

of what the later stages of starvation do to the body and the soul is chilling.

Dolot's description of the cunning ways the government enforced and utilized the famine to achieve policy objectives is especially timely, for Ethiopia's Marxist dictator Mengistu is using hunger to destroy the Eritrean movement for independence in the same way Stalin used that weapon against the Ukraine. Without historical perspective, it is impossible to imagine that even Marxists could be so cruel.

Unfortunately, the fashionably concerned probably will not take the time to read Dolot's testimony. It is much easier to buy a record or a T-shirt and "show" your concern than to actually sit down and think about how to help the Ethiopians. Why worry about dead people who once were the world? cc

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IN FOCUS

The "News" From Moscow

by Henry Mason III

Richard H. Shultz and Roy Godson: *Dezinformatsia—Active Measures in Soviet Strategy*; Pergamon Brassey's; Washington.

The analysis of *dezinformatsia* here provided by Richard Shultz and Roy Godson is overloaded with scholarly paraphernalia, ranging from statistical tables of Soviet "overt propaganda themes" to an erratic glossary containing a pompous and unnecessary definition of "forgery" ("Forgery, one of many disinformation techniques, is the use of authentic-looking but false documents and communiqués"). Because of a zeal to appear "learned," the authors' style and method of presentation often get in the way of their message. Nonetheless, *Dezinformatsia* contains much valuable information about Soviet propaganda methods. Unlike some other writers in this field, Shultz and Godson properly emphasize the central importance of International Information Departments of the Communist Party's Central Committee rather than focus entirely on the KGB. The book also includes a useful analysis of Soviet manipulation of front groups to further the U.S.S.R.'s foreign policy goals.

If *Dezinformatsia* has a major substantive flaw, it is its failure to give

sufficient attention to Soviet exploitation of the non-Soviet press, which is the rhetorical technique that most immediately strikes the reader of Soviet publications. In connection with the Korean airliner outrage, for example, the Soviet countercharge of espionage was elaborately buttressed by references to Western sources ranging from the San Francisco *Examiner* to the New York Times columnist Tom Wicker (who, as one émigré commentator put it, "frequently provides Soviet newspapers with extremely useful quotations"). Similarly, a recent *Pravda* diatribe on "psychological warfare against Afghanistan" cited three separate non-Soviet sources (the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *USIA*, and the "Indian magazine *Link*") in addition to agencies of the Afghan puppet regime.

When convenient Western sources do not already exist, it is easy enough to create them, and Soviet chutzpah in this area knows no limits. A good illustration is the Soviet coverage of the assassination of Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop, who was shot to death by his thuggish comrades of the New Jewel Movement, a party inspired by the Soviet Union and its hirsute marionette, Fidel Castro. Shortly after the American liberation of the island, *Pravda* suddenly announced that Bishop had been murdered by the CIA. *Pravda's* source for this remarkable intelligence was an obscure English-language weekly located (of all places) in New Delhi.

According to *Pravda* (December 20, 1983):

The weekly magazine *New Wave* has published facts incontrovertably demonstrating that the murder of Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop was carried out by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency on orders from the White House. . . . Based on the testimony of Grenadian eyewitnesses who fled the island after its occupation, the magazine writes that the CIA succeeded in recruiting the chief of the Prime Minister's personal bodyguard and one of his subordinates, who carried out Washington's order and shot Bishop.

However, as a commentator for the Russian-language New York daily *Novoye Russkoye Slovo* noted, not only is *New Wave* too small to employ any foreign correspondents, but at the time of Bishop's murder Grenada was crawl-

ing with Soviet journalists, including a *Tass* correspondent. (Now the Soviets have issued a postage stamp to commemorate the "fortieth anniversary of the birth of Maurice Bishop, the Prime Minister of the People's Revolutionary government in Grenada, who met his death in 1983 at the hands of enemies of the Grenadian revolution.")

Though Shultz and Godson frequently sacrifice clarity for pedantry, any attempt to expose the Soviet disregard for truth can only be welcome. cc

Henry Mason III is an attorney in Chicago.

Samizdat Philistine

by Andrei Navrozov

Alexander Kaletski: *Metro*; Viking; New York; \$17.95.

The philistine is alive and well in Soviet Russia—and, like his brethren the world over, he is writing novels. It is a mistake to assume that under the conditions of totalitarianism, culture naturally separates, like oil and vinegar, into two discrete layers: the official, government layer and the subterranean, clandestine one. Instead, rather like the dressing on a tossed salad, culture under any political conditions is an emulsion that coats the living fiber of society as if it were the leafiest Bethany lettuce. Accordingly, the epithets "good" and "bad" are not synonymous with "samizdat" or "Goslitizdat"; as elsewhere in the world, the wind bloweth where it listeth. In *Metro*, billed punningly as "a novel of the Moscow underground," the wind bloweth not.

To be sure, the Soviet philistine turned novelist is not as virulent a species as his West European or American equivalent. After all, since any unofficial act is an act of dissidence, every time he takes up the pen he flirts with martyrdom; his Western confrere risks only unemployment. Still, while this makes one something less of a philistine than the other, it has little effect on either one's writing, and equally bad novels can be written in a writers' colony in San Francisco and in a penal colony in Vorkuta.

