom been reflected directly and immediately in literature. In breaking away from age-old principles of former societies, writers and artists were not yet able to find in the surrounding world any solution of the complex contradictions of human history. Hence their capitulation to the king's knout and the corporal's stick, to religion and traditional morality. Hence

[5] Lenin "On Dialectics" in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, p 327, New York · International Publishers 1927—*Ed*

the *encouragement* of this capitulation by the interests of the ruling classes.

If Tolstoy expressed merely the psychology of the aristocracy in difficulties; if Pushkin sang only of the joys and troubles of the "bourgeoisified landowners," then the history of literature would be quite simple. "An artist truly great," said Lenin, "must have reflected in his work at least some essential aspects of the revolution."[6] And Lenin showed how the great artist Tolstoy overcame the psychological limitations of his environment and became the spokesman of the sufferings and indignation of the millions. Tolstoy carried over into his works the psychology of primitive peasant democracy, originally foreign to him. But Lenin showed also that this patriarchal psychology put its stamp of limitation on the entire peasant movement (1861-1905) When the patriarchal Russian peasant wished to express in his own language the idea of the socialization of the land, he said: "The land belongs to no one, the land is God's" Such a peasant could find no better spokesman of his hesitations than Tolstoy.

Lenin measured Herzen by the same criterion.

> The spiritual collapse of Herzen, his deep skepticism and pessimism after 1848 was the collapse of bourgeois illusions in socialism. Herzen's spiritual drama was the product and the reflection of the world-historical period when the revolutionary bourgeois democracy was *already* dying off (in Europe) and the revolutionary socialist proletariat had *not yet* matured [7]

In the contemporary capitalist world, too, there are many people who are already disillusioned in bourgeois democracy, but who have not yet attained to proletarian democracy. Their vacillations are reflected in the artistic searchings of the most diverse Western writers, from Thomas Mann to Celine and others. The class position of these people is determined, in the last analysis, by their attitude toward the central

[6] Lenin · "Leo Tolstoy, Mirror of the Russian Revolution"—*Ed*

[7] Lenin *Complete Works*, Vol XI, pp 466-469, Russian ed —*Ed*

problem of the epoch, the question of *property* and *power*.

From this it is obvious what a dangerous confusion results from deducing the tendencies of these people from the psychology of some petty bourgeois stratum. In our textbooks Anatole France is still represented as an ideologist of the "middle bourgeoisie," Romain Rolland as a "petty bourgeois humanist" Classification into these psychological types hides completely the basic question of the writer's attitude toward the revolution. Here vulgar sociology merges into "self-satisfied sectarianism"

In vulgar sociological textbooks on the history of literature, the works of these writers are subjected to the most merciless treatment Pushkin, Gogol and Tolstoy are interpreted in terms of the domestic affairs of the nobility, its "bourgeois transformation," its "impoverishment," and so on. And similarly Shakespeare, Moliere, Goethe But all this debases and traduces the artistic history of mankind, in contrast to Leninist class analysis, which brings forth all that is truly great in the history of art, and points out its link with the democratic and socialistic elements of the old culture Leninism teaches us how to discriminate the historical content of works of art, how to separate the living from the dead in them, how to determine what belongs to the *future* and what is the mark of a slavish *past*. In this concrete critique lies a real class analysis.

Here we come to the most important shortcoming of vulgar sociology. People who talk so much about classes and literature in reality understand nothing about class struggle In truth, *they are separating the class struggle from socialism* At the basis of all the absurdities of vulgar sociology lies not the Leninist, but the bourgeois-Menshevist conception of classes.

Indeed, what is the main occupation of our literary historians? They seek to find *top* groups of the bourgeoisie and the nobility, to whom they then ascribe

the creations of Shakespeare and Balzac To listen to our sociologists, one would think that the entire history of world art expresses only a minor brawl among the various kinds of parasites over some piece of prey. Is that all there is to the class struggle? And where are the basic class contradictions of each historical epoch? Where is the perpetual struggle of the *haves* and the *have nots*? Where are *the people*? It's no use, don't look for them! You will not find them in the historical schemes of our sociologists. The best they are capable of is to sing eulogies in honor of the "young," "progressive," "rising," "strengthening," "ripening," etc bourgeoisie. Working assiduously they try to wean art away from the masses and make it the legal possession of a bunch of palatial parasites and bourgeois upstarts Thus Pushkin's poetry is assigned to the "bourgeoisified land-owners," Gogol is given over to the "petty nobility," etc.

But the people, we are told, had no spokesman of their own in the art of the past, or almost none. To a certain extent this is correct. But it does not mean that art and literature developed without any influence on the part of the masses of humanity. Saltykov-Shchedrin, in this respect, is nearer to Lenin than many of our quasi-Marxists. "Besides the active forces of good and evil," says Shchedrin, "there is also a certain passive factor which serves mainly as an influence. To disregard this factor is impossible, even if the writer has no other pretentions than the assembling of material. Very often not a word is mentioned about it, and therefore it seems as if it were crossed out, but this obliteration is illusory. Actually this passive factor is never lost sight of by the writer. It is the very factor in which hides 'the man who feeds on goose-foot.' Does he exist or is he merely hiding? It seems to me that although he mainly hides, nevertheless he exists to some extent."

"The man who feeds on goose-foot" is the peasant, that awfully strange creature whom La Bruyere noticed sometimes in the French countryside, that

very peasant who, according to a remark by Montaigne, differs from the King only in the style of his pants. How can one say that literature developed without the influence of the peasant, the worker, the soldier returning from the field of imperialist battle? Lenin insistently refuted the "Vekhi" sociologists,[8] who attempted to separate the writers and critics of the nineteenth century from the moods of the peasant-serfs. We know from Tolstoy's example how the vacillations of that great writer from the nobility reflected the contradictions of the masses. The popular roots of art, the degeneration of artistic creation wherever artists or writers lose contact with this democratic basis of culture and turn into "an ideological component of the ruling class" (as Marx later expressed it) were correctly pointed out already in the eighteenth century by democratic writers like Vico, Winckelmann, Ferguson and others. This conviction was characteristic of all the revolutionary thinkers of the past. It inspired Belinsky when he wrote his letters to Gogol. This conviction underlay Lenin's opinion of Tolstoy. "Art belongs to the people," said Lenin to Clara Zetkin. "It must have its deepest roots in the broad mass of workers. It must be understood and loved by them."[9]

The class struggle in literature is the struggle of the people's tendencies against the ideology of domination and slavery, against religious sterility, against cruelty, against polite insolence and suavity. To apply this class point of view to the entire history of world art is not by any means equivalent to pigeonholing works of art into various compartments or social groups. No, it means to really understand the artistic heritage and to evaluate everything that is great in it; to understand its deviations, its collapses, and its

[8] "Vekhi" [Landmarks] was a collection of essays published in 1909 by such "liberal" intellectuals (opportunist Social-Democrats as Berdayev, Struve, Bulgakov, etc —*Ed*

[9] Clara Zetkin, *Reminiscences of Lenin*, p. 13 New York International Publishers: 1934—*Ed*

contradictions, and to judge these in the light of a subsequent, much clearer demarcation of classes, in the light of the contemporary struggle of the proletariat.

"Sociology," so-called, a soulless recounting offered under the false pretense of Marxism, is much nearer to the latest products of contemporary bourgeois thought (for example, the German "Sociology of Knowledge") than to Leninism. It breaks even with the best traditions of the democratic Russian criticism of Belinsky, Chernishevsky, Dobrolyubov. There is a vast difference between creative Marxism, which guided each step of our Revolution, and that most boring and artificial Marxist scholasticism which still chokes our literature. One may call this a lag in our literary criticism, or anything else, but the fact remains. There is dogmatic Marxism and there is Marxism which is creative, living, many-sided, free from all professorial and sectarian limitations, Marxism which is thoroughly saturated with the spirit of revolutionary dialectics. We support the latter, that is, Leninism

THE SHAKESPEARE DECRIERS

By V. Kemenov

HAVING said of a great poet that he was the "foremost defender of his class," that he "saw reality with the eyes of his class," vulgar sociologists are sincerely convinced that they are defending the class struggle in the history of literature The narrowness of this conception of the class struggle is evident from the fact that with vulgar sociologists the *exploited classes* disappear entirely from history and any change in social organization appears as a laughable occurrence, in which only two exploiting classes have a share: one of them "decadent," "reactionary," disappearing (*i.e*, the nobility), the other "rising," "progressive," "ascendant" (*i.e*, the bourgeoisie); whereas the broad masses of the people—those actual makers of history—again seem, during this metamorphosis, quite out of the picture.

Such an un-Marxist interpretation of history draws in its wake the most grievous distortions in the appreciation of literature proper. The exaggeration of the contribution of the exploiting classes and the concealment of the true role of the masses in the history of culture create the impression that the great literature of the world arose *on this very foundation* of the mercenary, self-seeking, egoistical propensities of the ruling classes From this point of view even artistic appreciation of the great writers of the past and their significance for proletarian culture are determined by the degree of their zeal in defending the interests of the ruling classes; that is, to put it bluntly, by the extent to which their creative genius was permeated with the spirit of despicable exploitation and servile sycophancy. To the shame of our "sociologists" it must be admitted that the disputes among them involve details of secondary importance: some place more emphasis upon the personal trait of conformity (Mirsky, Levidov, and so forth); others are inclined to

trace the matter to its "social" roots—to the loyal servility of the "foremost fighter" in the ranks of the monarchy, the bourgeoisie, etc. (Smirnov and others).

According to the critic D S. Mirsky, the "egocentricity" of Pushkin "on the artistic plane might have been transmuted into lofty lyricism, but on the plane of day-by-day existence became ordinary expediency." Mirsky particularly cites inconsistencies in Pushkin's depiction of Tatiana in order to demonstrate that the fate of her character was "determined by the exigencies of whatever conformity with the Czarist aristocracy was next demanded of Pushkin." Shakespeare is interpreted by Professor Smirnov in a similar manner[1]; for example, in his analysis of the tragedy *Hamlet* "It is very easy," writes Smirnov, "to link this tragedy with the sore distress of Shakespeare around 1600 over the dissolution of absolute monarchy." And again, "The very last years of Elizabeth and the first years of James Stuart were marked by great political schism, which produced an *equally grievous schism in the soul of Shakespeare.* His perception of the world becomes tragic" Professor Smirnov for the length of his entire book "links" Shakespeare's pessimism with the failures, and his optimism with the successes, of the English bourgeoisie, representing Shakespeare's mighty genius as derived from the unswerving devotion of a toady to absolute monarchy. Therefore, when Professor Nusinov upbraids Professor Smirnov because his esteemed colleague has not relegated Shakespeare to the particular stratum of his own choice, or when Professor Dinamov criticizes the late V. M. Friche, because "Friche refuses to see in Shakespeare the exponent of the interests of the new aristocracy turning capitalist," it seems to us that the fruitfulness of these disputes is greatly exaggerated

One of the chief motives animating the professors in their impassioned quarrels about class stratification

[1]A. A. Smirnov *Shakespeare,* New York · Critics Group 1936. See pages 63 and 61 —*Ed.*

seems to be to decry Shakespeare, to expose the idealistic legend about Shakespeare's universality. The problem of combating idealistic treatments of Shakespeare became a challenge long ago, all the more because just now, from the vantage of *socialist humanism*, the peoples of our country for the first time will be able to appreciate to the full all the grandeur and *profound humanity* of a bygone epoch, the tragedies of Shakespeare, the lyrics of Pushkin. There is no doubt in any one of us that the proletariat is the lawful heir of all the treasures of culture and art which have been created for the millennium of human existence. But it goes without saying that this is so not because the artistic ideologists of the ruling classes did battle in their works for the political slogans of these classes. In the great works of world poetry, painting, music, and so forth, there is something which is not confined to the narrow class practice of the ruling strata, or to the temporal period in which these works of art were created. And this "something" is so imbued with enduring life that precisely because of its presence the tragedies of Shakespeare, the statues of Phidias, the symphonies of Beethoven survive hundreds and thousands of years and enter as a reserve fund into the development of proletarian, socialist culture.

"Proletarian culture," wrote Lenin, "must be a regulated development of those stores of knowledge which mankind has produced under the oppression of capitalist society, the society of private ownership of land, bureaucratic society."[2] The outstanding works of art thus produced by mankind under and despite the oppression of exploiting societies are not filled with pæans to the knout, but with passionate protests against the degradation of human dignity, not with eulogies of private-propertied swinishness, but with wrathful hatred of the social evils evoked by it, those evils which corrupt all that is healthy and natural in mankind and human relations. Directly or indirectly,

[2]Lenin *Collected Works*, Vol XXV, p 387, 3rd Russian Ed. —*Ed.*

to greater or lesser degree, in spite of all the historical and national individuality of such writers, their works are fundamentally "*of the people*," regardless of whether their authors were nobles or aristocrats, or whether their criticism ended with conservative, utopian conclusions.

With Tolstoy, as is well known, relentless criticism of autocratic Russia terminated in the doctrine of non-resistance to evil; his teaching was unqualifiedly utopian and reactionary. This, however, did not prevent Lenin from perceiving beneath all that the profound "plebeian"[3] quality of Tolstoy's genius. The art of Tolstoy is acutely social in its concern and yet at the same time profoundly human; because they are "a step forward in the artistic development of all mankind," the works of Tolstoy "will always be read and appreciated by the masses when, having thrown off the yoke of the landowners and the capitalists, they will have created for themselves human conditions of life."[4] Indeed, it could not be otherwise, for the works of Tolstoy, as well as those of Shakespeare, step out beyond the frame of their own time and class and take their place on the stage of universal art, and to no small degree prepare the way for the universal classless art.

There is nothing easier and more pernicious than that "class" criticism of literature which sacrifices all that is enduring and vital in works of art—all that now could be understood and appreciated by a socialist people—to the fetishistic belief that the minds of the great figures of culture are circumscribed by their class and period. Vulgar sociologists bend every effort to discredit these universal elements of the history of culture. Their "anthrophobia" is based on the premise that "man in general" is an abstraction of bourgeois ideology. But, having exposed the idealistic application

[3]The Russian word here is "narodnost," the quality expressive of affinity or sympathy with the people, the masses. This word is being translated as "plebeian" throughout the book.—*Ed.*

[4]Lenin: "On the Death of Tolstoy."—*Ed*

of this term by bourgeois. Shakespearean scholars, many of our theorists, instead of investing this term with its true meaning, simply deny the universal elements in Shakespeare's work, choosing rather to concern themselves with his "unmistakable class characteristics," and tossing off, in this connection, such catch phrases as that the great dramatic genius was the "bard of absolutism," and so forth.

Consider, for example, such a typical formulation as the following. "The lively and sustained interest in Shakespeare has served as a basis for idealistic interpretation of his work as "extra-class" and "universal." It is claimed that the genius of Shakespeare lies in the fact that he represented emotions and experiences common to mankind in general. This is basically a contradiction of the essence of the work of Shakespeare, the militant artist of his time, who with the power of his art served definite political ends, who gave to his class an encyclopædia, as it were, on all questions of life and struggle."[5]

What, then, is the nature of this class which Shakespeare served with faith and truth? "Legend helps to establish with complete clarity Shakespeare's political and *class* character. He is the bard of the absolute power of kings, the representative of that new nobility which began to flourish after the rout of the feudal lords . . . it comprised even the bourgeoisie which was at the same time being drawn into the sphere of large-scale mercantile activity."[6]

Now everything is at last revealed, in one flash. What did Shakespeare sing? Absolute monarchy. what political ends did Shakespeare serve? Those of the new nobility, which was being drawn into the sphere of large-scale trade. Nothing here to quibble with. Unadulterated materialism. The matter is quite simple—it is necessary, it appears, to bear in mind only

[5] *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia*, Vol LXII, pp 213-218, article by S Dinamov on "The Dramas of Shakespeare"

[6] *Ibid.*

one thing: the lack of any universal elements whatever in Shakespeare, the need to lay more stress on the fact that he was the "defender of his class." The train of thought proceeds from this point quite easily: suppress as far as possible everything sublime in Shakespeare, bring him down to earth, explain all that is true in his work as opportunistic calculation on his part or as "the execution of instructions from his class"; in general, attempt to make Shakespeare, in so far as possible, more local, temporary, narrow and limited. All this taken together is known as "combating the idealization of Shakespeare." The individual tragedies of Shakespeare are often examined by exactly the same method. What precisely is the theme of *King Lear*? Man? Bosh! The tragedy lies in the fact that a headstrong old man, having parcelled out his centralized kingdom into shares, had underrated the progressive role of absolutism.

Shakespeare "brought down to earth" in this fashion *becomes entirely extraneous* to our present epoch, and foreign to our people, for if indeed the tragedy of the Danish prince is stripped of all the maladies of seventeenth century English nobility, be it even in the process of turning capitalist—then to our theatre-goer there is no conceivable point in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

In due course Professor Nusinov advances one after another a series of propositions in which he is at pains to demonstrate that, by virtue of their class origin, tragedy, satire, humour, the ballad, and so forth, are hostile to proletarian literature. To a similar idea the astute critic returned not long ago in his paper before the Communist Academy on the theme "Enduring Characters of Literature."

In this paper, illustrated by examples from *Prometheus*, *Hamlet* and other works, Professor Nusinov asserted that, despite all the genius of Shakespeare, the degree of interest in his work will diminish more and more. The "enduring" figures of literature, among

which Shakespeare's characters are numbered, "express in one form or another the passions and experiences of all classes that have recognized private property. But in so far as the genesis of these characters was in the inevitability of private property and in the oppression of man by man, to the people of a classless society the experiences incarnate in these characters will gradually become foreign."

Thus the vulgar sociologists lend support to one another, reviving the ancient theories of their spiritual forefathers Friche and Bogdanov.

Judging by recent articles, the point of view of Comrade Dinamov on Shakespeare as ideologist of the nobility turning capitalist enjoys greater acceptance than others of its stamp inasmuch as there exists a mistaken opinion that it rises above the one-sided extremes of the viewpoints of Friche and Smirnov. According to Friche, Shakespeare was a morose aristocrat, a reactionary pessimistic feudal lord. With Smirnov, on the other hand, the name Shakespeare connotes a boisterous optimist, a shrewd, red-cheeked bourgeois. There remains only to combine these points of view, and the result is a new eclectic conception according to which Shakespeare turns out to be a jolly pessimist, a red-cheeked aristocrat, a bourgeois nobleman, a feudal lord turning capitalist, and so on.

Wherein lay the chief flaw of Friche's conception? In his "anti-people" interpretation, based on the aristocratization of Shakespeare, which Friche borrowed from bourgeois Shakespearean scholars of the epoch of imperialism above whom he could not rise.

What were the flaws in Smirnov's point of view? Similarly in his "anti-people" interpretation, resulting from a liberal-apologetic obeisance before the bourgeoisie.

