

Malraux and the Revolutionary Hero

DAYS OF WRATH, by André Malraux.
Translated by Haakon M. Chevalier.
With a Foreword by Waldo Frank. Random House. \$1.75.

"And if this night should be a night of destiny . . ."
". . . may it be blessed until the coming of the dawn. . . ."

IT IS Kassner, back from the nine-days mind-shattering hell of a Nazi prison camp, safe across the border in Czechoslovakia, back with his wife and child. Inarticulate, incapable tonight of the old gestures of affection ("and there are no others"), he can but—

"In the cell I tried to use music to—defend myself. For hours. It produced images, naturally, an endless stream of them—and, by chance, a sentence, a single sentence, the call of the caravaneers. . . ."

So he repeats it: "And if this night. . . ." And she, his wife, gives him the antiphone. It is the closing chord of a great novel, a short novel and a great one. With its compressed and sustained intensity, it could hardly have been much longer. For—think of a fine novel, one of the finest that you know, take it at its most intense point, take that point as your mood for the whole, begin and end on it, sustain it throughout without a let-down and you have the feat which André Malraux has accomplished here.

There can be no doubt that worthwhile writers of the world are headed in the direction of a socialist realism; but as Bukharin has pointed out, this realism is by no means of necessity anti-lyrical; a "revolutionary romanticism" is one of the elements of it. This is to be distinguished, needless to say, from a false romanticizing, particularly when applied to so tempting and so perilous a theme as revolutionary activity in Hitler's Germany. The "Exiles," with their vague allusions to "dynamitings" and similar distortions have made rather a botch of it. One cannot but feel that this is in large part due to their ignorance of what the revolutionary movement is. André Malraux happens to be a working revolutionist himself; he knows. At the same time, he is the greatest romantic writer of our era. He is engaged in the discovery of the new man, the new hero who is being forged out of the blood and fire of the proletarian struggle the world over.

This is, also, the new individual—has not Malraux elsewhere assured us that "Communism restores to the individual his inherent fertility"? Not the "Faustian man," whose end is the Storm Trooper gangster, but the individual who is being hammered out by the revolution, to become the hero of constructive socialism, where he is to find his full flowering.

There is a sense in which Malraux is creating this individual, this hero. At the

Moscow Writers Congress there was talk of the "engineer of souls"; whereupon the author of *Man's Fate* arose to remind the assembled delegates that the business of an engineer is to create, to build.

Yet, the thought must come to one: is not the Malraux hero essentially a tragic figure, the last heroic off-shoot of an old and tragic line, who must die that the seeds of life may live in a rapidly dawning tomorrow? "I know that nothing will pay for what so many of us are suffering here except victories."

However this may be, in *Days of Wrath* we have the most deeply moving account, fiction or non-fiction, that we have yet had of the Hitler terror. If you lay awake nights after Billinger's *Fatherland*, you have an even more harrowing experience in store for you here. More harrowing because purveyed in its artistically concentrated essence. (It is fiction resuming its graphic empire.) Kassner's fight with madness in the presence of those blank cell walls, the inscriptions left by other prisoners, theappings from the next cell, the thud of Storm Trooper feet in the corridor—another merciless beating? more inhuman torture? Told with the winnowed art of a Proust, applied now to a socially self-respecting, a heroic content.

Malraux, we are to remember, was one of those who led the fight for Dimitrov's freedom. He at that time had an opportunity to document himself. He has here told the story of his German comrades. It is a story best summed up by the French title, *Le Temps du Mépris*, literally, the Age of Contempt—of contempt, that is, for all humanity and human rights, a contempt or scorn that is epitomized by the Storm Trooper, but which is so much more than that: the ugly property of a dying world order which takes down to a living death so many Kassners, that a new world may be born. A world whose one pervading value shall be man, and whose purpose: life.

SAMUEL PUTNAM.

The Eighteenth Century

AN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY MISCELLANY: Edited with an introduction by Louis Kronenberger. Putnam. \$3.

