Art

The Venice Biennale

NATIONS as well as members of illustrious families seem increasingly liable nowadays to feelings of guilt about living off the spiritual capital of their ancestors. What else can explain the following extract from a recent official advertisement designed to attract American tourists?—"Many experienced travellers report that the quality of cooking in British hotels and restaurants is now *the best in Europe*" (and the italics are not mine): not only is this unexpected amenity considered to have more drawing power than our ancient monuments and institutions, but the continuation of one of our most cherished traditions is expressly denied.

The Italians, perhaps more than anyone, seem desperately anxious to show that they are not living in or on their past but are very much alive. The realist approach in recent Italian films might well be one symptom among many of Italy's need to prove to herself and the world that she is a living force and not the beautiful ruin of past civilisations. The bustle and cacophony of Italian cities may likewise be considered a means of proving that life is going on. Milan, indeed, makes the point so effectively that one is persuaded that its ancient buildings have lately been imported there at the expense of its wealthy industrialists, anxious to give tone to the place.

Venice, however, is different. It is the only North Italian town in which one does not suffer from the delusion, provoked by the clatter of mechanical bicycles, that the streets are ceaselessly being torn asunder by pneumatic drills. Venice alone is, in auditory terms, on a human scale.

Machinery signifies urgency, and a sense of urgency is what gives us a sense of time: timelessness means nothing mystical, but simply not caring when things get done. It is its sheer remoteness from mechanical noise, not the ubiquity of its ancient buildings, that makes Venice timeless, giving the Piazza San Marco a detachment from the hour and the age not shared by, say, the equally beautiful, equally ancient, Piazza dei Signori in Vicenza. Venice is no museum, it vibrates with life. Only it is a life outside time. A few hours there, and one has become indifferent not only to when one will arrive where one is going, but also to where one is going: one begins to move in a trance, caring not at all whether one will ever come out of it. To induce this hypnosis, the absence of noise other than human noise and the soporific lapping of water conspires with the fact that Venice is a maze. If one does not try using a map to find one's way out, it is not so much that one feels this would be an insult to the spirit of the place as that one knows it will be useless: the only time I ever tried getting from one place to another in Venice with the help of a map, I found myself looking for some Tintorettos aboard a liner bound for the Ægean.

One has to accept, then, that in Venice one is perpetually lost. One acquires an Oriental acceptance of whatever may happen, an inability to formulate any intention. The future becomes meaningless, the present infinitely beautiful, the past infinitely regrettable, as, walking alone at night, one drifts on the currents of the streets, down dark narrow alleys in which one knows one will never be coshed, such is the confidence one has acquired in the benevolence of the external world. Nothing matters any more, and solitude is the only luxury one can conceive of.

And what has all this to do with the Biennale? Better ask: what has the Biennale to do with all this? Every two years, into this timeless world where nostalgia is more potent than desire, are introduced several thousand brand-new monuments to human ambition with an

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attendant train of officials, publicists, and merchants, there to decide which of them will be transformed into currency and instruments of national prestige. The present is with us, and the crowds and the gossip and the jealousies. Venice bestirr'd.

THE site of the exhibition is the Giardini Pubblici on the route from St. Mark's to the Lido—heavily scented sub-tropical gardens, all dark green and pale gravel. Here, during the last forty or fifty years, there have been erected a score of buildings for accommodating works of art during the summer season. Their architectural styles range from gilded Magyar and Holy Russian to Dutch modernistic and American colonial. The Palazzo Centrale is the centre-piece, a great bungalow of nearly fifty rooms; the others are the national pavilions, and are the actual property of the nations which display their wares in them.

How each nation fills its pavilion varies considerably. This year, the French have about thirty artists, all living, represented in two hundred exhibits, the Americans have two one-man shows of living painters and a single example apiece of three sculptors, the Germans have biggish exhibitions of two dead painters and a living sculptor and smaller selections of work by half a dozen living painters. Visitors seem to have a strong preference for seeing a fair number of works by a few artists rather than a handful apiece by many: the French pavilion has been severely criticised, both on the spot and in the press, for being excessively miscellaneous.