In what, however insignificant, lay the merits of their views?

Friche observed that Shakespeare criticized capitalism to be sure, and with the same stroke of the pen

he attributed this to the dramatist's reactionary landowning bias Smirnov observed that Shakespeare criticized feudalism, to be sure, and with the same stroke of the pen he ascribed this entire contribution to progress to Shakespeare's bourgeois qualities.

What happened to Comrade Dinamov as a result of his eclectic combination of these two points of view? *The flaws of the two conceptions were combined and their already negligible merits were lost entirely.* The bourgeoisified nobility did not come forward against the development of capitalism in England because its interests were in complete accord with that development, but at the same time the bourgeoisified nobility did not struggle consistently against the Middle Ages since it was to its interest to preserve the system of feudal privileges In such manner is the characterization of Shakespeare as ideologist of the bourgeoisified nobility stripped of every possibility of even such a narrow, abstract and one-sided interpretation of the critical relation of Shakespeare to environmental reality as still remained in the interpretations of Friche and Smirnov. But it is precisely this critical relation on the part of Shakespeare to the predatory members of the various ruling classes that bears witness to the profound "plebeian" quality of his genius and which constitutes one of the essential principles of Shakespeare's realism. Having created Shylock and Richard III, the poet treated each of them in turn with sufficient hatred to be the "foremost fighter" of the class whose members embodied the worst features of Shylock and Richard.

It is impossible to interpret Shakespeare as the great people's poet of England and at the same time as the ideologist of the bourgeoisified nobility, because these two conceptions are absolutely incompatible.

All history gathered from source material in England eloquently testifies to the predatory, cynical, and relentless robbery practised by the new knights of profit. It is enough to recall Marx's characterization

of this class, and of the role of the new nobility, and to compare its relationship to money with Shakespeare's treatment of this question, to perceive the utter speciousness and weakness of this sociological interpretation.

Of course, advocates of the new conception will put forward arguments concerning the "plebeian" quality of Shakespeare's work, just as additional arguments may be advanced in support of his affiliation with the bourgeoisified nobility. But it may be stated with complete certitude that not one of them will succeed in explaining Shakespeare's "plebeian" quality until such time as they abandon this "class" impregnation of Shakespeare. On the contrary, every time they take a notion to keep pace with life and discuss the "populist" quality of Shakespeare, they will be compelled tacitly to discard the initial premise of their conception about the "foremost fighter" of the new nobility turning capitalist.

A FORCED REPLY

By Mikhail Lifshitz

PROFESSOR I. NUSINOV does not approve of certain opinions expressed in our article "Leninist Criticism." At a scientific gathering recently, he presented a thunderous expose accusing us of all the seven mortal sins—above all of our refusal to study literature from the standpoint of the class struggle. No record of this convocation is preserved, with the exception of a fragment in the *Evening Moscow*. A well-meaning reporter provides the following details:

> The meeting ended with an interesting report by Professor Nusinov concerning the class nature of Shakespeare's work Professor Nusinov framed his report in the form of a sharp attack on the views of numerous literary scientists Particularly sharp was his attack on the beliefs of Mikhail Lifshitz, who had advanced the thesis that it is useless to determine the class nature of the great classical writers of world literature because, so he claimed, before 1848 in the West and before 1905 in our country, the classes were in

confusion, while the masses hesitated between revolution and reaction.

The charge is serious. That such nonsense is not found in my article—which finds so little favour with Professor Nusinov—will be perceived by everyone who reads it. Nowhere is it stated that "it is useless to determine the class nature of great classical writers of world literature." If we are to believe the *Evening Moscow*, the talk concerns the following passage from "Leninist Criticism :"

> Conscious revolutionary thought, as well as conscious or unconscious defence of obscurantism and falsehood, are to be found in all ages But besides this simple and clear class opposition, there are always millions of people who, having *already* risen to indignation against their oppressors, have *not yet* reached the stage of conscious and systematic struggle This objective class confusion, this inadequate distinction of classes (as in Russia between 1861 and 1905, and in France and Germany between 1789 and 1848), and the consequent vacillations on the part of the masses, best explain the contradictions of the great writers, artists and humanists of the past The confusion of revolutionary and reactionary tendencies in the consciousness of the great representatives of the old culture is an established historical fact Revolutionary ideals have seldom been reflected directly and immediately in literature In breaking away from age-old principles of former societies, writers and artists were not yet able to find in the surrounding world any solution of the complex contradictions of human history Hence their capitulation to the king's knout and the corporal's stick, to religion and traditional morality. Hence the *encouragement* of this capitulation by the interests of the ruling classes

Is there any denial here of the role of the class struggle in the history of literature? A little further in the article we find a very definite statement concerning the "class nature" of literary works. This nature is determined, in the last analysis, by the writer's attitude toward two basic questions of his time—the question of *property* and the question of *power*. Professor Nusinov does not accept these criteria. He prefers his own home-made "definitions," arrived at through sociological psychoanalysis. The term "nature" he interprets literally, almost in a physiological sense. Very well. Nevertheless, Marxism has no other criterion for defining the class character of an ideology.

What can be the cause of Professor Nusinov's indignation? It is obvious. The article in question contained a fairly sharp criticism of vulgar sociology as well as proof that the sources of this sociology are to be looked for in the dogmatic Marxism of the Mensheviks. Professor Nusinov must have taken this criticism as having been directed against himself personally—and not without reason. After all, his literary activities were permeated from the very beginning with the spirit of Menshevik sociology. Consequently, any criticism of the vulgar-sociological interpretation of social classes is equivalent, in his opinion, to a denial of the theory of class struggle in general. This is natural and logical.

A writer's attitude toward the basic meaning of the class struggle in his time is often complex and contradictory; it may contain various tendencies. Naked "definitions" such as Professor Nusinov employs—nobleman, middle class landowner, petty bourgeois—offer little for the understanding of a writer's *class nature*. These definitions indicate merely the personal social status of the writer, or else the higher ideological boundary which he cannot transcend. But the peculiar and complex development which the artist undergoes within these boundaries—the development making him a Shakespeare or a Tolstoy—remains a sealed book to our sociologists.

Occasionally our literary historians themselves acknowledge with horror that there are twenty or thirty "class definitions" to characterize one and the same writer (say, Pushkin or Shakespeare). Now, this is ridiculous. Such an abundance of "exact" yet dissimilar definitions can evoke nothing but skepticism Whence this multiplicity of definitions? There are reasons for it. The simple and well-known truth is that Pushkin and Shakespeare expressed the views of an aristocratic social structure This fact provides the first and most general definition of their class nature. It is far from being sufficient, however. The ideology of aristocratic

monarchy was shared, at different times and in different ways, by many writers and non-writers without making them all Shakespeares This phenomenon is clear even to our sociologists. It is for this reason that they seek to solve the insoluble problem: how to find a combination that would include all the peculiarities and all the poetic merits of Pushkin or Shakespeare. Hence their utterly nonsensical and complexly exact definition-monsters. liberal bourgeois-aristocracy in its transition to capitalism, capitalist landowners joining the ranks of the commercial bourgeoisie, the right wing of the left flank of the petty bourgeois nobility ... Is there any *exactitude* about it, my dear friends? Anybody who has not lost his reason can see clearly that *the attempt to be exact here passes into its opposite.*

In the meantime, the history of literature remains obscure. In fact, the more deeply the investigator penetrates into the narrow, petty, minute interests of separate groups of the ruling classes, the farther he is from the genuine, *world-historical* content of the work of art. The simple task of defining the writer's class position becomes, in the hands of our sociologists, a wild goose chase. Find a combination that is equal in significance to Pushkin's poetry, that is "equivalent" to this poetry! A hopeless task! There is no such combination. Indeed, Pushkin was a genius, whereas the nobility and the bourgeoisie—no matter how divided or how combined—were merely two parasitic social classes.

As a representative of aristocratic ideology, Pushkin was a class-limited writer. But as a great artist, he created in his works something that stood head and shoulders above the interests not only of Russian landowners but also of the entire practice of the nobility. Vulgar sociology itself acknowledges this fact, albeit in a highly distorted form. It is compelled to borrow from *formalism.* In proclaiming triumphantly that Pushkin was a bourgeois landowner or a capitalist

serf-owner, a boot-licker of autocracy, a literary business man seeking by means of poetry to improve his social standing, our sociologists themselves realize that they have gone too far Plekhanov already noted that to establish the "social equivalent" of a work of art is merely the first step of Marxist criticism, which must be followed by the evaluation of form. Plekhanov's idea received a peculiar modification in the practice of our literary sociologists. If Pushkin was only the spiritual mouthpiece of narrow class interests (a group of noblemen), what constituted his greatness as a poet? What can be his significance for the period of socialism? In answer to these questions, the sociological school can do no more than utter stereotyped phrases about Pushkin's *master-craftsmanship*, his virtuosity and extraordinary gifts.

Thus it turns out that this shameful (from the socialist standpoint) individual possessed also great craftsmanship: he could take a petty, selfish idea and create something marvellous from the point of view of form. We should learn from the great artists of the past how to make narrow and shallow things seem perfect and beautiful; we should learn the tricks of erecting smoke-screens Such is the only possible conclusion to be drawn from the arguments of vulgar sociology. This indeed is an exceedingly *cynical* view of the social role of the writer, a view which cannot help but be harmful in contemporary literary practice. According to this theory, the artist is an indifferent professional master, uninterested in the greatness or baseness of the contents offered him by his social environment. Pushkin wished to please the government, so he wrote his "Poltava." Shakespeare decided to glorify absolutism and the power of the new nobility, so he wrote his remarkable chronicle plays. In this manner vulgar sociology is transformed into the *crudest formalism* The artist's genius is something standing beyond all historical connections. Sociology, despite its reiterations concerning "class analysis," takes artistic form beyond the boundaries of social

relations; it treats form as if it were something outside classes, while the artist's æsthetic magnitude is regarded as a formal quantity subject to no historical evaluation.

The artist's task is supposedly to conceal narrow class contents under the guise of masterly form. The task of a sociologist with insight is to expose the artist and to reveal his class aspirations covered by an extra-class skill.

Whenever vulgar sociology turns to the æsthetic significance of creative art, it totally forgets even Marxist terms and devotes itself to shallow "formal analysis" or home-made enthusiasms

Who, then, denies class analysis? None other than those very literary "scientists" who, together with Professor Nusinov, drone day and night about the new nobility, the old nobility, the commercial landowners, etc Thus they neglect the basic problem of literary history—how to explain the *artistic development of mankind*, particularly with relation to the entire history of the class struggle. The task of the history of literature would be quite simple if it were necessary only to catch the great writers red-handed and to demonstrate that according to their birth, education and political beliefs they belonged to the ruling classes.

Vulgar-sociological definitions such as Professor Nusinov's help little in the study of creative art. But perhaps they do help at least in assigning each artist his proper place in the history of social thought, in studying his political ideas—in short, in determining his class relations. Yet even here, in our opinion, they introduce merely confusion Our vulgar sociologists have recently been stressing Pushkin's monarchism, perceiving therein a special kind of treachery. But are these astute scholars aware that among the ideologists of the revolutionary bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century (including men like Voltaire, Montesquieu, Argenson, Rousseau, Helvetius, Diderot) there was not a single republican? Are they aware

that Voltaire wrote verse more monarchical in content than Pushkin's *Stanzas*? That the enlighteners believed in autocracy even more emphatically than the topmost leaders of the aristocracy or the parliamentary bourgeoisie? Nevertheless there was more republicanism in the monarchism of the enlighteners than in the selfishness of educated magnates or of proud bearers of juridical mantles. Such contradictions are common in the pages of history.

Shakespeare's patriarchal, monarchic utopia is one thing; and the political exploits of the "new nobility" is another. In the Middle Ages the masses wanted to turn society back to the time when Adam delved and Eve span. This attitude was doubtless reactionary. But from the standpoint of world history there was hotter indignation in this reaction than in the works of the most progressive writers of the subsequent period.

Even now Nusinov assumes that in order to show the progressiveness of some old writer, he has to be classified as a "capitalist landowner." Shakespeare, too, suffers this fate. Like Pushkin, he was recently classified as the "spokesman of the interests of the new capitalist aristocracy." It is amazing to find Shakespeare's humanism deduced from this postulate. Imagine the irony of identifying Shakespeare's genius with the aspirations of those predatory classes that were so inimical to the interest of people!

Leninism demands an entirely different approach to the classics of world literature. Why did Lenin return again and again—so persistently and lovingly—to the question of Tolstoy? Simply because he saw in Tolstoy's creative work a reflection of the development of a contradictory and complex historical mass movement. We know that the deepest and most truly revolutionary movements of the past often contained patriarchal, religious and ascetic elements (witness the plebeian heresies of the Middle Ages, the peasant wars in Germany). We also know that individual geniuses

from the nobility and the bourgeoisie often became true people's writers, despite their inherent and acquired class prejudices. In the works of Tolstoy and Shakespeare the living and the dead are closely intertwined. Yet the victory is won by the living. However, as the class struggle deepens and the social forces are aligned, this naive combination of conservative and democratic trends becomes less possible. Nowadays, conscious alignment with the fighting people is required of the writer In place of Tolstoy comes Gorky.

Only in the undeveloped stages of the class struggle was it possible to be great writer and also a reactionary utopian or a moderate conservative. Marx wrote concerning the period of Goethe and Schiller in Germany : "We cannot speak here of estates or classes —only of former estates and unborn classes "[1] Lenin says of Tolstoy that in his period old things had passed away and new things had not yet formed. Under these historical conditions there is, of course, much confusion (especially in the consciousness of the masses) ; there are numerous intricate knots which only subsequent history can untie It was extremely important for Lenin, in his struggle against liberal-Menshevik dogmatism, to point out this peculiar and contradictory character of historical development

Professor Nusinov is clearly dissatisfied with this use of the word "confusion," as is obvious from the *Evening Moscow* report. He sees in it a definite denial of "class definitions." And why? Because in history there is no absolute confusion which is beyond comprehension, but relative and temporary confusion does occur. Perhaps Professor Nusinov is unaware of the fact that concerning the revolution of 1905, Lenin wrote in his article "One More Offensive Against Democracy."

> Until now the masses were really confused and perplexed, to the point of absurdity, by the elements of patriarchal oppression plus the elements of democracy This is shown by such objective facts as the movements of Zubatoff and Gapon [2]

[1] *Deutsche Ideologie.*
[2] Lenin *Complete Works*, Vol p. XVI, 133 Russian ed.—*Ed*

And further:

> *It was 1905 that put an end once and for all to this absurdity.* No other epoch in the history of Russia *disentangled* with greater clarity—in deeds, not in words—the relations entangled by ages of stagnation and serfdom No other epoch defined the *classes* so clearly, made the *masses* so class conscious, and subjected the theories and programs of the 'Intellectuals' to such a test by the *actions* of millions [3]

But has the question of "confusion" in social relations any significance for the history of literature? Indeed a very great one. It was precisely to the inadequacy of class differentiation that Lenin ascribed the contradictions in the works of the greatest Russian writer, Tolstoy

If we are to believe Professor Nusinov (and other professors sharing his views), Lenin refused to subject Tolstoy's creative work to class analysis. As a matter of fact, he thought that in Tolstoy's period the differentiating lines were insufficiently clear, while the confusion among the masses was enormous. All of Lenin's articles on Tolstoy were based upon this idea; but they do not satisfy Nusinov. Moreover, nowhere in Lenin's works do we find any supposedly exact but factually vulgar definitions of Tolstoy's class nature, definitions so loved by our "sociologist." Incidentally, such definitions are found in Trotsky's works. In his article on Tolstoy [*Neue Zeit*, 1908 11], Trotsky explains the great Russian writer's creative activity in terms of the interests of the landowners and the psychology of the nobility. In his articles on Tolstoy, Friche, too, following Trotsky, started with a class analysis. And Nusinov does the same.

It follows, naturally, that Nusinov must emphatically reject Lenin's doctrine that a great artist of artistocratic or bourgeois origin can, despite his class prejudices and reactionary inclinations, reflect certain aspects of the popular movement of his period. Lenin begins his article "Tolstoy, Mirror of the Russian revolution" as follows:

[3] *Ibid*

Perhaps at first glance it may seem strange and artificial to associate the name of this great artist with the revolution which he manifestly did not understand and from which he manifestly turned aside. Surely that which obviously does not reflect phenomena accurately cannot be said to mirror them? But our revolution is an extremely complex phenomenon Among the mass of its immediate protagonists and participants there are many social elements which also obviously did not understand what was taking place, who also turned away from the really historical tasks which had been assigned to them by the course of events *And an artist truly great must have reflected in his work at least some essential aspects of the revolution* [*Italics*—M L.)

Nusinov is not satisfied with this "confusion." This is a clear case of abstaining from class analysis—so rationalizes the professor; and he proceeds immediately to state his argument:

Only that person can be called a talented man or a genius who able to portray reality with maximum completeness and depth, as it is seen by *his class* And *only as reality is seen and understood by his class* To contend that a genius, owing to his artistic abilities, *reflects the essential aspects of reality even when he does not quite comprehend them*, is to renounce the class characterization of the genius and of his artistic practice, regardless of what excuses and extenuations we may find for this approach.[4]

Enough! Lenin, with his "excuses" and "extenuations," and Nusinov, instructing him in "class characterization"—this is entirely too much.

ON OBJECTIVE CLASS CONFUSERS

By I. Nusinov

I

MARXIST criticism has always held that writers express the moods and ideas of definite classes. It explains the contradictions in their works and viewpoints as due to the contradictions in their class backgrounds. The fact that Tolstoy championed the ideas and moods of the peasantry dictated his ruthless indictment of exploitation. But the fact that this

4 I. Nusinov "Maxim Gorky and the Problems of Socialist Realism," IKP No. 1, 1934, p 87

peasantry was naive and patriarchal was responsible for his feeble counsel not to resist evil by force.

Lifshitz thinks otherwise. It is not a question of the class origin of the writer nor the contradictions of class realities. It is a matter of "objective class confusion—this inadequate distinction of classes (as in Russia between 1861 and 1905, and in France and Germany between 1789 and 1848), and the consequent vacillations on the part of the masses, best explain the contradictions of the great writers, artists and humanists of the past"

This "theory" of his Lifshitz endeavours to uphold by references to Lenin. Lenin, he alleges also supported the idea of "objective class confusion"

The "Vekhi" Schepetov wrote that in 1905 "everything was muddled and jumbled in the general chaos and confusion." To which Lenin replied: "Yes, up to 1905, among the 'common people' the tendencies toward patriarchal submission and toward democracy were indeed 'muddled and jumbled in the general chaos and confusion.'" In 1905 the masses learned better than ever how to test the "theories and programs of the 'intellectuals' by the *actions* of the millions." As for these intellectuals, they had long since realized their own class interests.

