

Wolf's Fang, Fox's Tail

by Wayne Allensworth

"War is war. Guns are not just for decoration."

—V.I. Lenin

Red Victory:
A History of the Russian Civil War
by W. Bruce Lincoln
New York: Da Capo Press;
602 pp., \$18.95

By March 1920, Russia's Whites—an odd and disparate conglomeration of monarchists, anti-Bolshevik socialists, jaded liberals, reactionary clerics, frightened nobles, disinherited landowners, and loyalist army officers and soldiers—had turned what looked like certain victory over the Reds into an ignominious defeat. Disconsolate and grim, the remnants of Denikin's Russian Volunteer Army of the South loaded themselves into ships at the port of Novorossisk, bound for the Crimea, the last fragment of the once-mighty empire that remained a refuge for the Whites. Torn by dissension from within—with monarchists hating the anti-Bolshevik socialists (whom they partly blamed for the chaos that had ensued in Russia after the February 1917 revolution) as much as they hated the Reds who had successfully engineered the "Great October Revolution," and with liberals distrusting both—the Kolchak White dictatorship had collapsed in Siberia and Iudenich's motley army had disintegrated in the north. The Western Allies, disenchanted with the disarray, corruption, and incompetence of the Whites, were abandoning the struggle, gradually withdrawing support to the still-intact Army of the South. As late as 1919, the White armies, never effectively united, much less coordinated, in action, had still posed a serious threat to Soviet power in Russia. What went wrong?

Denikin, a competent tactician who had fallen prey to the Russian diseases of organizational ineptitude and ideological constriction, had handed over com-



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mand of the remaining White forces to Gen. Baron Petr Wrangel. To Wrangel fell the duty of sustaining White honor (for even he had no illusions about victory in the foreseeable future), and he saw—too late for the anti-Bolshevik cause—what had deprived the Whites of victory even as the great powers of the West irresolutely heeded Winston Churchill's adamant demands that they strangle the infant Bolshevik menace in its Russian crib.

Wrangel, of Baltic German stock, appeared immune to the romantic illusions of the White reactionaries, who actually believed that a restoration was possible, and to the dreamy republican mysticism of the liberals. He made peace with the socialists and set about patching together a program that would appeal to the masses in the age of *lumpen* democracy. "Aristocratic to the core," Wrangel "had no scruples about the strange bedfellows that politics in a democratic world brought his way." "For Russia and against the Bolsheviks," Wrangel proclaimed that he was prepared to make a pact "even with the devil." Without re-

gard to class or politics, the slim, stern aristocrat began his search for "men of strong character, who know how the masses live and how to shape their lives"—or at least their political sympathies.

He found them in Petr Struve, who had drifted from left to right in a career that had made its focus the study of all things Russian in culture and politics, and Aleksandr Krivoshein, an aging czarist statesman who would follow in the footsteps of Russia's greatest statesman of the late Empire and perhaps of any other period, Petr Stolypin. Wrangel built his White cabinet around these men and formulated a "leftist program with rightist hands" designed to "tear our enemies' principal political weapon from their hands, ignite the imagination of the army and the masses, and make a favorable impression on opinion abroad," as he later explained. Land, according to the new political sales pitch of the Whites (the old "Autocracy, Orthodoxy, and *Narodnost*," or "National Roots," trinity had long since turned to dust), would go to those who tilled it in the form of private property. Wrangel offered his Stolypinesque version of land reform as an alternative to the Bolshevik slogan of "Peace, Land, and Bread!" that had inclined the restive and land-hungry masses of a peasant country to turn a blind eye to the suppression of the pro-land reform, elected Constituent Assembly in 1918. These tended subsequently—and understandably, in view of their fear of a restorationist land repartition in the event of a White victory—to support the Reds over the Whites in the civil war that followed.

Wrangel had promised the rule of law over the terror of the Bolshevik secret police, the Cheka, or the pogroms and looting of the undisciplined armies of his predecessors. He enforced strict discipline in his revived Army of the South, rooted out incompetence, and punished corruption. Wrangel enforced unity within his White leadership and readily recruited Red Army veterans who had grown disil-

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lusioned with Bolshevik dictatorship. He did all these things and even briefly mounted a renewed assault on Soviet Russia, trying to convince his Western contacts that he was worthy of support and hoping to convert the sea of Russian peasants to White republicanism with an attractive array of slogans. He did all these things, and failed. Within a year of the evacuation to the Crimea, the White cause would be irretrievably lost, and Wrangel and a host of others would spend the rest of their lives attempting to explain, if not justify, the ineptness of a White leadership that had failed to recognize the political imperatives of the modern age.

The ideological cohesion, strict discipline, and strong leadership of Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, and company had enabled the Bolsheviks to read the epochal tea leaves correctly and organize a modern political campaign that mobilized the narrow self-interest, envy, and resentment, as well as the highest aspirations, of the atomized masses to the service of the all-knowing, all-seeing state. Mussolini, Hitler, Mao, and FDR would follow suit, as would Madison Avenue and Hollywood. The People had made their real, and final, choice.

