

Structure of the Russian Soul

"Short Stories of Russia Today," edited by Yvonne Kapp (Houghton Mifflin, 250 pp. \$3.50), is a collection of stories written by Soviet writers during the past twenty-five years. It is reviewed by Waclaw Jedrzejewicz, former Minister of Education in Poland who is now professor of Slavic Studies at Ripon College, Wisconsin.

By Waclaw Jedrzejewicz

BEFORE World War II people traveling by train from the West to Soviet Russia had to go through Poland. The boundary between Poland and Russia bisected the station Negoreloye, and at this station one had to change trains. Travelers noticed something else than just the changing of trains: here one world ended—Europe—and another began. Asia? No, not Asia. And, yet, something quite different from Europe. The great Russian philosopher Nicolai Berdyayev wrote in his book about Dostoevsky: "It must be understood that the structure of the Russian soul is all its own and completely different from that of Westerners . . ."

In reading the collection "Short Stories of Russia Today," one gets the impression that he has passed Negoreloye and is in a completely different world. The reader finds himself in the atmosphere of social realism that till now has permeated Russia. The general editor of this collection, Yvonne Kapp, picked the majority of short stories from the period 1934-1943—the most unexciting era of Soviet literature. The stories are either not interesting, like the two by Vera Inber (a capable poet, but a poor writer of prose), or they are totally intent on Communist Party activities and leaders. All this we know by heart, and even talented people like Lavrenev and Simonov can be boring when they get repetitious about Soviet heroism in the Second World War.

But after Stalin's death there appeared in Russia a "relaxation" and the first sign of this came in Ilya Ehrenburg's book entitled "The Thaw" (1954). It was apparent even more strongly in Dudintsev's "Not by Bread Alone." Both these novels, and numerous short stories, begin to show life in Russia as it really is, where directors, political commissars, agitators on kolkhozes and factories are

not infallible heroes, but ordinary people with human frailties.

In Yvonne Kapp's collection there are, however, several stories written in 1955-1956. One reads with great satisfaction Yury Trifonov's delightful and witty "Fedor Kuzmich of the Conservatoire"—a story one can hardly associate with the author of the book "Students," written before 1950 in a socialistic-realistic vein.

In common with the Polish novelist, Marek Hlasko, who writes very openly, the Soviet writers seem to try to shun the restraints of dialectical materialism. One can see that they are trying to free themselves from the former vigilance. Varvara Karbovskaya writes in "Bondage": ". . . Shall I tell about a couple of lovers and how it turned out that she was the newly appointed director of the factory

where he was an unsatisfactory worker? We've had that ten times. Shall I tell how she, his beloved, attained high production levels while he, her beloved was still not up to . . .? I don't even want to finish thinking this to the end: we've had it a hundred times already." Thus Karbovskaya writes simply about love. And it makes a good story.

Far ahead of the other stories in quality is "Loaf Sugar," by Konstantin Paustovsky, a real masterpiece of this type of literature, full of charm and romanticism. It is a pity that Paustovsky's works have not been translated into English. The works by this capable writer are altogether too little known in this country.

I regret that "Short Stories of Russia Today" does not contain more selections of later, post-Stalin times. Because it is in the short stories that one can see the tendency and pull of Soviet writers toward freedom of thought and expression.

The valuable biographical notes enable the reader to understand more clearly some of the lesser known Russian writers.



Criminal Record



THE PORT OF LONDON MURDERS. By Josephine Bell. Macmillan. \$3.25. Death of Scotland Yard sergeant sparks search for killer that involves platoon of suspects and horde of spear-toters. Thames-side background realistic, effective, but you can't tell the players without a score card.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS HAVE I NONE. By Jack Usher. Mill-Morrow. \$2.95. Milwaukee trucking tycoon flies to cottonwood-sagebrush-jacaranda country to salvage Korean War buddy facing execution five days hence; woman kicked in stomach survives; much gunplay, general mayhem, drinking. Slam and bang.

VIOLENCE. By Cornell Woolrich. Dodd, Mead. \$2.95. Six yarns (settings include New York, rural N. Y., France, Mexico) are wrapped up in this packet of situation pieces, all handled with this author's characteristic ingenuity and power-house punch.

DEPART THIS LIFE. By E. X. Ferrars. Crime Club. \$2.95. English lawyer's death jolts younger sister (his housekeeper) and booked-for-altar daughter; Inspector Crankshaw of local cops says "everyone has secrets" and proceeds to dig out same. Wispy, emotional, out-of-the-past stuff.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DETECTIVE NOVEL. By A. E. Murch. Philosophical. \$6. Scholarly, readable study starts from scratch, then examines Victorians, includes best of contemporary school, is highly hospitable to Americans. Sound critical performance by English lady is also useful directory of practitioners.

KILL MY LOVE. By Kyle Hunt. Simon & Schuster. \$2.95. London sporting goods dealer strangles too possessive mistress; wife then a problem; crux of yarn is fifteen-year-old son; police work effective. Taut and tense.

BEACON IN THE NIGHT. By Bill S. Ballinger. Harper. \$3.50. Yank soldier of fortune scours Greek isle, Albanian coast, for mystery map; A taps B taps C, etc.; cobalt 60 absorbed deleteriously; ladies present; terminal casualties extensive. Literate noisemaker, with unusual scenery, color.

