MIKHAIL ZOSHCHENKO
AND THE
SERAPION BROTHERS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the period of relative economic and artistic freedom that occurred during the time of the New Economic Policy (1921-1924).

The general failure in agriculture and in industrial productivity forced the Soviet regime to allow diversions from the orthodox Marxist view of state ownership of the tools of production. Because of the need to start the wheels of production turning, the minor landowners, small manufacturers and petty profiteers took to the task in hope of financial gains. This economic environment, uncontrolled by the Communist Party, reflected itself in the relatively chaotic "artistic scene". Amongst the many literary groups that appeared during the early 1920's, I dwell mostly upon the Serapion Brothers and the members of that group, singling out for more intense study Mikhail Zoshchenko: his artistry and his struggle for artistic freedom.
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The civil war ended in 1921. War Communism, as an economic policy to start production in the devastated country to feed its people, had failed.

The essence of [the] peculiar War Communism was that we actually took from the peasant all the surplus grain — and sometimes even not only surplus grain but part of the grain the peasant required for food — to meet the requirements of the army and to sustain the workers. Most of it we took on loan, for paper money. . . . We were forced to resort to War Communism by war and ruin. It was not, nor could it be, a policy that corresponded to the economic tasks of the proletariat. . . . The correct policy of the proletariat which is exercising its dictatorship in a small-peasant country is to obtain grain in exchange for the manufactured goods the peasant requires. . . .

Thus Lenin introduced the New Economic Policy\textsuperscript{2} to Russia. Lenin realized that the war-torn country's population needed immediate short-term incentives rather than communism at a distant future. Therefore, he was willing to bend his orthodox theories and allow ownership, the accumulation of capital and private profit-taking on labor.

Our poverty and ruin are so great that we cannot at one stroke restore large-scale, factory, state socialist production. This requires that we accumulate large stocks of grain and fuel in the


\textsuperscript{2}From here on referred to as N. E. P.
big industrial centers, replace the worn-out machines with new ones, and so on. Experience has convinced us that this cannot be done at one stroke.

Lenin was willing to allow craftsmen and certain small industries, which did not need big capital investment, machinery or power (i.e., oil, electricity) for operation, to produce and exist as private enterprises. Peasants were taxed in grain and, for the first time since the Revolution, they were allowed to sell their surplus grain, meat, and produce on the open market. The hope of profit-taking for their hard work gave the peasants incentive to work harder and thus they produced more food for the starved population.

The theory behind the toleration of "small-scale capitalism" was simple. The idea was that if the peasant accumulates cash not needed for his immediate survival he will spend that money on consumer goods, or invest it in machinery, or better housing. Thus, he will create a consumer demand for industrial products; in return, this will give jobs and wages to the urban proletariat. With greater demand for industrial goods, on the retained profit the state can build up heavy industry, communication, etc.

The theory was simple, but in real life it did not work that way. The peasants and the craftsmen took their profit, but they did not spend it: the policies of War

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3 Lenin, Selected Works, Part II, p. 544.
Communism were still too vivid in their memories, where a man could be condemned to death, or labelled as a kulak, because he kept his household in good repair or had a machine or a spare horse. As a result, homes stayed in disrepair. No peasant went on a big spending spree. If he did purchase some small machinery, he would hide it from his neighbors for fear of its being taken away at the next political change.

Bukharin supported Lenin's New Economic Policy, and he made no attempt to deny that the development envisaged by him might give economic power to the group which was considered the strongest remnant of capitalism: the kulaks, small holders, marketeers. "We have to tell the whole peasantry, all its strata: get rich, accumulate, develop your economy." In Bukharin's view the growth of cooperation with the kulaks would raise the economic level of the peasantry as a whole and thus sap the foundations of the kulak's power. The gains secured by poor and medium peasants who had been previously, to a varying extent, dependent on the village rich, would be much greater, particularly since they would have on their side the all-out support of the state. The sharply progressive taxation would narrow the...

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4 "O novoi ekonomicheskoi politike i nashikh zadachakh" -- Part II, Bolshevik, June 1, 1925. This formula offended the orthodox Marxists and soon Bukharin had to retract it three times. However, he did not renounce the underlying idea.
income differentials still further. Part of the taxes drawn from the kulaks would be saved and used for the establishment of the socialized sector of the economy and for the expansion of a nationalized credit system. The result of this gradual levelling and increasing dependence on state-controlled economy would be a euthanasia of the kulaks after they had (very much against their will) rendered a yeoman service to the socialist economy.

Bukharin put his finger on the crucial spot when he spoke of "setting into motion the factors of production which are lying idle like a dead weight" and of mobilizing "the hidden reserves of energy", as well as of "more intensive utilization of the unit of capital". This was, indeed, the basic fact from which all the rest followed. Soviet large-scale industry, in the early years of the N.E.P., could have increased its output without any expansion of its plant, because large reserves of unused capacity were available. However, without stepping up the volume of production as well as improving the efficiency of the labor

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5"If we are walking around naked, the kulak will conquer us economically, and if he is a depositor in our banks, he won't conquer us. We are helping him, but he is helping us, too . . ." Bolshevik, April 30, 1925.

6Bolshevik, November 5, 1924, p. 30.

7Bolshevik, January 15, 1925, p. 56.
force employed operating these plants and increasing the food supplies, the execution of this plan was impossible. (Also, important branches of the processing industries could not be put into operation without raw material of agricultural origin.) To increase the food supplies, the state had to deal with the peasants' demand for immediate incentives. By offering the peasants better terms of trade than a consistently "monopolistic" price policy would have permitted, the urban industry would have benefited in the long run — it would have had at its disposal larger amounts of agricultural products. This, in turn, would have made it possible to step up the utilization of the idle industrial capacity still further and thereby start new cycles of over-all increases. Similarly, the imposition of curbs on "easy monopolistic profits" would have put the managers of state enterprises under strong pressure to minimize their costs by introducing organizational and technological improvements. There could be no doubt that the "forced normalization" in the villages, and the cessation of uncertainty which had been weakening the peasants' incentive to apply superior methods of production, would have operated in the same direction.

Bukharin, who, four years earlier, had offered the most polished and theoretically sophisticated defence of War Communism, now hailed the "normalcy" of the N. E. P. as the
surest route to economic recovery from the ruins of a revolution and a civil war.

During the first months of the revolution, Lenin tried to confine nationalization to the more vital branches of industry, and tried to smooth the transition from the old order to the new by utilizing the managerial skills of former capitalists and bourgeois specialists. These efforts quickly revealed themselves as abortive. Capitalists and managers abandoned their plants in large numbers, and many others were driven out by workers intent on avenging past grievances. The workers assumed that the factories now belonged to them, and they sought to operate them in their own interest. The results were disastrous. Lacking managerial training and technical skill, and unable to impose discipline on their own members, the factory committees frequently brought their enterprises to a standstill. Their problems were greatly aggravated by failures of communications and transport, as well as shortages of raw materials.

Despite Lenin's strenuous efforts to improve the administrative efficiency of the nationalized enterprises, industrial disorganization was endemic. The cities suffered from cold and hunger; workers abandoned the factories in large numbers. Suppliers were cut off; industrial production declined catastrophically. The output of those factories that continued to operate was reserved almost entirely for
the Red Army. Amongst the population strict price control and rationing of goods were introduced. Shortages soon became so extreme as to render price and rationing controls meaningless. Money lost all value. Workers had to be paid in kind, and a rapidly expanding black market largely displaced the official channels of trade. The black marketeers flourished on the proceeds of illicit trade.

Despite all these hardships, to those who believed in the Communist cause, the revolution and the following civil war appeared as a liberating act which brought the working masses to the forefront of world history. It aroused hopes and dreams of a world to be remade in the image of brotherhood, equality and justice.

The civil war period and the period shortly following was an era of considerable social experimentation. During this time the new regime was feeling its way into the future. The overthrow of the old regime was accompanied by a rebellion against the family and traditional moral values, by the loosening of marital ties and a new emphasis on the emancipation of women, by the increased authority of youth, by educational innovations, and by a relatively unfettered ferment of literary and artistic productivity. Amidst the grimness of the ruins of War Communism, the rebels against the old society luxuriated in their new freedom. The domination of the Party by its central organs was not yet
complete. This was indeed the romantic period of the revolution. Party discussions were lively and uninhibited. The criticism of the leadership was not equated with treason. Utopian dreams of the rule of the masses still tempered the realities of dictatorship.

The peasants during this period were caught up in cross currents. They did not harbor love for communism, but as long as the Bolsheviks stood as the only barrier which prevented the landlords from reclaiming their estates, many peasants were prepared to give the Bolsheviks at least passive support.8

Left-wing intellectuals who were at odds with the Bolsheviks found themselves drawn to the Soviet cause because the policies espoused by the Whites were even more repugnant to them.