The Palazzo Centrale contains first of all a huge panorama of contemporary Italian art—well over a thousand works by almost two hundred and twenty painters and sculptors. Then it has a dozen rooms given over to countries not in possession of a national pavilion. Finally there are the exhibitions of foreign art arranged by or for the Biennale office—retrospectives of eminent individuals, living or dead, or surveys of movements such as impressionism, cubism, and fauvism. This year's special exhibitions are a Courbet show, organised by a Franco-Italian committee and containing some fifty paintings, several of them from America, including the *Toilette de la Mariée*, and displays of about thirty works apiece by Jean Arp, Joan Miró, and Max Ernst.

That the three artists who have been so honoured have all been connected with the surrealist movement is not fortuitous. Surrealism was selected as a theme for this year's Biennale by its central committee, the participating nations being invited to build their exhibitions around it. They have responded in varying degrees. The Greeks have given over their entire pavilion to a one-man show by a surrealist painter, Nicos Engonopoulos. The Spanish pavilion includes a group of water-colours by Dali and of coloured lithographs by Miró. One of the rooms in the French pavilion is consecrated to five exponents of "fantastic art." The Austrians and the Germans have sent works by some younger artists in the surrealist or fantastic tradition. The Belgians have conformed with high enthusiasm and thoroughness, compiling a historical survey of their national fantastic and surrealist art. There are works by Bosch, Peter Huys, Brueghel, Teniers, Wiertz, Felicien Rops, Ensor and others, a large room of Magrittes as centre-piece, a smaller room of Delvaux, and a few works by lesser contemporaries. It is the most coherent and instructive pavilion of the Biennale.

If the material was not there for other national pavilions—except perhaps the German and the Swiss—to be arranged quite on these lines, it is still a pity that no other country attempted a systematic surrealist exhibition. It is far more regrettable, however, that no surrealist exhibition on an international scale was organised in the Palazzo Centrale. The time is certainly ripe for a major survey of surrealism, laid out, preferably, in such a way as to reveal the historical development of the movement as a whole, rather than the artistic personalities of its individual exponents. One-man shows of three particular surrealists are hardly a substitute for this. Sad to say, however, we have come to expect nothing better from the Biennale. In 1950, for example, the Palazzo Centrale included exhibitions of cubism and fauvism and Italian futurism. Several major works were on view, but not one of these exhibitions could lay any claims to being comprehensive. The Biennale office—as distinct from the national pavilions—has been giving us far too many exhibitions which seem to have been carelessly and even hastily thrown together: too many tit-bits, not enough solid nourishment. On the other hand, the main purpose of the Biennale is, after all, to present a cross-section of current activity. Its

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justification lies in its topicality. So perhaps it is unjust to complain that it is not, so to speak, a history-book as well as a newspaper.

THE twenty-seventh Biennale may have failed to provide adequate data for a proper revaluation of surrealism, but it does confront us with the interesting problem of the relative value of the kind of surrealism which uses a purely descriptive pictorial language and that which employs a more abstract language.

Surrealism is not a style but an attitude of mind, one that can find expression in several different styles. It is concerned, in the broadest terms, with the revelation of unconscious fantasies as manifestations of the mystery and absurdity of life. This means in practice that its iconography consists mainly of transpositions and transformations: things appear in unexpected contexts, things undergo surprising metamorphoses. Where the surrealist uses illustrative forms, these transpositions and transformations are manifest; where he uses abstract forms, they are latent. That is to say, a Magritte or a Delvaux will represent the absurd in action: a pair of boots is depicted with toes in place of toe-caps, the circus strong man confronts us bearing dumb-bells one of the spheres of which is his own head. On the other hand, an Arp or a Miró will invent vaguely biomorphic forms which describe nothing but evoke a variety of things—a breast, a fruit, a mound of snow—which thereby become interchangeable and imply an unending process of

Formation, transformation,
Eternal mind's eternal conversation,
Wreathed with all floating forms of what may be,

to quote Goethe's words. By means of such implied or latent transformations suggested by quasi-abstract forms with an ambiguous reference to the external world, surrealism achieves its aim of proving the irrationality of reality by denying the primary law of logic, the principle of identity—a thing is what it is and not anything else.