"Those who wish to recall the early history of Russian liberalism will find that the liberal Kavelin and the democrat Chernishevsky are the best examples of the attitude of the liberal bourgeoisie Cadet Party towards the democratic movement of the Russian masses."[1] Therefore, Lenin continued, "it is especially intolerable to see people like Schepetov, Struve, Gredeskula, Izgoev and others of the Cadet brotherhood clinging to the apron strings of Nekrasov, Shchedrin and the rest." Lenin was provoked to contempt and indignation by the lie propagated by the "Vekhi" that in the past Nekrasov and Shchedrin had had something in common with Kavelin. According to

[1]Lenin *Collected Works*, Vol. XVI, p. 132, Russian ed.

Lifshitz, it seems, the Aksakovs and the Fets were not the ideologists of the exploiting class, and up to 1905 the "programs and theories of the 'intellectuals' were not the programs and theories of the bourgeois ideologists Struve, the Schepetovs and their predecessors." All this was but the reflection of the fact that the workers themselves were still "under the domination of the reactionary ideology of the ruling classes."

In the same way Lifshitz distorts Marx. "Marx," Lifshitz writes triumphantly, wrote the following concerning the period of Goethe and Schiller in Germany: "We cannot speak here of estates or classes—only of former estates and unborn classes!" The above quotation from Marx is parenthetic and when taken out of context must sound like a statement to the effect that the class struggle and therefore class ideology did not exist in Germany at that time.

In reality, the pages of the *Deutsche Ideologie*, from which the quotation was taken, are devoted to the affirmation of the thought that the German ideology of that period was expression and the reflection of the interests of the bourgeoisie. On page 175 we read about "the seeming contradiction between the form in which these [German] theorists express the interests of the burghers and the interests themselves." A little further follows the statement that Kant was "the apologist for the interests of the German burghers."

Marx always thought that even before 1848 the history of mankind was the history of the struggle between classes, and that philosophy and poetry represented the ideology of these classes. In this respect Germany was no exception.

The "theory" of "objective class confusion" is solely the property of Lifshitz and not of Marx or Lenin. What is the essence of this theory? That there exists only a small group of ideologists to whom one may refer as conscious revolutionaries, or conscious or unconscious reactionaries. Nevertheless the majority of writers up to 1848 in Germany and even in *France*,

and up to 1905 in Russia, were not ideologists of definite classes The consciousness of these writers was characterized by "confusion of revolutionary and reactionary tendencies." Their minds were clogged with uncertainties and contradictions. But this, however, does not yet mean that such writers are the ideologists of the reactionary classes, for "the toiling masses themselves remain under the domination of the reactionary ideology of the ruling classes until they begin to comprehend their surrounding social conditions. *Through this comprehension of the outer world*, they come to understand their own historical role, that is, they become class-conscious." (Emphasis by Lifshitz—*I. N.*)

Lifshitz "fights" against schematization and vulgarization. He assumes the pose of a fearless pioneer in the field of criticism, whereas in reality he arranges in a most transparent and vulgar manner all of literature (and all ideologists as well) on three little shelves. On one ledge are the conscious revolutionaries, on another the conscious or unconscious reactionaries, and on the third and largest are the "confusers." In addition, Lifshitz fails to distinguish between the masses who are still under the influence of an ideology alien to them from the point of view of class, and the creators of spiritual values which express the ideology of the classes antagonistic to these masses.

What picture of the history of the class struggle and ideology is drawn in the light of Lifshitz's "theory of objective class confusion"?

The conscious revolutionary elements and the conscious or unconscious reactionary elements stood opposed to each other in all epochs. Essentially they comprised an insignificant minority of mankind. This minority represented the "simple and clear class opposition." "But besides this simple and clear class opposition there are always millions of people, who having *already* risen to indignation against their oppressors, have *not yet* reached the stage of conscious

and systematic struggle." From this evolved that "objective class confusion" and that "inadequate distinction of classes" which characterized Europe up to 1848 and Russia up to 1905.

It is the task of a Marxist to discover objective class contradictions, to point out the objective class meaning of any ideological factor, and to determine how a contradiction of one or another ideologist derives from the contradiction of realities, particularly the contradictions of his class realities. But Lifshitz's contention is that since the masses "have *not yet* reached the stage of conscious and systematic struggle," the class conflicts themselves cannot yet be direct or clear, and the ideology cannot be the objective expression of objectively existing class interests.

According to Lifshitz's "theory" it appears that in the '60s two forces stood against each other: on the one side the autocracy, and on the other—Chernishevsky and Dobrolyubov. In the '90s, there was still autocracy on the one side, while on the other stood the Communist Party circles headed by Lenin. These two forces represented in the '60s and '90s the "simple and clear class opposition." As for the peasantry in the '60s, or the peasantry and the proletariat in the '90s, they remained outside the borders of the "simple and clear class opposition." The working class prior to 1905 belonged to the "millions of people" who constituted the "objective class confusion."

How far removed this is from Lenin's conception of the double path of capitalist development in Russia, from Lenin's contention that as far back as in the '50s in Russia the advocates of the Prussian type of capitalist development struggled with the advocates of the American type![2]

The basic error of Lifshitz's "system" is a lack of understanding of the Marxist theory of structure and superstructure. Lifshitz's "system" is built not upon

[2]Lenin: "The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution, 1905-07," *Selected Works*, Vol. III, esp. pp. 180-184—*Ed.*

objectively existing classes and their contradictions, but upon the consciousness of these classes themselves. The masses have not yet developed to the point of conscious struggle against their oppressors, and that is why the overwhelming majority of ideologists in any given country are full of contradictions.

According to Lifshitz, *the contradictions of the ideologists derive not from contradictions in reality; rather, they result from lack of clarity in the consciousness of the masses.*

Lifshitz's contention that "revolutionary ideals have seldom been reflected directly and immediately in literature" is unhistorical and anti-Leninist. The revolutionary ideals of the Russian peasantry found their direct and immediate expression in the works of Chernishevsky, Nekrasov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, Uspensky and other fine writers who did not belong to the privileged classes. Similarly the revolutionary ideals of the Russian proletariat have found their direct and immediate expression in Gorky's works as well as in all of proletarian literature.

Denial of the class nature of the artist is a thesis which in effect shoulders the contradictions contained in the work of bourgeois and aristocratic writers and artists onto the masses.

Let us try to view some of the facts in the light of this "theory."

A new intelligentsia which did not spring from the gentry appeared on the historical scene during the '60s and '90s, depicted in Tolstoy's *A Contaminated Family*, in the novels of Turgenev (*Fathers and Sons*), Pisemsky's *Troubled Seas*. Leskov's *At Daggers Drawn*, Dostoyevsky's *The Possessed*, Chernishevsky's *What Is To Be Done?* All these works reflected this intelligentsia in that objective reality was viewed from the angle of different classes and even different class groups. The distinguishing features of the social tendencies of the different class groups left their mark upon the portrayal of this new intelligentsia.

How can we explain the fact that Tolstoy, who as early as in 1863 had written works profoundly critical of his own class, wrote *A Contaminated Family*—a slanderous comedy about the nihilists? Why did Turgenev give in Bazarov such a distorted image of the new intelligentsia? Our answer is that the explanation lies in the dynamics of the class struggle in Russia, in the peculiar position of the various sectors of the nobility in this struggle. But Lifshitz says: No, that is "dogmatic Marxism" The reason lies elsewhere. The key is to be found in the fact that while "breaking away from the age-old principles of former societies, writers and artists were not yet able to find in the surrounding world any solution of the complex contradictions of human history."

But "in the surrounding world" [of Tolstoy and Turgenev—I.N.] there existed such members of the nobility as Saltykov-Shchedrin and Nekrasov.

Why did the noblemen Nekrasov and Saltykov-Shchedrin find in their "surrounding world" the answer to these problems, why did their evaluation of the new intelligentsia differ so radically from Tolstoy's and Turgenev's? Because Nekrasov and Saltykov-Shchedrin had completely broken away from the nobility, whereas Tolstoy and Turgenov continued to express the ideas and tendencies of various groups of the gentry. If this theory is to be rejected, then there remains nothing else but to account for everything psychologically, by the inner conflicts of these writers.

For Lifshitz these sharply contrasted ways of portraying the new intelligentsia prove above all that the masses were wavering. It seems to Lifshitz that he is thus making creative use of Lenin's judgment of Tolstoy, an evaluation based on the fact that Tolstoy reflected the protest and indignation of millions of the peasant masses as well as their inability to wage a consistent struggle against their oppressors. In reality, however, Lifshitz instead of making creative use of Lenin's articles on Tolstoy, is standardizing Lenin's criticism and transforming it into a ready-

made suit in which he clothes all writers. This schematization and vulgarization of Lenin's appraisal of Tolstoy leads Lifshitz to the point where, while in theory he is fighting against vulgar sociology with its mechanistic psychology, actually he is substituting psychology for sociology.

Lifshitz believes that when writers capitulate before reaction it is due to the wavering of the masses, their inability to solve complex problems. Then how would he explain the fact that these writers, who indicated a readiness to break away from the past, hastily began to capitulate in the face of reaction and mysticism at the very moment when the masses showed the least signs of wavering, at the very moment when these masses and their parties were offering the most radical solutions for the contradictions of human history? This is exactly what happened in Russia at the time of the December uprisings in 1905 and in 1917-19. Our answer is that these, writers surrendered to reaction precisely because they were the spokesmen of the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie. The contradictions in this bourgeois environment aroused in them the desire to break away from the past But their ties with their own propertied classes constrained them to advocate political reaction, to glorify philosophical and religious mysticism at the very moment when the masses began by their revolutionary actions to threaten the very foundations of property.

Lifshitz believes many of the greater writers have served reaction because they lacked real understanding. Lenin had something entirely different to say.

Bogdanov and Bazarov capitulated before the church hierarchy not because they were not able "to find in the surrounding world any solution of the complex contradictions of human history," as Lifshitz puts it. The solution is there. It is supplied by dialectical materialism. But Bogdanov and Bazarov did not find this answer because the "epistemological scholasticism of empirio-criticism . . . ultimately expresses the tendencies and ideology of classes hostile to one another in modern society."[3]

[3] Lenin. *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism,* p 311, New [illegible] 1927 —*Ed*

The contradictions found in the works of a great many writers, and their limitations in depicting reality, were not due to the wavering of the masses in general, nor to their inability to find in objective reality the answer to the contradictions of human history. The contradictions of these writers reflect the contradictions of reality itself, the contradictions of the propertied classes whose tendencies and ideologies they endeavoured to express.

II

Lifshitz's "theory" of "objective class confusion" fails to distinguish between socialist literature and literature of the propertied classes, between the problems of the popular base of socialist literature and the problems of the popular base of the literature of the propertied classes.

On this point Lifshitz believes that since contradictions constitute the basic factor in literary works, and since these contradictions are due to the wavering of the oppressed masses, therefore the history of literature is not the history of literature for all social classes, and particularly not of the propertied classes, the nobility, the bourgeoisie or the petty bourgeoisie, but rather it is the history of the people's literature, of the literature of the wavering masses.

Has the struggle of the masses of the people against their oppressors left its mark upon the works of great writers? To be sure the people have wielded a tremendous influence upon all literature. To be sure the struggle of the masses against their oppressors has left a deep imprint upon the works of the great writers. But were these writers the ideologists of the masses of the people? No, an overwhelming majority of the great writers prior to the proletarian revolution were the ideologists of the nobility, the bourgeoisie, the urban petty bourgeoisre, but not of the proletariat, the peasantry or the toiling masses.

The people, their art, their struggle against their oppressors, wielded a tremendous influence on the art

of Cervantes and Shakespeare, Voltaire and Hugo, Stendhal and Balzac, Pushkin and Gogol, Tolstoy[4] and Dostoyevsky. Without analyzing the effect of the people's art upon these writers, without determining more exactly the way in which the struggle of the masses of the people was reflected in their art, any study of their work would be either formalistic nonsense or a sociological schematism and parody of Marxism. But the more thoroughly, the more precisely we determine the character of the influence of the people's art upon these writers, and the nature of their attitude toward the struggle of the people against their oppressors, the more clearly do we see that these writers were the ideologists of the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, the reactionary middle class, the petty bourgeoisie, but not of the peasantry, not of the toiling masses.

Lifshitz makes fun of those who seek the "*top*" groups among the bourgeoisie and nobility to whom the art of Shakespeare, Balzac, Pushkin and Gogol are ascribed. He asks pathetically: "Where is the perpetual struggle of the *haves* and the *have nots*? Where are the *people*?

We suggest that Lifshitz take unto himself sufficient courage to assert that Balzac was the spokesman of the struggling proletariat and peasantry, in other words, of those in the lower brackets in the conflict with the nobility and the bourgeoisie of the period of the July monarchy; let him say that Pushkin and Gogol were the ideologists of the Russian peasantry, and that they, despite the waverings which were characteristic of the Russian peasantry, reflected the perpetual struggle of the *haves* and the *have nots*; that Tolstoy in his *A Contaminated Family* and even in his *War and Peace* stood forth as the spokesman of the peasantry; that Dostoyevsky reflected the perpetual struggle between the *haves* and the *have nots*, and became the ideologist of the people, the masses, and not reaction.

[4] I wish to emphasize again that I have in mind Tolstoy prior to his *A Confession* and *Anna Karenina*.—I. N

I still think that Shakespeare was a nobleman's writer and Balzac a writer of the bourgeoisie, that Pushkin, Gogol and Tolstoy up to the '70s represented the aristocracy, and that Dostoyevsky was a writer of the reactionary class.

Lifshitz thinks like a metaphysician. He thinks that by dissociating the "class struggle from socialism" he can either rank Gogol with the "small landowning gentry" and admit that the "entire history of world art only expresses a minor brawl among the various kinds of parasites over some piece of prey," or accept Balzac and Gogol as spokesmen of the "perpetual struggle of the *haves* and the *have nots*," as ideologists of the people, as fighters for socialism.

I think that the creative art of Balzac and Gogol is of importance to us not because they were writers of such and such propertied classes or social groups, but in proportion to the objective significance of their works in the struggle between the revolutionary and the reactionary tendencies of their time, in proportion to their objective importance to the triumph of socialism over fascism and imperialism.

Due to the contradictions of the propertied world their art had and still has a tremendous objective significance, even though they were ideologists of the exploiting classes. In this lies their strength. But the fact that they were ideologists of the exploiting classes was also the source of their fatal shortcomings. Without a consideration of these faults it is impossible correctly to evaluate their works.

Lifshitz falls to understand the profound difference in principle between the literature of the period of socialism and the literature of the period prior to the Great Socialist Revolution. He does not distinguish between the influence of the victory of socialism in the Soviet Union upon the works of men like Jean-Richard Block or Lion Feuchtwanger, and the influence of the struggle of the toiling masses of the nineteenth century upon the writers of that period.

He also fails to understand that one must not lump together the "plebeian" aspect of reformists with the "plebeian" aspect of socialist literature. Still less can one identify, as regards plebeian art, the works of the French bourgeois realists of the nineteenth century (who were incomparably less democratic than the reformers) with the plebeian base of socialist literature. A genuine people's art can be created only in a socialist society.

It is not enough merely to talk of *War and Peace* as a realistic reflection of the life it depicts, of the class nature and popular base of this great work. We must answer the following question : What class conditions in the environment of the Russian gentry determined that the novel *War and Peace*—which the new intelligentsia attacked vehemently because it pleaded the rehabilitation of the old feudal social relations—what decided that such a novel should turn out to be a masterpiece of the nineteenth century ?

Lifshitz's mistakes are reduced invariably to slurring over the class struggle, to substituting for the Marxist-Leninist analysis the Taine conception of the epoch and the people who create contemporary literature.

In place of a history of literature which is the history of the class struggle conducted by means of the pen on the literary front, Lifshitz offers us the annals of literary class confusion.

III

Comrade Rosenthal wrote that a great writer is capable of a profound reflection of reality, regardless of his world outlook and regardless of whether or not he understood this reality "[5] Quoting the famous words of Lenin that "an artist to be truly great must have reflected in his work at least some of the essential aspects of the revolution,"[6] Comrade Rosenthal adds :

[5] *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, No 6, 1933 —*Ed.*

[6] Lenin "Leo Tolstoy, Mirror of the Russian Revolution." —*Ed*

"Here Lenin has in mind particularly the *creative attributes* [emphasis mine—*I.N.*] of the writer, for according to his social views Tolstoy "manifestly did not understand" the revolution and "manifestly turned aside" from it.

I have always thought and still think that Rosenthal in this instance misinterpreted Lenin. He compares the "class and creative attributes of the writer".

Indeed, if a writer is capable of showing one or another aspect of reality, regardless of his class distinction, then why did Tolstoy prove so helpless when the workers and the revolutionaries came forward? Lenin answers this: because "it was absolutely impossible for Tolstoy to understand the workers' movement and its role in the struggle for socialism;"[7] but Tolstoy, says Lenin, "adopted the point of view of the naive patriarchal peasant"[8] and therefore he "reflects their state of mind so accurately."[9] Thus Lenin declares that Tolstoy was capable of reflecting not the entire revolution but only certain of its phases, and then only those phases which he, as spokesman for the ideas and moods of millions of peasant, had grasped. To say that a writer by mere virtue of his "creative attributes" is able to depict anything regardless of his understanding of it, is to say that a great writer or a genius is above classes.

On the basis of this I take issue with anyone who misconstrues Lenin's words about a great writer reflecting "some of the essential aspects of the revolution." Above all I take issue with Rosenthal, who reduces the depiction of reality by a writer to "creative attributes," and who wrote: "To say that a genius, thanks to his 'creative attribute' reflects the most essential phases of reality, even though he does not understand them, means to deny the class character of the genius and his artistic experience, no matter what slip of the tongue may be made concerning it".

[7] *Ibid—Ed*

[8] Lenin: "Tolstoy and the Contemporary Workers' Movement"—*Ed.*

[9] *Ibid*

It is clear that here we are concerned with Rosenthal and not Lenin. Lenin used no such term as "creative attributes." All this comes from our shop terminology. Lenin wrote simply: "a great writer." It is plain that the phrase "slip of the tongue" refers to Rosenthal and not Lenin. This is clear even to Lifshitz.

Vulgar sociology is the scourge of our criticism. But to fight vulgar sociology by means of neo-Taineism and the popular subjectivism of Lifshitz is equivalent to extinguishing the fire by pouring more oil on it.

We must maintain a careful and critical attitude toward our literary heritage. But to declare all writers of the past "universal" spokesmen for the interests of the people amounts to rejecting Lenin's theory of heritage, and the class approach to our cultural heritage, and it finally resolves itself to reducing to naught the difference between socialist realism and the realism of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, between Tolstoy and Turgenov, Saltykov-Shchedrin and Gogol, Gorky and Dostoyevsky.

