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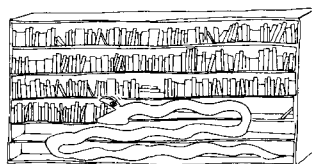
# EAST & WEST

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*Letter from Russia*

## Buying Books in Moscow

*By Walter Laqueur*



**B**UYING BOOKS in Moscow, like buying most things in the metropole of scarcity, is not easy. Residents of Washington, D.C. will find a greater selection

of recent Russian publications in Rockville, residents of London in the Charing Cross Road. But it is still a fascinating pastime, full of surprises. The other day, when passing Kuznetski Most (which has more bookshops than Charing Cross), I saw a queue which, following years of experience, I instantly joined even though, like those in front of me, I had no idea what the reward would be. It happened to be the very first Soviet book on the theme of . . . queuing!

There always was an enormous appetite for books in the Soviet Union, and it is greater now than ever. After decades of conformity and boredom there is something of curious interest to be found in almost every paper and periodical. For many years it was sufficient to glance at *Pravda* once a week; now the day is not long enough to read all the interesting articles. And since many Russian writers have an inclination to be long-winded, their published essays frequently extend to 30 pages or more. There are other reasons for this tremendous interest: Russians traditionally take their literature more seriously than we do, and it has always been seen as more than just entertainment.

IT IS DIFFICULT to buy newspapers and periodicals unless one takes out a subscription: but this, for a variety of reasons, is not easy either. Newspapers arrived at eight in the morning in my hotel, and to have a reasonable chance of obtaining at least one or two, I had to arrive 15 minutes earlier at the kiosk of *Soyuzpechat*, the state agency which monopolises distribution. When my turn came, I asked the lady in charge for one copy each of every publication she had, including sport, agriculture, etc.—a request which did not strike her as unreasonable; many others in the queue did the same. For the most popular weekly, I had to pay twice the price indicated on the masthead, but Soviet newspapers are cheap and I did not argue. All dailies are sold out within an hour. But how to get copies of the monthlies? This is a most difficult assign-

ment, and my enquiries resulted in answers ranging from pity to amusement. The literary journals are, I found, quite unobtainable; some of the others can be bought if one shows sufficient ingenuity and persistence, or has something of a special relationship with one of the kiosk managers.

The alternative is simply to engage in a systematic, methodical search, and this I did on consecutive mornings. At the Kursk railway station, after much prodding, the sales-lady produced a literary magazine, called *Ashkhabad*, published in the capital of the Turkmen Republic, of which she had an unlimited quantity, and for a very good reason; it was quite unreadable. I figured that in the *kolkhoz* markets the demand for the more highbrow magazines would not be that great, an assumption that proved to be partly correct. In one I got a copy of a monthly statistical journal, which had interesting relations about what kind of information had not been released in the past but would be published in future. In another, a copy of *Sovietskaya Musika*, in a third one a number of *Sovietski Voin* (Soviet Soldier). The musical journal had a reproduction of a Marc Chagall painting on its cover; the military journal, on the other hand, featured an article which said that Soviet patriots had no use for the Jewish symbolism of Chagall and that Josef Brodski, the Russian Nobel prize winner who lives in New York, was not a genuine poet either. In yet another *kolkhoz* market I managed to get a copy of *Chelovek i Zakon* (People & the Law), a popular journal on law in everyday life, as well as a copy of *Semya* (Family) which deals with relations between children and parents, and between the sexes. In Leningrad, I spotted a copy of *Nash Sovremennik* (Our Contemporary), one of the two leading Right-wing monthlies which at one time ran into trouble because it substituted "RUSSIA MY FATHERLAND" for "WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!" on its masthead. But I could buy only on condition that I also bought the whole set for 1987, which I would have done but for what Kundera might have called "the burden of the unbearable weightiness".

**T**HUS, WITH a car and unlimited time, it is still possible to gather an interesting selection of publications—and this is no doubt why major foreign embassies in the Soviet capital now have a person dealing full-time with the purchase of books and periodicals. There is probably more information and items of interest to be picked up in publications than in diplomatic conversations.

There seems to be a genuine paper shortage, yet this has never prevented Russian publishing houses from putting out vast quantities of propaganda material, or novels and poetry, by untalented, but highly-placed and well-connected writers which gather dust in warehouses, libraries and bookshops. *Glasnost* has produced embarrassing statistics about these unread and unreadable publications.

