

run. Take, for example, the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. John F. Kennedy had himself fanned the flames of anti-Castro and anti-Soviet resentment in the presidential campaign of 1960, when he skewered Eisenhower and Nixon for "allowing the triumph of Communism in this hemisphere." By the summer of 1962, under assault for not deposing Castro and not "enforcing the Monroe Doctrine," Kennedy tried to minimize the Soviet military build-up in Cuba in order to defuse his right-wing critics and reduce Democratic losses in the November elections. "Cuba is the number-one issue," declared the GOP, in condemning JFK's "tragic irresolution." Some Republicans even charged that there were Soviet missiles in Cuba. When Kennedy learned in mid-October that the critics were right about missiles in Cuba, he was boxed in. He lacked the time to educate the public to the fact that these additional weapons in no way altered the military balance. Now it was too late for such an argument. Had he wished to accede to the presence of missiles in Cuba, he might have been impeached. Kennedy concluded that he had to act decisively and that he could not first try private negotiations, partly because news of the missiles might leak out and his party and program would suffer. Electoral politics and the anticipated demands of the military restricted his options. He eagerly chose a public confrontation with Khrushchev and offered the Soviet premier the painful choice of either retreat and humiliation, or else nuclear holocaust.

During the week of crisis, the administration skillfully managed the news. In discussing this strategy, one aide at a high-level conference raised the question, "Do we have a plan to brainwash the key press?" That week, the answer became clear. The administration exaggerated the range of the missiles, denied that they were analogous to our "defensive" missiles in Turkey, and deceived the American public on the fact that most of the missiles in Cuba were operational during the crisis. Ironically, had Americans known that these weapons were operational, they might have condemned JFK for dallying a week before imposing the quarantine and demanding a Soviet retreat.

Not only does Levering's book neglect critical instances of manipulation, but readers will search in vain for any analysis of such key institutions

as the Council on Foreign Relations (treated in a sentence) or the Trilateral Commission (not mentioned). Members of these bodies, however, do indeed exercise great influence on American foreign policy. Levering implicitly rejects the theory of a ruling class and does not even consider that the Trilateral and the CFR are key filters for selecting foreign-policy advisers and, possibly, even presidential candidates. Carter, for example, despite self-proclaimed populist leanings, was a member of the Trilateral—founded by David Rockefeller—where he worked with Samuel P. Huntington and Zbigniew Brzezinski.

Basically, this book, like much liberal work on American society, relies upon a modified model of pluralism and avoids basic questions about concentrated power. As a result, the author can comfortably plead for a more informed public opinion and a more knowledgeable dialogue on foreign policy without ever realizing that information and knowledge can be a threat to powerful interests. □

KOLYMA: The Arctic Death Camps, by Robert Conquest. Viking Press Inc., 254 pp., \$10.95.

Stalin's garden

DAVID LONGLEY

I APPROACHED ROBERT Conquest's *Kolyma* with mixed feelings. Yet another book about the Soviet camps? What could there be left to say? In fact, most of the material used here is already available in English, much of it in Conquest's own *The Great Terror*. True, there is some new material, most notably the excerpts from Varlam Shalamov's *Kolymskie Napiski*. But is it enough to justify a new book?

As for interpretation, Conquest offers very little. The book is baldly factual; clearly and unemotionally writ-

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ten, it is a plain, descriptive piece. Of course, this is a kind of trick, since selection and organization of material is itself argument, but there is justification for it.

Difficult though it may be to understand, there are still intelligent and otherwise humane people in the West prepared to defend the Soviet regime. Solzhenitsyn is dismissed by such persons as too obviously a man with a case to prove. Robert Conquest, on the other hand, presents his account almost without comment. Written in good, clear English, it will make a strong impression on any reader. Throughout, the facts are permitted to speak for themselves . . .

The facts he provides relate to the part of the USSR that lies closest to the United States: that long, bearlike peninsula that reaches out from northeast Siberia almost to touch Alaska. In it lies the Kolyma gold field. In the 1920s the gold was worked on a small scale by scattered private miners. This was replaced in the 1930s by a severe, but still relatively humane, camp system. Since 1937, however, the camp regime has been such that, as Conquest puts it, "for Russians . . . Kolyma is a word of horror wholly comparable to Auschwitz." One of Conquest's reasons for writing the book is that he feels "that it is surely right that this should become true for the world as a whole."

Another reason is that, as the entire area was supplied by sea, and as the numbers of ships, their capacities, and so forth, are known, there is a reasonably solid basis for calculation of the number of prisoners taken there, and of the numbers who died there. Conquest adduces a figure of 3 million deaths, "a figure," he points out, "well within the range of the Final Solution." A third reason is that, as the death rate can be clearly seen to vary with the nature of the camp regime, it can accurately be ascribed to "conscious decisions taken in Moscow" and not to the severity of the climate or geography.