IT is impossible for anyone with a conscience, remembering what Swift and Pope had to say about critics, to approach with any comfort a miscellany of 18th century literature, in a critic's guise. A critic in such company, runs always the risk of pulverizing himself by his own citations. Mr. Kronenberger, fortified with a gift for an apt phrase, acquits himself creditably in the introduction to this miscellany which includes, besides Swift and Pope, Sterne, Chesterfield, Gibbon, Gay, Sheridan, Walpole and Blake. One could wish however, that he had paid

some attention to the relation the Industrial Revolution and the development of a "nation of shopkeepers . . . prospering handsomely" had to the development of a literary audience from this rising bourgeoisie and the accommodation of literature to the taste of this newly empowered class.

Mr. Kronenberger does well to indicate that despite Pope, Chesterfield, Gibbon and Sterne the 18th century had more to it than a stuffed shirt, a powdered wig and a dance called the minuet. It was a century of superstition, religious intolerance, political corruption such as would have made a Tammany politician sick from sheer envy, and (what Mr. Kronenberger fails to mention) a century when the English proletariat first began to taste the full flavor of systematic capitalist exploitation under the newly developed factory system. One cannot help feeling that a masterpiece of political pamphleteering such as Swift's *Drapier's Letters* (which actually did prevent Wood's halfpence from even reaching Ireland) or the brilliant and bitter *Modest Proposal* (unfortunately omitted in this collection) were closer to the tenor of 18th century life than the mincing system of etiquette which the Earl of Chesterfield rammed down his son's throat. Likewise one cannot help feeling that the savage and simple rejection of such an age in Blake's *Songs of Experience* involved more courageous and honest effort than, for all its charm, Sterne's trifling satire on and smug acceptance of it in the *Sentimental Journey*.

PETER YORK.



ATTENTION!

If you plan to visit

SOVIET RUSSIA

during this summer

Make Your

Reservations NOW

Join one of our economical Tours

Personally conducted by

MARK GRAUBARD ROB BROWN
GEORGE WISE ANTON TAFT

or
TRAVEL INDEPENDENTLY

35 to 66 days

\$240 to \$425

Come, phone or write

COMPASS TRAVEL BUREAU

55 West 42nd Street New York City
Longacre 5-3070

DECORATION DAY WEEK-END

GRAND FESTIVAL in CAMP NITGEDAIGET

BEACON, N. Y.

I. AMTER and CHAS. KRUMBEIN will greet
The Opening Summer Season
The Athletic Field is ready and fully equipped
(Ed Bates, sport director)

MARK FEDER will perform the
"PICHELOV TRIO"

In Concert—CELIA DEMROE in Dancing
SIX PIECE ORCHESTRA FOR DANCING
—Hotel and Bungalow Accommodations—
\$2.75 per day — \$16.00 per week

Remember Schedules:

Cars leave daily 10 a. m. from 2700 Bronx Park East. Fridays
and Saturdays 10 a. m., 2:30 p. m. and 7:30 p. m.
Tels.—Beacon 731. City Office, Estabrook 8-1400 and 8-5141

The Screen

"We Are from Kronstadt"

NO other recent Soviet film has the physical sweep and impact of *We Are from Kronstadt* (Cameo). It has just those qualities in which the American western and gangster films developed most proficiency—excitement, visual stimulation. Yet these qualities remain essentially superficial and formal aspects of the creative cinema. Even *All Quiet on the Western Front*, which concentrates on the horrors of war and the sweep of the battle scenes, fails to become a vital drama; its message—propaganda, if you will—is impeded by the ideological limitations of the creator or by censorship.

These limitations do not inhibit the director or the scenarist of *We Are from Kronstadt*. Its realism is both terrifying and stirring. Its theme is simple: revolutionary workers defending the new-born Workers' State against the invading White Guards. A group of sailors from the naval base at Kronstadt meet the Yudenich army which outnumbers them and fight a heroic and at first a losing battle. Reinforcements arrive. The battle scenes on the whole are so amazing in their intensity that it is difficult to believe they were acted, that they were not filmed during the course of the struggle.

There are other extraordinary sequences: most extraordinary of all—and one of the most dramatic in the history of cinema—is the execution of the Red sailors. The captured men stand at the edge of a steep sea cliff. Round each sailor's neck is tied a heavy stone. One by one they are pushed over the cliff into the water far below, while overhead the gulls wheel back and forth. Without sentimentality, almost without comment, the horror and the tragedy and the heroism of men dying in defense of their homeland (and it is truly their homeland) enfolds. There is a passage in which the lone soldier creeps up to the oncoming tank and shatters it with a single grenade; there is the grotesquely comic scene in which the progress of the battle is followed for the most part through the action of a White soldier captured by the Reds, who sits in the trench and indicates the ebb and flow of the fight as he rips off or replaces his epaulets.