This latter type of surrealism seems, in theory, to have every advantage over the other. The implications of its iconography are more universal. It is more likely to be a product of the imagination than of the fancy. It uses forms evolved through the interaction of unconscious fantasy with the properties of the medium, instead of realising images which might be the product of trick photography. Above all, and as a result of all this, it is capable of having a formal value denied of necessity to pictures in a style parodying that of Victorian illustrations or technicoloured advertisements in glossy magazines.

But what does this quasi-abstract surrealism amount to in practice? The Biennale provides the answer, because Miró and Arp are its most eminent and faithful exponents in painting and sculpture respectively. Miró is clearly a tremendously gifted painter, a consummate master of his means of expression, a truly original spirit, and a real charmer. But there is something terribly thin about his painted poetry. It is not merely that it is too often trivial, for he has also produced works such as *La Ferme* in which gaiety becomes portentous, and a few quasi-abstract compositions of the mid-thirties as broodingly impressive as they are elegant. Hence it is not so much his habit of being wilfully lightweight that determines Miró's limitations, but rather that whatever the character and whatever the intensity of his emotion it is always coloured by a certain quaintness. And this combines with the extreme directness and simplicity of his language to produce an effect of infantilism which, whether one believes it to be affected or genuine, must become tiresome. A painter with any claims to distinction can only afford to use so direct and primitive a language as Miró's if he has the heroic vision of a Léger.

Arp is an altogether less brilliant artist than Miró, but he reveals a refined sensibility in work which has the conviction that belongs to any art that springs from a deeply felt obsession. Springs? Hardly: oozes would be more precise. And that's the trouble. The obsession is there, and a certain subtlety in communicating it. But no vitality or intensity: there is something fatally tired and lax about these serpentine anatomical doodles in the round, an absence of tautness which makes them rather boring, mildly disgusting. Yes, women are curvaceous creatures, and their breasts and behinds are like cumulus clouds. Does it matter?

DELVAUX'S women are more like waxworks: it is a less pious notion, but its implications are more intriguing. Frigid as film-stars, they parade before us showing us everything, offer-

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ing nothing, rapt in a narcissistic daydream. In the painting (here reproduced) which, like a cubist collage, takes its name from the newspaper in the corner, *La Voix Publique*, and in the background of which is a *voie publique* with a tramway, there reclines a descendant of Manet's Olympia who is, however, no *fille publique*, since she does not await an expected guest, but, glazed of eye, has allowed her fingers to stray to the symbolic pleat in the drapery over her thigh, while behind her are three familiars, dressed like Victorian governesses, the huge bows in whose hair provide them with the wings of ministering angels or Eumenides. It may not be art, but it has an authentic nostalgia —nostalgia for the secret longings below the surface of Victorian propriety, and then nostalgia for boyhood hours spent with one's eye at the keyhole of a sister's bedroom.

If Delvaux is compared with another painter who employs a highly detailed naturalism like Lucian Freud (one of the contributors to this year's British pavilion), or with another naturalistic painter of erotic subjects like Balthus (a stranger, I believe, to the Biennale, though probably, with Gruber dead, the best painter under fifty in France), it is clear that he is no painter at all. His drawing is academic in the worst sense, his composition is that of a *metteur-en-scène*. His vision has none of the sensuousness which in Balthus matches the sensuality of the idea. Apart from his inspired rendering of pubic hair, his detail is purely descriptive, reflects none of the desperate visual curiosity of Freud's autopsies on the living. There is, in short, no poetry in the rendering but only in that which is rendered. But this lack of painterly qualities is precisely what makes Delvaux's art efficacious. For the point about painterly qualities is not that they lend a picture some kind of æsthetic value standing over and above its content, but that they give it *reality*. And Delvaux's works, unlike those of Balthus or Freud, are not images of reality; they are images of fantasy. We are not meant to be convinced that life is like this, but only that it would be interesting if it were. Consequently, the qualities of painting which give us sensuous pleasure and make us see reality afresh have no place in Delvaux's world. It is significant and sad that the two most recent paintings in his room in the Belgian pavilion reflect a desire to encompass the virtues of form and design. But this enterprise is so much out of key with the operations of Delvaux's imagination that the intrusion of such qualities, so far from heightening the effect of his imagery, merely neutralises it.