HOW REFUTATIONS ARE WRITTEN

By Mikhail Lifshitz

PROFESSOR NUSINOV complains that somebody wished to ascribe to him the theory that Cervantes, Shakespeare, Voltaire, Goethe and Pushkin were ideologists of "the proletariat and peasantry." As a matter of fact, asserts Professor Nusinov, all these writers were ideologists of the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, reactionary groups, and the petty bourgeoisie, in short, *ideologists of exploiting classes*. Try to prove, remarks Nusinov ironically, that Pushkin and Gogol were the ideologists of the Russian peasantry.

We suggest that Lifshitz take unto himself sufficient courage to assert that Balzac was the spokesman of the struggling proletariat and peasantry . . . .

I should like to give Nusinov a counter-proposition. Let him be courageous enough to declare that Balzac's *Lost Illusions* or Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* express the *ideology of exploitation*, that therein lies the value of these works.

There was a time when Nusinov did not hesitate to be so "courageous" "What is the objective criterion of a work of art?" he once asked in an article devoted to the problem, and he answered forthwith: "Creative art serves *class preservation, class consolidation.* It is artistic or inartistic, in proportion to its ability to fulfil this function *without depending upon the underlying idea.*"[1]

That is what is called consistency! Why was Gogol great? Because he helped more than other writers to "preserve" the landowners. Wherein lay the greatness of all the classical writers of the past? In the fact that they were the most consistent and faithful "ideologists of the exploiting classes." Thus spake the daring Nusinov. "A great writer is one whose creative activity gives a synthetic, typical expression to the psycho-ideology of his class".

Take an example. which contemporary Western writers are closer to true art—those who reflect actuality by approaching the ideas of Communism, or those close to reaction? *The latter*, says Nusinov, in full consonance with his theory

> It is worthy of note that masterpieces are produced only by writers who express synthetically the vision of those who take leave of the secular world or who retire within themselves realizing that everything of value lies in the past Only those writers can create who accept, in the spirit of ecclesiasticism, the futility of the world (Proust, Joyce)

This conclusion is not surprising It follows from Nusinov's basic premise. The great writer of a decaying class is the one who is most decadent. And conversely those Western writers have the least chance of immortality who attempt to break with their class, who revolt against exploitation and try to find some

[1] "What Is the Objective Criterion of a Work of Art?" *Literature and Marxism*, No 1, 1931

other road. This is clearly a mistake on their part. They fail to take into consideration the fact that the great writers of the past were those who expressed most fully "the ideology of the exploiting classes".

A merry theory! Let us point out that its advocates find themselves in a highly embarrassing situation. Immediately the question arises: What is Communist society going to do with *Don Quixote, Evgeni Onegin* and other artistic expressions of exploitations? That is very simple, answered the brave Nusinov in 1930—it is going to dump them into the "garbage pail of history".

> Cervantes, Shakespeare, Moliere, Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoy, Dostoievsky created images of the social essence of their class. . . The end of class society will also be the end of their imagery When man will have lost power over man, when classes and property are destroyed, these images will lose all their "universal" significance.

With the victory of socialism—so predicted Nusinov—classical literature will lose all æsthetic interest for humanity *Faust* and *Hamlet* he excepted, to some extent These works "can appeal to humanity for a certain number of generations, but finally, with the ultimate destruction of all that had been preserved from capitalism, they too will pass into the past, just as the ages that gave them birth".

Of course, today Nusinov expresses his position in a much more cautious manner. If Shakespeare, Pushkin and Gogol are merely "artists of propertied classes," then what is their significance for people whose task lies in the struggle against every sort of filthy ownership? In order to answer this question, Nusinov draws a rigid distinction between the *class character* of a work of art, and its role in the *class struggle:*

> I think that the creative art of Balzac or Gogol is of importance to us not because they were writers of such and such propertied classes or social groups, but in proportion to the objective significance of their works in the struggle between the revolutionary and the reactionary tendencies of their time, in proportion to their objective importance to the triumph of socialism over fascism and imperialism

Charming! Nusinov has wasted a good deal of ink demonstrating the proprietary, exploiting character of the great works of art of the past, and now this turns out to be totally *unimportant*. The task of the literary historian seems to be the study of the objective course of literary development. If we are to believe Nusinov, the class character of literary activity has no significance in this field.

Class analysis is an idle game; it is necessary and useful only to those who make it their life-time profession. As far as the struggle for the triumph of socialism is concerned, it is useless, as Nusinov him self acknowledges. A *genuine class analysis only begins where our sociologists put away their weapons*. This new and at the same time old tendency of vulgar sociology has already been pointed out. As soon as the question arises of the significance to us of classical art, or, in Nusinov's expression, its "objective importance" in the triumph of socialism, these persons hastily renounce all class analysis Presumably it is unimportant whether the masters of literature "were writers of such and such propertied classes or social groups".

But why is it unimportant? How can we define the objective significance of a writer's creative work if we disregard his attitude toward oppression and exploitation? Is there any difference between Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoy and Chekhov on the one hand, and Bulgarin, Katkov and Suvorin on the other? From Nusinov's standpoint, they all are of the same ilk. They are all "ideologists of the exploiting classes" or the "propertied classes". But proceed! Prove that Bulgarin and Katkov play, objectively, a great role in the struggle against fascism. For, from your point of view it is inconsequential whether a particular work was written in defence of exploitation and oppression of man by man or in protest against this oppression.

To recall: In 1934, by way of confirming his theory of the independence of objective and class division, Nusinov referred to the work of . . . the whiteguard Shulgin, *The Year 1920*, Shulgin had written his book

in the interests of the white emigres, but it turned out to be enlightening for the proletarian reader also. The same holds true of Gogol, Pushkin and other "writers of the propertied classes" The social equivalent of their creative work was some sort of white guardian, now defunct; but "objectively" they helped, as they still do, to fight against fascism and imperialism.

Nusinov calls this the "contradictions of the propertied world." His philosophy of creative art is based on the following two postulates: (1) all literature is created by men like Shulgin; (2) this literature of exploiters and property owners has, "objectively," a great artistic and revolutionary significance.

Humbug! Such a separation of the writer's *class* position from the real and *objective* content of the class struggle is, in fact, pure Menshevism.

Now Nusinov's reasoning is understandable

In our article on "Leninist Criticism", we wrote that the immaturity of mass movements and their contradictory growth in the course of history explain excellently the contradictions in the works of great writers, artists and humanists of the past. And here Nusinov raves: What? So the masses are guilty! According to Lifshitz, it seems, the Kavelins, the Aksakovs, and the Fets were not the ideologists of the exploiting classes." This is not so. Of course, the Kavelins were ideologists of class exploitation. But if you wish to refute the foregoing passage, demonstrate first that the Kavelins were great writers, artists and humanists of the past. But when you lump together with the Kavelins such writers as Pushkin, Gogol (up to his *Selected Passages*), and Tolstoy as "ideologists of the exploiting classes"—I am sorry but no one will listen to you.

In order to demonstrate that the great writers, artists and humanists of the past were ideologists of class exploitation, Nusinov refers to . . . the Struves, the Shchepetovs and "their predecessors," and also to the Mensheviks, the Social Revolutionaries, contributors to the *Novaya Zhizn* and even to Bogdanov

and Bazarov. They are all, according to Nusinov, great writers, artists and humanists of the past. Add Shulgin to their number, and the picture of world literature is complete.

Nusinov's entire reasoning is stuffed with such incredible nonsense. For instance, he uses Tolstoy's *A Contaminated Family*—a poor lampoon which he considered so bad that he was ashamed to publish it—as an argument against us; he also recalls Pisemsky's *Troubled Seas*, Leskov's *At Daggers Drawn*, etc. We can add to our professor's collection two unsuccessful comedies by Goethe, written against the French Revolution, office orders issued by the same Goethe, circulars by Saltykov-Shchedrin, the ledger in which Voltaire recorded the profits from his faithful Hirschell's speculations, forged reports by Bacon, and Petrarch's servile petitions for lavish grants. There can be no doubt about the exploiting character of this "literature".

There are spots even on the sun of literature; nevertheless, the sun does not consist of spots alone. Gorky made an excellent remark regarding people who, like Nusinov, bark at the sun:

> It is a low, petty trait to decry all the bright colors and to paint all the world in uniform gray Just look how long we remember that Pushkin wrote flattering letters to Nicholas I, that Nekrasov played cards, that Leskov wrote *At Daggers Drawn* That is the sign of the memory of small men who enjoy pointing out the faults of a great man in order thereby to bring him down to their own level

But particularly amusing is the fact that having cited his examples. Nusinov writes:

> Due to the contradictions of the propertied world their art [the art of Balzac and Gogol] had and still has a tremendous objective significance, even though they were ideologists of the exploiting classes In this lies their strength But the fact that they were ideologists of the exploiting classes was also the source of their fatal shortcomings Without a consideration of these faults it is impossible correctly to evaluate their works

There you have it! That which "had and still has a tremendous objective significance" in the history of literature gives rise only to that which is of no

significance and which makes for "fatal shortcomings". Consequently, the great works of art (which, as everybody knows, consist not of shortcomings alone) were created contrary to the interests of exploiting classes and *despite* these interests. Consequently class analysis consists precisely in discriminating between the merits and the "fatal shortcomings" of the art of the past, between the defence of proprietary ideals and the attack against them, between that which is artistic and that which is not. And yet we are told that the class character of an ideology, the very foundation of every work, is *unimportant* in determining its objective significance.

But perhaps we have misunderstood Nusinov. Perhaps he does mean to say that Tolstoy's *A Contaminated Family* had "a tremendous objective significance". It seems that this is exactly how we should understand our sociologist. Nusinov's supporters, in fact, do believe, for instance, that *Dead Souls* arose out of a desire to consolidate the exploitation of the serfs; and yet, objectively, this work of Gogol's had the "tremendous objective significance" of a great and progressive work of art. In the terminology of our sociologists, this is a contradiction between "*origin*" and "*function*". Landowners and exploiters created splendid works of art in their own interest, but the "function" of these works, despite the fact that they were written in defence of exploitation, was to serve the cause of the workers and peasants. According to this vulgar theory, the only difference between the ideology of exploitation and progressive social thought is *subjective*—each is right and great in his own fashion; but *objectively* these opposite pursuits coincide and unite in the same "spiritual values".

Thus "objectivity" becomes complete. So complete, in fact, that it is amazing how Nusinov proclaims himself a guardian of the Marxist theory of class struggle. For it is Nusinov and his friends who deny all objective class criteria in the evaluation of the artistic and social meaning of literary masterpieces.

Hence, what right have they to declare that the influence of the ideology of exploiting classes begets only "fatal short-comings" in literature? Where do *merits* originate? Have they any social equivalent? Or are merits just a gift of heaven without any origin?

There is no choice: either assert that all the *artistic development* of mankind, all the *merits* of classical art, originate merely as a regular expression of the ideology of exploiters and propertied classes; or else comprehend that the great achievements of art arose in the process of struggle against this ideology, as art came nearer the people.

In order thoroughly to understand Nusinov, it is necessary to comprehend his original position. He attacks Plekhanov, who believed correctly that there is an objective rather than a subjective difference between true and false ideas, between the ideology of exploitation and sympathy with the oppressed masses. Plekhanov contended that all great creative art is based on true and progressive content. It was from this point of view that he condemned the intellectual degradation of bourgeois art. No doubt there were faults in Plekhanov's exposition of this thought. Nevertheless it was the better part of his æsthetic theory, a part related to the legacy of Belinsky, Chernishevsky and Dobrolyubov, and precious to every Marxist.

Against this view Nusinov mobilizes the worst aspects of Plekhanov's view, namely his sociological relativism. Since everything is contingent, argues the wise sociologist, everything is equally permissible. Reaction, egoism, and falsity can serve as foundations of great art. It is not true that a work is artistic only when it portrays reality faithfully. "Artistry", writes Nusinov, "consists *not in the realistic portrayal of actuality* but in the expression of a given class' interpretation of actuality".

If falsity and defence of exploitation cannot serve as the basis of a genuine artistic work—then what is truth? inquires Nusinov. Truth is merely "*the pro-*

found consciousness of the author." A work is artistic if it corresponds not to external reality, but to "*the veritable, profound consciousness*" of a given class. And to exclude any possible doubt, Nusinov adds a clarification:

> The concept of "false idea" is not identical with absolute truth, absolute justice. It is a class concept. The true and the false depend upon the standards of a given class. The idea of a work is false if it is false from the standpoint of the consciousness of the given class, it is true if it corresponds to that class' veritable consciousness. It is false if the author expounding it *does not believe* in it, it is *not false* if *the author is deeply convinced of its truth.* And all this is *quite independent of whether it is a reactionary or progressive idea, whether it leads to the distortion of reality or to its faithful portrayed* [2]

It is perfectly obvious that vulgar sociology results in *pure absurdity.* Even fascism, according to Nusinov, can produce "spiritual values." Nusinov demonstrates in great detail that the most antisocial, predatory, and false ideas are capable of producing masterpieces of art, in so far as these ideas contribute to the "*self-preservation*" of the propertied classes and uphold faith in the importance of their dominating position. Now it is obvious why from Nusinov's standpoint it is totally *unimportant* whether a writer defends the exploiting classes or not. From the sociological point of view, truth and falsity, revolution and reaction, are equally right, equally good. It is possible to *believe* in exploitation, just as during the Middle Ages people believed in the devil himself.

Our new upholders of mysticism argue very much in the fashion of Don Quixote at the moment of philosophic interpretation. There are as many truths as standpoints. "What to you is a shaving basin, to me is Mambrino's helmet, and to another it is something else." At the root of all Nusinov's thinking lies the most vulgar idealistic *subjectivism.* And conversely; this subjectivism leads our sociologist to a no less vulgar *objectivism* which compels him to raise "spiritual

[2] I Nusinov, "What Is the Objective Criterion of a Work of Art?" *Literature and Marxism,* No I, 1931, pp. 28-29, 31-34. Italics ours —*M L.*

values" beyond the limits of class analysis. He sees no difference whatever between Mambrino's helmet and a shaving basin, between Pushkin and Kukolnik, between Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and his *A Contaminated Family*, between truth and falsity, between progressive and reactionary movements in history, between the greatness of classic literature and the defence of the ideology of exploiting classes.

This cynical theory denies the very *realistic* foundation of art as well as its reflection of actuality. In order to demonstrate the over-whelming relativity of the standpoint of the various classes, Nusinov cites against us Tolstoy's *A Contaminated Family* and a number of other works portraying one and the same social type. It is interesting to note that Nusinov cited this example once before . . . against Lenin's *theory of representation*. In his article on "Problems of the Objective Significance of Creative Art," Nusinov writes:

> Very frequently we come across two radically wrong and dialectically false views of the problem of the objective significance of literary work. The first is to regard literature as *a representation of reality* The other is to compare the writer to the scientist and to assert that both are engaged in the pursuit of *the cognition of life*, differing only in the means of cognition: the scientist arrives at it through methods of investigation, whereas the writer uses imagery. . The writer is no photographic camera, a work of art is no snapshot, and *literature is no mirror* . . *The advocates of the theory of representation are not dialectical materialists, but essentially sensualists* . From this point of view it is quite impossible to explain why different writers portrayed one and the same event in a different manner [3]

Then follow familiar examples: Tolstoy's *A Contaminated Family*, Dostoyevsky's *The Possessed*, Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*. "If literature is the *objective 'cognition of life,'* then it is incomprehensible how these three great writers could present one and the same contemporary phenomenon in such different ways".

[3] *Russian Language in the Soviet School*, 1929, No 1, pp. 9-13. Italics are mine.—*M L.*

Some people believe, rather naively, that it may be advisable to retain a trace of vulgar sociology in literature, as a reminder of the class struggle. The sociologists go too far, it is acknowledged, but their intentions are good and revolutionary; hence, for purposes of equilibrium, they should not be criticized too harshly. This attitude is decidedly incorrect, for it is grounded in the confusion of such dissimilar things as *pacification* and *struggle on two fronts.*

It is unnecessary to reiterate that vulgar sociology and formalism, different as they are, are closely allied. The more we eradicate from our literature all traces of bourgeois sociology, whether in its pseudo-Marxist or its pseudo-revolutionary form, the more clearly will we see the real content of the class struggle in history and the more successful will be our efforts to develop socialist culture.

LET US CHANGE THE COURSE OF THE DISCUSSION

By Feodor Levin

ATTEMPTS are being made to relegate the entire creative work of this or that author to the ideology of the left wing of the right section, or the right wing of the left section of some particular social group or stratum. All this is not far removed from what might be called Pereverzevism, when Focht, for instance (one of Pereverzev's disciples), in analyzing Lermontov, quoted a passage about a "steed eyeing askance the heights of racing waves" and tried to distort the phrase "eyeing askance" into direct evidence of certain social tendencies on Lermontov's part.

It is quite apparent that our Marxist literary studies cannot advance without a determined exposure of such "theories". The recent articles of Comrade Lifshitz and others are directed against these distortions of Marxism and render a useful service. Still, the problems before us demand a correct methodical approach.

But a close scrutiny of the essays of Lifshitz and his comrades-in-arms conducting the criticism of Nusinov, Dinamov and others discloses not a few "confessions" that are such distortions of Marxism that they threaten to misdirect the entire current of the struggle against schematism and vulgarization

The first confession was sounded in Lifshitz's "Leninist Criticism" wherein he claims:

> The class nature of the spiritual phenomena is determined not by their subjective colouring, but by their depth of comprehension of reality From this objective world comes the subjective colouring of class ideology It is a *conclusion* and not a *premise*! A man who is capable of rising to hatred of oppression and falsehood in *all* their manifestations and forms in the social life of his epoch, becomes an ideologist of the revolutionary class A man who is fully immerged in his individual existence, in his basic isolation, remains for ever under the influence of a reactionary ideology. In contrast to the dogmatic Marxism of the Mensheviks and the Economists, Lenin proved that class consciousness does not originate automatically No one is born an ideologist of a definite class

The following statement stands out: "The subjective colouring of class ideology . . . is a *conclusion* and not a *premise*!" If Comrade Lifshitz expects to pass off this thesis as Leninism, he will be sadly disappointed. This is not at all a Leninist position, and a good many of Lifshitz's subsequent errors are derived from it. "The subjective colouring of class ideology" is inherent in the very class division of society, in the divergent attitudes of these classes toward the means of production, and in the different positions occupied by men in social productivity. Man is not a tabula rasa and he does not live in a vacuum. "Some are born with a silver spoon in their mouth; others haven't a pot to cook in." Some inherit, from the day they are born, estates, factories, bank; others, merely the prospect of selling their labour. Their class consciousness, conditioned by their position and upbringing, begins to form from their very infancy, and therein lies the incontestable "*premise*."