Typically, the philistine's novels contain richly varied material—comedy and tragedy, farce and drama, truth and invention. He can write about anything, in any style, because he is not

ashamed to write without genius. In *Metro*, the author describes his life and adventures; he wishes to convey that life in Russia had many unhappy, or perhaps even tragic, moments, though many of his adventures were comic. In brief, the joys and sorrows of the author's life can be described as those of love and youth; his adventures are meant to make the reader laugh at the absurdities of day-to-day existence in the Soviet capital.

Not one line in this novel is genuine literature; not one comic adventure is above the level of a scabrous anecdote, or one situation anything but an aggregation of sloppy details. Yes, the philistine is alive and well in Soviet Russia—and he is publishing in the United States. cc

Andrei Navrozov is editor of the Yale Literary Magazine and a contributing editor of Harper's.

Dead Cows & Mangled Translations

by E. Christian Kopff

Fyodor Abramov: *Two Winters and Three Summers*; Translated by Jacqueline Edwards and Mitchell Schneider; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; San Diego.

Fyodor Abramov was awarded the State Prize of the U.S.S.R. in 1975 for his trilogy of life on a rural commune, *The Pysylins*, of which *Two Winters and Three Summers* is the second volume. "Begin at the beginning, go on to the end, then stop," was the King's advice to Alice, but Harcourt Brace Jovanovich prefers to start in the middle, perhaps because Deming Brown wrote in his *Soviet Russian Literature Since Stalin*: "If *Two Winters and Three Summers* had been written by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, it would have immediately been translated in the West and proclaimed a masterpiece." Not all readers may agree.

The narrative centers on life on a rural commune in the years after World War II, when it begins to sink in that the good life Stalin promised is still not on the horizon. The protagonist, Mikhail, tries to keep his family and commune together but sees both dissolving under the pressures of grinding poverty and an equally grinding central bureaucracy. At the end of the book, one

of the few good workers is hauled away forever because he is a Christian; Mikhail's beloved sister, Liza, decides to marry a loutish jerk with good Party connections; and the family's cow dies. I know. You are smiling. But all three are tragedies of the first magnitude, although Liza's marriage does at least get them a new cow. The narrative is slow-paced and depressing, but interesting as a clear, if simple, vision of Russian life and as an example of the Russian genre of "village prose."

The translation is a disaster. The original is permeated with authentic regional peasant dialect. The translators decided to reproduce this with the corniest 1930's slang. The diction is loaded with "Kicking the bucket," "Bold as brass," "Quit blubbering," etc. This twenty-three skadoo English—false to any feeling of rural concreteness—gives the reader the irritating impression of reading the script for a Hollywood B movie—*The Dead End Kids in Russia*, with Huntz Hall as Mikhail. Authenticity is sought through the preservation of a few transliterated Russian words, e.g., *kolkhoz* and *kolkhozniki* for "commune" and "communard." The translators give us the transliteration of the Russian measure that equals two-thirds of a mile, with results "You could smell . . . a *verst* away." There are a few notes, one of which tells us what "Stakhanovite" means.

Mercifully, Abramov died in 1983, before he had to endure the sight of his masterpiece sporting the bizarre zoot suit it now wears in the United States of America. cc

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Stray Nuts & Bolts

by Peter Katopes

Jayne Anne Phillips: *Machine Dreams*; E.P. Dutton/Seymour Lawrence; New York.

Using the backdrop of a small Southern town slowly awakening to the cultural and social rumblings of the mid and late 20th century, Jayne Anne Phillips is attempting in this novel to weave the lives, dreams, and remembrances of the Hampson clan of Bellington, West Virginia, into a mythic mosaic of the sort found in Faulkner. Written with a sharp eye for detail and an ear well-tuned to language, the book nonetheless never lives up to the reader's hopes. For the

creation of a myth demands more than the illusion of significance. Myth affirms unity over fragmentation and requires an author to establish the universal importance of particular and seemingly unimportant details. *Machine Dreams* falls short of these standards.

"It's strange what you don't forget," remarks Jean Hampson as she reminisces with her daughter Danner in the opening scene. Yet not everything remembered is necessarily important, a truth which Phillips often ignores as she piles detail upon meaningless detail.

The very structure of the novel militates against any clear understanding of the theme. Phillips has chopped *Machine Dreams* into 17 sections, few of which cohere. Some of Danner's sections are clearly intended as revisions of her mother's own life story, and the letters from a son serving in Vietnam are obvious echoes of his father's earlier V-mail letters. But the book too often reads like a collection of short stories—some of them good but not integrated into a compelling whole.

Because of the title, the reader suspects that some deep meaning lies buried in the frequent dreams about machines—World War II bulldozers, cars in snowstorms, ominous airplanes. Yet it is difficult to say just what is being symbolized. Is it the mechanistic materialism of industrial America? Is it brute or brutal death? Or is it merely

MOVING?

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