WHAT CONQUEST HAS TO tell is a terrible story of degradation and death, of corruption and cruelty under the banner of socialism. Throughout, far more is implied than actually stated. There are, for instance, the implications for the condition of the Soviet economy in the remark that common criminals bribed the guards with bread that they

had stolen from their fellow prisoners. There are the legal implications of a code that includes "falling under suspicion" as a crime, and of a regime that justifies arbitrary killings on the ground that the victims had displayed "ill will." There are the political implications in the fact that General Nikishov, who presided over a slave camp system *four times the size of France*, a man responsible for the deaths of millions, was made a deputy to the Supreme Soviet, a candidate member of the Central Committee, and a Hero of the Soviet Union for his "extraordinary achievements." (For "extraordinary," the Russian citation used the word *chrezvychaynye*—as in *Chrezvychaynaya Kommissiya*, or Cheka?) And there are the moral implications of the signs above the gates of the Kolyma camps: "Labor is a matter of Honor, Courage and Freedom." How embarrassingly close to *Arbeit Macht Frei*!

All this is reflected in the rich ironies of camp slang. Normally, when his sentence expired, a prisoner under 50 would get a new one. One man did not, but got no discharge papers either. He remained in camp with the status of "free prisoner." Common criminals were used as *Kapos*. One petty criminal posed as a multiple murderer so as to get a post of responsibility. When his fraud was discovered, he was demoted. Henceforth, the prisoners called him "the careerist." A "goner," a prisoner who has reached the end of his tether, can no longer work, and will soon die, was called a *dokhodyaga*, "one who has arrived"—as some humorously added, "at socialism."

Conquest also hints at the similarities with serfdom. Not only did the peasants of the Soviet Union lose full citizenship rights, not only were they again, through collectivization, tied to the land, but in the camps the new lords of the NKVD aped the worst of the pre-1861 *pomeshchiki*. The nine top Kolyma families had their own special shop where, even in wartime, they could obtain every luxury from oranges to American cigarettes. They lived in great houses, surrounded by private hunting grounds. Their wives dressed in Paris fashions, sewn by prisoner-seamstresses. They collected lace, tapestry work, and paintings made by prisoner-artists. They had a theater staffed by prisoner-actors, musicians, and singers. New prisoners were lined up, stripped, had their buttocks pinched, teeth, eyes, and shoul-

Conquest tells a story of cruelty under the banner of socialism.

ders examined by the heads of Kolyma concerns looking for (slave) labor.

One major point of disagreement: central to the book is the thesis that the main aim of Kolyma was to kill people, implicitly equating it with the Nazi camps. The argument rests primarily on two quotations and the appalling death roll. It won't do. Certainly, sadists and criminals rose to high position in the NKVD, and Stalin encouraged their cruelties. Certainly millions of innocent people died. This does not mean that the *main* objective of the camps was to kill people. It merely means that, given the existence of the camps, they were a useful place to have people killed.

The Soviet camp system had a different history from the Nazi one. The Nazis had an avowed policy of exterminating the Jews. Ironically, this gave their sadists less freedom of action than their Soviet counterparts. The flowers on the station at Treblinka, the towels and soap at Auschwitz were there because extermination could be carried out faster if the Jews went willingly to the gas chamber-shower rooms. The deceptions were aimed at the victims, to make them collaborate in their own deaths.

NOT SO IN THE SOVIET Union. A Jew, after all, is a Jew from birth. A Soviet citizen became an enemy of the people only on his arrest. Fear of the indiscriminate arrests was as important politically to the regime as were the labor camps that followed. The purpose of spreading the fear was to crush what remained of private enterprise and political independence; the purpose of the camps themselves was to build socialism in a single country through the use of forced labor.

These two goals led to a process of development from Solovki, merely an isolator, to Kolyma with its economic

role. Since, after 1927, free enterprise was no longer acceptable, and since there was no capital for state enterprise, slave labor was used. It may have been inefficient, but that only means that it was typical of much of Soviet industry. Still, by the 1940s Kolyma was responsible for about one-third of the world's gold production; only intermittently, if at all, were there targets for deaths. That the production targets were in any case unrealizable gave the guards the freedom to exercise their baser instincts.

The deceptions used in connection with Kolyma, although superficially like those used by the Nazis, had a different clientele in mind. Not the prisoners, but Western fellow travelers—the real frontier guards of the Soviet Union—had to remain convinced that this was the land so dear to every toiler. It was for them that the funnels of the Dalstroy ships were painted blue and white, symbolizing hope. It was for them that the NKVD guards changed into civilian clothes and hid the machine guns on the slave ships when they passed close to Japan through the La Pérouse Strait.

