

A LONE WOLF FROM RUSSIA

A little more than a year ago in a Soviet magazine called Novy Mir installments of a novel with a non-Communist hero, entitled "Not By Bread Alone," by Vladimir Dudintsev, began to appear. By Communist Party officials the novel was roundly excoriated. But for intellectuals in the Soviet Union who have long searched for

an acceptable compromise between Soviet literary rigidity and artistic freedom, author Dudintsev's novel has become an important rallying point. This week the novel was published in the U.S. (translated by Dr. Edith Bone; E. P. Dutton, 512 pp. \$4.95). Our reviewer is Ernest J. Simmons, of Columbia University's Russian Institute.

By ERNEST J. SIMMONS

WHOEVER has learned to think cannot be completely deprived of liberty," declares Lopatkin, the hero of "Not by Bread Alone," after his release from a term of hard labor in Siberia. This observation could appropriately be applied to many artists in the Soviet Union today, especially the young ones. One would have to return to the first years immediately following the 1917 Revolution to find anything comparable to the ferment that presently exists in Soviet intellectual and artistic circles. In those early years youthful revolutionary writers damned the smugness and banality of bourgeois literature; today Soviet writers condemn the varnished reality, the boring sameness in the plots of industrial and agricultural novels, and the absurdly perfect Communist heroes that appeared in literature during the Stalin regime. It is rather significant that young

authors are now looking back to the Soviet literature of the pre-Stalin period for models and inspiration.

Several obvious factors have contributed to the development of this ferment—Stalin's death, Khrushchev's famous debunking speech at the Twentieth Party Congress, and particularly the sudden lessening of fear of administrative or government reprisals for speaking one's mind. A most important factor, however, has been the effect of the recent events in Poland and Hungary upon Soviet intellectuals and artists. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that over 1956 and much of 1957 Soviet writers have staged a courageous revolt against Party dictation in literature, and one of the major incitements has been Vladimir Dudintsev's "Not by Bread Alone" which began to appear serially in the summer of 1956.

It takes some knowledge of the grey stream of fatuous and futile fiction that poured from the presses in the

severely regimented post-war period preceding Stalin's death to understand and appreciate the enthusiastic praise and national *réclame* that at first greeted the appearance of "Not by Bread Alone." For there is nothing original or daring about the basic theme—the efforts of an inventor to secure acceptance, despite bureaucratic red tape and chicanery, of the design of a machine for the centrifugal casting of drain pipes. Novels and plays on the trials and tribulations of inventors or innovating engineers and factory managers have long been a commonplace in the planned propaganda literature of the Soviet Union. The point is that Dudintsev, in the interests of realism and not Socialist realism, reverses the fictional formula generally regarded as acceptable by Party critics. Instead of a Communist hero who, with the aid of the collective, struggles to get his invention accepted in the face of the obstructions of a non-Party bureaucrat



—Der Stern, Hamburg.

Dudintsev—"challenges Soviet life."

THE AUTHOR: Vladimir Dudintsev, apart from a shock of wild brown hair, would attract no attention on Russia's streets. He is a mild, modest Slav, who looks about forty-five, though he's probably only in his late thirties. Twenty years ago, when Stalin unleashed a series of bloody purges, Dudintsev was a young Komsomol with a passionate dedication to the Soviet system. His avocation was writing, which he studied under Lev Kassil, a Russian Jew who conducted a literary seminar in Moscow for talented Komsomols.

His vocation was law, which he studied at Moscow's Institute of Jurisprudence. In 1940, Dudintsev received his law degree but Hitler intervened with his practice.

While serving in the Army, Dudintsev was wounded in the leg. Since he was unable to serve on the front any longer, he was transferred to

Siberia to act as a military procurator. This position is comparable to a kind of provincial Judge Advocate in our Army, only Dudintsev—because of the peculiar nature of Soviet law—had authority to try and prosecute civilians. Lopatkin, the young inventor in Dudintsev's book, was tried by such a prosecutor.