DEATH ON ALL HALLOWS. By Allan Campbell McLean. Washburn. \$2.95. Holidaying Inspector Neil MacLeod finds business awaiting him as Scotland land promoter and local servant girl perish; get ready for *ceilidh*, *skelp*, *guisers*, *slainte mhor*. Time-table job, with abundance of Q & A. Plus mark. —SERGEANT CUFF.

A Siren in Search of Serenity

"My Story: An Autobiography," by Mary Astor (Doubleday, 332 pp. \$3.95), is the account of a onetime bewitching, always bewildered woman whose escapades some years back provided gamy tabloid copy. SR's motion-picture critic Hollis Alpert here evaluates her apologia.

By Hollis Alpert

CAN a beautiful, young movie star, earning four thousand a week, find love and happiness? The answer, in Mary Astor's candid autobiography, isn't entirely negative, but any unusually attractive girl contemplating a career as movie star might well study these pages before approaching an agent. For Miss Astor's story is largely a record of turmoil and trouble. She is in her early fifties now (her own admission) and her career has been a long one, beginning with silent movies in the Twenties, and continuing into the era of sound and big screens. She has also worked on the stage and in television. By the time she was sixteen she was a featured player in movies made in the East, and at seventeen she was in Hollywood, playing leading lady to John Barrymore's Beau Brummel. The young Miss Astor promptly fell in love with the forty-year-old star, who went to great lengths to arrange trysts with his "protégée," even putting up with boring dinner and after-dinner sessions with Mary's watchful parents. The latter were not watchful enough, however, for their daughter was able to continue the romance long enough to earn her first broken heart.

She was born Lucille Langhanke, to Otto Ludwig Wilhelm Langhanke, a German immigrant, and Helen Vasconcells, who came from a Kansas farm. Exactly the right sort of stock from which movie queens are generally assumed to be made. Otto, an arrogant, ambitious fellow, according to Miss Astor's account, decided that the way to his fortune (everything else he had done had failed) was to get his daughter into the burgeoning movie industry. His methods were aggressive and shameless, and he continued to exploit his daughter until, finally, she pensioned both her parents off. Later, when she turned to psychoanalysis, she attributed some of

her emotional misfortune to the lack of warmth and love in her home atmosphere.

From her mother she learned the habit of keeping a diary, a document which was to get her more publicity than even the most brash press agent dreams of. Miss Astor explains how most of the widely quoted passages were cooked up by a man who figured in the diary and who hoped to pressure her into dropping her suit for custody of her daughter, thus keeping the diary out of evidence. It contained, she assures us, nothing so lurid as a "box score," nor did she ever address "the damned thing as 'Dear Diary.'" The suit marked the finish of her second marriage, to a doctor. Her first marriage was to Kenneth Hawks (brother of the producer Howard Hawks), and it ended tragically when he died in a plane crash. Her third was to Manuel del Campo, a good-looking chap six years her junior (she was then thirty), and her fourth was to Tommy Wheelock, an Air Force sergeant. None of the marriages proved happy, and even the first was marred by an infidelity, due, she writes, to Kenneth's coldness.

The unsuccessful marriages and unhappy love affairs were compounded by a more and more serious drinking problem, by severe illnesses, and plaguing money troubles. She tried religion, A.A., and psychoanalysis. The last helped her the most. Father Peter Ciklic, a Catholic psychiatrist, turned her towards writing as a form of therapy. "My Story" is indirectly the result. It is an affecting account of a sorely beset and bewildered



—From the book.

Mary Astor, New York, 1920—from her mother she learned to be a diarist.

woman who managed in her maturity to find some serenity and self-sufficiency. It helps to dispel that dismal myth of glamour on which Hollywood, one of the dullest *milieus* in the world, has subsisted far too long. It also happens to be written with distinct literary ability, and is thus far superior to (and better written than) the slick ghosted jobs that have been coming our way lately. Miss Astor mentions that she is turning to fiction. The prospects look excellent. She certainly has a mine of material.

Protean Prince

"One Man in His Time," by Serge Obolensky (McDowell, Obolensky, 433 pp. \$6.95), is a former Russian prince's recollections of his glamorous, panoramic life. The syndicated society reporter Igor Cassini is our reviewer.

By Igor Cassini

SERGE OBOLENSKY has already led more lives than the cat's proverbial nine. He has been, among other things, a child of the privileged class from one of the 200 princely families of pre-Bolshevik Russia; a young and successful gentleman farmer with ideas of land reform; a student at Oxford in the halcyon pre-war days of 1912; a fighting cavalryman in the Czar's crack Chevalier Guard in World War I; a guerrilla with a price on his head, engaged in a desperate undercover fight for life against Red revolutionists in the Crimea; a disguised refugee during the Red reign of terror in Moscow; an exile in Vienna and Switzerland; an adventurous farm machinery salesman in Australia; a broker's half-commission man and dashing bachelor in glamorous postwar London; a husband to one of the world's wealthiest heiresses, Alice Astor, and therefore a member of International High Society; an overage paratrooper commando behind enemy lines in World War II—and a famous promotion man-hotel executive in New York.

It appears now that Serge, the prince who traded his title for the rank of colonel, can add another item to his long list, since he has proved to be an entertaining and engrossing writer. (Though one might wish that as a man who has survived two world wars, a revolution, and several major social upheavals he had gone into some of his impressions more thoroughly and less in the slapdash manner of Elsa Maxwell.)

Still, the sheer weight and diversity of this book and its time span give