To keep or obtain the loyalty of the workers and peasants, concessions had to be made immediately. These concessions were made by the almost total abandonment of heavy industry in favor of the consumer industry. (For example: the mining industry in 1920 produced 33% of its 1912 output; this fell further to 30% in 1921, and rose to

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8"The land settlement adopted and reluctantly blessed by the Bolsheviks was actually deeply repugnant to them, since it introduced the 'Trojan horse' of private property into the very midst of the communist citadel and raised ultimate dangers of counter-revolution." Merle Fainsod, How Russia is Ruled, p. 96 (see Bibliography).
only 36% in 1922. In the metallurgical industry, the output in 1920 was no more than 6% of that of 1912, rising to 9% in 1921, and declining to 7% in 1922.)

According to a statement at the twelfth party congress in April 1923, industry as a whole, in spite of severe measures taken, was still working at 30% of capacity.

The peasants' original reluctance to part with their profits eased up, and an increasing spending-spree swept through the countryside. The peasants learned how to drive a hard bargain for industrial goods. The demand for food supplies was so acute that prices moved in favor of agricultural products. To act as go-between, a new class emerged: the Nepman,—some of them once reputable, others not so reputable. Some of them emerged from the underworld where they had lived since the revolution, others were newcomers to the scene who quickly adapted themselves to the new tricks of the trade. Their strength lay in their success in making themselves indispensable to state trading institutions and to the industrial trusts. They received privileged treatment everywhere. Their profits were doubtless large enough to enable them to resort to direct or indirect forms of

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10Ibid.
corruption. Moscow, under N.E.P., became a city of luxury for private agents of the new state capitalism.

The lapse of time had brought forgetfulness of the fearful crisis which necessitated the introduction of N.E.P., and some of its less agreeable implications had become notorious. Complaints against it began to be widely heard. The R.S.F.S.R. had entered the N.E.P. period without any official machinery for the conduct or regulation of internal trade.

The philosophy of N.E.P., while it encouraged state institutions to engage in trade, insisted that trade should be conducted on market principles without state interference; it was, therefore, as inimical as the practice of war communism had been, though for a different reason, to the creation of any supervisory organ. Complete official detachment could not, indeed, be maintained.

The need for some central planning was obvious. Stalin started with the assumption that a program of rapid industrialization was imperative and that nothing short of a wholesale reconstruction of Soviet agriculture could guarantee the grain reserves to carry it forward. The Stalinist plan, which was borrowed in many of its aspects from the proposals of the Left Opposition, involved the preliminary application of "emergency measures". These

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11 Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic.

measures were against the kulaks, in order to expropriate
the surpluses which they were allegedly hoarding, and subse-
sequently to liquidate the kulaks as class enemies. By herding
the agricultural population into state and collective farms,
the regime would be able to operate through a relatively
limited number of controlled collective units instead of
dealing individually with millions of peasant households.
While the advocates of this plan professed to believe that
rapid industrialization could be combined with an increase
in consumption as the result of the application of modern
technical methods to agriculture, in practice, this hope was
soon shown to be illusory. Stripped of its propaganda
verbiage, the Stalinist program foreshadowed a profound
extension of the scope of totalitarian power. The peasantry
was to be brought to heel and tied to state ends. The
surpluses extracted from the peasantry were to provide the
means of creating a powerful industrial structure which
would render the Soviet state impregnable. Thus the era of
N.E.P., of private enterprises, of supply and demand market
principles, gave way to the era of the "Five-Year Plans":
the era of complete state-controlled economy.
CHAPTER II

During the era of N.E.P., literary policy was subject to the same compromise which was inherent in all the policies of the ruling party: lack of central control. This comparative freedom can be explained by the great political struggle for complete power, between rival groups behind the scenes. As long as no one group had absolute power over the party and thus over the country, the control of literature seemed to be of secondary importance, even though Trotsky, Lenin, and Bukharin were conscious of the fact that literature was the battleground of social and political opinion. During this period an embarrassingly large number of literary groups mushroomed all over the country, but most intensively in Leningrad and Moscow.

The clash of opposing opinions was mounting. On the Left, a number of literary groups and movements claimed to be speaking in the name of the party and the revolution. They rejected the heritage of the bourgeois past. On the opposite wing were the so-called "fellow travellers"

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12 The party view on this, in May 1924, was as follows: "Considering that no one literary trend, school or group can, or should be allowed to speak in the name of the party, the congress emphasizes the importance of regulating the question of literary criticism and of throwing the fullest possible light on patterns of belles-lettres in the pages of the Soviet party press." VKP(B) v Rezolyutsiyakh (1941), i. 602.
(Poputchiki) who accepted the Russian literary and artistic tradition as a valid foundation on which a new Soviet literature could be built. In effect, Lenin and Trotsky were both on the side of the fellow-travellers. Their works were freely published in literary journals, receiving praise from Bukharin as well as Trotsky.

Heated debates and statements on the position the party should take in regard to literature were frequent, but not binding. Bukharin described his position as "very radical". He felt the party should impose its ideology on all fields, "even on mathematics", but it would be wrong to "crush peasant literature" or to eliminate "the writer from the Soviet intelligentsia". Trotsky gave the longest and best-reasoned speech in defence of the fellow-travellers, but by this time his position in the party, since the "Thirteenth Party Conference" (January, 1924), was seriously compromised.

The main opposition to the fellow-travellers was the

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13 Non-proletarian and non-communist writers who, in their own way, had accepted the revolution, mainly focusing their artistic attention on its processes. Even the majority of the Serapion Brothers, despite their insistence on being free to choose their subjects, in fact wrote almost exclusively about the revolution. All these writers who, without being communists, vaguely sympathized with the revolution and were certainly hostile to its enemies, were dubbed "fellow-travellers". The name was first used by Trotsky in one of the essays in his book, Literatura i Revolutsiya, -- as stated by Gleb Struve.
"On-Guardist" (Na postu) group. Originally this group broke away from the "Smithy" (Kuznitsa) group, by first publishing their rival journal October (Oktyabr) and then calling their group by the same name. They had a hundred per cent communist membership. Their aims were to develop ideologically pure proletarian literature and to crush any other literature, such as that of the peasantry and the intelligentsia, as non-representative of the revolutionary masses. In June 1923 they began issuing their new journal, On Guard. The editorial manifesto appeared in the first issue, and demanded a break with the past:

We shall stand firmly on guard over a strong and clear communist ideology in proletarian literature. In view of the revival ever since the beginning of N.E.P. of the activity of bourgeois literary groups, all ideological doubts are absolutely inadmissible, and we shall make a point of bringing them to light.

We shall fight those Manilovs\(^\text{14}\) who distort and slander our revolution by the attention they pay to the rotten fabric of the fellow-travellers' literary creation in their attempt to build an aesthetic bridge between the past and the present.\(^\text{15}\)

Among the list of contributors in the second issue of the journal were Kamenev, Radek and Yaroslavsky.\(^\text{16}\) This

\(^{14}\) Manilov: the complacent land-owner in Gogol's Dead Souls.


\(^{16}\) This might not be as significant as it seems, as it was a common practice of party leaders to lend their names
meant that the journal and the group had support in party circles. This support gave them confidence to wage an all-out battle against the very popular group of fellow-travellers.

Proletarian literature in the Soviet Union has but one aim before it: to serve the cause of world proletarian victory, to fight ruthlessly all the enemies of the Revolution. Proletarian literature will conquer bourgeois literature, for the proletarian revolution will inevitably destroy capitalism.

Trotsky answered their attack in his book, Literature and Revolution (1923):

If we should eliminate Pilniak, the Serapion Brotherhood, Mayakovky, Esenin, what will remain of a future proletarian literature except a few defaulted promissory notes?

The proletarian writers will have to win this war "by high-grade productiveness rather than by manifestos"; "the issue between bourgeois and proletarian literature depends on quality." As a matter of fact, all the leading poets of the period emerged from other than proletarian backgrounds: Mayakovky and Blok from the nobility, Pasternak from the

to a new journal without any serious intention of writing for them.

17 Gorky was tagged by them as "the darling of Western bourgeoisie"; Alexis Tolstoy and Ehrenburg as "pseudo-revolutionaries". Mayakovky, Esenin, Pilniak, the Serapion Brothers, Polonsky were accused of being "liberals who pamper oldtimers and NEPmen".

18 Zvezda (Star), No. I (1925), editorial.
intelligentsia, Esenin from the peasantry. Another strong influence on the literary scene was the Futurist movement. Russian Futurism developed parallel to the Italian Futurist movement of Marinetti, but ideologically independent of it. From the very beginning the movement was not homogeneous: it split into many factions, such as the Ego-Futurists, Cubo-Futurists and others. Their common aim was to eliminate the conventional form, balance, and rhythm in all types of art. In "western" art and literature, this was just another movement to welcome the new age of the machines. In Russia the Symbolist movement still dominated the literary scene, and the Futurist movement was a revolt against the Symbolist trend toward investing poetry with religious or philosophical meaning.