Dudintsev at this time was always writing—or reading. He expressed a special fondness for Joyce and Proust. Toward the end of the war or shortly thereafter, he wrote a book—his first. ("Not By Bread Alone" is his second book.) It's called "Rovesniki" and it won Dudintsev an unimportant prize and the jocular criticism of his associates, who spoke of "the liveliness of my pen and the thinness of my material." At a meeting last fall, he admitted with a smile that he was then a formalist.

Also during this period, Dudintsev

steeped in "bourgeois survivals," Dudintsev creates a lonely, non-Communist hero who for years fights the selfish opposition and machinations of a collective of Party bureaucratic industrial officials and would-be scientists, who are themselves guilty of pandering to what passes for "bourgeois survivals" in the Soviet Union, before he achieves success largely (though not exclusively) through the assistance of non-Communist friends.

This Lopatkin is a striking contrast to the conventional positive heroes of post-war Soviet fiction and this fact has no doubt aroused much of the popular enthusiasm for the novel. Lopatkin is not a perfected version of Communist virtues or a hero who has so completely identified himself with the collective that there is no trace left of individual human personality. Drozdov, the factory manager, calls him a lone wolf: "Look here, Comrade Lopatkin, if I were a writer, I should write a novel about you. Because you are a truly tragic figure embodying within yourself a whole epoch, which by now is irretrievably past and gone. You are a hero, but a solitary one. . . ."

Drozdov is one of the most interesting characters in the novel. In many respects he is a more powerfully realized and psychologically convincing figure than the hero. A self-made Soviet tycoon, Drozdov is a representative of the managerial class which Dudintsev fearlessly satirizes and exposes. An oily Communist, hypocritical, and cautiously unscrupulous, he has a contempt for the individualists and the geniuses of Soviet society. He believes himself

to be a model Communist. "I belong to the producers of material values," he declares. "The main spiritual value in our time is the ability to work well, to create the greatest possible quantity of necessary things."

Dudintsev portrays Drozdov and his managerial colleagues as the fat-cat "capitalists" of Soviet society who sport silk shirts, buy mink coats for their wives, live in superior dwellings, drive around in chauffeured automobiles, and are contemptuous of their subordinates. In stark contrast are the little people—Lopatkin, his friends the Sianovs, and the memorable old frustrated inventor Professor Busko, all of whom live a hand-to-mouth existence in wretched, crowded quarters. The contrast of the two levels of society is brought to a meaningful focus in Lopatkin's observation that "men are not born to accept humiliation, to lie, and to betray, for the sake of rich food and a good time." Indeed, it is Dudintsev's challenge to the official picture of Soviet life—his devastating account of the dishonesty and distrust at all levels brought out in the course of the selfless efforts of a man to benefit the State—which has vastly annoyed Soviet officialdom.

The artistic achievements of "Not by Bread Alone" do not measure up to the book's ideological importance in the current literary ferment. Artistically the novel does not stand much above the mediocre level of post-war fiction. However, Dudintsev succeeds in this first novel in drawing a few bold and often brilliantly realistic scenes of Soviet life, such as those in the hospital at Muzga, the family

existence of the Sianovs, and the shocking account of Soviet injustice in the court scene where Lopatkin is sentenced to eight years at hard labor. Of the many characters, only Drozdov and old Professor Busko emerge as well-rounded, thoroughly believable human beings. Curiously enough, the intransigent Lopatkin wins our sympathy—if not always our understanding—by his strange, off-center behavior. His relations with the three women in his life, Jeanne, Valentina, and Nadia, seem contrived to exemplify his own self-characterization: "I reason so much that I have forgotten what feelings are like."

In an introduction, written by the author after London Soviet officials foolishly protested the translation of the novel into English, Dudintsev inveighs against those so-called Russian experts in the West who ignore his positive thinking while emphasizing the filth "which I washed out when I cleaned some dirty linen." Now, however, Party critics in the Soviet Union roundly denounce both Dudintsev's positive thinking and his washing of dirty linen in public. Up to date the young author has resolutely refused to recant, though repeatedly called upon to do so, and his novel and his courage have become important rallying points for those literary dissenters who only recently caused such a disturbance in Moscow.