It is just the same with Magritte. It is palpably obvious that Magritte's pictures possess none of the qualities normally associated with serious painting. But Magritte is not concerned with good painting. Painting for him is not a means of conveying his vision of, or his feelings about, the external world: it is a vehicle which he uses for posing problems and stating paradoxes—only not intellectual problems and paradoxes visually expressed, but visual problems and paradoxes. Thus he paints a picture representing a canvas on an easel set up in view of a landscape, and the painted landscape on the canvas coincides precisely with that part of the real landscape which the canvas is obscuring. What, we are led to ask, is the relation between the scale of a painting and the scale of nature? And then, what is the relation between a world we know we can move about in and a world we think we can move about in?

It is clear that pictures which are puzzles rather than inspired recreations of experience are not objects one would wish to live with. But why should we assume that any image executed in paint on canvas ought to satisfy the platitudinous criterion of being-liveable-with? If we put on white flannels, it is not necessarily in order to play cricket. The craft of painting might well serve a purpose quite other than those hallowed by tradition. And the purpose to which Magritte puts it is really rather suited to the circumstances in which we generally look at paintings nowadays—not in churches or private houses, but in exhibition galleries. Could it not be that the cursory glance we give most pictures as we make our way through a gallery is more likely to get something out of a picture which wittily poses a problem than a picture which contains some profound emotion?

But, if it be admitted that Delvaux and Magritte put painting to a purpose altogether different from that of a Titian or a Rembrandt or a Boucher or a Picasso, it must be emphasised that they do not put it to a purpose which could, as is sometimes said, equally well be achieved by literature. For all that their iconography is the be-all and end-all of their pictures, and the pictorial treatment entirely negative, utilitarian, a verbal description of that

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iconography would not have the same effect as the picture. For words are such complex symbols, so rich in overtones and undertones, that such a description, if it had any vitality, would be bound to say or imply too much. The visual image, on the other hand, as used by Delvaux and Magritte, is a plain and literal statement of the marvellous, by which fantasy becomes fact and the private is rendered public without ceremony or equivocation. And serious painting or no, their imagery does satisfy the one criterion for evaluating works of art which is universally and eternally valid—the possession of imaginative authenticity.

ALTOGETHER, then, I believe that the view long held outside the dedicated ranks of the surrealists themselves that the only surrealist painters worth taking seriously are those who might be called the æsthetes, and that the others, the quasi-photographers in colour, are *pompiers* with perverted minds, is in need of revision, because, leaving aside the quasi-abstract surrealist sculptures of Giacometti (who, significantly, abandoned surrealism in 1935) and such inventions of Picasso's as verge on surrealism, it is the work of the latter group which is the more fascinating and disturbing in content, and it was, after all, a renewal of interest in content—in opposition to the æstheticism of the fauves and cubists—and a desire to expand the subject-matter of the arts that brought surrealism into being. So long as the aspirations of surrealism are granted any validity—and even those who have contemned its visual art have not hesitated to admit the worth of its literary products—the validity must be admitted of the kind of surrealist painting which resembles the coloured photograph. When all is said and done, the camera was the medium which produced surrealism's greatest contributions, *Un Chien Andalou* and *L'Age d'Or*. And once we begin to think of the paintings of Delvaux and Magritte and Dali in his better days as stills from further films which were never turned, they begin to make sense: they become images pure and simple with no pretensions to the virtues of painting.