In Soviet Russia the movement gained some strength mainly due to the efforts of V. Mayakovsky, but its beginnings went back to 1910. Their journal was Lef\textsuperscript{19} published by Gosizdat.\textsuperscript{20} The journal's name was significant, as the Futurists still identified literary innovations with "Leftism". They hoped to establish proletarian credentials, and to attack the fellow-travellers. Trotsky, in an essay on "Futurism", gave

\textsuperscript{19}Seven issues, in all, appeared between March 1923 and March 1925.

\textsuperscript{20}Gosudarstvennoye Izdatel'\textsuperscript{stvo} (State Publishing House).
very qualified approval to the efforts of this group.\textsuperscript{21} In his essay on "Party Policy in Art", he argued that, just as the Soviet state under N.E.P. tolerated the parallel existence of different forms of economic production, by no means all of them socialist, so it must tolerate different forms of literary and artistic production.\textsuperscript{22}

Mayakovsky and his Futurist friends organized the Left Front of Art in 1923, and began publishing the magazine \emph{Lef}. Their purpose was stated in the following points:

1. To aid in the discovery of a Communist path for all varieties of art.

2. To re-examine the theory and practice of so-called "left" art, freeing it from individualistic distortions and developing its valuable Communist aspects.

3. To struggle with decadence and aesthetic mysticism, as well as with self-contained formalism, indifferent naturalism, and for the affirmation of tendentious realism, based on the use of the technical devices developed in all the revolutionary schools of art.\textsuperscript{23}

After a four-year interval, Mayakovsky launched a new journal the "New Lef". Its theoreticians were Chuzhak, Brik, and Tretyakov. Victor Shklovsky also contributed regularly; he

\textsuperscript{21}L. Trotsky, \emph{Literatura i Revolyutsia} (1923), pp. 159-168.

\textsuperscript{22}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 91-116.

\textsuperscript{23}E. J. Brown, \emph{Russian Literature Since the Revolution}, p. 58.
advocated "literature of fact". In 1929 a collection of articles written during the past two years was edited and published by Chuzhak. The title of the volume was Literature of Fact. Most of the articles spoke of the death of fiction and of plot literature. Lenin referred to religion, Chuzhak to fiction, as "opium for the people", and they saw factual literature as an antidote for it. The aim of the New Lef was to shift the importance in the arts from human emotions to the organization of society. In Chuzhak's opinion, nothing could be learned from reading the classics as they were thoroughly individualistic and idealistic. Art was a matter of skill and did not require artistic inspiration. "Factography", according to Chuzhak and his followers (amongst them M. Gorky), was the highest form of literary activity: it was factual reporting of the writing of diaries, travel notes, biographies. The writer's concern should be with writing facts. His topic should be what his "client" demands. Following this principle, V. Shklovsky published a number of stimulating and original studies in the New Lef, among them, "Tolstoy's War and Peace, a Formal Sociological Study"; Furmanov wrote "Chapayev"; Mayakovsky, "How to


25 В. Е. Шкловский, "Материал и стиль в романе Льва Толстого Война и Мир" (Москва, "Федерация", 1928).
The New Lef never enjoyed the popularity or the support that Lef had. They limited the journal's edition to fifteen hundred copies, as Osip Brik felt that their literary adventures were in the experimental phase and should not be read in this "green" state by millions: "It is a mistake," he said, "to demand that every cultural work be multiplied and distributed in the hundreds of thousands." Under political pressure, Mayakovsky resigned from the editorship of New Lef in the summer of 1928, giving as his reason later that tiny literary "factionlets" had outlived themselves, and instead of organizing groups literary men should transfer their activities to mass organizations carrying on agitational work: newspapers, "agitprops", commissions, etc.

In 1929 Mayakovsky and some of his fellow-writers abandoned Lef and formed a new group which they called the Revolutionary Front of Art (REF). They claimed that their aim was to carry on a struggle against "a-political tendencies". From their abandonment of Lef, it must follow that they also rejected the theory of "factual literature". The independent existence of this group was short; it ended by merging with a larger group of proletarian writers, the

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26 В. Маяковский, "Как делать стихи" (1927), Полное собрание сочинений в 13-ми томах (Москва, 1959), т. XII, pp. 81-117.
Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP).

Lef and the New Lef, as well as RAPP, were ardent opponents of the fellow-travellers. At the first All-Union Conference of Proletarian Writers in January 1925, they pressed for the "licence" to become the organ of the party dictatorship in literature. In his report, Vardin declared that

... the supremacy of the proletariat is incompatible with the supremacy of a non-proletarian ideology and, consequently, of a non-proletarian literature.

What was required was "the seizure of power by the proletariat in the field of art". Bukharin, who could not be accused of Trotskyism, through his political maneuvers became the most active champion of the peasants in the councils of the party, and this logically aligned him with the fellow-travellers in literature. He accused RAPP of wanting to establish a monopoly, and explained that "our relation to the fellow-travellers is determined by our general relation to social-political forms sympathetic to us." In conclusion, in his appeal for toleration for many literary movements, he showed how little the party leaders wanted to be compelled to take sides in this thorny issue:

Let there be 1000 organizations, let there be 2000 organizations. Let there be side by side with MAPP and VAPP as many groups and organizations as you please.28

Other principal speakers at the conference, such as Lenin and Frunze, argued "the necessity of allowing, within certain limits, capitalist accumulation in the countryside". They pointed to the toleration of similar non-party elements in literature. "Face to the countryside" carried with it an obligation for the On-Guardist group to accept, or at least tolerate the fellow-travellers.29

The resolution of the central committee of June 18, 1925, proclaimed that in a class society there could be no neutral art, and that leadership in the field of literature belongs to the working class as a whole. However, at this time there was no hegemonic group of proletarian writers and the party recommended that tolerance and a tactful attitude should be adopted toward the fellow-travellers, as they were "qualified specialists in literary technique".30 The controversy did not end with this qualifying statement from the party, but continued in the pages of the party journal.

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28The conference of January 1925 had resulted in the creation of a new Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP), which took the place of the former VAPP. MAPP was its Moscow branch.

29M. Frunze, Sobranie Sochinenii, iii (1927), 150-155.

30Pravda, July 1, 1925.
Bolshevik.

After shedding Trotsky as their main supporter, the fellow-travellers found a new champion of their cause in Bukharin. The enthusiasts for proletarian literature — notably Vardin, Lelevich and Rodov — logically joined Zinoviev's Leningrad opposition, and attacked Bukharin's peasant orientation. These new alignments also produced a split in RAPP.31

Auerbach, using his opposition to the fellow-travellers as an excuse, set himself against Lelevich's group as well. He managed to keep the journal On Guard, which he renamed On Literary Guard (Na literaturnom postu). Through his attacks his former colleagues appeared, like Zinoviev in the party struggle, as the factious dissidents who had broken party unity. Vardin and his followers did not see the trap, and by their own miscalculation they sealed their own defeat. Auerbach emerged as the rising star in the literary constellation. Through his "intuition" he disassociated himself in time from both the fellow-travellers of the Right and the proletarian extremists of the Left. Thus Auerbach utilized the same tactics which Stalin so brilliantly

31 Literaturnaya Entsiklopediya, ix (1935), p. 521, attributes the split directly to the resolution of June 18, 1925. After the split Lelevich claimed that he, Vardin and Rodov had the approval of the majority in the Leningrad section of RAPP. (Bolshevik Nos. 9-10, May 30, 1926, p. 91).
applied in the party struggle. Auerbakh's victory was not complete over the All-Russian Union of Writers; he had to accept a compromise: both proletarian writers and fellow-travellers he equally admitted to membership.

However much the proletarian writers pressed the party to take an official stand, the party leadership remained reluctant to take sides in these disputes. Their policy and desire was to tolerate all conflicting groups or schools, subject only to the condition of loyalty to the regime.

Auerbakh and a group of young proletarian writers were trying to convince the party leadership that this literary issue was essentially a political and ideological issue as well. They branded their literary opponents as associates of the political opposition. They sought to persuade the party to extend its exclusive patronage to them and to entrust to them the functions of literary dictatorship. After considerable struggle the party had been obliged to renounce an attitude of neutrality in literary affairs and to take decisions about them. This was a step in the direction desired by Auerbakh, and a victory for the view that art and literature were inseparable from politics.
Faithful to the vogue of the era, the handful of young literary enthusiasts who met for the first time on February 1, 1921,\textsuperscript{32} established a literary circle. They called themselves the Serapion Brothers.\textsuperscript{33} The decisive difference between this group of writers and most of the others was their casual, free, not confining association. Whereas the other groups forged alliance to restrict participation to, for example, a common proletarian background among the members, or to advocate a common style, topic, or ideology, Lev Lunc's "manifesto", "Why We Are the Serapion Brothers",\textsuperscript{34} states that the strength of their alliance lay in their mutual love of literature and in their freedom of self-expression:

The Serapion Brothers is a novel by Hoffmann. Well then, we write in imitation of Hoffmann, so

\textsuperscript{32}M. Slonimsky, "Serapionovy Brat'ya o sebe", Literaturnye zapiski, 3 (August 1, 1922).