Once again the justifiable demands of Soviet writers have been silenced, but freedom is patient, and meanwhile a new and potent spirit lurks in the USSR.

became very much interested in Russian classical literature, and he liked to think he was able to handle a major theme by himself—one that tackles a critical problem of life. He soon tired of short stories; he longed for the majesty, scope, and power of a big book. He read and reread Gogol's "Dead Souls," and he became obsessed with Gogol's mastery of the big theme. When finally he sat down to write his own big novel, Dudintsev worked with a theme incorporating the whole Soviet system, the one common denominator—bureaucracy.

AFTER the war, Dudintsev worked as an industrial correspondent. He traveled from one machine plant to another, and soon he got to know the industry very well. For some reason, he took a special interest in the invention bureaus. He investigated many himself, got on personal terms

with Russia's top bureaucrats, and gained the valuable knowledge which he employed in his novel.

Dudintsev admits he started writing "Not By Bread Alone" in 1952, and he made his first attempt to publish the book after the Twentieth Party Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in February, 1956. One Russian told me Dudintsev had tremendous difficulty finding a publisher. He was told his manuscript was good but too controversial. Finally, in desperation, he turned to Konstantin Siminov, editor of *Novy Mir*, a literary monthly. Siminov accepted the book, and publication began in installments in August, 1956.

Possibly Dudintsev could have had the manuscript published before the Twentieth Party Congress, but this would have been both tricky and dangerous. Although the Communists have always mouthed a distaste for

bureaucracy, there was in fact no official, active campaign against the Kremlin's red tape until Nikita Khrushchev cut loose with his violent denunciation of Stalin at the Congress. Thus, an attack against bureaucracy might have been interpreted as an attack against Russia's leaders.

When Dudintsev heard Khrushchev rip into the Stalin era, he felt justified in publishing his attacks on Russia's Drozdovs and his defense of her Lopatkins. Moreover, it was safer. Editor Siminov probably published the book for the same reason.

Now, Vladimir Dudintsev stands as a pivotal symbol of a bid for greater artistic autonomy. The reaction to his book stands as an arresting affirmation of the Communist fear that a little freedom is as dangerous to totalitarianism as a lot of freedom—that even the Russians live not by bread alone. —MARVIN L. KALB.

Young Arriviste

"Room at the Top," by John Braine (Houghton Mifflin. 301 pp. \$3.75), a first novel by a member of England's emerging group of "angry young men," records the story of Joe Lampton, a young rake whose goal is to enjoy the comforts of wealth.

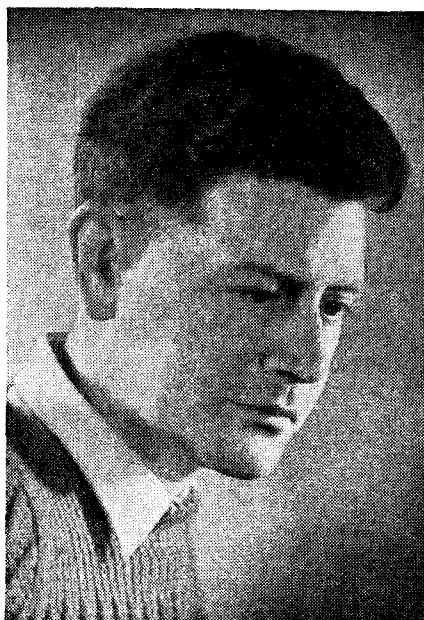
By James Gray

IN England not long ago a novel entitled "Room at the Top," written by a young novelist named John Braine, was received with critical endorsement by certain discerning journalists. The reason: Braine is a member of the emerging group of novelists known as "the angry young men," a group which has attracted wide attention both in England and in the U.S.

"Room at the Top" is an account of a "rake's progress" out of his native working-class world into the cozy comforts of a rich industrialist's world. The "rake" is one Joe Lampton, a young man who is ready to exchange his prevailing presence for a well-paid job and all that goes with it in the way of wardrobe, perquisites of wealth, and solid bourgeois status. He practices his "beefy" blandishments on two susceptible women and, succeeding with each, ruins the lives of both. The first mistress becomes a tragic figure as a result of his desertion; the second, as the book makes abundantly clear, will be made an equally tragic figure by marrying him.