Naturally, this does not exhaust the matter. Further development, "the life of all classes in society in

all its manifestations—mental, moral and political," as Lifshitz indicates, modifies and develops that "premise" and yields the sum total, the "conclusion" which (for individuals and occasionally for groups) may prove remote from the "premise," and even contradictory. Tolstoy, for instance, was born a member of the higher gentry but became converted to patriarchal peasantry. And there are many such examples. Unequivocal also is the thesis long ago advanced by Lenin : that scientific socialism is not a mere development of the workers' immediate consciousness (such development leads no further than trade unionism), but is the sum total of all human history and its highest achievements.

Still, that does not warrant ignoring such a "premise," such a point of departure, as class ideology, which derives from the realistic status of the classes, from class interests. Lifshitz in particular ignores this point of departure. It is for this reason that, being interested only in the conclusion, only in the sum total of the world outlook of this or that ideologist, he completely repudiates the matter of class roots, the class character of a given author's creativeness. Moreover, Lifshitz regards definitions such as "ideologist of the middle bourgeoisie" as being "psychological." In the same article he speaks with utter disdain of our prevalent manner of deducing the aims of a writer from the psychology of some given narrow stratum of the petty bourgeoisie". In our textbooks Anatole France is still represented as ideologist of the 'middle bourgeoisie,' Romain Rolland as a 'petty bourgeois humanist.' Classification into *psychological types* hides completely the basic question of the writer's attitude toward the revolution." (Italics mine—F.L.)

In a word, the "middle bourgeoisie" and the "petty bourgeoisie" constitute, all in all, "psychological types". This Lifshitz passes on to us as Leninism—which will never do. The consequences of these confusions are inevitable. Lifshitz furiously attacks all efforts to reveal the class roots of the creativeness of this or that artist. He derides the tendency to

determine precisely which class stratum the artist represents.

"Moreover," writes Lifshitz, "nowhere in Lenin's works do we find any supposedly exact but factually vulgar definitions of Tolstoy's class nature, definitions so loved by our 'sociologist'."

Naturally Lenin did not measure Tolstoy's status by Nusinov's method. He wrote:

> By birth and by education Tolstoy belonged to the highest landowning nobility in Russia, he broke with all the customary views of this milieu and, *in his last works* he subjected to impassioned criticism the political, ecclesiastical, social and economic order, based on the enslavement and impoverishment of the masses, on the ruin of the peasants and the petty proprietors in general, on the violence and hypocrisy which permeate our whole contemporary life from top to bottom [1] (Italics mine)

And, farther on, Lenin says:

> Tolstoy adopted the point of view of the naive patriarchal peasant and brought the psychology of this peasant into his criticism and his doctrine

If the millions of naive patriarchal peasants whose viewpoint Tolstoy adopted *in his last works* can under no circumstances be termed a "sub-stratum," how about the highest landowning nobility, to which Tolstoy belonged and whose point of view he expressed *in his early works*? Is not Lenin's definition of Tolstoy's class status a bit too exact for Lifshitz? Would it not have been simpler to proclaim Tolstoy a great artist of the people, without entering into circumlocutions and derisive sociology? Nevertheless, Lifshitz notwithstanding, Lenin correctly defined Tolstoy's class status. "What clatter, my friends, would you have raised, if I had done it!"

And an extraordinary clatter has certainly been stirred up. Thus, in his article "The Shakespeare Deciders" V. Kemenov, examining attempts by Friche, Smirnov and Dinamov to determine the class nature of Shakespeare's art, repudiates them, one by one. According to Friche, Shakespeare was a nobleman;

[1] Lenin "Tolstoy and the Contemporary Workers' Movement" —*Ed.*

according to Smirnov, he was a bourgeois, whereas Dinamov sets him down as feudalist at the beginning of capitalism.

Wherein lay the chief flaw of Friche's conception? In his "anti-people" interpretation based on the aristocratization of Shakespeare

What were the flaws in Smirnov's point of view? Similarly in his "anti-people" interpretation, resulting from a liberal-apologetic obeisance before the bourgeoisie

Kemenov points out the fact that Friche was cognizant of Shakespeare's criticism, of capitalism, while Smirnov perceived him as a critic of feudalism On the other hand Dinamov, consolidating Friche and Smirnov in the affirmation that Shakespeare was an incipiently capitalistic nobleman, lost all the merits inherent in the conceptions of Friche and Smirnov, and acquired all the faults. Kemenov concludes this analysis with the following pathetic declaration:

It is impossible to interpret Shakespeare as the great people's poet of England and at the same time as the ideologist of bourgeoisified nobility, because these two conceptions are absolutely incompatible.

Very well And so, Shakespeare was no nobleman, no incipiently capitalistic nobleman, and no bourgeois. What was he then? Did he have a class status? Or does that exist merely for plain mortals, while the gods of Parnassus soar above the classes? One can find no direct answer to these questions in Kemenov's article, but it is hinted that Shakespeare is the people's great poet (which we knew quite well prior to the publication of Kemenov's essay), and that one should not pursue further any discussion about the nature of his attitude toward his people, nor the class roots of his art, etc.

A similar conception is developed in the same vein by one of Lifshitz's companions-in-arms who hides under the pseudonym of I. Ivanov. Criticizing Krap-henko's book on Gogol, Ivanov jots down his own conception of Gogol:

Actual history maintains that Gogol rose above the restrictions of his own environment and its egotistic interests, that he detested the "dead souls" of aristo-bureaucratic Russia. It was for this reason especially that Gogol became the great denunciator of serfdom and of the savage world of property Actual history avers that Gogol was not disturbed by the "fate of his class," by its "mystic importance and bankruptcy," about which a good many ludicrous things have been injected into Krapchenko's book Gogol's torments were due to his passionate love and anxiety for his people and his country Only after capitulating and undergoing a profound internal crisis brought about by the miserable inadequacy of the social forces that could oppose the regime of Nicholas I, did Gogol begin to preach his reactionary utopia—which spelled the betrayal of the ideals of liberation That is what Krapchenko fails to grasp, and that is why his book is a denial of the traditions of Belinsky, Chernishevsky and Lenin

These lines testify to Ivanov's complete disregard of the concrete facts of history, to his ignorance of the very existence of those facts. He speaks of Gogol's "betrayal of the ideals of liberation" without inquiring to what extent Gogol sympathized with these ideals.

Ivanov speaks of the renunciation of Belinsky's tradition, not knowing, evidently, that Belinsky pointed out certain false notes even in the first volume of *Dead Souls*; that he marked off sympathetic notes in Gogol's description of "old-fashioned landlords" and similar "personages". Ivanov is unconcerned with the fact that the Slavophiles, for instance, interpreted Gogol's satire as "revealing a need for inner purification".

Ivanov refuses to understand that although "Gogol's torments were due to his passionate love and anxiety for his people", Belinsky envisaged the people's happiness in the liberation of the serfs, whereas Gogol's conception of that happiness was a "peaceful" life for the peasants under the jurisdiction of a patriarchal landlord In an article on the cossack Lugansky, Belinsky wrote that "an illiterate muzhik frequently possesses more inborn dignity than an educated member of the middle class," but Gogol portrays the Russian peasant as Uncle Mitya and Uncle Minyay.

Ivanov does not understand that one of the principal causes of Gogol's tragedy was the fact that his

criticism of the bureaucratic landowning Russia of the nobility, a criticism which was not meant to be destructive or revolutionary, yet acquired a revolutionary significance and became the rallying point of the liberating movement, owing to the living dialectics of history and the actual relationship of class forces.

Upon examining the viewpoints of Lifshitz and his fellow critics, we become convinced that the history of literature cannot be embodied in their presentation. They cannot imagine how the works of a poet hailing from the aristocracy could ever become people's art, how the creations of a bourgeois writer could ever become people's literature.

And yet that which Lifshitz cannot grasp was clearly perceived by Belinsky, to whom even Lifshitz directs others for enlightenment. Belinsky spoke of Pushkin's national creative genius, describing *Evgeni Onegin* as "an encyclopædia of Russian life," at the same time noting his aristocratic background.

But how is one to account for the fear of acknowledging great artists as ideologists of the aristocracy or bourgeoisie? According to Ivanov such classification amounts to concealing a great artist in a narrow cage of aristocratic-bourgeois interests. And according to Kemenov:

> The exaggeration of the contribution of the exploiting classes and the concealment of the true role of the great masses in the history of culture create the impression that the great literature of the world arose *on this very foundation* of the mercenary, self-seeking, egotistical propensities of the ruling classes. From this point of view even artistic appreciation of the great writers of the past and their significance for proletarian culture are determined by the degree of their zeal in defending the interests of the ruling classes, that is, to put it bluntly, by the extent to which their creative genius was permeated with the spirit of despicable exploitation and servile sycophancy.

Nusinov suggests that Lifshitz prove that Pushkin and others were not "ideologists of the exploiting classes." Lifshitz is unbelievably shocked.

> I should like to give Nusinov a counter-proposition. Let him be courageous enough to declare that Balzac's *Lost Illusions* or

Puskin's *Boris Godunov* express the *ideology of exploitation* . . . To listen to our sociologists, one would think that the entire history of art expresses only a minor brawl among the various kinds of parasites over some piece of prey Is that all there is to the class struggle? And where are the basic class contradictions of each historical epoch? Where is the perpetual struggle of the *haves* and the *have nots*? Where are *the people*?

All this seems terribly r-r-revolutionary, but in reality it is anti-historical and foreign to Marxism. Lifshitz performs a "minor" carry-over and substitutes the "ideology of exploitation" for the "ideology of exploited classes." However, these are by no means the same. The exploiting classes are the nobility and the bourgeoisie; their domination during certain historical periods was indispensable and wafrantable. Feudalism and capitalism constituted social forms in which national industry could thrive. These ruling classes "administered" the entire national economy. The struggle between the bourgeoisie and the nobility involved more than the booty, it determined the mould in which the progressive development of mankind was to proceed. Today, both the nobility and the bourgeoisie have long since forfeited their positive, progressive significance, have long since become a drag-chain on human progress. The world gave birth to socialism amid throes of strife; socialism is already fortified and victorious on one-sixth of the earth. Hence when Lifshitz, Kemenov and others simplify the historic past beyond due measure, refusing to see in the nobility and the bourgeoisie of bygone eras anything but parasitism and exploitation—what is it if not a denial of objective history? What is it if not present-day "politics catapulted into the past"?

AN INSTRUCTIVE INCIDENT

By I. Satz

COMRADE LEVIN'S article sets out to change the whole course of the discussion and to direct it into an entirely new channel. As to the vulgar sociology of Professor Nusinov, Levin makes short shrift of it at the very outset. To be sure, this is no longer such

difficult undertaking. But to make up for lost time, Levin rushes in with his criticism of Lifshitz and all those whom he pleases to dub Lifshitz's "comrades-in-arms." These comrades, according to Levin, are really doing a good job by exposing vulgar sociology, but they too in turn "distort Marxism." Most of Levin's article is devoted to criticism of these exposers of vulgar sociology; the rest of it, and he stresses the importance of this part, is given over to an attempt to pose the question in a strictly historical perspective. The inconsistency of Lifshitz and his comrades-in-arms, according to Levin, is that their scheme of thinking does not accord with the actual facts of the history of literature.

This is the only serious point he makes, and it cannot be ignored It is only to be regretted that certain points made by Levin do not seem to accord with the facts. Says Levin:

> Upon examining the views of Lifshitz and his fellow critics, we become convinced that . they cannot imagine how the works of a poet hailing from the aristocracy could ever become people's art, how the creations of a bourgeois writer could ever become people's literature

But what do we find on checking up? In "Leninist Criticism" Lifshitz says:

> Can an "artist-aristocrat" reflect the people's movement in his own country? From the point of view of Plekhanov such an idea is tantamount to the negation of Marxism And indeed this view of Tolstoy's works does not accord with the *dogmatic* Marxism of the orthodox Mensheviks

And in another article.

> We also know that individual geniuses from the nobility and the bourgeoisie often became true people's writers, despite their inherent and acquired class prejudices

A whole series of passages from Lifshitz might be cited to show the discrepancy between facts and the way they are interpreted by Levin. Nevertheless this does not minimize Levin's contribution in exhorting us to take recourse to actual facts. We have very little need of generalizations and abstract argumentation. We need a concrete criticism; we need to lay

the foundations of a methodology that will permit a concrete analysis of the history of literature.

In this respect Levin is wholly correct, just as he is correct in his decision to probe into the essence of the views of Lifshitz and his other literary adversaries by analyzing their attitude towards Gogol, which serves as an acid test of the value and accuracy of the theories of the various critics. In this connection Levin cites the following passage from an article by I. Ivanov:

> Gogol's torments were due to his passionate love and anxiety for his *people* and his *country* Only after capitulating, and undergoing a profound internal crisis brought about by the miserable inadequacy of the social forces that could oppose the regime of Nicholas I, did Gogol begin to preach his reactionary utopia—which spelled the betrayal of the ideals of liberation

To which Levin counters

> He [Ivanov] speaks of Gogol's betrayal of the ideals of liberation without inquiring to what extent Gogol sympathized with these ideals These lines testify to Ivanov's complete disregard of the concrete facts of history, to his ignorance of the very existence of these facts

Now what are the facts to which Levin is referring? To begin with, he complains that Ivanov "is unconcerned with the fact that the Slavophiles interpreted Gogol's satire as 'revealing a need for inner purification'."

Rather a strange complaint. Why should a Soviet critic be so much concerned with continuing the traditions of Gogol's *reactionary* commentators? Perhaps it is because our vulgar sociologists have proclaimed Gogol's satire as "self-criticism" on the part of the landowning nobility? This, in fact, is what Krapchenko actually says about Gogol. "While he condemned the representatives of his class, Gogol did not wish to condemn the system" . . . "the concluding lines of *Dead Souls* are the expression of the profound uneasiness he felt for the fate of his class."

Such a view is quite in place in Krapchenko's book on Gogol, but it would sound strange comings from the

pen of Levin, who from the very outset expressed his fulminating denunciation of vulgar sociology.

But let us leave the Slavophiles alone. Levin apparently needed them for the purpose of piling up arguments. His chief postulates, however, are based on the views of Russian revolutionary-democratic criticism of the past century. Says he:

> Ivanov speaks of the renunciation of Belinsky's tradition, not knowing, evidently, that Belinsky pointed out false notes even in the first volume of *Dead Souls*, and he also pointed out notes of sympathy in Gogol's depiction of the "*old-world landowners*" and other "personages"

For lack of space we shall content ourselves with simply comparing Levin's interpretation of the views of Belinsky with the actual statements of that great revolutionary democrat. Said Bélinsky in his essay entitled "A View of Russian Literature in the Year 1847":

> Our literature has always tended to express national originality, to be of the people, to be natural rather than rhetorical . . And without equivocation we may say that in no author has this tendency been so successful as in Gogol To achieve this it was necessary to turn one's entire attention toward the masses, toward the common people . Therein lies Gogol's great achievement.

And in his literary review for 1846 Belinsky stressed the fact that with the appearance of Gogol Russian literature had become a *people's* literature, that it had turned its face toward reality and begun to exhort the people to examine and improve their real life:

> Literature has in this respect reached such a pass that its success in the future, its progress, depends more on the scope and quantity of the material within its grasp and control than on itself. The broader the scope of its content, the more material it has to work with, the more rapid and fruitful will be its development.

Such is Belinsky's general evaluation of Gogol, in view of which all references to his limitations, even the sharpest notes against Gogol's straying errors are of little importance. Even when Chernishevsky mentioned them, he spoke with many reservations, adding that his remarks were impelled not only by his profound respect for the great author, but, what was more, by a feeling of just forbearance for a man who

was surrounded by relationships that were unfavourable to his development.

Levin speaks the truth when he says that both Belinsky and Chernishevsky pointed out that they did not consider Gogol's works as unqualifiedly satisfying the contemporary needs of the Russian public. Belinsky "found false notes even in the first volume of *Dead Souls*." But how did the great revolutionary democrats explain these "false notes"? Belinsky wrote:

> The portrayal of ideals has always been Gogol's weakest side, due probably not so much to the homogeneity of his talent—to which many ascribe this failing—as to the very power of his talent, a power derived from unusually close ties with reality. When reality presented ideal persons such persons were excellently depicted by Gogol . . But when reality did not present ideal persons, or presented them in situations inaccessible to art, then what was Gogol to do? Was he to invent them? Many who are accustomed to lying can accomplish this very cleverly, but Gogol was never capable of invention.

And Chernishevsky even sought to explain the defects in Gogol's works by objective reality, by the contradiction between the miserable inadequacy of the social forces of his time which could furnish material for a creative and positive evaluation of reality, and Gogol's conscious "desire to introduce into his works an element of consolation." Even when he spoke about the reactionary side of *Dead Souls*—the character Kostanzhoglo, the "ideal" landowner—Chernishevsky contrasted the author's "critical" tendencies with his "reactionary" sentiments and came to the conclusion:

> Indeed, Gogol the artist always remained faithful to his calling, no matter how we must judge the transformations which he underwent in other respect . . . These passages [which Chernishevsky enumerates] must convince even one highly prejudiced against his *Selected Passages from a Correspondence with Friends*, that the author who created *The Inspector-General* and the first volume of *Dead Souls* remained to the end of his life true to himself as an artist, regardless of the fact that as a thinker he was prone to err. They prove that his lofty nobility of soul and his passionate love for the true and the good for ever burned in his heart, that to the very end of his life he was consumed with a passionate hatred for all that was base and vile.

This is how Gogol was evaluated by the great revolutionary democrats, those men of exceptional intellect and great heart, who had a profound understanding of the essence of literature and the historical role of artistic realism, and who had a fair comprehension of the class struggle of their time.

In contrast to them, Levin makes a painstaking collection of such passages from Gogol's works which show his limitations, and he imparts exaggerated importance to the fact that Gogol represented the Russian peasant as "Uncle Mitya and Uncle Minyay." He stresses the character Konstanzhoglo—who Chernishevsky said does not yet prove anything—in order to place Gogol and Belinsky in two opposing camps.

In vain does Levin call upon Belinsky in the endeavour to defeat Ivanov, Lifshitz and their "comrades-in-arms." The facts are against Levin. Levin sought to prove the weak position of his literary adversaries by citing their concrete evaluations of great writers. Indeed, this is one of the best methods of ascertaining the merits and shortcomings of critical analysis, as Levin himself prove when he undertakes to present his positive views concerning the essence of Gogol's art. Says he :

> Ivanov does not understand that one of the principal causes of Gogol's tragedy was the fact that his criticism of the bureaucratic, landowning Russia of the nobility, a criticism which was not meant to be destructive or revolutionary, yet acquired a revolutionary significance and became the rallying point of the liberation movement, owing to the living dialectics and the actual relationship of class forces.

This, indeed, is a "revelation," to use Levin's expression. According to this, Gogol's tragedy was not that he was unable to break away from the captivity of the dark forces of Czarist Russia and that he was broken down by that reaction. Nor, according to Levin, was Gogol tormented by the realization of the impossibility of reconciling his view of contemporary society—the view of a realistic artist—with the views of the reactionary friends whom he trusted.