\textsuperscript{33}Their members were: Lunc, Fedin, Vsevolod Ivanov, Kaverin, Gruzdyov, Nikitin, Tikhonov, Slonimsky, Shklovsky, Pozner, Elizaveta Polonskaya and M. Zoshchenko. Professor Struve quotes V. Pozner as writing about twelve Serapion Brothers; Fedin in his book on Gorky speaks of ten, excluding Shklovsky and Pozner, although giving Shklovsky credit for his contribution to their literary debates.

we are a school of Hoffmann.

This conclusion is drawn by any person who has heard of us. And he too, having read through our collection or separate stories by the brothers, is at a loss: What do they have from Hoffmann? Surely, generally speaking, they do not have a single school, a single trend. Everyone writes in his own way!

Yes, it is so. We are not a school, not a trend, not a studio in imitation of Hoffmann.

And that is why we named ourselves Serapion Brothers.

We have named ourselves Serapion Brothers, because we do not want compulsion or boredom, we do not want everyone to write identically, even if it were in imitation of Hoffmann.

Each of us has his own personality and his own literary tastes. In each of us it is possible to find the most diverse literary influences.
"Everyone has his own drum," said Nikitin at our first meeting.

The six Serapion Brothers are not a school

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35Reference to the six brothers in Hoffmann's novel. "At the first meeting four friends were present -- Lothar, Theodor, Cyprian, and Ottomar -- while Sylvester and Vincenz were discussed as prospective members at the third meeting and appeared at the fourth. Lothar, Theodor and Cyprian represent, generally speaking, delicately graded aspects of Hoffmann's own personality: Lothar is more realistic in his views and is somewhat inclined to skepticism; Theodor is Hoffmann the musician, and Cyprian is an out-and-out romantic and mystic. Ottomar is Hoffmann's old friend Hitzig, more of a realist, more skeptical than Lothar; he is ever calling his companions back to earth. Vincenz is a lively and sparkling participant in discussions. Sylvester is showing special care in selecting stories of his own imagining which might be appropriate to the literary tendencies and prejudices of his friends, perhaps with a bit of malicious humour." Harvey W. Hewett-Thayer, Hoffmann: Author of Tales (Princeton, N.J.:
or a trend either. They attack one another, eternally disagree with one another, and therefore we have named ourselves Serapion Brothers.

In February of the year 1921, in the period of the most strict regulations, registrations and barrack-like ordering, when everyone was given one iron-clad and boring set of rules,—we decided to gather without any rules or chairmen, without elections or voting. Together with Theodor, Ottomar and Cyprian we believed that the character of the future meetings would take shape by itself, and we undertook the vow of being faithful to the end to the rules of hermit Serapion.

We believe in the reality of our fictional heroes and fictional events. There lived Hoffmann, a man, there also lived Nutcracker, a doll, it lived its special, but also real life.36

Lunc expresses his dislike for the "monotony" and "stiffness" of Russian literature. Writers' fantasies, imaginations in today's Soviet literature are banished. We are permitted to write stories, novels and tedious dramas, either in the old orthography or in the new one,—but without fail on everyday life and without fail on contemporary themes.

We gathered in the days of revolution, in the


The "hermit Serapion" is an acquaintance of Cyprian. He was Graf P. — nobleman, diplomat, poet — who disappeared into the Tyrolese mountains. When forcibly returned to his home he became a madman. He insisted that he was the monk Serapion, who suffered martyrdom under the Emperor Decius. The mad hermit had amazing intellectual vigor. He outmatched Cyprian in logical dialectic. Ottomar discovered that the day of their first meeting happened to be St. Serapion's Day, and they took the saint for their patron.36

36Abridged portion of Lunc's "Pochemu my Serapionovy Brat'ya?", parts 1 and 2.
days of powerful political strain. "Who is not with us is against us," they said to us on the right and on the left. "So with whom are you, Serapion Brothers? With the Communists or against the Communists? For the revolution or against the revolution?"

So with whom are we, Serapion Brothers?

We are with hermit Serapion.

So, with no-one? Slough? An intelligentsia idly indulging in beauteousness? Without ideology, without conviction, the devil may care?

No.

Each of us has an ideology, political convictions; everyone paints his hut in his own color. So it is in life. And so it is in stories, tales, dramas. But we together, we -- a brotherhood -- demand one thing: that the voice should not be false; That we should believe in the reality of literary work whatever its color may be.

So with whom are we, Serapion Brothers?

We are with hermit Serapion. We believe that literary chimeras are a special reality, and we do not want any utilitarianism. We are writing not for propaganda. Art is real as life itself. And, as life itself, it is without aim and without meaning: it exists because it cannot help existing.

Brothers!

To you my last word.

There is still something that unites us, that cannot be proved or explained,-- our brotherly love.

We are not fellow members of a club, not colleagues, not comrades, but Brothers!37

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37Abridged portion of Lunc's "Pochemu my Serapionovy Brat'ya?", part 3.
Considering the character of relative relaxation in the N.E.P. era, Lunc's article was a courageous plea for freedom of expression in the arts, and a protest against the made-to-order literature of the time. He renounced the idea that literature's only purpose is to deliver party propaganda to the plebs. In his articles that followed the previously quoted "manifesto" he had to defend his position. The old Marxist critic, P. S. Kogan, in his article "O manifesto Serapionovykh brat'yev", charged them with devotion to "art for art's sake". Jury Sobolev compared the Serapion Brothers' trend to childhood measles: they will get over it, and it is not too dangerous. The majority of the Marxist critics took it much more seriously and made a political and ideological issue of it. Valerian Polyansky called it a "cheap, outmoded theory, taken from the archives of history." Behind this facade the Serapions were trying to hide their "petty-bourgeois prejudices".

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38 I refer to his article, "Pochemu my Serapionovy Brat'ya?", as his manifesto, admitting that he himself denied that it was a manifesto. According to Lunc this was his personal view of why he was a member of the group. Having a manifesto to follow and live by would have been against the brotherhood's philosophy.


Using G. V. Plekhanov's analysis of art for art's sake essay, which he gave in Paris in 1912, Kogan wrote his reply to Lunc:

Plekhanov beautifully demonstrated that writers who proclaim art to be non-ideological and non-social are also expressing a specific social idea. "Pure" art attests to the fact that there are social groups which, because of their social situation, find it necessary to avoid the interests of society, and "pure" art is nothing else than their ideological expression.

Both Kogan and Polyansky attacked the Serapion Brothers for their refusal to take political sides in their literature. Lunc maintained that as far as it is a dictated ideology they will continue to reject it. Polyansky condemned the Serapions for having their work published in

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\(^{41}\) G. V. Plekhanov, "Iskusstvo i obshchestvennaya zhizn'", lecture given in Paris, November 10, 1912. The main idea of the article is expressed in this paragraph:

The tendency of artists and those concerned with art to adopt an attitude of art for art's sake arises when a hopeless contradiction exists between them and their social environment. . . . The so-called utilitarian concept of art, that is, the tendency to regard the function of art as a judgment on the phenomena of life and readiness to participate in social struggles, develops and becomes established when a mutual bond of sympathy exists between a considerable section of society and those more or less actively interested in artistic creation.

Translated for "Critics Group Series", No. 3 (New York, 1937) title: "Art and Society".

\(^{42}\) P. S. Kogan, "Ob iskusstve i publicistike", Krasnaya Gazeta, No. 274 (1425), December 2, 1922.
non-proletarian journals and their lack of principle that undermines the working class' confidence in their art. He said that the proletariat is looking for a leader in their writers "with whom they are united in thought and action", and not for some selfish "playboys".

Lunc's original theory became a very hotly debated issue for the following six months. Every critic who was of any importance had a statement, article, speech on the topic. The most remarkable point in the dissension was that it appeared in literary as well as party newspapers without censorship. This expression of idealism could only be explained by the unsettled political climate of the country or by the idealism of these young, talented people; or by the mixture of both. Kogan invited them to see the revolution through the eyes of the workers whether they were within the party or on the outside. He pressed their social obligations, attacking their "art for art's sake" theory.

... A truly artistic work always serves social purposes, it always organizes the thoughts and feelings of one collective or another and guides its will in a specific direction. Let the enthusiastic "Brothers" not become angry. In these words there is no attempt upon their independence, upon their freedom of inspiration. Precisely because they are talented, they already exert social influence. And it does not matter whether they want this or not.

