

Two poems by James Reeves

Evolution of a Painter

Beneath a pastoral sky, spotted by shadows,
Only by your young, talented eye regarded,
The two farm horses stood, unkempt and useful.
Your heart approved as your deft brush recorded.
One notes the skill; surprised, one notes the love,
And pensive, calm content the scene afforded.

For that was forty years ago, since when
The stoical farm beast has been abolished.
Not so your art, though now the patrons call
For something more expensive and embellished.
Proudly your valuable racers prance
Over the emerald turf, well combed and polished.

We need not twist our mouths with scorn to see
A pretty talent gone corrupt and hard.
Better than you have sold out for champagne.
Enough to know there is, where few regard,
The evidence of your compassion once,
In that ill-lit provincial gallery stored.

Traditional

Strenuously downstream with muscles flexed,
See how he manages his sleek canoe.
All on the banks appraise
The style, the masterful technique, the resolute gaze.
“There is a man who will,” they say, “arrive.”
Down the main stream, dead centre, see him strive.

We in our slothful punts keep to the shallows.
We hug the bank and watch the moorhens ride.
No trophy and no race
Seduce us from our talk and this unhurried pace.
May all such muscular candidates prefer
The main stream, leaving us the backwater.

FROM THE OTHER SHORE

Russia's Exigent Intellectuals

A Eulogy and a Warning

THE CONTEMPORARY FERMENT in Russian intellectual and artistic life is so well known that the fact of its existence requires no demonstration. Once the province of the specialist, it has now come within the range of the average well-informed layman. Whereas a few years ago it was customary to search for clues to Soviet politics in personnel shifts of the Central Committee or even in the arrangement of the leaders atop Lenin's mausoleum during the May Day parades, to-day one wants to know what Khrushchev thinks of dodecaphonic music or what the censors have done to the latest instalment of Ehrenburg's memoirs. And when the poet Evtushenko, whose first visit to America in 1961 had passed quite unnoticed, makes the cover of *Time*, we can be certain that Soviet literature has arrived.

But what is the significance of this ferment? What are its sources, motives, issues, and long-term aesthetic and political implications? These questions are more difficult to answer. Of course, our instinct is to approve of the ferment and to rejoice at every victory won by the intellectuals over the bureaucrats. But we are often carried away and translate our spontaneous reaction to something we approve of into political prognostications. We like to interpret any manifestation of libertarian tendencies as an indication of the growth of liberty itself. That such procedure cannot be justified on logical grounds requires no elaboration. The reassertion of man's desire for freedom despite constant efforts to destroy freedom does not mean that freedom will win; at best it suggests that the desire for it is indestructible. We have to be extremely careful in interpreting such phenomena as the intellectual ferment in present-day Soviet Russia, lest by some mental sleight-of-hand we draw entirely unwarranted conclusions from the available evidence.

RICHARD PIPES is a well-known American scholar in the field of Russian studies. He is the author of a book on Soviet nationalities and a study of Karamzin, the Russian historian. He is one of the few Westerners to be invited to lecture at a Soviet university, and his lectures on Russian intellectual history were well-attended and very controversial. He is professor of history at Harvard and associate director of Harvard's Russian Research Centre.

THE RUSSIAN INTELLECTUAL has been traditionally involved in the country's political life. Indeed, concern for political questions most broadly conceived, so as to include social relations and economics, has been the hallmark of the Russian intelligentsia. In this respect the writers and artists who to-day engage (to an extent unknown in the contemporary West) in Soviet political life are merely following an old and established pattern. The cause of this involvement must be sought in the peculiar relationship established in Russia long ago between state and society. Three factors—the vastness of the territory under Russian dominion; the vulnerability of the long and open Asiatic frontier; and the poverty of the human and natural resources at the country's disposal—have contributed to shape the character of Russian statehood, the main outlines of which are clearly discernible also underneath the façade of Communism. Broadly speaking, the Russian state has developed more rapidly and more solidly than Russian society, and has tended to assume an extraordinarily active role in directing national life. At certain periods, as under Peter the Great and the Communist dictatorship, the Russian State has succeeded in combining the omnipotence of an Eastern despotism with the purposefulness of a Western democracy, producing a dynamism, a singleminded drive towards a pre-set goal for which it is difficult to find an historic parallel. Society, on the other hand, tended to be passive, and to let itself be harnessed by the government in the pursuit of these state-determined ends. The system of government of the Moscow period known as *tiagloe gosudarstvo*, the rigid estate structure of the imperial period based on Peter's Table of Ranks, and the Communist system of one-party rule have this one feature in common, that in all of them the status of social groups and individual subjects is determined by the needs of the state. Or, to put it in other words, that the criterion of social status is not *rights* but *obligations*. Under this arrangement, the rights of the subjects are viewed as instruments of state power, and last only as long as the state finds them useful. Such a system of government has permitted Russia to weather many serious challenges, and eventually to emerge as the greatest power in Eastern Europe.

BUT THE TRIUMPH was bought at a heavy price. It prevented Russian society from developing that sense of civic responsibility and involvement which a healthy body politic requires, and which can derive only from active participation in political affairs. Insecure in their position, and dependent on the state for benefits and privileges, social groups in Russia always have preferred to concentrate their attention on immediate social and economic gains, conceding the conduct of national politics to the autocratic sovereign. Given their precarious position, the paucity of firmly grounded legal rights, each group feared more the competition of rival groups than the whim of absolute power. This connection between the absence of firm civic rights on the one hand, and the weakness of social initiative on the other, has