Levin endeavours to convince us that this was not the case at all; that Gogol's tragedy is easy to understand. Gogol had no desire to abolish the Czarist order; he only wanted to make some slight improvements in it. He had thought that his satire would accomplish that end, but he was deceived. "Living dialectics" brought about a situation where the best representatives of democracy, headed by Belinsky, acclaimed him as a democratic writer rather than one representing middle size landowners, and they greeted his creative work with unbounded enthusiasm. Gogol had himself placed weapons in the hands of the enemies of his class. Isn't that a real tragedy?

"Living dialectics," it turns out, fooled not only Gogol, but the revolutionary democrats fooled themselves as well, although they benefited by the deception. They had accepted Gogol the feudalist as their ally. And as if that were not enough, they considered him the founder of a new literature which harmonized with their social tendencies. They thought that the literature which truthfully depicted "mujiks, cabmen, janitors, joints, and refuges of hungry paupers" actually belonged to Gogol's school.

Here is what Lenin said in an article[1] which depicted the intensified social activity of the masses in 1905:

A long time ago Nekrasov cried

"Oh may it come quickly
The time when the peasant
Will make some distinction
Between book and book
Between picture and picture,
Will bring from the market,
Not picture of Blucher,
Not stupid 'Milord,'
But Belinsky and Gogol!"[2]

[1] Lenin "One More Offensive Against Democracy," *Complete Works*, Vol XVI, pp 132-133, Russian edition.—*Ed.*

[2] Nicholas Nekrasov. *Who Can Be Happy and Free in Russia*, translated by Juliet M. Soskice, p 43, Oxford University

The "time" so much hoped for by one of the old Russian democrats has arrived The merchants have given up trading in oats and have gone into a much more lucrative business—cheap democratic pamphlets The democratic booklet has become bazaar merchandise The ideas of Belinsky and Gogol, which made these writers dear to Nekrasov—and to every decent person in Russia—have saturated all through this new bazaar literature

Gogol's ideas, Lenin said, are dear to every decent person. . . . What were these ideas? That the Russian peasantry, represented by the Mityas and Minyays, can prosper only in a state of serfdom, under the rule of a paternal landowner? Obviously Lenin valued something altogether different in Gogol; nor was he deceived by Levin's "living dialectics."

The objective essence of Gogol's art seems to have completely evaporated in Levin's generalizations about that writer's works. It seems that this essence was one thing for Gogol and something else for the revolutionary democrats. But where is the difference between this and the "profundities" of Krapchenko and Nusinov, with their theory of a feudal "genesis" and a revolutionary "function," with their efforts to bring to the fore, as the great writer's distinguishing feature, all that was weak in him, all that was imperfect, all that limited the scope of his creative power and blocked his social progressiveness?

Levin has returned to the point which he most wanted to escape: vulgar sociology. This is by no means accidental, and it is extremely instructive. From the critics whom Levin is attacking he acquired the idea that revolutionary Marxism is incompatible with vulgar sociology. Yet so far he has learned to discern only the crudest manifestations of this anti-Marxist "tendency," whereas the subtler, less obvious manifestations are still enjoying widespread circulation and are little understood, as evidenced by Levin's own example.

THE ESSENCE OF THE CONTROVERSY

By Feoder Levin

THE essence of this controversy is contained in a question raised by Marx in his famous introduction to the *Critique of Political Economy :*

> . . the difficulty is not in grasping the idea that Greek art and epos are bound up with certain forms of social development It is rather lies in understanding why they still constitute with us a source of æsthetic enjoyment and in certain respects prevail as the standard and model beyond attainment [1]

Here is the problem which we must solve. This problem in all its urgency has arisen precisely now in the epoch of socialism.

The question arises why literature and art created by representatives of classes which we are now sweeping away into the dustbin of history nevertheless continue to provide material for the enlightenment of the masses, for the education of our youth and of the workers and collective farmers of the Soviet Union; why this art still affords enjoyment to the reader, the beholder and the listener in this epoch of socialism ?

The great damage that has been done and is being done by the so-called vulgar sociologists lies before all else in the fact that their representatives have completely ignored this Marxist question. They have concentrated their entire attention solely upon clarifying the link between this or that work of art and definite forms of social development, definite classes or class-groups. But even this easier part of the task the vulgar sociologists have fulfilled very badly and inaccurately, because their very understanding of the class struggle, of history, of the expression of class ideology in art, has been mechanical, vulgar—politically speaking, Menshevik.

1K Marx *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, pp. 311-312, Chicago. Kerr: 1904.—*Ed.*

The clearest expression of this theory was the Pereverzevist theory, which isolated classes from one another, leaving the artist merely the role of mouthpiece of his own class group, denying the artist's possibility of knowing and depicting other classes, and hence even the very possibility of influencing other classes.

The destruction of Pereverzevism did not, however, lead to the annihilation of all vulgar sociology.

Before me lies a text book entitled *Russian Literature* by Karyakin. Kremensky, Mamonov, Fedders, and Tsvetayev. It is a perfect example of vulgar sociology.

What caught my attention in this book was first of all its structure. The book is divided into chapters not on the basis of any scheme of the Russian historical process, not chronologically, but on the basis of "class index": the literature of the nobility, the literature of the various "plebeian" intelligentsia, etc. Aside from the fact that not every member of the intelligentsia was a "plebeian," aside from the fact that the intelligentsia is not a class, and that such division into chapters is quite illiterate, let us nevertheless look into the contents of the chapters. Tolstoy is included in the literature of the nobility, and hence the change in his world outlook which made him the spokesman of the patriarchal peasantry is buried in oblivion. In the literature of the various "plebeian" intelligentsia are included Gleb Uspensky, Nekrasov and Saltykov-Shchedrin, in other words the companions in arms of Chernishevsky and Dobrolyubov and of the revolutionary peasant democrats; without further ado the same group includes the Narodniks.

The analysis of Griboyedov's *The Misfortune of Being Clever* is preceded by a historic excursion in the manner of Pokrovsky's history; the rise of the grain export is, of course, directly linked with the origin of

this ingenious comedy ; and on the basis of two passages from the play, Griboyedov is shown to be indifferent to the feudal peasantry.

The analysis of the character of Natasha Rostova is crowned with the conclusion that in her Tolstoy expressed the feudal-landed view on women. Briefly speaking, the entire text-book represents a "scolding" of the classical writers on the score that they were not proletarian revolutionaries, that their class had historical limitations, that they did not "understand" this or that.

If Natasha Rostova is merely an expression of the feudal-landed view of woman, of what value can she be to us, except in a very narrow sense? If all we can learn from perusing *War and Peace* is the aristocratic view of women, marriage, war, duels—is that enough? Is a work of art merely an expression of class opinions, and not a reflection of objective reality through the prism of class view? Are class opinions blindness, rather than class vision? In class society, no artist can be free from class interests. But class interests are neither a crime nor short-sightedness, but reality, a fact. Within historical and class limits there is recognition of the objective world and that we must see rather than slight the giants of the past because they were not socialist in their attitude toward women.

Lenin said:

> And the contradictions in Tolstoy's views must be evaluated not from the point of view of the modern labour movement and modern socialism (such an evaluation is, of course, necessary, but it is inadequate), but rather from the point of view of the inevitable protest by the patriarchal Russian village against the onslaught of capitalism and the ruin of the masses despoiled of their land.[2]

These lines contain a valuable methodological lesson. In developing it, Lenin wrote:

> As a prophet who would discover new recipes for the salvation of humanity Tolstoy is ludicrous, and those "Tolstoyans"—

[2] Lenin "Tolstoy, Mirror of the Russian Revolution"—*Ed.*

Russian and foreign—who sought to transform the weakest side of his teaching into a dogma are, therefore, truly pitiful. Tolstoy is great as the expression of the mood and ideas of millions of Russian peasants as the hour of the bourgeois revolution in Russia approaches.[3]

Lenin evaluated Tolstoy not only from the point of view of the peasant protest against capitalism, but from the point of view of the modern workers' movement and modern socialism in the light of which Tolstoy the prophet is ludicrous.

The vulgar sociologists measure the great writers of the past with the yardstick of the 30's of the twentieth century in the Soviet Union.

It is very easy to prove that Pushkin's views cannot withstand criticism from the point of view of modern socialism (and such evaluation is necessary, but inadequate), but one must understand why

The captivating sweetness of his poems
Will pass generations of envious distance

The literary and artistic significance of the classics completely escapes the vulgar sociologists. Busy "scolding" the classics, they close the door to their æsthetic evaluation. In the text-book on literature, literature is not discussed Yet the portrait of Natasha Rostova expresses more than Tolstoy's views on women, we learn more than merely how a noble girl of the beginning of the nineteenth century lived and was brought up.

The image of Natasha Rostova possesses "something" else, and that "something" fires the imagination and broadens the experience of the young Soviet girl, and causes her to read *War and Peace* with interest, admiration and excitement.

The text-books of the vulgar sociological theoreticians give no inkling as to why the works of Tolstoy, Pushkin and Gogol afford æsthetic pleasure, and wherein lies their brilliance, because æsthetic taste is

[3] *Ibid.—Ed.*

subject to development, it is not created at once, nor by the mere reading of the works themselves. Let us remember that Belinsky, Dobrolyubov and Chernishevsky not only examined literature ideologically and socially; they treated literature as something to be loved. But before the "pure" definitions of the sociologists the richness and greatness of the classics vanish. Lifshitz is right when he says that the vulgar sociologists are forced to borrow from the formalists and to mumble commonplaces about the masterliness of the classics.

Comrade Satz believes that I slandered Lifshitz in saying that he cannot imagine how the creations of noble or bourgeois writers can be of the people. And to put me to shame, Comrade Satz brings forth two quotations from Lifshitz:

(1) Can an "artist-aristocrat" reflect a people's movement in his own country? From the point of view of Plekhanov such an idea is tantamount to the negation of Marxism. And indeed this view of Tolstoy's works does not accord with the *dogmatic* Marxism of the orthodox Mensheviks

(2) We also know that these individual geniuses from the nobility, and the bourgeoisie often became real people's writers, despite their inherent and acquired class prejudices.

I shall return immediately to these citations, but first allow me to mention other citations from Comrade Lifshitz's articles.

(1) Indeed, Pushkin was a genius, whereas the nobility and the bourgeoisie—no matter how divided or how combined—were merely two parasitic social classes

(2) Pushkin, Gogol and Tolstoy are interpreted in terms of the domestic affairs of the nobility, its "bourgeois transformation," its "impoverishment," and so on

From these quotations it is apparent that according to Comrade Lifshitz Pushkin was not an ideologist of the nobility, because the nobility itself was merely a parasitic social class. If we should dare declare that Pushkin was an ideologist of the nobility, this would be equivalent, according to Lifshitz, to declaring him a

defender of exploitation—of serfdom, etc. That Pushkin was a great artist, a people's writer, and also an ideologist of the nobility is like saying that genius and evil are two incompatible things—is that not clear from the foregoing ideas quoted from Lifshitz?

Now Comrade Satz may judge for himself whether I slandered his defendant in stating that this obvious contradiction is incompatible with his idea about the nobility and the bourgeoisie. But what will happen to the two quotations introduced by Comrade Satz? Does Comrade Lifshitz contradict himself by any chance? Not in the least. He is entirely consistent Lifshitz thinks that an "artist-aristocrat" can "reflect a people's movement in his own country." An artist-aristocrat but not an ideologist of the aristocracy. He thinks that "individual geniuses from the nobility and the bourgeoisie often became people's writers." ... "Individuals from the nobility and the bourgeoisie, but not ideologists of the nobility and the bourgeoisie

In other words Comrade Lifshitz admits that members of other classes, parasitic classes, can become people's writers. Comrade Lifshitz employs the term "artist-aristocrat" to mean an artist belonging *by social origin* and *by education to the aristocracy.* That is all.

As if we did not already know that not every proletarian revolutionary, for instance, is necessarily a proletarian by social origin, that a proletarian revolutionary can be by birth a member of a different class.

But Comrade Lifshitz, do you really think that when Lenin calls the Decembrists "aristocratic revolutionaries" he had in mind their noble origin, and not those ideological limits beyond which their revolutionary spirit could not rise?

Thus no one slandered Comrade Lifshitz. Comrade Lifshitz actually assumes that an ideologist of the nobility cannot be a people's writer, and Comrade Satz

simply did not understand the quotations from Comrade Lifshitz's article with which he thought to defeat me.

All other "charges" of vulgar sociologism Comrade Satz bases on my remarks on Gogol.

Let us first recall the quotation from Ivanov which raised the storm. Ivanov wrote:

> Only after capitulating, and undergoing a profound internal crisis brought about by the miserable inadequacy of the social forces that could oppose the regime of Nicholas I did Gogol begin to preach his reactionary utopia—which spelled the betrayal of the ideals of liberation

Ivanov referred to "the miserable inadequacy of the social forces." But it was during the '40s that these forces were gathering momentum. Precisely during the '40s Belinsky wrote to Annenkov: "The peasants are asleep but they see their coming liberation." Belinsky in those years was going further and further along the revolutionary path. Although he died before the German and French Revolutions of 1848—which, of course, would have called forth a warm response on his part—Gogol lived up to and after 1848. How then can one ascribe Gogol's reactionary preaching, his capitulation to the Slavophiles, to "the miserable inadequacy of the social forces that could oppose the regime of Nicholas I"? Is it not clear that Ivanov neglected the facts of history in order to fit his arguments?

In my article I called attention to the fact that the Slavophiles explained Gogol's satire as "a need for inner purification." What does this mean? It means that the Slavophiles considered Gogol their own and fought furiously against the revolutionary interpretation of his criticism of the landed officials' police orders. Belinsky on his part fought for Gogol. And the Slavophiles fought for Gogol. The Slavophiles did not attempt to fight for Belinsky and to explain his criticism as "a need for inner purification." That would

have been ridiculous. Belinsky was a revolutionary fighter and an implacable enemy of the reaction. But to fight for Gogol was not ridiculous. And in this instance reaction won. The *living* Gogol went over to their side. He was not a revolutionary fighter. Nevertheless Gogol's satire remained a dangerous weapon of the emancipation movement. It became the foundation of the "natural school" of critical realism. Here reaction suffered a terrible defeat.

Belinsky was right when he wrote regarding Gogol's renunciation of his works:

> And how does that concern us? When people praised Gogol's works they did not go to consult him as to how he felt about his productions, they judged according to the effect which they produced . . .

The same is true today, and we do not go to Gogol to ask him how we should think about his works. What if he did not recognize the merits of his own works, so long as the public recognized them?

Belinsky was absolutely right in this instance, just as he was right when he wrote:

> Serious shortcomings of the novel *Dead Souls* we find almost everywhere, where from poet and artist the author endeavours to turn moralist and falls into a somewhat bloated, bombastic lyricism Fortunately, such lyrical passages are few in proportion to the volume of the novel as a whole . But unfortunately these mystical lyrical escapades in *Dead Souls* were not simply chance mistakes on the author's part, but the source, perhaps, of the complete loss of his talent for Russian literature. .

That is what Belinsky saw and understood and that is what Ivanov and Comrade Satz, who paint Gogol as a revolutionary, cannot seem to understand. They cannot separate Gogol's subjective strivings from the objective essence and significance of his writings. Satz rejects completely the reference to the Slavophiles. "Why should a Soviet critic be so much concerned with continuing the traditions of Gogol's *reactionary* commentators?" he asks. But, needless to say, we are not concerned with continuing the traditions of the

Slavophiles, we merely pointed out that Gogol was not a revolutionary, and cited among other things the struggle on the part of the Slavophiles for Gogol.

Satz bases himself on Chernishevsky, and in many instances quite correctly. He cites Chernishevsky:

The portrayal of ideal has always been Gogol's weakest side, due probably not so much to the homogeneity of his talent—to which many ascribe this failing—as precisely to the very power of his talent, a power derived from unusually close ties with reality. When reality presented ideal persons such persons were excellently depicted by Gogol But when reality did not present ideal persons, or presented them in situations inaccessible to art, then what was Gogol to do? Was he to invent them? Many who are accustomed to lying can accomplish this very cleverly, but Gogol was never capable of invention

But it does not occur to Comrade Satz why Gogol endeavoured to paint a positive ideal And why he painted that ideal in the character of Kostanzhoglo. And why Saltkov-Shchedrin for instance was not led astray by such an ideal. Was there not a difference between the plebeianism of Gogol and that of Saltykov-Shchedrin? And if so, then are Gogol's political views of so little importance in determining the character of his plebeianism?

That is precisely the point, that such was the power of Gogol's realism, such was the power of his satire, that it proved to be stronger than his political views, his ideals. That Chernishevsky understood.

Engels wrote to Miss Harkness.

Balzac was politically a legitimist, his great work is a constant elegy on the irreparable decay of good society, his sympathies are with the class that is doomed to extinction. But for all that his satire is never keener, his irony never bitterer, than when he sets in motion the very men and women with whom he sympathizes most deeply—the nobles That Balzac was thus compelled to go against his own class sympathies and political prejudices, that he saw the necessity of the downfall of his favourite nobles and described them as people deserving no better fate, that he saw the real men of the future where, for the time being, they alone were to be found—that I consider one of the greatest triumphs of realism, and one of the greatest features in old Balzac

But if we say that Gogol was a monarchist, that he never dreamed of overthrowing the monarchy nor of abolishing the privileges of the serf-owners, that he sighed with Kostanzhoglo, that his sympathies were with the cultured, landed serf-owners, that in spite of his class sympathies and political prejudices his satire was never keener, his irony never bitterer, than when he painted the Manilovs, the Nozdrevs, the Sabakeviches, the Pliushkins, the Karabacheks, the Khlestakovs, the Skvoznik-Dmukhanovskys, then, according to Comrade Satz, we are necessarily proving our vulgar sociological propensities.

Lenin wrote that Gogol's ideas are dear to every decent person in Russia. But what right have Comrades Ivanov and Satz on that score to paint Gogol as a revolutionary?

It is necessary in order to forestall any question concerning the character of the plebeianism of a great artist, to sidetrack the question of the class nature of his creations.

The theoretical views of Lifshitz and Satz are clearly unhistorical, leading to the rejection of ascertaining the class nature of the artist.

Their position in practice, however, reminds one of tales that are told of bygone times when besides the match-maker an assistant match-maker would appear before the father of the prospective bride. The match-maker would begin: "The bridegroom we propose is very rich." "What do you mean!" shouts the assistant match-maker. "He is a Crœsus, a Rothschild!" "And besides, he is good-looking," says the match-maker. "What do you mean, good-looking!" retorts Satz and associates. "He is an Apollo!"

We say Gogol was a great satirist. What do you mean, great satirist! retorts Satz and associates. He was a revolutionary, a fighter for ideals of freedom!