It is strange that writers should consider it a disgrace for their works to influence society. It was long ago demonstrated that the freer a writer's inspiration is, the more powerful is his
influence; that crude tendentiousness achieves exactly the opposite effect; that a work of art stamped by such tendentiousness inspires disgust for those very ideas which it aims at spreading.43

Looking back at these developments fifty years after these events took place, one must come to the conclusion that their bold claim to stay apolitical, not involved in a dictated ideology, and interpret events of the times through its beauty as the artist sees it -- does give the impression of superfluity. Those were very difficult times and writers of the era had a duty either to support the new regime or take active part against it. The Serapion Brothers chose neither. Why? Precisely for the same reason as the other group of society, the peasants, the intelligentsia did not actively fight against the revolution: it was their revolution, but this revolution did not fulfill their needs or hopes. The tsarist regime was repulsive and the new regime shortchanged them. Where does one turn when there are no more cards left to play? The fact that they stated that their artistic independence was of the greatest value to them,-- they did take up their share of social protest.

The Serapion Brothers' insistence on artistic independence met with the utmost criticism and had far-reaching consequences. In August, 1934, the new Union of Soviet

43Kogan, "O manifeste 'Serapionovykh brat'ev'".
Writers had its first Pan-Soviet Congress in Moscow. The party's policy on literature had been stated by A. Zhdanov: there will be no room for other forms of art than the one that reflects "upon the life and experience of the men of Dneprostroy and Magnitostroy. . ." The proletariat is the only heir to the best treasures of the world and of Russian literature. Zhdanov called upon Soviet writers to "collect, study, and critically digest" the literary heritage "squin­dered" by the bourgeoisie. Under the dictatorship of the proletariat, literature must become "Party-minded".44

And I think that every Soviet man of letters can say to any thickheaded bourgeois, to any philistine, to any bourgeois writer who will talk of the tendentiousness of our literature: "Yes, Soviet literature is tendentious, and we are proud of its tendentiousness, because our tendency consists in liberating the workers, the whole of mankind from the yoke of capitalist slavery."45

Vsevolod Ivanov, a Serapion Brother, who had earlier protested against "tendentiousness" in Soviet literature, repented at the Congress, stating that he now realized that "Bolshevik tendentiousness" was an indispensable weapon in the hands of Soviet writers.

The far-reaching consequence of Zhdanov's purge among

44Lenin had pretty well stated the same aim in articles as early as 1905.

45"Soviet Literature -- The Richest in Ideas, the Most Progressive Literature in the World", A. Zhdanov's address to the Congress.
Soviet writers reached M. Zoshchenko in 1946. He was accused of

... specializing in writing empty, fatuous and vulgar stuff, and in preaching rotten lack of ideas [bezideynost'], vulgarity, and apoliticalness, designed to lead our youth astray and to poison its consciousness.46

Zoshchenko was described as "scum of literature". His short story, "The Adventures of a Monkey" (published in Zvezda, No. 5-6, 1946) was singled out for attack. (Zhdanov's persecution of Zoshchenko will be discussed in more detail in Chapter IV.)

The idealistic, soul-searching, balance-seeking period in literature had ended. Now, even their former supporter, L. Trotsky, turned against them:

The most dangerous trait of the Serapions is that they glory in their lack of principles. This is stupidity and thickheadedness. As if an artist could ever be "without a tendency", without a definite relation to social life, even though unformulated or unexpressed in political terms. It is true that the majority of artists form their relation to life and its social forms during organic periods, in an unnoticeable and molecular way and almost without the participation of critical reason. The artist takes life as he finds it, coloring his relation to it with a kind of lyric tone. He considers its foundations to be immovable and approaches it as uncritically as he does the solar system, and this passive conservatism of his forms the unseen pivot of his work.

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46 Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, August 14, 1946.
Critical periods do not allow an artist the luxury of an automatic and irresponsible elaboration of social points of view. Whoever boasts of this, whether insincerely or even without pretense, is masking a reactionary tendency or has fallen into social stupidities or is making a fool of himself. . .

The novelists and poets who were born of the Revolution and who are still very young, being almost in their swaddling clothes, try, in their search for their artistic individualities, to get away from the Revolution which has been their environment and in which milieu they have yet to find themselves. From this come the tirades of "art for art's sake" which seem very significant and bold to the Serapions, but which are, in fact, a sign of growth at best and of immaturity in any case. If the Serapions should get away from the Revolution entirely, they would reveal themselves at once as a second-rate or third-rate remnant of the discarded pre-revolutionary literary schools. It is impossible to play with history. Here the punishment follows immediately upon the crime.47

The artistic freedom that Lunc sought after became a bitter ideological fight. Victor Shklovsky presented an indirect defense of his fellow Serapions in a witty chapter of The Knight's Move.48 In this he told the story of the millipede, which for some time managed to walk quite well until one day a turtle admired his legs for their wonderful coordination. This compliment made him conscious of his movements and he himself began to marvel: just how did he manage so well?

47L. Trotsky, Literature and Revolution (New York, 1925), pp. 70-71. (Quoted from the English translation.)

48Victor Shklovsky, Khod Konya (Moscow-Berlin, 1923).
He established centralization, red tape, and bureaucracy, and by that time he could not move a single leg.

... "Citizens and comrades!" said the millipede, "look at me and you will see what superorganization leads to. Postrevolutionary comrades, postwar comrades, leave art free, not on its own account, but because we must not regulate what is unknown." 49

Marxists, including Lenin and Trotsky, had some awareness of the necessity of freedom to create good art, but their interpretation of this freedom differed from that of the Serapions. "The important point for the Marxists was that the writer should accept his unfreedom so willingly that he actually felt free within its limitations." 50

The Marxists were in the advantageous position of having a doctrine which they confidently applied to art as well as to all other human activities. With the help of Plekhanov's essay on "art for art's sake", they were able to classify the Brotherhood. To counterattack their seasoned critics, the Serapions lacked experience, they were too young and "suffered the disadvantage of possessing no ready-made philosophy". 51 Lunc tried to qualify his former

49 Ibid., p. 17.
51 Ibid.
statement, by which the Serapions were branded as a group advocating "art for art's sake", by arguing that he did not mean "art for art's sake" in the crude sense of that phrase. But his argument for love of literature and for great devotion to art contained many holes, even for a non-Marxist.

For example, to state the case in terms that are meaningful today, let any Western democratic survivor of the second World War try to imagine himself reading a skillfully written novel of Nazi ideology purely for the aesthetic pleasure it might offer.52

The moderate Marxist critic and editor of Krasnaya Nov', Voronsky, came to the defense of the Serapions and made a much better job of it than they themselves had managed. The main point of his article53 lay in the value of both art and science to society and how its value depends on its faithfulness in revealing objective truth. A social order that attempts to frustrate or restrict the development of the arts or sciences "does it at its own peril".

The fundamental task is to keep subjectivism, ideology, and propaganda from distorting the writer's works of art; his subjective attitudes must correspond to the nature of the object...54

Voronsky defined the value of art as "the way it renders

52 Ibid., pp. 60-61.


54 Ibid., p. 352.
objective reality". And "objective reality" can be found in the classics as well as in literature written by proletarians or by fellow-travellers. This principle enabled Voronsky, not only to refute Friche's nonsensical article in which he rejected the contemporary value of the classics (such as Shakespeare), but also to hold up one common standard by which all the new Soviet literature could be judged, "whether written by proletarians, peasants, or petty-bourgeois intellectuals". Following through with his principles as the editor of Krasnaya Nov', he invited all the writers of the Soviet Union, of whatever background or political affiliation, to compete for a place within the journal's pages.

It is not a matter of sly intrigurers taking in the "good-natured" Bolsheviks, but of the fact that 95 percent of Russians are still fellow travellers of the Communists, and that cannot help being reflected in the fortunes of the new literature. Our journals are not opening their doors to the fellow travellers because as a result of NEP they have a peculiar and criminal enthusiasm for them, but because contemporary Russian literature cannot confine itself to Demyan Bednyj and Libedinsky's tale "The Week". It is a fact that we find the most brilliant talents in the persons of Ivanov, Tikhonov, and the other fellow travellers, that it was they who first spoke living words about the living people of our Revolution, if you exclude

55 V. Friche, "Nuzhno li?", Krasnaya Gazeta, No. 215 (1368), September 23, 1922.

56 Krasnaya Nov' was considered to be the literary journal of the fellow-travellers.

57 Both Serapion Brothers.
("The Twelve") Blok (also a fellow traveller), Demyan Bednyj, there will be very few other talents left. Let us give honor and a place to the communist writers and the proletarian writers, but in proportion to their talents and in proportion to their creative capacity. A Party card is a great thing, but it is not proper to wave it about at the wrong times.  

Who were these heretics who managed to stir up such an ideological battle on the literary scene?  