But the surrealist films have counterparts closer than these among images made by hand (actually, not entirely by hand). I mean Max Ernst's *Femme 100 Têtes* and *Semaine de Bonté*, those novels in pictures pieced together from Victorian engravings. If it be the case, as I believe, that these stand together with the Bunuel and Dali films as the summits of surrealist achievement in a visual form, the implication is that surrealism tends towards a narrative series of images rather than the single image which contains an entire cosmos. But I do not think the inference should be drawn that the surrealist imagination is therefore essentially dramatic rather than pictorial, for the same thing can be said of medieval art. And is it not the case that surrealism likewise is didactic, inspired by a conscious moral purpose?

As to Ernst in particular, he must not be overlooked as the creator of some of surrealism's most memorable single images in a naturalistic style—those early paintings such as *L'Eléphant Célèbes* and *Pietà, ou La Révolution la Nuit,* the execution of which, thanks to a touching technical ineptitude, gives them a resemblance not to coloured photographs but to clumsily painted inn-signs or labels on date-boxes. This deprives them of the slick conviction of a Delvaux but it gives them a compensating poignancy.

Ernst, however, was not content with this kind of achievement and by the mid-1920's began to reject this naïve means of communication in favour of a style which was at once more esoteric and exploited more fully the evocative possibilities of paint. Not only did his manner thereby become embarrassingly arty—because the æsthetic values had been imposed from without—but his matter became increasingly commonplace, with its big bad forests and its bigger, badder bogey-men. Ernst's development, indeed, reveals with some pathos the limitations of surrealism when it refuses to accept its proper level, a non-æsthetic level.

THE thirty rooms in the Palazzo Centrale devoted to Italian art do not pretend to offer at every Biennale a complete survey of current activity in Italy—for example, Manzù, Marini, and Morandi are absentees this year—but they do provide a very clear notion of its main directions and its general quality.

On this showing, there is not only very little to be said for contemporary Italian painting, but very little to be said about it. It does not seem to be making any very significant formal discoveries, while its content is either deficient or banal—deficient in the art tending towards abstraction, banal in that tending towards realism. The handling of paint, moreover,

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tends to show a lack of that affection for and sympathy with the medium which would be present in a comparable exhibition of French painting. One notable exception to this is the admirable Filippo de Pisis, that exponent of a curiously personal brand of impressionism, closer to Guardi than to Monet and Pissarro, who is the most distinguished representative at this Biennale of the older generation.

Among the participating painters working in an abstract or post-cubist tradition, the most imaginative and vital seems to me to be Mattia Moreni, whose romantic-post-cubist landscapes are the product of an approach very similar to that of Graham Sutherland in his work of the early Forties. His colour is fiercer than Sutherland's, his forms more jagged, and, while he is the less evocative painter of the two, he is more able to give energy and life to paintings on a fairly large scale. Another painter of talent working in more or less the same vein is Afro, whose forms are much more soft and serpentine and whose colour much more restrained.

Many of the more realistic or expressionistic paintings and drawings might be intended to serve as posters for some of the more sexily lachrymose post-war Italian films—which is to say that, resembling posters rather than the films themselves, they tend to exhibit an excessively heightened sentiment. The most interesting offering is, perhaps inevitably, Guttuso's, whose social realism is, of course, rooted in the post-cubist tradition. Having shown at the last Biennale a large figure-composition on a *risorgimento* theme, he has now produced one on a contemporary theme in which his mood has shifted from the heroic to the satiric. The painting depicts youths and girls jiving, talking and drinking in a *boîte* of the type curiously known as "existentialist." It is called *Boogie-Woogie a Roma*, and in the background is a painting of one of Mondrian's paintings of the *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* series. The intention presumably is to identify and jointly condemn decadent bourgeois abstract art and decadent bourgeois night-life. In view of the social-realist character of this tract against be-jeaned, besotted and bewildered youth, it may be pertinent to point out that boogie-woogie is an anachronism in a crew-cut world, since it is a musical style current a decade or two ago: Guttuso is unfortunate in that there is no celebrated abstract painting entitled *Bop*.