If you please, Marxist criticism can get along without assistant match-makers.

LITERATURE AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE

By Mikhail Lifshitz

COMRADE LEVIN has succeeded in establishing two positive truths, namely: (1) that according to Marx the classic works of art have permanent æsthetic value; (2) that on the other hand we should not forget the class nature of every ideology. These observations are quite just, but they are so well known that their reiteration is not particularly helpful. The whole discussion concerns precisely the question of how to reconcile the two aspects of the problem in the actual historical process of art.

One of the cornerstones of Marxism is the doctrine of class struggle and the dependence of all forms of consciousness upon class interests. In past societies, ever since the decomposition of clan existence, there could be no extra-class or supra-class ideology. This is a well-known and correct thesis of Marxism. However, not everyone who accepts this thesis becomes thereby a Marxist. The doctrine of class struggle appeared long before Marx and Engels. The bourgeois scholar Helvetius wrote in the middle of the eighteenth century:

> Since the individuals comprising society must group themselves into various classes, all having different eyes and different ears with which to see and hear, it is evident that the same writer, regardless of how much genius he may have, cannot be equally agreeable to all of them, that there must be authors for all the classes [1]

At the present time there are numerous sociological schools in Europe and America which regard the class struggle as the foundation of cultural history.

Therefore, it is well to recall the following remark by Lenin:

[1] A. Helvetius. *De l'Esprit*, Discours IV, Chapter 7, *Œuvres*, Vol. II, p. 178, Paris, Briand; 1793—*Ed.*

The main point in the teaching of Marx is the class struggle. This has very often been said and written. But this is not true Out of this error, here and there, springs an opportunist distortion of Marxism, such a falsification of it as to make it acceptable to the bourgeoisie The theory of the class struggle was *not* created by Marx, but by the bourgeoisie *before* Marx and is, generally speaking, acceptable to the bourgeoisie He who recognizes *only* the class struggle is not yet a Marxist, he may be found not to have gone beyond the boundaries of bourgeois reasoning and politics To limit Marxism to the teaching of the class struggle means to curtail Marxism—to distort it, to reduce it to something which is acceptable to the bourgeoisie A Marxist is one who *extends* the acceptance of class struggle to the acceptance of the *dictatorship of the proletariat* Herein lies the deepest difference between a Marxist and an ordinary petty or big bourgeois On this touchstone it is necessary to test a *real* understanding and acceptance of Marxism [2]

All this we know, the reader may say. We know how to apply the criterion of the dictatorship of the proletariat to contemporary struggle. But what about the past ages, what about ancient and mediæval literature, what about Homer's poetry and Leonardo's painting? Is our criterion applicable to those times, when the class struggle existed but the proletariat itself did not?

It is our deep belief that no matter how far back we are taken by the science of history, the distinction between the Marxist and the ordinary sociologist remains essentially the same, and the criterion for determining this distinction also remains the same. The dictatorship of the proletariat was prepared by long and stubborn struggle of the masses, by struggle which has its origin in social inequality and which constitutes the main content of all class struggle. In contradistinction to the sociologist, the Marxist must trace the movement towards the proletarian revolution and socialist ideology through the entire history of world culture; he must bring out at each epoch that progressive maximum of social thought which reflects the living conditions of the oppressed

[2] V. I. Lenin *State and Revolution*, p 80, New York International Publishers: 1935—*Ed*

classes ; he must find those features which, at the *given* period, distinguish the progressive, democratic elements of culture from the elements of reaction and defense of exploitation of man by man. Any interpretation of classes which distracts us from this fundamental content of history leads us away from Marxism.

Consider, for example, a comparatively recent date, the beginning of the sixties. Menshevist historians of that period announce the triumphant march of capitalism, with young, healthy, progressive bourgeoisie. The Marxist analyzes the concept of progress according to his criterion: he marks the distinction between progress on the part of liberal landowners and progress of another variety, *bourgeois* in its content but incomparably more *democratic* and useful to the masses.

Contemporary vulgar sociology has somehow assimilated this distinction as applied to the period of the new grouping of liberal and democratic tendencies, the period of Kavelin and Chernishevsky. But what about all the preceding history of literature, when Pushkin and Gogol, Lessing and Diderot, Shakespeare and Cervantes wrote their works, when democracy did not exist in literature?

Professor Nusinov concedes that it is important to clarify the role of the masses in art and literature of the past, but in doing so he arrives at a conclusion which we already know. Pushkin and Gogol are predecessors of Kavelin, Struve, Schepetev, etc.—that is, defenders of interests inimical to the masses. This conclusion is a common one. Not only are the limitations of the great writers of the past attributed to the greed of exploiting classes (which is not always just), but the merits of these writers, even their profound and passionate protests against contemporary social conditions, are regarded as concealed, disguised—consciously or unconsciously—selfishness.

The most valuable progressive-critical elements of old literature vulgar sociology interprets as "class

self-criticism" produced by a realization of its defects and aimed at a restoration of its dominance. As we already know, Nusinov, Krapchenko and Levin interpret Gogol's *Dead Souls* as an attempt to consolidate the exploitation of the serf.[3] They consider Gogol's tragedy to be that contrary to his intentions, he lent aid by his sharp criticism to the enemies of his class (that is, the revolutionary democrats).

Professor Mokulsky asks an interesting question: What is the origin of Moliere's criticism of the ignorant physicians of his time? But immediately he finds a suitable answer: "In warning against physicians, Moliere was actually protecting the interests of his class, he was worried about its 'social hygiene.'"[4]

All these historians of literature agree upon one point: they are quite eloquent when it comes to interpreting the writer's every step as an artistic sublimation of the narrow, special interests of his social group. But when it comes to explaining the social and æsthetic value of Shakespeare or Pushkin they can only repeat platitudes. In this connection, every reader has the right to declare: If your application of materialism to the history of literature is correct, then the æsthetic value of artistic literature must wither away with the downfall of the propertied classes. On the other hand, if Pushkin and Shakespeare do not perish in the period of socialism, but on the contrary become for the first time accessible to the masses, then your interpretation of historical materialism is unable to explain what is *most important* in Pushkin and Shakespeare—that is to say, their world-historical significance.

Being engaged in the search for the golden mean, Levin would not dispute such a statement of the

[3] In his article "The Essence of the Controversy" Levin abandoned his original position.

[4] S. Mokulsky: Introduction to Moliere's *Works*, Vol. I, p. 78, Russian ed., Leningrad Academia 1933.

question. He insists only on a historical approach to the problem. The aristocracy and the bourgeoisie were not merely parasitic classes. They performed a certain progressive function, they directed social affairs. That is why these classes were able to create permanent artistic values. "The struggle between the bourgeoisie and the nobility," Levin informs us, "involved more than the booty, it determined the mould in which the progressive development of mankind was to proceed."

Of course the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the nobility involved more than the booty; yet everyone who disregards the "progressive development of mankind" transforms the class struggle into a nonsensical conflict of egoistic social groups. And that is what Levin himself does when he attempts to confirm his argument with an example. For why does he arrive at vulgar sociology in fact while renouncing it in words? Surely because his understanding of progress is abstract and quite distant from Marxism.

The Russian bourgeoisie fought the aristocracy for years in order to secure the right to own serfs. Did this struggle involve the "progressive development of mankind?" Hardly so. It is ridiculous to deny that this struggle between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy frequently took on the character of a conflict between two privileged classes. Such, for instance, were the continual quarrels in eighteenth century England between the landowning aristocracy and the bourgeois oligarchy of the Whigs. It was a struggle which completely disregarded the influence of the people upon political affairs. The populism of Swift consisted precisely in that he, despite all his conservative-ecclesiastic prejudices, satirized both struggling sides, calling them "Sharp-edgers" and "Blunt-edgers," the two parties quarrelling about the side on which the egg should be broken.

The "progressive development of mankind" assumes various forms. The British bourgeoisie, having allied itself with a part of the nobility against the people, chose one way of progress. The French bourgeoisie, having allied itself with the masses against aristocracy, chose another way of progress. And now let us examine its consequences for the history of culture. British enlightenment of the eighteenth century was moderate and conservative. What a contrast to the Shakespearean epoch, when the spirit of compromise vested in temperate piety had not yet been established in English literature! Even the great realists of the eighteenth century, Fielding and Smollett, lack the courage of thought of Voltaire and Diderot.

We find an entirely different thing in France. The remarkable qualities of French literature of the eighteenth century are well-known. But let us first quote the following important remark of Marx: "Nothing did more to retard the French bourgeoisie in their victory than the fact that they did not decide until 1789 to make common cause with the peasants."[5]

As a matter of fact, two centuries before the French Revolution, at the time the Estates General assembled at Blois, peasant masses were already rising against the king and landowners. Even then the bourgeoisie could think of the "common cause." But, having made an agreement with the king's government, it stepped aside and betrayed the peasantry. As a result, French history attained the classical age of absolutism, a period of enormous oppression, a period of the deterioration of the popular culture of the Renaissance, a period of metaphysical narrowness in philosophy and servile pseudo-classicism in art. The French bourgeoisie of the seventeenth century, stagnant in its provincial stupidity and interested only in its class privileges, was far from playing a leading role in the

[5] Marx letter to Engels, July 27, 1854. Marx-Engels *Selected Correspondence*, p. 72, New York International Publishers. 1936 [new ed.]—*Ed.*

development of culture. The center of cultural life was for a long time the king's court and a narrow circle of educated aristocrats.

We do not deny the relative progressiveness, historically speaking, of such writers as Racine and Boileau. They did not succeed in isolating themselves completely "from the roots, from the soil, from the people." Boileau urged the study of not only "the court" but of "the town" as well; he fought against excessive subtlety of language, just as Malherbe before him had instructed writers to learn the French language from the street-porters of Port-au-Foin.[6]

However, there is progress and progress. The Renaissance created the possibility of a profoundly popular art; but the reaction of the seventeenth century isolated art from the people's life, transformed the artist into a courtier, a pensionary of the royal and princely power. Sculpture degenerated into the fanciful pathetics of Bernini, and literature into the polite emptiness of the pastoral Were it not for Moliere and La Fontaine, who transplanted the plebeian legacy of the Renaissance, with its genuine popular humour, into the seventeenth century, there would be little left of French literature of that period.

Neither do we deny the relative progressiveness, historically speaking, of absolutism. However, the struggle of the townspeople and peasants against the royal power of the sixteenth century was even more progressive. If it were not for the resistance of oppressed classes, the path of the "progressive development of mankind" might be even more tortuous and painful. The masses exerted considerable pressure upon kingly politics; and it is here that we must look for the mainspring of progress. Changes of dynasties, usurpations of the throne, so frequent in history, cannot be understood apart from the development of

[6] "Les crocheteurs du Port-au-Foin sont nos maitres en fait de language."—*Ed.*

mass movements. "A poor law makes the king good," says an old English proverb. When the peasantry and the democratic bourgeoisie demanded of King Henry III, the last of the Valois, that he introduce reforms of the administration, courts and taxes, he invariably replied: "It cannot be done." Another Henry, the first of the Bourbons, declared that something can be done about demands of the people. He took the French throne, under the name of Henry IV, and legends glorify the king who wished that every peasant could have a chicken on Sunday.[7]

Tyrannies of antiquity and of the Renaissance, the Tudor dynasty, idealized by Shakespeare, the formation of a centralized monarchy in Europe—all these facts are merely *by-products* of the contradictory yet real movement from below.

The real essence of progress in those epochs lay in the masses' steps towards liberation. "All the revolutionary elements formed under the surface of feudalism," wrote Engels, "gravitated toward the royal power, just as the latter gravitated toward them." This does not mean that monarchy was fundamentally revolutionary. It remained essentially the power of landowners; but having won a decisive victory, it "enslaved and impoverished its ally." At the same time, absolute monarchy lost its progressive significance. In the eighteenth century there begins another powerful popular movement headed by the bourgeoisie. Together with the rise of bourgeois democracy comes the bourgeois enlightenment, apparently a renaissance of philosophical materialism and realistic æsthetics.

"The strength of the national movement," we read in Stalin's classic work *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*, "is determined by the degree to which the wide strata of the nation, the proletariat and

[7] "Je veux qu'il n'y ait si pauvre en mon royaume qu'il n'ait tous les dimanches sa poule au pot"—*Ed.*

the peasantry participate in it."[8] Even when the people keep silent, while only the men of property talk and move on the foreground of history, nevertheless the mute but powerful influence of the masses constantly makes itself felt! "The oppressed classes built contemporary nationalities," said Engels in his analysis of European history.

Thus, *the progressive development of mankind is measured by the degree to which it affects wide strata of the nation.* "The thoroughness of historical action" is in direct proportion to the "volume of the masses" participating in it The aristocracy and the bourgeoisie become progressive classes only when their activities coincide, directly or indirectly, with the interests of the people. In all other instances, the struggle between them is just a quarrel over booty, while they themselves remain *merely two parasitic classes.*

True enough, there was a time when the bourgeoisie managed social affairs and was a progressive class. With an energy deserving of all respect it pushed forward the development of productive forces. But what kind of process was it? Actual history declares that in the development of productive forces the pressure of the oppressed classes played a vital role. Everyone who has studied the economic theory of Marx knows that at the beginning of its career the bourgeoisie left the technical level of production practically without change. And even later, when the workers' resistance was negligible, the capitalists preferred to make profits by prolonging the working day and cutting wages (that is, by getting the absolute surplus value). Only the pressure from below helped the bourgeoisie to enter the progressive road of technical development.

[8]Joseph Stalin *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*, p. 15, New York International Publishers n.d. (Marxist Library, Vol. 38)—*Ed.*

Recall how Lenin explained to Gorky the Marxist attitude toward the colonial question. The penetration of capitalism into backward countries is progressive. There is no reason to shed tears over the destruction of the patriarchal idyl. We are by no means sentimental populists, nor are we apologists for imperialism (as are the Menshevik Economists who contribute to Bernstein's newspaper). Everybody has his way, wrote Lenin, let Liakhov conquer the Near East. We are not willing to help them; quite the contrary, we'll struggle against imperialism. And our fight will be the mainspring of progress. It will force capitalism to assume more democratic forms, it will save humanity many superfluous victims, much pain and expense.

The Marxist cannot forget that at all times the "*progressive development of mankind*" had two forms, two alternatives of progress. At certain historical periods the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie were progressive; in fact, the more progressive they were the less they defended the special interests inimical to the people; but whenever these interests appeared in their pure form, as interests of the exploiting upper strata, the spirit of the "progressive development of mankind" evaporated from all the historical activities of these classes. Moreover, the ideologists of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie who pursued only their narrow class interests could never rise to creating spiritual values of permanent significance. Great and really progressive victories could be won only by those writers who defended the interests of the "progressive development of mankind" in its most advanced forms and who fought for the interests of their own class only when these interests were in agreement with progressive development. Even so, many of the better artists erred and sought salvation in the socialism of priests and landowner; this was the case with Gogol, who tried to combine monarchism with certain elements of Fourier's doctrine; this was also the case with Balzac. This attitude made them defenders of

reaction and turned them back to the starting point, thus magnifying the class limitations of their works. But the roots remained sound. Gogol could not be confused by publicists of Count Uvaroff's type; nor Balzac by ideologists of royalism, such as he described, for instance, in *Lost Illusions.*

Having uttered a few current sociological truths, Levin fails to contribute to the solution of our problem; quite the contrary, he confuses it. Let us take a simple example. Who managed social affairs in the period of Pushkin and Gogol? Aristocrats and landowners, headed by Nicholas I and his collaborators, Count Kankrin, finance minister, General Kisselev, minister of state property, and others. It would be historically false to portray these persons as either non-entities or moral monsters. It is possible that they were subjectively honest. It is possible that, in striving to preserve the landowners' system, they were thinking of the welfare of the people. Nor do we deny the existence of some progressive elements in their historical activities. They appointed guardians over the wildest of landowners; they even confiscated the estates of such persons. For instance, Nicholas I put on trial before a court of law the well-known reactionaries Magnitsky and Runich. Fearful of a general peasant uprising, the government of "capitalist landowners" issued a number of edicts dealing with the peasant question ("inventory rules," etc.), including the famous order of Kisselev concerning the Danube peasants, which, as Marx remarked, satisfied not only the nobles but also the liberal cretins of all Europe.

It is easy to see in all this "managing" a premonition of the liberal-serfdom reform of 1861. But even that reform should not be regarded as purely reactionary. We should not forget that even in the first half of the nineteenth century there were men in Russia who fought for more democratic forms of the "progressive development of mankind." Among them

were the Decembrists and also Pushkin, who was, in our opinion, the founder of the "Gogol period of Russian literature." On the extreme left wing of progressive social thought stood Belinsky, a direct predecessor of the democrats of the sixties. All these people were separated from the landowners—that is, the men managing the social affairs of the period—by a line that was quite definite, vague as it may have seemed to each individual in question. The existence of this line was not perceived at times, even by the creators of the best literature of the nineteenth century, for indeed the line was historically relative. Nevertheless, it had an objective existence. Despite their class limitations, Pushkin and Gogol were essentially the precursors of Nekrasov and Saltykov-Shchedrin rather than Kavelin and Fet.

Vulgar sociology erases the most important line separating progressive social thinkers from ideologists of exploitation The historians of the Pokrovsky school describe the Decembrists as defenders of the "Prussian way" of Russian development. The historians of literature portray Pushkin as a "capitalist landowner," even more moderate in his convictions than the Decembrists, whereas Gogol is called an ideologist of propertied reformers, of General Kiselev's type. Dialecticians of Levin's type arrive at these conclusions on the ground that the exploiting classes were, on the whole, progressive.