But, on the whole, *Kronstadt* remains essentially uncinematic. It consists of large sections of action separated by lengthy subtitles which fill the gaps not shown on the screen. It is as if the camera was unable to avoid the limitations of both space and time. Consequently, the film is composed like a book (divided into chapters) or like a play (separated into acts). In addition, the musical score lacks imagination; several of the battle scenes are either too long and so poorly edited that they become anti-climactic.

The film was made essentially for a Soviet

audience. Presupposing a knowledge of the political situation at the time when the White Guards threatened Petrograd, it takes for granted that the audience is acquainted with the geographical relationship of Kronstadt to Petrograd, that the fall of Petrograd threatened the very life of the Revolution. American audiences obviously are not any too familiar with Soviet history of 1919-1920, hence the full significance of the film can easily be lost. More experienced Soviet directors fashion their films so that the result has international appeal. Their films are not merely accurate histories; they are interpretations of the struggles of workers, the oppressed, for freedom, for the right to forge their own state. *Kronstadt* fails because its treatment lacks this universality.

For example, while the problem of collectivization is primarily a Soviet problem, *Peasants* retranslated the conflict into a warm, vital, intimate film that presented the subject in such a way that even a foreign audience, an American audience, participated in it fully. *Chapayev* which, like *Kronstadt*, deals with the Civil War, had a warmth and humor that gave it an international quality. *Zigan* and *Vishnevsky* did not solve this problem of universal appeal in *Kronstadt*.

Vishnevsky has attempted to give a composite picture of the rank and file Bolshevik soldier and sailor. He has drawn from the unidentified mass, types endowed with intimate details and characterizations—the happy-go-lucky sailor who refused to part

with his guitar even when thrown to his death from the cliff; the supreme individualist, antagonistic to the political commissar and the Communist Party, who is finally won over; the cold-blooded and scientific army commander; the political commissar sent by the Party to direct the defense of Petrograd. For the most part, these various people perform their individual actions—some of which make you like them or hate them momentarily—without correlating them into the main flow of the film. Thus, the collective hero is not *typical of the mass*; it is merely a composite of *types*.

Friedrich Wolff has called *Kronstadt* "the real brother of *Potemkin*." With this I cannot agree. In the Eisenstein film, the *mass* is the hero, but in the new film an attempt is made to draw individuals from that mass. But if the scenarist and director have not been entirely successful with their new collective hero, they have at least made clear what it is that makes the Red Army and the Navy different from any other in the world today.

In the final analysis, *We Are from Kronstadt* has vitality and importance. Moreover, it has political significance. The last line has a solemn, prophetic ring: "Who else wants Petrograd?" demands a Bolshevik sailor. It is a warning to the enemies of socialism; it is a vow to sacrifice everything to defend the new, the vital.

The farther the art form of the cinema progresses, the more complex become the problems of form. Markov in his little volume *Soviet Theater* (Putnam) writes: "The theater (and this applies to the cinema as well) can no longer remain a place for memories. It is an instrument for the investigation of the new social relations produced by the new conditions in a country that is building up socialism." PETER ELLIS.

To the SOVIET UNION

A memorable vacation — SEE the country that is building Socialism!
Visit Leningrad, Moscow, Kharkov, Kiev, Volga River, Crimea, Caucasus.

CONDUCTED TOURS

1. Social Workers' Tours
2. Professional Tour
3. Teachers' Tour
4. Theatre Festival Tour
5. American Friends of the Soviet Union Tour

Individual itineraries are arranged in accordance with the wishes of the tourist

Mediterranean cruises, tours to Europe and all parts of the world — separately, or in conjunction with Soviet tours.
Steamship tickets sold to all parts of the world.

WORLD TOURISTS, INC.

175 Fifth Avenue

New York, N. Y.

Telephones: ALgonquin 4-6656, 7, 8

Chicago Office:

110 SO. DEARBORN STREET

Room No. 312

Tel. Franklin 9766



San Francisco:

580 MARKET STREET

Room No. 304

Tel. Garfield 7700