

vidualism and subjectivism. The same desire to incorporate the world, filtering its multiplicity of events through his own glass, that makes of Sartre a heroic figure for cultural history seems finally also to have set limits to Sartre's conceptual world, to have made impossible for him a consistent ideal of community and social justice. This may not be the necessary price of a commitment to radical individualism or freedom, but Sartre's unsuccessful struggle makes that consequence seem more nearly inevitable than it would be otherwise. [WV]

### THE SOVIET NOVEL: HISTORY AS RITUAL

by Katerina Clark

(University of Chicago Press, xv + 293 pp.; \$20.00 [paper])

Judith M. Mills

The American reception of Soviet literary dissent has been almost invariably warm. In our race to embrace the Soviet waywards from Pasternak on, we have left aesthetic considerations far behind. It has been a given that anything rejected by a system so alien to our own must concur with our perceptions of the real, the good, and the true—and so, of course, must also be beautiful.

America's reception of the far larger body of writing that flourishes under the rubric of Socialist Realism is an entirely different matter. Despite the fact that Socialist Realism represents the Soviet literary mainstream and embodies the values and perceptions of our major ideological antagonist on the socio-cultural, political, and economic fronts, it is readily dismissed—and even by professional Sovietologists—as far less interesting and far less significant than its underground counterpart. Often enough Soviet Realism is not even treated as a literary tradition. Instead it is seen as the offspring of political powers who, insensitive to literary creativity and hostile to free literary expression, tamper with literary production. These attitudes have been enshrined in America as the strong and lasting conventional wisdom.

Katerina Clark's book is convention-breaking on both fronts. It is the kind of questioning of received wisdom that keeps intellectual life and scholarly endeavor vital, and it brings the study

of Soviet literature into an arena that enhances the possibilities for richer analysis—much as a similar kind of questioning has enriched the analytical and explanatory frameworks of political and sociological Sovietology.

Its scope and analytical framework make *The Soviet Novel* the most significant and enlightening treatment of Soviet literature to be published in the United States in recent memory. A comprehensive description and analysis of the entire Socialist Realist phenomenon from its nineteenth-century precursors through its post-Stalinist developments, it takes Socialist Realism seriously as a literary and cultural tradition in its own right and dispenses with the acerbic commentary that seems to have become de rigueur for a treatment of Soviet culture and society. Moreover, Clark contends that the bulk of Soviet dissenting works, even those written in the West by émigrés, have greater affinity with Socialist Realist structures, symbols, images, and methods, and to the Russian traditions that underlie them, than to anything that can be considered endemically Western.

The book's major concern, though, is to provide an analytical and explanatory framework for coming to terms with the interaction between Soviet literature and Soviet society. The author meets the problem of the relationship between literature and society head-on. This too involves questioning a favored Western stance with a very strong hold on the scholarly study of Russian literature: that literature is an autonomous series that changes and develops on its own terms, according to its own lights, and independent of its cultural and socio-political surroundings. Clark argues that though literature can be an autonomous series, it cannot be absolutely independent of extraliterary phenomena. All interact as subsystems within an overall cultural system, although in different ways in different societies and cultures. Words, after all, would have no meaning were it not for their extraliterary context.

Socialist Realism in its purest form has no sympathy for literature as purely verbal play divorced from social reality—a seminal concept for modernists in the West. True, the Russian tradition in its prerevolutionary and immediately postrevolutionary periods produced dazzling feats of verbal pyrotechnics. But in the battle between stylistic virtuosity and social meaning, the

scales tip significantly in favor of meaning even among the most gifted of the experimental writers, as witness the best-known works of Biely, Solugub, Blok, Zamyatin, Pilnyak, and Olesha. Perhaps no literature can depend solely upon its own literary system for its vitality and meaning. Yet the Russian tradition has always been preeminent for dynamic interaction with its socio-political setting.

In the Socialist Realist tradition this interaction is even more evident, more integral. We all know that the tradition derives from the political support given to certain themes and styles of expression since the articulation of Socialist Realism as the official mode of Soviet writing in 1934. But something of greater significance is usually overlooked. When the political powers decided that some effort should be directed toward producing a literature that would be a monument to the new society, they found what they wanted and needed in an ongoing tradition that dated back to prerevolutionary radical writing.

The conclusion is that Socialist Realism was not created by politicians for political ends, although it was used by them as such. It was created by socially and ideologically attuned writers long before the politicians ever made the decision to take sides in the literary battles of the 1920s and '30s. The political decision was to develop what was already there by turning all writers in that direction and by closing off other avenues of creativity as unseemly and less effective for Soviet socialist purposes. The political role was first to weed and then to nurture the shoot that was already deeply rooted.

Clark's approach is poststructuralist. Socialist Realism, as a mode intended for mass consumption, has features in common with other popular literature. It is formulaic and didactic, and at varying phases in its development it shares elements with Russian hagiography and folk narrative. But the book's purpose is not to identify structural similarities among traditions, which often leaves the impression of much ado about little. What it does is distinguish and specify the function of these various elements within one integral literary tradition and then trace the changes in formulae, symbols, character types, and images as literary culture interacts with extraliterary systems. Significant

meaning is found to be imbedded in the specific Russian pre- and postrevolutionary context. The generic is recognized but is not of primary importance in this study. Instead, the focus is on the generic as it is transformed in its particular cultural recension.