It is clear that this is none other than the dialectics of Dr. Pangloss, who believed that even the Holy Inquisition and syphilis are good, since they are products of history. Everything is progressive in its own time. Similar logic is used by our sociologists, who derive their interpretation of progress from old Social-Democratic pamphlets. "Class interests," writes Levin, "are neither a crime nor short-sightedness, but reality—a fact. . . . Are not class opinions blindness rather than class vision?" In two long articles our

dialectician strives to prove that the distinction between "vision" and "blindness," between the conquests of progressive social thought and the defense of class short-sightedness on the part of the propertied people, exists only in our day. To attribute this distinction to the days when the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy controlled social affairs is, according to Levin, to be unfaithful to dialectics, to transfer modern concepts into the past, etc. What curious dialectics! It seems that there were no class prejudices in the past, that there was no difference between genuine creators of culture and persons who expressed in their writings *merely* "short-sightedness," *merely* the "blindness" of their class. Confusing dialectics with sophistry, Levin fails to comprehend that short-sightedness, blindness and crime are *facts* that played a tremendous role in past history. Even the formation of class society was, as Engels said, "a sinful retreat from the moral heights of ancient clan existence" The negative aspects of class society are no doubt inseparable from the progressive development of mankind at that period. "Even the lowest instincts—vicious greed, pursuit of raw pleasures, disgusting avidity, and predatory appropriation of communal property"—even these traits described by Engels—were a tool of progress in ancient history. But it does not by any means follow that a Marxist historian should take a position beyond good and evil, or that a historical point of view discards all distinctions between the progressive ideals of the best representatives of past cultures and the defense of property interests—that is, between "vision" and "blindness" at *each given epoch.*

We have a special *criterion* to evaluate various "facts." Vulgar sociology has an entirely different idea of progress. It does not recognize the existence of the "progressive development of mankind" toward socialism. In speaking of the progressiveness of some class, vulgar sociologists admire the strength and health of red-cheeked, muscular beasts. "The healthy

bourgeoisie," they repeat with gusto . . . "the young bourgeoisie." "A strong class is realistic," announces Nusinov. This kind of diagnostics (as laid down by a Western representative of the movement, Karl Mannheim) is more like a new cult of strength than revolutionary Marxism. Vulgar sociology endows each progressive class with toilet optimism, in the style of Babichev.[9] It discovers that any one who "controls" deserves respect. Yet these persons, who pass unquestioned rather transparent analogies between the progressiveness of the working class controlling social affairs after the socialist revolution and the progressiveness of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie in past history, these woeful Marxists raise cain when told that everything great and progressive in old culture had deep popular roots. You transfer the socialist conception of plebeianism into the period of the Renaissance! declare thinkers of the type of Levin and Roshkoff.

Calm yourselves, gentlemen! We understand perfectly well that socialist society creates for the first time a broad popular base for creative art. However, we also know that socialist culture is "an out-growth of that store of knowledge which humanity prepared *under the oppression* of capitalist society, landowners' society, bureaucratic society" The source of the artistic attainments of the best representatives of old culture should be sought not in their support of this oppression, even though it was historically necessary and conditioned, but in their participation in the historical process of liberation from patriarchal and civilized limitations.

Those who disagree should try to prove that the bourgeoisie created the highest artistic values precisely at the period when it had attained fullest "control" of social affairs, when its interests were

[9] Ivan Babichev is a character in Yuri Olesha's novel *Envy*—*Ed.*

fully isolated from the interests of the people. They must also prove that the Roman slaveholders *created* better art than the art of Greece, where slavery never attained the same development as in Rome.

This controversy has old roots. Once upon a time Belinsky, following the abstract, Hegelian interpretation of progress, exclaimed: Stop blaming Omar for burning the library of Alexandria, stop condemning the Inquisition for its atrocities! It was historically necessary; it was real, and, hence, progressive and rational!

Indeed, replied Herzen afterwards, Czarism, too, is historically necessary, it is real and, hence, to some extent, rational. However, the struggle against Czarism is also real and, hence, rational. So distinguish between two sides of historical reality, between two lines of the "progressive development of mankind." Of this our sociologists, who so enjoy accusing their opponents of Hegelianism should be reminded

VULGAR SOCIOLOGY AND METAPHYSICS

By Mark Rosenthal

CRITICAL realism presents a very important phenomenon in the history of literature, for it expresses in the most glaring form the whole complexity and contradictory nature of literary development in exploiting societies

We find critical realism quite widespread throughout the entire literature of the nineteenth century. It is a known fact that the great realist writers were as a rule critical realists Gorky used to say that only second-rate writers sang the praises of the feudal order and the capitalist system. The real artists, on the other hand, were the prodigal sons of their class. It was impossible for them not to have a critical attitude toward the ideas and affairs of their class. Suffice it to cite Pushkin, Griboyedov, Balzac, Flaubert, and Tolstoy.

What social role did the critical realists play? What social tendencies did their works express? What method shall we employ in developing a social analysis of their art? Let us see how these questions are answered, first from the point of view of Marxism, and then from that of vulgar sociology.

We shall begin with the question of the methodological principles employed in the investigation of ideological phenomena, particularly literature.

What, indeed, are the fundamental principles of the Marxist-Leninist theory of cognition and what is the basis of the "theory" of cognition of vulgar sociology? And how do these theories tie up with the social analysis of literature?

The Marxist-Leninist theory of cognition proceeds from a basic principle of materialism; namely, that consciousness and ideas are reflections of reality. However, consciousness, in reflecting reality, is by no means passive. Consciousness and thought are *active* in the process of cognition, and the reflection of reality in human consciousness constitutes a very complex and contradictory process.

We shall not discuss here consciousness as it operates in a class society; we shall not speak of class ideologies: these are rather trite matters. For our purpose it is important to emphasize that the theory of reflection calls for a certain methodological approach to the various phases of ideology.

Every kind of ideology is a reflection of reality, an interpretation of reality, but it is not a dead, straight-line reflection. Religion is also a reflection of reality, but it is a false, fantastic reflection, one that distorts reality. So it is with idealism: it too reflects and interprets objective reality, nothing else—but it reflects it in its own way, by distorting it, by standing it on its head. Hence the conclusion that to understand that

which is peculiar to a given ideology or theory, to understand what is specific to it; to grasp its epistemological and social roots—it is necessary to place that theory alongside social reality.

Only by placing actual social reality, with its classes and class interests, side by side with the ideological reflection of that reality, will we be able to determine the complete meaning of any given ideology and the role it plays in the class struggle. This is precisely the methodological principle of investigation that is dictated by the Marxist-Leninist theory of cognition.

In fact, it was this very principle that Marx used as a basis in defining the inter-relation between the political and literary representatives of a given class and the class itself, when he said it is not absolutely necessary for an ideologist from the petty bourgeoisie to be a shopkeeper himself or to have any ties with shopkeepers. What makes him a representative of the petty bourgeoisie is the fact that in his way of thinking, in his consciousness, he does not go beyond the boundaries set for the shopkeeper by his prosaic practice.

Now let us see what are the principles that are dictated by vulgar sociology. To begin with, vulgar sociology does not proceed from the postulate that ideology is a reflection—a very definite reflection—of reality. On the contrary, it is based on a denial of the Leninist theory of reflection.

If we are to accept the theory that only those writers are to be considered gifted who are able to present a profound portrayal of reality as seen by their class—and only by their class—then everything will at once be turned upside down. For according to such a standard, the artistic quality and importance of a given work would be measured not by the degree to which artistically it reflects reality, not by its depth of understanding and its power of penetration into reality, but

by the ideologist's loyalty to his class, regardless of all else. From this theory emanate certain methodological principles of approach to ideological phenomena that are altogether subjective and arbitrary, and that preclude every possibility of a truly objective, scientific analysis.

What are these methodological principles, and to what conclusions do they lead? According to these principles, the study of a literary work should begin not with an analysis of reality and a tracing of its tendencies, its development and (in a class society) the role played by each class, together with an analysis of the attitude toward reality expressed in the given work of art. No. Such an approach is foreign to the vulgar sociologists. With them the investigation of a literary work is based upon an analysis of the relationship between that work and the ideology of the class to which our sociologists may see fit to "attach" the author. This is their *first principle.*

Their *second principle* An author is bound to his class, and he can only depict reality from the point of view of his class. This thesis is looked upon as the highest achievement of modern thought. Should an artist in his development begin to stray away from his class (which is altogether impossible from the point of view of vulgar sociology), he ceases to be a gifted portrayer of reality and becomes a chimerical anomaly.

Nevertheless, the facts cry out against such "principles," for it happens that writers belonging to the nobility often created works which played a considerable revolutionary role and served as inspiration for the revolutionary classes. To explain such cases, vulgar sociology rushes in with its *third principle,* which proclaims that a work of art which by its "genesis" and ideology is thoroughly reactionary, may by the "dialectic" of social development fulfil a revolutionary "function."

Thus armed with their militant principles our vulgar sociologists play havoc with the history of literature and with the great writers of the world.

It is easy to see the tremendous gap between the Marxist principles of literary analysis and those advanced by vulgar sociology.

The Marxist method retains freedom of analysis and offers the fullest opportunity to perceive the whole complexity of the development of literature, to trace the unevenness of this development, and to understand all of its specific laws.

The method of vulgar sociology, on the other hand, fetters analysis from the very outset. It makes investigation subjective and arbitrary, it tramples upon reality, and presents, instead of an actual history of literature, an illusory conception of it.

Now we can return to the question of critical realism and test the force and correctness of the general methodological postulates by concrete application to literature.

Why was the realism of the greatest writers a profoundly critical realism? This is a broad and very complex question, too broad in fact, for a detailed analysis within the limits of a brief article. We shall endeavour, however, to give a general answer to this question. To begin with, let us inquire why Marx (and Hegel before him, although in an abstract way) very justifiably pointed out that the capitalist mode of production is inimical to art and poetry. Even in the period when the bourgeoisie was carrying out the enormous tasks of destroying mediæval feudalism it had to come forward not in its own image, but as representatives of the entire third estate. Not by accident did the ideologists of the bourgeoisie plead its interests and depict its struggle by drawing analogies from wholly different epochs. Recall what Marx had to say about bourgeois revolutionists who had to cloak themselves in the togas of Roman heroes.

Is it an accident that great works expressing the tremendous historical change that was taking place in the interests of the bourgeoisie were built around material furnished by folklore, by the sagas and oral creations of the people's genius? And what shall we say of the bourgeoisie and of bourgeois relations when capitalism flourishes?

This period is very favourable to the development of technology and the technical sciences, but it is not very conducive to the development of poetry. The bourgeoisie cannot increase its wealth without developing technology and the sciences connected with technology. Yet the system developed by capitalism, the relations between men under capitalism, and capitalism's effect upon men do not inspire outbursts of poetry in praise of the system. A profoundly realistic portrayal of capitalist relations by a great writer cannot but be a critical portrayal, just as a great poet cannot endorse the system in terms of poetical creation. A profoundly realistic portrayal of reality must inevitably become critical—whether the author so desires or not. Such a work may be circumscribed in various ways; it may not reach its full artistic value, yet it cannot but be critical.

Gogol, for instance, like a true artist, gave faithful, sincere pictures of the landowning society of his time; he created artistic images of the people living in that society. How could he fail to see the baseness and vileness of the Korobochkas, the Sobakeviches? How could he, great artist that he was, despite all his prejudices and false theoretical notions, have refrained from rebelling against the life dominated by men with foul, inhuman instincts? Could the realism of Gogol have been anything but critical realism?

Flaubert, who was an adherent and champion of the bourgeois system, depicted bourgeois reality with the precision of a naturalist whenever he rose against some of the distasteful manifestations of that system.

Could Flaubert's realism have been anything but critical realism?

It is a noteworthy and important fact that almost all the extensive realistic literature of the nineteenth century bears the imprint of dis-approbation, skepticism and poignant searching for a positive hero. Gogol, for instance, in one of his letters wrote:

> It will also become clear to you why I have not presented my reader with consoling situations and why I have not picked for my heroes decent people They are not to be invented in the head

And when Gogol did try to "invent" a positive landowner, nothing came of it. He could not go against himself as an artist; he could not be insincere enough to create invented heroes. And so Gogol went on depicting the Manilovs, the Nozdrevs, the Korobochkas, whom he hated, and whom he portrayed with the whole force of his passion, with the whole power of his heart At the same time, Gogol, partly because of his class bias and partly because of other reasons, failed to see and did not wish to see the new characters who had arrived on the historical scene.

All these facts reveal the deep contradictions inherent in the development of art in the past. It is therefore not surprising that the investigation of concrete facts in the history of literature may lead to highly paradoxical conclusions.

What then is the social role of these writers, and what are the ideas behind their art? With full justification and with absolute scientific objectivity, Marxism seeks the answer in the *actual content* of their art. The theory of the class struggle demands an investigation of the concrete facts and their place among other sets of facts, and of their role in the class struggle, according to their actual content.

Belinsky and Chernishevsky justly discerned in Gogol's *Dead Souls* and *The Inspector-General* a strong opposition to the prevailing order and a call to fight against it. Not by accident did Lenin write abou

these ideas of Belinsky and Chernishevsky. With all this Gogol was a writer from the nobility in the same sense that the founder of Russian populist socialism was a revolutionist of the nobility, that is, in the sense that his conception of the methods by which the existing order was to be improved and changed, his conception of the social forces capable of bringing about that change, was narrowed by patrician limitations.

Is this a contradiction? No doubt it is; but it is the same contradiction that we find, in a different form, perhaps, in Ricardo, in the naturalists of the school of spontaneous materialism, and in many artists whose creative work was done under the conditions of an exploiting system.

At this point our vulgar sociologists, scenting the odour of contradictions, an odour too heavy for their delicate nostrils, mobilize all the artillery at their command. They invoke the aid of their rationalized principles and embark upon an "analysis" reminiscent of bloodletting, by which they debilitate the great writers. This is how our homegrown dogmatists arrive at politically harmful conclusions, of which the following gems are examples: Pushkin was a Czarist flunkey; Gogol's ideas have nothing in common with ideas of Belinsky: the works of Ostrovsky in their entirety are nothing but a hymn to Moscow's shopkeepers, and Dobrolyubov was grievously at fault in his highly gifted essays on Ostrovsky.

How do they arrive at these conclusions? Very simply.

Writing without inventing, Gogol portrayed reality in a light far different from that in which his class saw it. But the reader will recall that the method of vulgar sociology prescribes that the writer's creation be identified with the ideology of the class which he must inevitably express. Thus the vulgar sociologists arrive at their conclusions counter to all reality. They tell the writer, in effect:

> Turn and twist as you may, you are a landowner, and all your writings are merely so much defence of the feudal order.

This is why Pereverzev, in his time, declared that Gogol's heroes are none but Gogol himself, a member of the small-scale landed gentry incarnated in literary images. This is why V. Desnitsky looks upon Gogol as the champion of feudalism rehabilitated, as the ideologist of the noble gentry. This is why M. Krapchenko thinks that the sum total of Gogol's creative work resolves itself into an endeavour to defend and revive feudalism, and that Gogol's tragedy was that reality proved to him the utter futility of his aims. True enough Krapchenko admits that the "function" of Gogol's works was to play a revolutionary role. This is the only "extreme" and "left" conclusion at which the representatives of vulgar sociology are capable of arriving, the gist of it being that Gogol's works, for instance, could play a revolutionary role "by virtue of the living dialectics of history and the actual inter-relation of class forces." In other words, the "genesis" of Gogol's works is to be considered reactionary, but because of their "function" they are to be looked upon as revolutionary.

This separation of an author's creative work into "genesis" and "function" flows from the inner requirements of vulgar sociology, and it is obviously one of a thousand petty methods employed by vulgar sociology. Krapchenko in his books on Gogol says:

> The contradiction between genesis and function appears most clearly when we analyze the literary activity of this remarkable master

Let us analyze this. Gogol, as the author points out elsewhere, was the "champion of a renewed feudalism," and all his works are permeated with a desire to defend the feudal system. And Krapchenko goes to say:

> The sharp inner conflict of Gogol's artistic development lay in the fact that in his endeavours to defend the principles of feudal society he objectively inflicted devastating blows upon the whole old order by laying bare its social "ulcers."

Hence the ideas behind *Dead Souls* and *The Inspector-General* are ideas of renewed feudalism, only they are expressed in the form of sharp "self-criticism" of his class. And it is to this extent only, by their "function," that Gogol's works played any revolutionary role.

If we add that Krapchenko has in mind not Gogol's theoretical conceptions but rather the ideas behind his works, then the "ulcers" of the theory of genesis and function will be "bared" completely. There is one conclusion to this whole theory: Gogol goes down in the history of literature as the representative and champion of feudalism, notwithstanding Belinsky, Chernishevsky and Lenin, who identified the ideas of Belinsky with those of Gogol.

The theory of "genesis" and "function," like vulgar sociology as a whole, is a splendid example of metaphysical thinking. Once Gogol is a writer from the nobility, his art must inevitably be that of the nobility.

This sort of methodology, applied to literature, is identical with the methodology of the Mensheviks with regard to the revolution of 1905. The Mensheviks reasoned that the revolution must and would be a bourgeois revolution, and they concluded that its motivating force could come only from the bourgeoisie. They were simply unable to understand the contradictory nature of the development of the Russian revolution. They were unable to visualize a situation in which the principal motivating force in a bourgeois-democratic revolution would be not the bourgeoisie, but the proletariat and the peasantry, under the leadership of the proletariat, who would carry out a bourgeois-democratic revolution even against the wishes of the bourgeoisie.

Lenin justly called Herzen a patrician revolutionist, yet he did not hesitate to consider Herzen the founder of Russian populist socialism. And again, Lenin fought against the dogmatic thinking of the "Left" Communists who were up in arms about the strategy

of utilizing state capitalism in the interests of socialism within the conditions of a devastated country and who maintained that state capitalism and socialism are irreconcilable contradictions. Lenin taught them a lesson in dialectical understanding of contradictions, proving that contradictions can be combined to produce some sort of cacophony, but that they can also be combined to produce complete harmony. But the "Left" Communists, however, being metaphysicians, were in mortal fear of contradictions.

Our vulgar sociologists also are in mortal fear of phenomena, dreading that they might find contradictions therein. And as if by wicked design, history goes on shoving paradoxes right under their noses.

According to the theory of the class struggle, in analyzing a writer's work, the whole historical background and the conditions in which the writer lived and worked must be fully considered; there must be a clear understanding of the basic and decisive social problems that were pressing for solution at the time: the relationship of all classes to those problems must be explored; and a concrete analysis must be made of the objective significance of the author's works and their objective relation to the basic problems of the class struggle.

This is actually the way Lenin approached Tolstoy when he wrote that the legal Russian press was "little interested in analyzing his works from the point of view of the character of the Russian revolution and its driving forces."[1] This, too, is the way Engels approached Goethe. In analyzing Goethe's works, Engels proceeded from the main, the most fundamental point—Goethe's attitude toward the German society of his time.

Otherwise what is the sense of the theory of the class struggle? The class struggle is a sharp, active weapon that enables us not only to understand the

[1] Lenin: "Leo Tolstoy, Mirror of the Russian Revolution."—*Ed.*

facts of reality, but also to determine the direction in which these facts are developing and the forces which they champion and represent. The theory of the class struggle is a guide to action. And this sharp, active theoretical weapon the vulgar sociologists have turned into a child's toy.

Vulgar sociology has not the least right nor the slightest ground to proclaim itself an adherent of the theory of the class struggle. The words "class," and "class struggle," as used in vulgar sociology, are no more than empty, meaningless conceptions which are called upon to put its material into shape and to attribute to reality the connections, the order and system, which these conceptions lack.

The reverse of this seemingly ultra-materialistic theory of vulgar sociology is the most undiluted idealism, an idealistic arbitrariness, a subjective sort of irresponsibility in treating facts—a metaphysical corpse.

Printed by H. P. Bajpai at the Krishna Press, and Published by India Publishers, Allahabad.