The black-and-white reproduction accompanying this article shows how skilfully Guttuso's picture is composed and how journalistically it is drawn, but not the way in which it is deprived of unity by an excessive emphasis on local colour. Its defects are not only formal. Clearly it is meant to indicate an attitude of disapproval towards its subject: the lonely figure of a girl at a table in the foreground is obviously not merely crossed in love or in need of a Fernet Branca but is a symbol of a lost generation. Guttuso, however, has not managed to repress a pronounced sensuous pleasure in the well-formed bodies of the dancers. Certainly, in so doing he reveals a respect for truth which would be lacking in an expressionist painter, who, given the same subject and social-critical intention, would have made the appearance of the dancers repellent. Yet perhaps this latter, less ambiguous, treatment would have made the picture psychologically more telling. As it is, we cannot help feeling that Guttuso has tried to have his cake and spit it out.

The curious thing about the state of the arts in Italy is that, whereas her painting is generally mediocre, her sculpture is more vital than that of any country in the world to-day. This may be because the Italians seem to have an extraordinary facility in producing graceful and pleasing *objects*, whether utilitarian or decorative: they produce elegant statues as they produce elegant motor-cars. And, certainly, it is the stylishness and elegance of their sculpture and its wonderfully tactful handling of the medium which commends it. It is seldom very profound, and, like their painting, has not made any shatteringly new formal discoveries. On the contrary, it has derived its energy from the rediscovery of ancient sculpture—Gothic, Romanesque, Etruscan, Chinese. Thus the bronzes by Mirko exhibited at the Biennale are unashamedly derivative from early Chinese bronzes and the Romanesque, both in their shapes and in their treatment of surface, but their complete mastery of style gives them authenticity, is the very source of their poetry. Again, it is the combination of the two characteristic virtues of contemporary Italian sculpture—a profound sympathy with the medium and a consummate sense of style—which give the wood-carvings of Pericle Fazzini their tenderness and warmth.

Where style counts for so much, we tend to get a wilful exaggeration of its traits: the

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seductive affectedness and preciosity of a Marini or an Emilio Greco has much in common with the spirit of Tuscan Mannerism. A Mascherini can take the characteristic affectations of modern Italian sculpture to the point of self-caricature without quite becoming absurd, because of the sheer shamelessness with which he exploits them.

So pervasive are the elements of elegance and preciosity in Italian sculpture today that they even insinuate themselves into the coloured terracotta sculptures of Agenore Fabbri, for all the brutality and vulgarity of their expressionistic-realist treatment of women and children in distress. It is in fact their odd reconciliation of a journalistic blatancy and literalness with a streak of almost effeminate elegance that gives them their pathos and makes Fabbri the most interesting of all the Italian social realists of today.

THIS review of the Biennale has been confined to a discussion of its two dominant features—the Surrealist works and the Italian section. In conclusion, I should like to draw attention to a few of the outstanding artists represented in the national pavilions.

There are three important exhibitions of dead artists. Norway has contributed a well-chosen show of Edvard Munch (displayed not in the Giardini but in the Ala Napoleonica in the Piazza San Marco), while the German pavilion includes rooms devoted to Paul Klee and Oskar Schlemmer.

Among the members of the older generations of living artists, André Derain contributes a particularly distinguished wall to the French pavilion. His six paintings are all late-ish works. Their controlled exuberance of feeling, their complete domination of the medium, and their fusion of sensuousness with intellectual vigour entitle them, for all their palpable indebtedness to a variety of 17th century sources, to be ranked among the most considerable achievements in the art of the last thirty years.