This aspect of a previously recognized insight—leaving out FDR, if not Hollywood, from the totalitarian rogue’s gallery—is most likely the Big Point that professors of history, quite correctly, will urge their students to take from *Red Victory*. Nevertheless, judging from the text itself, if there is a single Big Point that W. Bruce Lincoln hoped his readers would glean from this book—the final volume in a trilogy that began with *In War’s Dark Shadow: The Russians Before the Great War* and continued with *Passage Through Armageddon: The Russians in War and Revolution*—this reviewer has failed to see it. Beyond a mainstream worldview that sometimes seems to let the “progressive” Bolsheviks off the hook a bit too easily and at other times may be slightly too unsympathetic to the Whites, Lincoln has no “framework” (as academics put it) for analyzing the mass of information he sets out in *Red Victory*, no readily identifiable theory of history, politics, or economics that would facilitate an intellectually rigorous examination of the causes, effects, or course of the Russian Civil War. In short, his book makes no attempt to telegraph to the reader what the Big Point is, which means there is no effort to veil liberal snobbishness in theo-

retical pretentiousness. That is not Dr. Lincoln’s forte, and he is honest enough to forego such empty posturing.

What Lincoln has given us is a highly readable and readily accessible history in narrative form that assumes his readers can think for themselves. His book allows the record, Red and White, to speak for itself, unsanitized in the interest of any discernible political agenda or on behalf of any particular academic theory. Epic in scope, *Red Victory* nevertheless is human in scale: Like a skilled novelist, Lincoln arrays a Tolstoyan cast of characters, each with a “fascinating tale” to tell, as the author writes in his preface, each one managing to illuminate the often confused events, themselves lost in a fog of war and social upheaval. Bruce Lincoln’s success in presenting this tale of sweep and high drama, of human pathos, tragedy, and low comedy in a coherent fashion that manages to cram in necessary information even as it sustains a compelling narrative force is a truly remarkable achievement.

More than anything else, *Red Victory* is a fine example of history as dramatic chronicle, displaying Man in all his glory as fallen angel and also Man as the agent of evil, as killer angel. At times, the book reads like a Russified version of a novel by Cormac McCarthy, evoking a Gnostic sense of the evil world: As the Reds tighten their grip and terrorize the peasantry, reluctant to give up grain to Cheka expropriators, the heretofore sympathetic inhabitants of the village succumb to the savagery that has become commonplace in their land, now a hellish tapestry of demonic violence.

Tambov [peasant] partisans nailed known and suspected Bolsheviks to trees, often by driving a single railroad spike through the victim’s left arm and foot and leaving him to dangle in agony a few feet above the ground . . . [the peasant partisans] maimed and mutilated their victims, flaying some, quartering others, and disemboweling still others . . . they often buried captured enemies alive, but took care to leave their victims’ heads above ground so that peasant women could urinate on them before the village dogs closed in to gnaw the still living flesh from their faces and skulls.

The Cheka, of course, had already made its reputation by skinning prisoners alive, gouging out their eyes, crucifying them, and by developing a system of concentration camps that would eventually metastasize, assuming the form of Solzhenitsyn’s Gulag Archipelago. The descent into savagery had made death the only currency, with many buying freedom by their own hand: Moscow sociologist Pitirim Sorokin recorded a series of gruesome suicides by poison, hanging, and every other conceivable means during the dreadful winter of 1919-20. The Russian “Civil War” was more than war: It was an orgy of rape, pillage, and murder, foreshadowing what was to come. “There is no point in cursing anyone,” wrote conservative historian Yuriy Gote in his Moscow diary in 1921, the year of the Reds’ final consolidation of power. “A people that has ruined itself has no right to demand anyone’s help or sympathy.” Thus did a sincere Russian patriot grimly judge his own country.

The same Yuriy Gote—and a few of his neighbors—had earlier displayed behavior that one might interpret as a sign of hope for redemption even in the depths of hell’s inner circle. Gote’s wife died during the same Moscow winter when Sorokin kept his grim accounting of death’s icy harvest. The neighbors fashioned a coffin out of “the rough remains of a garden fence,” sacrificing precious fuel so that his wife could have a Christian burial. Gote put the crude receptacle for his wife’s earthly remains on a horse-drawn sledge and drove it some 30 miles to a graveyard at Moscow’s Virgins’ Convent. Lincoln records that he carried his grim cargo to Moscow at night so as to avoid trouble: The Bolshevik bureaucrats had restricted the use of wood for such personal uses. Gote told his diary,

The moon was shining and the whole sky was sown with stars. Her last ride was in this magical setting. . . . The Revolution has devoured everything that was most dear to me There is nothing ahead but terrible loneliness and fear of hunger.