Lev Natanovich Lunc was a teenager (nineteen years old) in 1920, a Romance philology major from the University of Petrograd, specializing in Spanish literature. He had a happy but somewhat sheltered childhood in a highly cultured Jewish intelligentsia family. After the outbreak of the revolution his parents emigrated to Germany. He himself was supposed to go to Spain on a scholarship to continue graduate studies in literature. Lunc had a deep "romantic" involvement with Western literature. One of his favorite writers was Conan Doyle.  

As a fellow Serapion Brother in his critical works he often attacked the "static", dull traditions of Russian literature in fiction as well as in drama. In his article "To the West" (which twenty years later served as a  


59 "Na zapad!" First read by Lunc at a meeting of the Serapions. Published in Gorky's Beseda, No. 3 (1923), pp. 259-274.
foundation for attack by A. Zhdanov against former Serapion Brothers), he suggested that the Russians might learn "plot construction" and "dynamic narrative", or how to achieve and hold suspense from the West. (This "Western tendency" was also followed by K. Fedin.)

Lunc looked upon his audience as a group of people who had certain likes for entertainment and a good writer's duty was more to please his readers than to educate them. In this respect he and his fellow Serapions found themselves out of favor with most of the communist critics.

Lunc's importance to Russian literature was not confined to his championing of the "freedom of art" on behalf of the Brotherhood, he also contributed to it: "The Outlaw" (Vne zakona, 1921), "The Apes Are Coming" (Obezyany idut, 1921), "Bertrand de Born" (1922). His play, "The City of Truth", was published posthumously by M. Gorky in Beseda.

He joined his parents in Germany in 1923 to seek a cure for a chronic illness. He never recovered and died there shortly after his twenty-third birthday.

Konstantin Alexandrovich Fedin was the oldest member of the group (twenty-nine in 1921). He was closely associated with the revival of the Russian novel and of nineteenth century Russian literary traditions.

Fedin was born in the Volga region; his father was of peasant stock and his mother of noble background. He was
educated at the Commercial Institute of Moscow. During the first World War he was in Germany. After his return in 1918 to the Soviet Union, he served in the Red Army.

Fedin's literary debut was in the Serapions' Almanac. On Gorky's recommendation he was accepted for "membership" in the Serapion Brotherhood. His first short stories were written under obvious stylistic influence from Chekhov and Bunin. "Stillness" (Tishina, 1924) conveys the tragedy of an old dispossessed squire; "The Peasants" (Muzhiki, 1924) is a story which relates many episodes of village life with its cruelty and harshness, very much like Bunin's stories. His first novel, Cities and Years (Goroda i gody) was published in 1924, a long narrative that combined "psychological realism of characterization with a plot of adventure and suspense". The theme of the novel is the personal tragedy of a member of the intelligentsia in the tide of the revolution. The hero is a modern variant of the nineteenth century superfluous man. In "The Orchard" (Sad), Fedin returns to his favorite theme, the clash of the old and the new in the Revolution. The old gardener who served the former master so faithfully cannot accept the new "masters" and burns down the manor house.

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In the Serapion Brotherhood, Fedin took a uniquely personal position. He did not subscribe to Lunc's philosophy "To the West!", nor did he wholly belong to the "Eastern" or Scythian wing of the movement. His main interest was concentrated on the relationship of Russia and Europe, and the problems of the individual in history, the fate of the "superfluous man" in modern Russia.

Fedin drew criticism from time to time for his close relationship with the Serapions, but managed to survive all the purges. Now he is an honored doyen of Soviet literature, a leading figure in the Union of Writers and former editor of the most important literary magazine in the Soviet Union, the New World (Novyj Mir).

Vsevolod Vyacheslavovich Ivanov was the son of a Siberian village school-teacher and drunkard. His father was accidentally killed by one of his sons when Ivanov was only fifteen years old, after which he promptly left his home. Although he was the product of a provincial intellectual milieu, his biography is very similar to that of Gorky. Like Gorky, he lived as a kind of tramp on the lower level of life. He had numerous occupations: sailor, clown, poetry reader, sword swallower, dervish, musician. He had some

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The expression of "Western" and "Eastern" wing was used by E. Zamyatin, "Serapiony Brat'ya", Literaturnye zapiski, No. 1 (May, 1922).
doubt as to his sympathies during the Civil War: he fought under Admiral Kolchak with the Whites and later joined the Red Army.

Ivanov's first short story was printed in 1916 in a local Siberian paper. Encouraged by his success, he sent some stories to Gorky for publication in Letopis'. Gorky encouraged him and urged him to study, to read. According to Ivanov's autobiography, in two years he read more books than in the rest of his life. His reading did not include political literature, and when the Revolution broke out, in his naiveté he joined both the Social-Democratic and the Social-Revolutionary parties.

His first book of short stories was printed and published by himself in 1919 in Siberia. With Gorky's help he came to Petrograd. "The Partisans" (Partizany) was published in 1921, a long story based on his experiences during the Civil War. In the novel, Skyblue Sands (Golubye peski), we find most of the characteristics of Ivanov's early works: ornamental language full of dialecticisms, lyrical refrains, human joys and sorrows, obvious Russian folklore influence, cruel Siberian nature and great stress on the cruel aspects of the Revolution. His topics include the people of mid-Asia, the Altay and Siberia. Psychologically his stories plough deeply into the barbaric, senselessly cruel nature of human beings (e.g., "The Child"). In
his short novel, *The Return of Buddha* (Vozvrashchenie Buddy, 1923), his language was much less ornamental, had less localized interests, and had a plot of adventure. His book of stories of village life, *Mystery of Mysteries* (Taynoye taynykh, 1927), received a mixed reception from Soviet critics. In his later writings Ivanov took a step toward psychological realism. His style became less ornamental and he developed the psychology of his characters with great care.

In the 1930's Ivanov made the 180° switch, he became an enthusiastic supporter of the industrial achievements under Stalin. His style in *Parkhomenko* (1938) and in *The Fall of Berlin* (1945) was neatly tailored to party line requirements, but lacked the stylistic beauty of his earlier works.

Veniamin Alexandrovich Kaverin (pseudonym of Veniamin Alexandrovich Zilberg) came from an intellectual, musically-gifted family. To follow four generations of musical tradition in the family, he himself first studied music. At the University of Petrograd he studied Oriental languages, history and literature. At the age of fifteen he sent his first short story, "The Eleventh Axiom", to Gorky. Still a teenager when he joined the Serapions, Kaverin -- and his best friend, Lunc -- represented the "Westernizing" tendency in the Brotherhood. In his autobiography, he is cynical of
the Russian tradition among writers:

... so far I have not had time to make for myself a biography fit for a Russian writer. I have tried neither to shoot myself nor to hang myself, nor have I once gone mad.62

Kaverin's first major work, The End of a Gang (Konets khazy, 1926), is an exciting story of a gang of anarchists and underworld characters in Leningrad. His style in this story shows the identifiable influence of R. L. Stevenson. Gogolian grotesque realism is mingled in the story "Diamond Suit" (Bubnovaya mast, 1927). "Revisor" is a parody of Gogol's "The Nose", with an obscene twist.

"Nine-Tenths of Fate" (Devyat' desyatykh sud'by, 1926) followed the trend of psychological realism. The main theme is the place of the intelligentsia in the Revolution. It is reminiscent of Fedin's Cities and Years, but much less developed and superficial. Kaverin's "Artist Unknown" -- in theme very much like Olesha's Envy -- is a contemporary myth. Its hero, the artist Arkhimedov, is a modern Don Quixote, an old-fashioned romantic idealist who fights a lonely, losing battle against the new society in the name of forgotten moral values, of artistic freedom and independence. His later works (The Fulfillment of Desires, 1935; Two Captains,

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1939) show a marked improvement: they are well-written and nicely-constructed stories, with just enough of the required ideological element to make them publishable in the Soviet Union.

Nikolay Nikolaevich Nikitin was born in the north of Russia in a merchants' family. He spent most of his childhood and school years in Petersburg. He fought in the Civil War, but on which side is not known. Nikitin's first story was published in 1922, after he had met Gorky, Shklovsky and Zamyatin. Collections of his works were published in 1928 under the titles, Fort Vomit (Rvotny Fort) and Flight (Polyot). Like most young authors he also experimented with many different styles of writing.

It is not difficult to see the influence of Remizov, Zamyatin, and Pilnyak on Nikitin. To this list can also be added either as direct or as indirect influences the names of Leskov and Gogol, and, as occasional influences, those of Dostoyevsky and Andrey Bely.63

In his stories he used the "author's personal interventions"; to substantiate his hero's claims he used documentations, quotations. Historical landscapes, intense eroticism, a variety of spoken dialects, intonations, anecdotes, folklore elements made his "skaz" come alive. Many of his stories deal with the Civil War -- in the North, in the South and

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East. It was not so much the romanticism of the revolution that interested him, but the effect on the life of the remote Russian villages, where the old and the new clashed. Soviet critics did not fail to point out that Nikitin was concerned not so much with the new as with the old: the resistance of the old against the new.