As to the less established figures, I for my part would award the palm for sculpture to Germaine Richier (France), for graphic art to Božidar Jakac (Yugoslavia), for abstract painting to Jean-Paul Riopelle (Canada), and for figurative painting to Francis Bacon. However devoid of chauvinism one may be, it has been immensely gratifying to see what an impression Bacon has made on many Europeans who have seen his work for the first time in Venice, to find it described by at least one French critic as "*la seule véritable révélation de toute la Biennale.*" It is agreeable to have such a confirmation of one's own feeling that the work of a painter who looks important in England, where it is so easy for English painters to look important, has stood up to the dual test of international competition and the Adriatic sun.

David Sylvester

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Communications

AFTER THE THAW

Sir—Readers of your magazine might be interested in developments on the Soviet literary scene since the publication of Mark Alexander's article (Encounter, No. 9). The "new liberalism," mentioned by Mr. Alexander, has recently suffered some severe checks. Among the books recently published, and now condemned, there are Panferov's *Volga*, Zorin's play, *The Guests*, and Virta's *Crown Prince*. But the case of Ilya Ehrenburg is the most interesting. In part, because he is regarded as a sort of spokesman for the régime. In part, too, because his novel—now sharply under attack—was entitled precisely *The Thaw*.

The two main characters in *The Thaw* are Volodya and Sonia, son and daughter of an old Bolshevik, and both members of the Komsomol. From their earliest years they are concerned only with their own advantage. Volodya decides to become a painter, because that is the easiest way of attaining wealth and fame. In Moscow, where he goes to study, everything runs smoothly: he climbs steadily up the ladder, but then he makes a slip, speaking too openly of his personal ambitions to an influential member of the artists' association. It turns out that he "is not a genuine painter" after all, and he is forced to return to the small industrial town where he grew up, "in order to draw inspiration from factory life." There, Volodya strikes up an acquaintance with a factory director, and when an article praising the director appears in *Izvestia*, begins to paint his portrait. Of course, as Volodya himself says mockingly, in the portrait the director is "every inch a leader of Soviet industry, his chin up and in his eyes a look of iron determination." The picture, he reckons, will be hung in the local museum, and that will bring him 20,000 roubles. Volodya dreams of the Pobeda car he will be able to buy.

He is completely cynical: "Everybody tacks and turns about, everybody tries to wriggle through, tells lies—but some are clever about it and some stupid." It is not surprising to find him saying, in a tone of light sympathy: "I understand father when he talks about ideals; it's his right to do so. He grew up in another age, in the age of revolution, of romance."

Sonia is not cynical like her brother. But she is not more pleasant for that. She takes everything in deadly earnest. "Soviet man must master not only nature but his own feelings," she says, and studies electrodynamics, although literature is far closer to her heart. She praises Mayakovsky, although she really prefers Blok and Essenin, and rejects the man she loves because he has no prospects of getting an apartment. Everything is calculated; expediency comes first, and at nineteen she never acts on impulse.

It is true that Ehrenburg suggests that there are other kinds of young people, but he does not depict them. These two are presented as typical. Is it any wonder that *Komsomolskaya Pravda* objected?

It is interesting to compare *The Thaw* with *The Second Day*, a novel Ehrenburg wrote twenty years ago, and set in a similar scene. In *The Second Day*, the present generation of top-ranking engineers is still young. They are young Communists, like Volodya and Sonia—but how different! The romance of the revolution has faded by 1932, but those who built the Kuznetsk plant were still fired with enthusiasm. They revelled in ideals, even when injustice surrounded them. The cynic and detractor of that day—another Volodya—commits suicide in the end. Unable to grasp the fierce and relentless power of the new and tremendous life around him, he begins to doubt himself; he feels himself a stranger in the society in which he is living, a creature of the past rather than the present. The Volodya of *The Thaw* is quite different: he neither belongs to a different society, nor does he feel drawn to a different age. He does not stand aside from what is happening around him, nor does he find it incomprehensible. On the contrary; he is a living fragment of the present, inseparable from it, at home in it.

Ehrenburg merely records the fact that today, not

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