With a few exceptions the publishing houses seem to be more conservative both in outlook and in business practice than the literary magazines. *Roman Gazeta* which publishes every month a relatively new novel in a cheap mass edition (say, a million or two) has not featured in living memory an author outside the neo-Stalinist or "patriotic" camp. Of late,

there has been a grudging change—more, it would appear, because of political reinsurance than as a result of genuine conviction. It wouldn't have touched with a barge-pole Rybakov's *Children of the Arbat*, the novel about Stalin's purges, which is not exactly a literary masterpiece but still a work of great educational importance.<sup>1</sup> According to a professional literary journal which carried out a public-opinion poll, Rybakov's novel was in far greater demand than any other published book during the last two years; it could easily have sold millions of copies. In the event, the book came out in an edition of 1,200,000, was sold within a few days, and can now be bought in one bookshop on Kropotkinskaya street for foreign currency only.

There is no official list of best-sellers yet a general picture emerges from interviews with heads of publishing houses, librarians, and occasional print figures. Nothing has changed with regard to the eternal best-sellers list, topped for a century or more by Alexandre Dumas' *Count of Monte Cristo*. The list of most widely-read, contemporary Soviet authors has been headed for years by one Valentin Pikul, virtually unknown outside Russia. He is the author of a string of historical novels glorifying the exploits of the Czarist armies and, less frequently, of pre-1917 Russian diplomats. The heroes are always Russians, the villains—aliens. As far as Pikul and his readers are concerned, historical materialism has never existed. I surmise that his books would have sold equally well under the Czars.

Among the most widely-read authors now are those who could not be published before (such as some of Platonov's and Bulgakov's works) and, of course, the revelations of the Stalin period (Dudintsev's "White Coats" on Lysenkoism); Granin, Rybakov, Pristavkin (on the persecution of nationalities); and others.

Rybakov's novel has been bitterly attacked by Right-wing critics, but as the result of its first publication (in three instalments) in *Druzhba Narodov* (Friendship of the Peoples), the circulation of this previously very boring publication, quadrupled and reached 800,000. However, it still hasn't caught up with *Novy Mir* which has well in excess of a million subscribers; a fact which, as its editor rightly noted, should be registered in the Guinness Book of Records. During the last two years *Novy Mir* has featured some outstanding novels, old and new, and also many controversial and widely discussed essays about the state of Soviet society and economy.

The mouthpieces of the Right have done less well, with one notable exception—*Moskva*, which owes its success to the ingenious idea of publishing, in instalments, excerpts from Nikolai Mikhailovitch Karamzin's *History of the Russian State*. This is a very well written, romantic-sentimental account of Russia's past, monarchical and conservative in inspiration. It was first published more than 160 years ago, but it has not been reprinted for ideological reasons since the Revolution and there is obviously a great thirst for history in the mode and manner of Sir Walter Scott. In addition, a book of excerpts from Karamzin has just appeared (500,000 copies) and the whole series of 11 volumes will be published

soon, again in hundreds of thousands of copies. The cultural gap between West and East could hardly be greater. While social (and Socialist) history, often Marxist inspired, figures prominently in the curricula of our American and West European history departments, the Russians, in their post-Marxist phase, prefer to read about great men and their colourful exploits.

NOT ALL NEWSPAPERS have benefited from the boom. *Trud*, the trade-union paper has stagnated and *Pravda* has slightly declined, the price they had to pay for their official character and the resulting ennui. *Izvestia*, on the other hand, which has been more outspoken and controversial, has risen by some 30%. Another category which has suffered from decline are the periodicals dealing with events abroad, such as *New Times*, *Foreign Literature*, and *Za Rubezhom* (Abroad). Events inside the Soviet Union are so much more exciting at the present time than happenings in Washington, Paris, or London. *Foreign Literature* has tried to keep its readers by publishing *Ulysses* in instalments, but even James Joyce does not have the desired effect at a time when provincial journals are featuring Kafka and Orwell.