The success of this policy is suggested by what Conquest calls "a clownish interlude." In the summer of 1944, Vice President Henry A. Wallace, accompanied by Professor Owen Lattimore, visited Kolyma. They were enchanted. Wallace was particularly impressed by "Mr." (actually NKVD General) Nikishov and "Mr." (ditto) Goglidze; the latter they described as "a very fine man, very efficient, gentle and understanding with people." They admired the exhibitions of (prisoners') art, and the theater (staffed by prisoners). Of course, the visit was organized in true Potemkin-village style: the wooden watchtowers were pulled down everywhere the Americans were to go; prisoners were kept out of the way (except the actors, on stage); NKVD women posed as swineherds, NKVD men as miners and trade unionists, any deficiencies in their knowledge of their "jobs" being blurred by the interpreters; and the shops of Magadan, Kolyma's port city, were stocked with goods rushed in from all over Siberia. On their return, Wallace and Lattimore wrote enthusiastically of their trip. Wallace subsequently recanted and apologized. Lattimore was still defending his account in the press in 1968.

Which brings us back to the reasons for, and importance of, this book. □

Packing the line

HUGH KENNER

BASIL BUNTING (BORN 1900, Northumberland, England) learned in Quaker meeting-houses or perhaps in his cradle what most of us know as a poetic discipline of the 1920s: Pack the line tight. Part of that decade's adventure was to abolish what Wyndham Lewis called "prepositions, articles, the small fry." Ordinary sentences seemed littered with Styrofoam pellets. But—

*Weeping oaks grieve, chestnuts raise
mournful candles*

—that was the way to do it.

That is also the opening of the earliest poem Bunting has preserved (1924); he didn't have to work toward compactness, he started from it. He's rootedly English in this; enjambment of word against word was a Saxon way in the time of the *Beowulf* poet; prattle marks a silly dissipation of attention, or a bogus-colloquial need to be liked, or both.

But it's an impacting discipline, apt to clog movement; even Bunting's movement is sometimes clogged. His way of freeing it is to let sound lead to sound, remember sound.

*Drip—icicle's gone.
Slur, ratio, tone,
chime dilute what's done
as a flute clarifies song,
trembling phrase fading to pause
then glow. Solstice past,
years end crescendo.*

Gone, tone, done, song, four variations on a note, all at line-ends; and *glow*, when we come to it, glows like a triumphant rhyme, though it answers to nothing

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more than an ambient tonality of *o's* (and will force us to assert the final vowel of *crescendo*). Three sentences here, so compacted they're nearly crabbed, are miraculously opened up by the auditory patterning, "as a flute clarifies song"; characteristically, he states a musical analogy for what's going on.

But it's not prose. Be guided by the lineation, and mark the accretion of sounds. "Syringa sings" tells us to listen for "—ing(s)," which sound duly recurs five times (*wings, things, trusting, wings, things*), with assonances in *hunger* and *thunder*. Also, *thrush* gets picked up in *ruffles*, then again in *thrusts, trusting, bush, list, lust*. Then



That is a detail from *Briggflatts*, which it's becoming a cliché to call the first major longish English poem since *Four Quartets* 35 years ago. The distinction is deserved. But here (in a short review) is a short poem entire:

A thrush in the syringa sings.

*'Hunger ruffles my wings, fear,
lust, familiar things.*

*Death thrusts hard. My sons
by hawk's beak, by stones,
trusting weak wings
by cat and weasel, die.*

*Thunder smothers the sky.
From a shaken bush I
list familiar things,
fear, hunger, lust.'*

O gay thrush!

As the syntax fan will note, that's as densely packed as 50 words can well be. "My sons by hawk's beak, by stones, trusting weak wings, by cat and weasel, die"—so runs the fourth sentence word for word in prose, and though clear it makes mannered prose indeed.

beak, introduced as late as the fifth line, finds its echo in *weak*, is dissociated into *shaken* . . .

It's an obsessed little tune, in short, that carries the burden of the thrush, and "O gay thrush!" is of course an irony. (People think it's a carefree bird, much as Keats seemed to think the nightingale—Philomel, rudely forced—poured forth her soul in ecstasy.)

But "O gay thrush" is a dissonance too. There's been no acoustic preparation for "gay"* and these three strong monosyllables would seem strayed in from some other poem but for the principle the American poet Ronald Johnson invokes when he quotes Charles Ives to elucidate this very line: "All the wrong notes are right."

ALL THE WRONG NOTES are right. The three words are simply wrong, and yet a voice that can find a way to speak them terminates the poem. And whose voice—not the voice of the thrush, which commands all the middle of the poem—spoke the first line, which said that the thrush "sings"? As the thrush

*The dictionary meaning, please.