Almost anything can be made of this kind of material. You can make "Madame Bovary" of it if you have the genius to reveal how pitiful a thing it is to snatch greedily at the semblance of love and miss love itself. Or, if you have a kind of earnest, uncensorious sympathy for the young arriviste, as Arnold Bennett had, you can make a nice little comedy of his adventures: Bennett did so in "Denry, the Audacious" (entitled "The Card" in England). Or, if you are a man with a gift for spite like John O'Hara, you can make a "Pal Joey" of it, exposing all that is brassy and brutal in a way of life.

But somehow "Room at the Top," on its voyage here from England, seems to have suffered a sea change without becoming either rich or strange. It repeats much that is garishly familiar about the techniques of seduction but adds little that is revealing about human society or human relations outside the narrowest confines of the boudoir. Led to believe



Braine—"youth snarling."

that the overtone of the book is the "good sound" of hungry "youth really snarling," one is astonished to be able to detect nothing more lively than the persistent purr of youth in calculated exploitation.

The author of the novel lacks both the maturity of insight and the flair for style that might have enabled him to seize upon any of the book's possibilities. He tells his story in the idiom of the little theatre rehearsal room where all the characters, from the upper reaches of the middle class and the obscure alcoves of the civil service, come fortuitously together. The prattle of the imitators of the imitators of Noel Coward is on every tongue with absolutely no differentiation of accent from speaker to speaker.

Perhaps Mr. Braine's most serious mistake was to try to present this report of the heel-as-hero in the form of direct first person testimony from the young man himself. All the gusto that might have belonged to an objective story of shameless adventure is lost and replaced with nothing more rewarding in the way of subjective interpretation than an occasional wisp of self-doubt.

It may be that the young author tried the novel too soon. The last pages of "Room at the Top" constitute a short story which rises above the level of the rest of the book. These pages have to do with a night-long orgy of perverse dissipation, in which Joe Lampton indulges as an attempt to escape the awful image of his guilt. This picture of the simple savage turned sentimentalist has a kind of woeful authenticity to it. That, at least, is something on which to build a talent which has yet to emerge.

Timid Torero

"The Wounds of Hunger," by Luis Spota (translated by Barnaby Conrad. Houghton Mifflin. 233 pp. \$3.50), is a popular Mexican novel which has now been published in the U. S. and which tells of the making of a matador.

By David Dempsey

ONE need not collect fight posters or belong to a fan club to appreciate Luis Spota's new novel "The Wounds of Hunger," a remarkable book first published in Mexico some ten years ago before bullfighting in the United States was expanded from a few lines out of "Carmen" to a neo-Romantic cult, with its borrowed vocabulary, its glorification of ritualized blood-letting, and its gospel of living dangerously—at a safe, literary distance. For those who contracted the sort of bull fever passed on by such writers as Kenneth Tynan, "The Wounds of Hunger" is a recommended antibiotic; and for others not yet infected it may very well provide lasting immunity.

The nearest North American equivalent I can think of to Luis Ortega, the young torero of Mr. Spota's novel, would be a small-time boxer striving very hard to get carded in Madison Square Garden. As the story opens, Luis and his manager, Pancho Camioneto, are in Mexico City hoping to fight at the Plaza Mexico. Of course, this is not easy for an eighteen-year-old beginner—not easy unless one is willing to submit to the unexpected demands of the impresario, for it seems that in bullfighting, as in the theatre, the casting couch is not unknown. Luis rejects this approach and he and Camioneto go off to "the wars," the dusty little country fiestas—the bush league fights—in which an aspiring matador is expected to perfect his style.

For a year they wander the provinces, by boxcar, truck, and sometimes, when they are lucky, by bus. If Luis has a weakness for bulls, which often frighten him, he is even more greatly affected by women, and his motto, "Never a backward step!", like his veronica, is more suitably executed in the bedroom than the bullring. Camioneto's attempts to keep a tight leash on his torero, their escapades with fight managers, country doctors, and the police; Luis's love affair with a sultry little female torera; his narrow escape from a cuckolded husband who wears an iron hook in place of a hand and turns up, in the best tradition of