What makes the literary scene so interesting are the polemics between Left and Right and, also, the fact that some of the most notably outspoken contributions to the economic, sociological, and historical debate have appeared in the literary journals rather than the professional periodicals which, by and large, have changed little. Some, such as *Voprosy Istorii* (the official organ of Soviet historians) were so much opposed to any attempt to re-examine Soviet history that its whole editorial board was dismissed by order of the Central Committee—yet another "revolution from above". On the Right there is an uneasy coalition between anti-Communist conservatives and neo-Stalinists. The latter have not much time for the cult of icons and "old women in old villages", but they do share a common aversion with the national-patriotic "Russia-firsters": namely, a dislike of liberals, pro-Westerners, and Jews.

Nothing of great literary interest has, in my opinion, been published in the journals of the Right during the last two years; they appear to be altogether obsessed with the struggle against Rock and Alcoholism. But I find the essays are frequently worth reading for their extreme frustration, for their *résentiment* and nostalgia for a lost paradise. The Right is openly sceptical about the chances of *perestroika*. Their argument runs, briefly, as follows: As far as economic performance is concerned we shall never be able to compete with the Europeans and the Japanese. But this doesn't really matter that much, for we have "spiritual values" which the others lack, our scale of values is different.

One of the most remarkably poisonous attacks against de-Stalinisation and the political reform movement was written by V. Gorbachov, the deputy-editor of *Molodaya Guardia*, a neo-Stalinist organ. In the name of old-style Communism, the author attacked the "defeatism and materialism of the liberals" and, in general, their destructive influence on all that had been traditionally sacred to loyal Communists. A few weeks later *Moskovski Literator*, the house organ of the Mos-

<sup>1</sup> *Children of the Arbat*. By ANATOLI RYBAKOV. Century Hutchinson, £12.95.

cow branch of the Union of Soviet writers, leaked the text of a letter which Gorbachov (the editor, not the general secretary) had written to the executive of his union to the effect that he was a man of impeccable political credentials; that his apartment was not roomy enough; and that unless he got a larger one very soon he would commit suicide or some other act of despair. This didn't exactly create a good impression, for while one can feel a certain sympathy with Gorbachov (the claustrophobic editor), most of his colleagues also have small apartments and, in any case, such threats are unbecoming to a man preaching an heroic life-style and a return to the old anti-materialist idea of frugality. In any case, he probably had a *dacha* somewhere outside Moscow. . . .

FOR ME, THE MOST stimulating journal these days is the illustrated weekly, *Ogonyok*, which has a circulation of 1.75m but could easily sell three or four times as many copies; it is an astonishing achievement, for the intellectual level is high; and the readers' letters are as interesting as the articles. *Ogonyok* functions as the bulwark of anti-Stalinism, and it goes about as far as is politically feasible in present circumstances. However, I should warn, one cannot ignore the literary journals of the extreme Right when gauging public opinion. They may not be very influential among Moscow intellectuals, but they have a stronger base outside the capital and among the far-flung bureaucrats. These journals can now openly express "unorthodox" views which, until recently, would have been considered anathema and would have had highly unpleasant consequences for the authors. Thus, it can now be stated that Marxism is an "alien ideology" as far as Russia is concerned; sometimes the "Zionist" origins of Marxism are also emphasised. The organs of the extreme Right cannot yet openly attack Lenin but this, it seems, can be circumvented by denouncing Leon Trotsky when Lenin is meant; the Russian public has been accustomed for decades to read between the lines.

The journals of Russia's far Right find a great deal to admire in Stalin. True, he also committed mistakes but here again the evil influence of Trotsky and other "rootless cosmopolitans" is adduced. Trotsky, we are told, devised and introduced the bureaucratic-military style of command . . . which Stalin later merely copied. The man mainly responsible for the collectivisation of agriculture was not Stalin but Yakovlev, the People's Commissar for Agriculture, whose real name (*sapientia*) was Epstein. As far as the Purges were concerned, the main villain was one Mekhlis; the responsibility for the destruction of so many historical sites should be put at the door of Kaganovitch; and the liquidations in Soviet genetics were not the fault of Lysenko, as commonly believed, but of two cosmopolitans named Present and Deborin. . . .

It is only fair to add that arguments of this kind have come in for merciless criticism in the "liberal" journals. But they still have a captive audience in a country in which there has been a very long tradition of dark belief in the sinister machinations of a "hidden hand". In Stalin's time such belief was systematically indoctrinated, but it has also existed before and after.