Russia had succumbed to the Bolsheviks’ skillful use of the “wolf’s fang” (the Red terror) and the “fox’s tail” (effective propaganda). The reader may judge for himself the lessons to be learned from the story Dr. Lincoln tells. c

Love and Grace

by Thomas Fleming

Una vita in fabbrica:
itinerario spirituale

by Mario Marcolla

Milano: Maurizio Minchella Editore;
101 pp., Lire 18,000



This is a remarkable book by a remarkable man. Mr. Marcolla is well known to many conservatives in Europe and the United States for his observations on modern philosophy contributed over the years to *Osservatore Romano*. He is a keen student of Anglo-American conservative thought as well as having been a friend and translator of the late Russell Kirk. Dr. Kirk and the editor of this magazine are only two of many Americans whom Marcolla has served as *cicerone* in their explorations of Italian political and intellectual life.

Despite frequent bouts of ill health, Mr. Marcolla exudes an air of benign understanding, though not complacency. What this little book reveals, however, is the long and hard road that has been traveled on this spiritual itinerary. Born into a family reduced to poverty, Marcolla watched his father trying to preserve his dignity working in the factories of Torino. The young Mario was sent to work in a bakery. As he grew older, he drew up plans for his self-education, only to see them founder for lack of time and energy. He found time to study Italian literature, and learned German and English eventually.

After studying some accounting, Marcolla went into the textile industry and by the time of his retirement had worked his way up to plant manager. His real life, however, was intellectual and spiritual. As a working man, he took an eager interest in Marx and the Russian Revolution, eventually finding in it a "Luciferian rebellion" of matter against form. Working among the looms and shuttles, he contemplated the great problems of existence and came to regard the factory as "a place of pain and sorrow, a nursery of men and women devoid of deep relations, without spiritual roots."

Factory work, he realized, was inher-

ently dehumanizing:

The influx of machines modeled on scientific reasoning appeared . . . to be diabolical: assembly-line work mortified the personalities, creating psychological dissociations which were noticeable in the old workers, in their worn-out look, in a kind of inattention which was the sign of an unconscious crisis, of the impossibility of being whole men like the old-time artisans and peasants from which they were descended.

Much of this memoir is devoted to Marcolla's progress through books, from leftists to Nietzsche and Evola and finally to the wisdom of the great Italian philosopher Augusto del Noce. The higher truth is to be sought, he concludes, in the human work that "binds each and every person to a supernatural destiny of love and grace." This is not the mysticism that flees the everyday world of hope and fear, but an appreciation of the mysteries woven on the loom of life. "Every man has his talents and spends them not by himself but, in his liberty and autonomy, in harmony with a providential plan that hangs over him and protects him."

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Chronicles.

Our Time

by Bill Croke

Mountain Time

by Ivan Doig

New York: Scribner;
316 pp., \$25.00



In a regional literary world ripe with poseurs, Ivan Doig may be the true descendant of Wallace Stegner. Unlike the typical carpetbagger who begins with preconceived notions as to the nature of the "real" West, Doig actually grew up here during an unforgiving time when the place was good for nothing except for what could be physically extracted from it. The two authors have led somewhat

parallel lives, their work growing out of their Western roots, each accepting a necessary flight from beloved surroundings to an academic life lived in cities west of the West.

In Doig's new novel, *Mountain Time*, Mitch Rozier—at 50—is at loose ends. His career as an environmental journalist in politically correct Seattle ("Cyberia") is in a nosedive because of the financial restructuring of his paper, *Cascopia*. His ex-wife hates him, and his two now-grown children ignore him as he did them while they were growing up; his aged father is tormenting Mitch long distance with tangled business affairs that directly affect him. Mitch's girlfriend, a caterer and native Montanan like himself, is the glue that holds his life together.

Mr. Doig—author of the National Book Award nominee *This House of Sky*—is on familiar ground. In novels such as *English Creek*, *Ride With Me*, *Mariah Montana*, and *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*, he has created a Montana Yoknapatawpha, complete with multi-generational interrelated families and mutually remembered local history. A native, Doig knows the terrain of working-class Montana: the ranchers, farmers, and small-town businessmen who struggle to adapt to life in a changing West.

Mitch returns to Twin Sulphur Springs, "a country of great mountains and mediocre human chances," ostensibly to deal with his father's financial difficulties. There, Lyle Rozier nonchalantly tells him of the leukemia that is slowly killing him: "The doc says it's about got me. Why I called you." Lyle—a World War II veteran of the South Pacific—is a member of that great generation of Americans who expected nothing from life except the fruits of hard work, pain, and ultimately death, a generation—unlike their progeny—for whom whining and complaining were anathema. While sticking around to care for his ailing father (and forced to tolerate the annoying Donald Brainerd, a new New West high-tech neighbor constantly complaining that Lyle's yardful of rusting farm machinery and "tractor carcasses" is spoiling his bay-window view of the Rockies), Mitch is reminded—through flashbacks to his childhood growing up in "the Springs"—what kind of man Lyle really is: a taciturn survivor of a life typically fraught with contradictions and emotional turmoil, including the guilt left over