Of all the Serapions, perhaps, no one aimed so persistently at strange, paradoxical effects as did Nikitin. In its most consistent form, the method of "ostranenie" (making strange) is applied by him in "Daisy", the story of a young tigress in captivity and of her ultimate escape.

Gradually, maybe under increasing official pressure, Nikitin evolved toward a more realistic treatment of his themes.

Vladimir Pozner was born in Paris, received his high school education in Petrograd and in Moscow, and his university education at the Sorbonne. His first poems were printed in Epopeia (1923). His first book was published in France in 1929: The Panorama of Contemporary Russian Literature (Panorama de la littérature russe contemporaine). He took up the heroic themes of the Civil War and treated them in the form of ballads. In this the influence of English poetry, and more particularly of Kipling, can be seen. After the mid-twenties he returned to France, where he became an active critic of capitalistic (mainly American) values. His
views did not prevent him from seeking refuge in the U.S.A. during World War II. His latest novel, *Spain, My First Love* (Espagne, premier amour, 1965, translated into Russian in 1967), emphasized the romanticism of the Spanish Civil War.

**Elizaveta Grigor'evna Polonskaya** was the only "sister" in the group. She was born in Warsaw, Poland. To escape police surveillance she went to France, where she attended medical school at the Sorbonne from 1907 to 1914. After her return from France, she tried her hand at writing poetry. Her first collection of poems, *Flags*, was published in 1921, mostly her personal feelings, joys and sorrows in connection with the Revolution and the Civil War.

Polonskaya was one of the seven young writers who formed the nucleus of the Serapion Brotherhood. Later in the twenties, she wrote exclusively poems for children: *Baby Rabbits* (1923), *Guests* (1924), *Hours* (1925). In her capacity as a correspondent for the Leningrad Pravda in the thirties, she travelled widely in the Soviet Union. On her experiences she wrote a book of short stories, *People of Soviet Weekdays* (1934). In the fifties she found great success with her translations of Hugo, Molière, Shakespeare, Kipling, García Lorca.

**Mikhail Leonidovich Slonimsky** came from a very highly cultured Jewish family: his father was editor of the magazine *Herald of Europe* (Vestnik Evropy), and his mother was the
sister of a famous professor. "My childhood," he wrote, "passed in an atmosphere permeated by literature and music."

After the war he began to attend lectures regularly at the House of Arts. His first lecturers were Shklovsky and Zamyatin.

The collected volume of his first stories, *The Sixth Lancers* (Shestoy stréłkovy) was published in 1922 and showed a very strong influence of Zamyatin's manner and style: eccentric, odd characters involved in strange situations where reality and fantasy intermingled in dramatic incidents.

In 1923 Slonimsky edited the miners' paper in the Donets coal basin. One of the stories he wrote there, "The Emery Machine" (Mashina Emery), marked a new departure from his former themes. His hero is an idealist Communist, Oleynikov, for whom personal life is completely overshadowed by his sense of duty toward the collective. Slonimsky failed to make his portrait of a Communist visionary; instead, Oleynikov is not real and human, but remains an abstraction.

His first novel, *The Lavrovs* (Lavrovy), depicts the disintegration of an intelligentsia family. The novel is obviously autobiographical and documentary. It centres around the figure of Boris Lavrov, who through his exploits is trying to become a useful member of Soviet society. At one point he thinks that in siding with the Revolution he has attained full freedom, but later he realizes that there
is no freedom anywhere on this earth, not in a single corner of it, and that of all the available unfreedoms he had chosen the one in which his wishes and actions coincided.

Foma Kleshnyov was published in 1931, five years after The Lavrovs; the hero is a model communist at work. As a novel this book is a failure.

Nikolay Semyonovich Tikhonov was born into a lower-middle-class family. After studying at a trade school, he enlisted in the army. He fought with a Hussar regiment during World War I, and later with the Red Army in the Civil War. Like Vsevolod Ivanov, he also tried his hand at various professions. He joined the Serapion Brothers in 1921, and a year later his first collection of poems was published: The Horde (Orda). Its principal theme was the war. The influence of the Acmeists is quite obvious in it. His verse has a noble simplicity, there are no innovations for novelty's sake, and his choice of words is precise.

Tikhonov's second book of verse was Mead (Braga), in which themes of the Civil War predominated. Most of his poems in this collection were written in the form of ballads in the English tradition. Like Kipling, he used Oriental settings for his unrhymed ballad, "Sami".

Tikhonov experimented with language and metre. In this period (1924) the influence of Gumilyov and the Acmeists gave place to that of the Futurists: of Mayakovsky and of
Pasternak. Later he experimented with prose writing: *The Venturesome Man* (1927) and *An Oath in the Fog* (1933). While in his poetry he tended to become less of a romantic and more of a realist, in his prose he moved in the opposite direction: Caucasian setting with unusual characters, the "drowsy East".

Il'ya Alexandrovich Gruzdyov was born in Peterburg. He also received his education there. In 1918 he graduated from the University of Petrograd with a degree in philology.

Gruzdyov was one of the original seven founding members of the Serapion Brotherhood. From 1914 he wrote literary criticism and tried to write feuilletons. He became best known for his biographical book on M. Gorky, *Gorky and His Time* (1938), which included personal correspondence between himself and Gorky.

Victor Borisovich Shklovsky, one of the most important figures in the history of Soviet literature, was of mixed Jewish-German-Russian descent. His literary career began in 1914, while studying at the University of Petrograd. He became one of the leaders of the Formalist movement, which had close links with the Futurist movement in literature.

In 1920 he was appointed professor at the Institute of the History of Art, where among his students were several Serapion Brothers. His influence and authority upon them was such that he immediately became a leader among them.
The Serapions' dislike of bureaucracy and of organizational formalities was so great that only the date of their first meeting is definite. The exact number of their membership is also in doubt. Some literary historians and one of the Brothers (Gruzdyov) accept ten members, others include Shklovsky and Pozner. Whether the latter two were "officially" members or not is really unimportant. Shklovsky's ideas were certainly stimulating, even when they were demonstrably wrong or fantastic.

In the 1920's Shklovsky became a close friend of Mayakovsky. When the Moscow Proletarian Writers' Association (MAPP) and members of Lef demanded the expulsion of Shklovsky and Pasternak, Mayakovsky defended him: "... even Victor's dubious notions will later enter into the history of Russian literature." 64

Shklovsky's first important book was published in Berlin in 1923, after he had left Russia. Its title was Sentimental Journey (Sentimentalnoye puteshestvie). In it, his approach to the Revolution and the Civil War and their horrors is as cool, as detached, and as matter-of-fact as that of his pupils, the Serapions, who undoubtedly learned their detachment from him. His second try at another book, 

Zoo, or Letters Not About Love (Zoo, ili pis'ma ne o lyubvi), showed a personal digression. Shklovsky's Knight's Move (Khod konya) was a small volume of short essays about art and literature,—uneven, but mostly interesting and witty. After his return to Russia he published another volume of "autobiographical fragments", The Third Factory (Tretya fabrika, 1926).

When, in 1929, Formalism was proclaimed a dangerous doctrine, Shklovsky devoted himself to literary history and dramatic film criticism. He lost the fire and recanted the heresies of his youth and managed to carve out a long career in Soviet literature.
Mikhail Mikhailovich Zoshchenko was the chronically depressed and most humorous Serapion Brother. His stories enjoyed immense popularity in Russia. He was popular not only among those readers who preferred to read light, unsophisticated literature, but also among those who as a rule read mostly classics and did not follow contemporary literature. His first stories to appear in the West were published as early as 1929.65

He was born in Poltava, August 10, 1895, into a family of artists: his father was a painter of modest fame, his mother was an actress. He was the youngest in a family of three, with two older sisters. After graduating from gymnasium (high school) in 1913, he continued his studies in the faculty of law at the University of Petrograd. Without graduating from law school he volunteered for military service in 1915, and was sent to the front as an ensign. He fought for two years, was wounded many times. A German gas-attack left him in poor health for the rest of his life, but it did not stop him from volunteering for the Red

65Mikhail Zoshchenko, Four Sketches, translated and edited by Cargill Sprietsma and Georges Nazaroff, "Reprinted from the Bulletin of the American Women's Club, 1929" (Paris, 1929?).
Army in 1917. On account of his failing health he left the Red Army, tried a number of occupations. In 1920, when he was working as a clerk for the military Port Authority of Petrograd, he began to write. In 1921 his first collection of stories was printed by "Erato" publishers, Petrograd. His literary career took an upward turn from 1921, after he joined the Serapions' literary group. K. Fedin describes him in the following manner:

Zoshchenko is black-haired and quiet. He is handsome in person. In war he had been poisoned by gases; he has a heart disease. That's what makes him quiet. He is a man who is not self-confident; he never knows how he will write next? He began to write well already after the studio at the "Serapions". His "Stories by Nazar Il'ich, Mr. Sinebryukhov" are very good.66

It was customary at the time to ask popular writers and artists to publish autobiographies in which they were to state their personal feelings on popular issues. Zoshchenko published a witty parody on his fellow Serapions,67 in which he made fun of the "precise ideology" demanded of writers by Marxist critics:

... being a writer is sort of hard... Take ideology -- these days a writer has got to have ideology.