How free are Soviet publications under *glasnost*? Compared with the situation three years ago, there have been tremendous changes. And yet: compared with the situation in Czarist Russia there is still a long way to go. The taboo zones have been reduced, and there is no advance censorship except on matters of national security. During the last year 3,500 books, previously banned, have been made accessible. But a closer look shows that this list mainly includes proscribed books by Old Bolsheviks and some publications which were erratically censored such as grammars and Russian-language textbooks. In any case, this can be only a tiny percentage of the total number of forbidden books kept out of circulation. At this rate it will take decades until the Soviet reader gains access to all previously banned authors and titles. According to a recent article in *Sovietskaya Kultura*, half the basic sources for the history of Soviet society are still inaccessible. From readers' letters we learn that single volumes of foreign encyclopedias are still withdrawn from general circulation, and can be consulted only with special clearance. This is a far cry from the situation in Czarist Russia where *Das Kapital* passed censorship without difficulty as an "important contribution to economic science". True, Nietzsche could be published only after the Revolution of 1905, but this was an exception. After the constitution of 1905, many Bolshevik publications saw the light of day. The old *Pravda* was frequently banned, but it could still appear the following day under another title.

THE DESIRE to catch up with what they have missed—*Nachholbedarf* is the term used in post-Nazi Germany—seems to be enormous, and the number of manuscripts waiting for publication almost unlimited. *Novy Mir* published Boris Pasternak's *Dr Zhivago* between January and April of 1988; during the same period, *Znamya* featured Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate*; Andrey Platonov's *Chevergur* appeared in *Druzhba Narodov* in March and April; Zamyatin's *We* could be read in *Znamya* in April and May.

The provincial literary magazines have not been lagging much behind. George Orwell has appeared in a literary magazine in Latvia, Vladimir Nabokov in *Vulga* and *Don*, where less controversial Western fare such as Agatha Christie's *Sparkling Cyanide* can also be found.

Most recently, the Leningrad *Neva* has begun to print the famous "counter-revolutionary" novel of Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*, in the excellent translation by the late Andrey Kistyakovski. Dr Chubinski, an historian, noted in his preface the lasting value of Koestler's powerful artistic reconstruction. He also shrewdly observed that Koestler's novel "dealt only with one (and by no means the most cruel) aspect of the diabolical means of the moral and physical destruction of the human personality which had been the practice during the Stalinist terror. . . ."

Under *glasnost*, on the other hand, non-Marxist-Leninist viewpoints can still not be voiced in the political debate—except in some special contexts under the banner of patriotism. However, I must not grumble. Moscow is now an infinitely more interesting place than it has been for decades, and one should be grateful while it lasts.



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# LETTERS

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## Bauer on Foreign Aid

PETER BAUER (ENCOUNTER, April 1988) claims: "Aid played no part in the development of Western Europe. . . ." This surely overlooks the crucial role of US Marshall Plan Aid (1948-53) in the post-War development and recovery of Western Europe. Curiously, Lord Bauer, who is otherwise so critical of foreign aid, does not even refer to Marshall Plan Aid in any of his prolific writings. Would he argue that aid to and within the First World is economically sound and politically laudable but such aid to the Third World is deplorable on every score? Perhaps Lord Bauer's silence on Marshall Aid is yet one more example of the perils of "Double Asymmetry" (Ibid, p. 69)!

ANAND G. CHANDAVARKAR  
Washington, D.C.

"THE SUCCESS of the Marshall Plan is a recurrent theme in the advocacy of aid. But the Marshall Plan is irrelevant to the case for Third World aid. The peoples of Western Europe had the faculties, motivations and institutions favourable to development for centuries before the Second World War: rebuilding, not development, was the task after the War. Hence the rapid return to prosperity in Western Europe and the termination of Marshall Aid after four years, in contrast to the economic plight of many aid recipients after decades of aid, and their failure to repay loans obtained on favourable terms; and in contrast also to the proposals for indefinite continuation of official aid." P. T. Bauer, *Equality, The Third World and Economic Delusion* (1981), p. 110.

I have also dealt with the Marshall Plan in *Dissent on Development* (1971).