It is within this specific tradition that overarching structural features are found, a master plot and a master theme that embody the problem of perennial concern to the Russian intelligentsia and to which the Bolsheviks claimed to have a resolution: how individual and society can, should, and do interact. The master plot serves as a ritual, as it is worked and reworked from the radical writing of the nineteenth century through the 1920s, '30s, '40s, and '50s. And the novel became a repository of official myth: the belief that individual and society will be reconciled as communism is achieved. The novel shows how it is to be done—a *Pilgrim's Progress* in socialist guise.

Clark studies the formulation of Socialist Realism, the reasons why this particular mode of writing came to be the one chosen for the Stalinist purpose, its development through changes in ideological stance, and the impact this had on hero, villain, and mentor figures and on other motifs. She identifies the subtext that informs all of this writing, from the radical writing of the nineteenth century through the eventual passing of the heroic and the mythic as the dominant mode in Soviet literature with the coming of the 1960s and '70s.

By taking the pulse of its literature, Clark chronicles the Soviet Union's own coming of age, its rite of passage from the heroic revolutionary phase through its development into an organizational society and then its move into the modern technological world. But the complexity and richness of the author's analysis and description defy summation. Again and again it is painfully obvious that much had to be put aside to meet space limitations. Nevertheless, the University of Chicago Press and its new paperback "Chicago Originals" series must be congratulated for making this book available. Unquestionably, *The Soviet Novel* is intensely thought-provoking. It takes up the challenge of trying to understand and explain a literary system of an alien culture on its own terms and on its own grounds, and in so doing it throws down the gauntlet to Western readers.

**ERNEST HEMINGWAY:  
SELECTED LETTERS, 1917-1961**  
edited by Carlos Baker  
(Charles Scribner's Sons, xix + 948 pp.,  
\$27.50)

Carroll Grimes

Wonder of wonders, the man who forged in his fiction a new prose style stamped by laconic understatement reveals himself in this voluminous text as a prolific practitioner of the epistolary form—an art that today seems on the brink of extinction. These letters, some six hundred in all, represent about a tenth of the six or seven thousand Hemingway posted in his day.

As the letters move through a forty-odd-year period of his life and times, the private voice of Ernest Hemingway comes through in many guises, revealing the complexity of the person who develops, matures, declines, and disintegrates bravely, bitterly, and tragically before our eyes. Chosen by Hemingway's biographer, Carlos Baker, and arranged chronologically, the letters permit us to eavesdrop on a man who, never intending his letters to be published, speaks in many voices—by turns kind, honest, sympathetic, generous, grateful, thoughtful, humorous, fatherly, mean, petty, vindictive, jealous, even vicious. On the whole, this collection contains something for everyone, supporters and detractors alike.

A few of the notes are trivial. But in the best and worst of his correspondence there is evidence of Hemingway's ability to relax, upbraid, sympathize, pontificate, shock, or philosophize. "There really is, to me anyway, very great glamour in life—and places and all sorts of things and I would like sometime to get it into the stuff. People aren't all as bad as Ring Lardner finds them—or as hollowed out and exhausted emotionally as some of the Sun generation. I've known some very wonderful people who even though they were going directly toward the grave (which is what makes my story a tragedy if carried out until the end) managed to put up a very fine performance enroute."

The many masks Hemingway adopted over the years shed themselves in his letters to Charles Scribner, Sr., and later to his son, Charles, Jr. Repeatedly, Hemingway ranted about his escalating income taxes, a matter on which he became increasingly paranoid

in the waning months of his life; frequently he was testy about delays over incoming mail to Cuba from Scribner in New York, yet often he pens a second letter apologizing for such impatience. One can only surmise that Charles Scribner did not always roll over and play dead for his sometimes temperamental writer. Other notes display flashes of humor, as when Hemingway writes about having fourth and last wife, Mary Welsh, and second wife, Pauline Pfeiffer, at his home in Cuba, both tending to his ailing son. Breezily he gossips about the success former third wife, Martha, is having as a correspondent; claiming he taught her how to write well. He chuckles over Martha and Pauline meeting in Venice. Speaking about his mother, his letters bristle with hatred as he charges her with his father's suicide in 1928. From problems about his weight and diet Hemingway can shift into high dudgeon over critical response to *Across the River and Into the Trees* (1950). Later, in a calmer moment, he admits that John O'Hara's estimation that next to Shakespeare, Hemingway is the greatest writer is "ridiculous"—even though, as he tells Scribner, it gives him "a good quote if you have anybody who reads reviews and can paste up quotes." Still, Hemingway adds, he "would have been 100 times happier if O'Hara had understood the book."

As Hemingway moves through Italy, Canada, Paris, Key West, Spain, Africa, Europe, Cuba, the Mayo Clinic in Rochester to the newly purchased home in Ketchum, Idaho, where he takes his own life, the letters show him at his finest and at his most insufferable. Hadley Richardson, his first wife, retains a tender spot in his heart; and, during the breakup of his second marriage to Pauline, Hemingway turns to Hadley for some form of understanding. Well into his fourth marriage with Mary, he laments to Scribner that he wished "there had never been a divorce" from Pauline.

The letters to his children often show Hemingway at his best. International figure he might be, but this did not weaken his concern and devotion to his three sons. A rather touching simplicity graces many of these letters, particularly to his second son, Patrick. Whatever the accretion of guilt over his unsuccessful role as husband and father, when word of Pauline's death reached him in October, 1951, he was