PETER BAUER  
London

## Olga & Ezra Pound

FOR YEARS I have been distressed by the down-playing of Olga Rudge in articles about Ezra Pound. Even in the lengthy and fascinating piece by Humphrey Carpenter (ENCOUNTER, June), she is identified only in a footnote as "mother of Ezra's daughter Mary. . . ." Mary herself was indeed rather cold to her mother in the 1971 book *Ezra Pound, Father and Teacher* by Mary de Rachewiltz; but surely the mother of his

only daughter deserves more than a footnote.

Although it is my personal conviction that violinist Olga Rudge was the love of Pound's life, I cannot speak for the years before his release from St Elizabeth's and his return to Italy. I met Olga Rudge in 1956 when she was executive secretary to Count Chigi at the international music school, Accademia Chigiana in Siena. She told me little of her background and never mentioned Pound. Yet any reasonably attentive reporter could perceive, in the course of research, her connection with Pound in the "discovery and resurrection" of Vivaldi. Eventually I worked up the courage to face her with this, and we became friends.

She couldn't be near him at St Elizabeth's because the same Americans who locked up Ezra had taken her passport. And she was flat broke. When he came back, he came back to Olga. Hers was the home in Rapallo—little more than a

mountain cabin—and hers the home in Venice, a tiny gondolier's house she had bought years before. I visited them often in both of those homes, and they came once to look over my new house, a building on Lago Bracciano, north of Rome.

Ezra was totally lost without Olga, who was the only one who could induce him to speak, however briefly, in those last years. I always wanted to write about her and she always said "No, do Ezra. . . ." Useless to proclaim that half the world was "doing" Ezra. This self-effacing and indomitable little old lady still lives in the Venice home, which she is turning into a Pound museum and library. She gets virtually no help except from the considerate and admiring American administrators of the nearby Peggy Guggenheim gallery. She deserves much, much more.

DORA JANE HAMBLIN  
*Trevignano Romano*  
*Italy*

## Theological Tom-tom, Metaphysical Bagpipe

*Steiner vs Feuer—By SIDNEY HOOK*

IT IS NOT Lewis Feuer's discussion of the Holocaust but George Steiner's rebuke to him that is "almost obscenely impertinent (in the dual sense of the term)". The Holocaust, Steiner suggests, is enough to have made "God Himself . . . speechless". But it hasn't left Steiner speechless. Indeed, his *The Portage of A.H.* is the only rationalisation ever offered, albeit in a speculative vein, of Hitler's infamy. The only thing that approximates it is the view of some fanatically pious Jews that the Holocaust was an act of divine justice, a punishment of Jewry for failing to live up fully to Judaic law. In the light of the details of the *Shoah*, how God differs from Satan is inexplicable.

Steiner repudiates any rational attempt to inquire into the roots and nature of the *Shoah* as a hopelessly shallow and inappropriate approach to a phenomenon whose true character can be grasped only by a "theological-metaphysical perception". But he gives not a hint at what is revealed by this perception, and why it was overlooked by the theological and metaphysical perceptions of the past. What, if anything, can we learn from it to prevent mankind from suffering future Holocausts?

DESPITE Steiner's charge, there is no justification for characterising Feuer's outlook on the Holocaust as "stoical". He believes there was nothing fated in the monumental slaughter of the Jews. Nor is there any reason to accept an intellectual taboo against comparing it

with other outrageous actions or even natural catastrophes. Some species in the natural world would have destroyed other species; and the human species (considered purely biologically as animals) has periodically treated some of its members, strangers to local groups, as an enemy-species.

To Feuer, when men are considered as historical and acculturated organisms, the practices of intra-species extermination is *not* an expression of the natural order. Good and evil are human predicates. The evils of Hitler and Stalin are not to be explained by the radical evil of existence, whatever that is. The natural world provides both the basis of human evil and the possibility of limiting and defeating it. The *Shoah* and the *Gulag Archipelago* undoubtedly were largely a consequence of the decisions of Hitler and Stalin. But even if one contends in the light of Steiner's "systematic ontology" of the Holocaust, that Hitler and Stalin were already monsters in their mothers' wombs, it does not relieve us of the rational and moral necessity of inquiring how, and in what way, the societies in which they were nurtured went astray—and shared the responsibility, and to some extent, the guilt, of their crimes. Steiner's ontology may convince him that the *Shoah* is so unique that it can be understood only in terms of "certain theological and metaphysical categories", whose eclipse he deplores but whose defence he strangely avoids.

Professor Feuer does not accept the radical confusion between physics and