Here's Voronsky now (a good man) who writes: "... It is necessary that writers should have a more precise ideology."

Now that's plumb disagreeable! Tell me, how can I have a "precise ideology" when not a single party among them all appeals to me?

I don't hate anybody -- there's my precise ideology...

In their general swing the Bolsheviks are closer to me than anybody else. And so I'm willing to bolshevik around with them. ... But I'm not a Communist (or rather not a Marxist), and I think I never shall be.68

This arrogant show of political and artistic independence went unpunished in 1922, but was never forgotten, and in 1946 he probably wished many times that he had not made that statement.

With great care Zoshchenko gradually developed his own manner of writing. His style became like a signature: instantly recognizable. It was based on "skaz", which was a popular form in the early 1920's, but by the mid-twenties had gone out of fashion. Zoshchenko not only remained faithful to the "skaz" form, but perfected it and put it to new use.

The "skaz", as an artistic technique, demands direct speech. In his speech the narrator reveals his social background, his education, his temperament, his prejudices. The

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skaz form frequently accentuates comical effects. Zoshchenko, the grand master of comical skaz, excites laughter by the manner in which the narrator, "Nazar Il'ich, gospodin Sinebryukhov," tells his stories. His narrator's figure is a compound of many characters. His view of his surroundings is simple, the events that take place are grotesque, the situations are fantastic.

Zoshchenko's characters never develop to sufficient depth to become ugly and hateful. He achieves grotesque effect not necessarily through the world he describes in his stories, but mostly with the unusual twist that he gives to the language in his stories. Not only do his characters not develop depth and dimension, but his "skaz" unfolds on a single plane: that of the narrative "skaz" of anecdotes. The grotesque in "Nazar Il'ich gospodin Sinebryukhov" is not his world, but the representation of his spontaneous, muddled oral narration:

Я такой человек, что все могу... Хочешь -- могу землишку обработать по слову последней техники, хочешь -- каким ни на есть рукомеслом займусь, -- всё у меня в руках кипит и вертится.

А что до отвлеченных предметов, -- там, может быть, рассказ рассказать, или какое-нибудь тоненькое дельце выяснить, -- пожалуйста: Это для меня очень даже просто и великолепно.69

69 Михаил Зощенко: Избранные произведения в двух томах, стр. 51.
His language is full of distortions and deviations. Even his name is comical: instead of "Gospodin N.I.S." the "gospodin" is inserted between his patronymic and his family name; this offers a canonical twist to his name. This, in itself, might not be particularly funny, but with the farcical family name following, it has a hilarious effect on the reader.

The primary character is the narrator, who breaks up into two opposing characters: Nazar Il'ich and Gospodin Sinebryukhov. Nazar Il'ich is a very serious personality: "I am such a man, that I can do everything," he can do everything according to the latest techniques. This serious character's double is the farcical Gospodin Sinebryukhov, in whose hands "everything boils and turns around." His peasant love of the land shows in his choice of the word "zemlishka". Such words as "tonen'koe del'ce" are used only in colloquial spoken language. They support the oral narrative dominant in this quotation. From the above excerpt we can find out many things about the narrator: he is a happy-go-lucky fellow, he has superficial knowledge and very little education. He is also impressed by the technological craze that swept over Russia in the 1920's -- "po slovu posledney tekhniki", misusing the slogan, "po poslednemu slovu tekhniki". The narrator reveals his emotional attitude and his personal feelings toward the object of his communication. With this
stylistic device the author makes his hero into a living person. But the writer has to be careful not to exceed the quantity of verbal means necessary to characterize his narrator. He would contravene the principle underlying the "skaz" technique: one type of phraseology -- one point of view.

The speech that the characters of the "skaz" use is never their own, but that of the narrator. The speech of the characters goes through the narrator's interpretation. To give an example, the raven, for the lack of human language, displays the same attitude, thinking and speech as Nazar Il'ich gospodin Sinebryukhov:

... только, смотрю -- сверху на меня ворон спускается.

Я лежу живой, а он думает, что падаль, и спускается.

Я на него тихонько шикаю:

-- Шш, -- говорю -- пошел, провал тебя возьми!

Машу рукой, а он, может быть, не верит и прямо на меня наседает.70

In Nazar Il'ich's interpretation the raven is using the same philistine diction as he does. The characters do not possess any depth or individuality of expression other than that of the narrator.

70 М. Зощенко: Избранные произведения в двух томах. Том I. "Виктория Казимировна", стр. 69.
Zoshchenko's presence is very seldom felt in his stories; he prefers to leave all the communication to his narrators. Leskov, whose stylistic influence on Zoshchenko was very strong, sometimes sweeps away this illusion of an autonomous narrator and he, the author, takes over as the story-teller: the narrator's speech becomes a humorous quotation in the author's speech. When the writer takes over as narrator the limitations of the "skaz" technique betray themselves. With only one point of view, one diction, the character of the narrator can be quite life-like. As soon as the author introduces his own point of view, the validity of his carefully-constructed character suffers, or sometimes is destroyed. The reader will no longer believe that the oral narrative flows from the mouth of a living narrator. Thus the narrator is not the story-teller any more, but only helps the author to tell the story himself.

Zoshchenko consistently uses the "skaz" technique: one phraseology — one point of view. The narration is communicated only through his unsophisticated hero. The complexities of relationships he cannot comprehend, everything filters into his mind simplified. Trivial notions that trigger his emotionality become absurdly exaggerated. In both cases the mechanism remains the same: his naive narrator's mind distorts the proper scale of things. For example, in "The Aristocrat" the narrator, Gregorii Ivanovich,
is preoccupied first with the plumbing and the toilet, later with the pastries. There is no other side to his character.

Not only does the narrator have no depth of verbal communication, but the other characters are also shallow (like the narrator). Here the humour is established through the "mask" of the narrator: he is masquerading as a gentleman until the situation is too demanding and his mask falls off.

In "The Bathhouse" the absurdity of the situation is a naked man with a paper claims-ticket; the manageress in a men's bathhouse. This creates the humour. The naked bather situation is repeated four times. The expression "you're not in the theatre" is used out of context three times and it achieves farcical humour:

He царский, говорю, режим шайками ляпать.
Эгоизм, говорю, какой. Надо же, говорю, и другим помыться. Не в театре, говорю.71

In the above quotation Zoshchenko uses the pure form of "skaz" with the narrator repeatedly reassuring the reader that it is not a dialogue, but a monologue he is reading: "говорю". The conversation with the bath attendant is the same device: the narrator talks for both of them:

Граждане, говорю. На моих, говорю, тут дырка была. А на этих эвен где?

А банщик говорит:

The comedy here is in the dual nature of the "hole" (дырка): first, it is the means of identifying the object; second, it becomes an object of necessity (that is, without the hole the pants lose their former worth).

Narrative techniques conform in varying degrees to either of the two functionally different types of narration: 1, scenic narration, 2, narration proper. In "scenic narration" the narration serves more or less as a binding material to keep the elements of the dialogue together. It prevents a given literary work from turning into a pure drama.

In "narration proper" the oral narration forms the dominant component of the literary work. The reader learns the story from the mouth of the narrator. The "skaz" technique utilizes this device well. The author uses "skaz" technique with a view to setting the "oral narration" of the person who communicates the story. For this purpose the author selects the proper lexical means, he construes the appropriate syntactical combinations and he sets the intonation in harmony with that of the supposed narrator. This supposed narrator is the subject whose consciousness —

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72 Ibid., p. 144.
whatever the degree of its explicitness may be — both records literary reality and interprets its meaning, estimates it and imparts to it the tonality agreeable to the understanding of this consciousness.

The selection of a naive and socially humble narrator was not unique to Zoshchenko; in fact it had a long-established literary tradition: Pushkin's Ivan Petrovich Belkin, the provincial squire; Gogol's Rudyj Pan'ko, the beekeeper; Leskov's nameless narrator of working-class background, in "Levsha"; Babel's Kurdyukov, the simple soldier who writes home to his mother.

The pure "skaz" form is even more successful in smaller genres, such as in anecdotes. Zoshchenko succeeds best in his short anecdotes, where the narrator's connection to each anecdote is only formal.

Besides Zoshchenko, Vsevolod Ivanov and Nikolay Nikitin, both Serapion Brothers, also wrote short stories with the use of "skaz" technique. What did Zoshchenko think about his own style?

Я пишу очень сжато. Фраза у меня короткая. Доступная бедным.

Может быть поэтому у меня много читателей.74

In his stories he always relies on the "one phraseology -- one point of view" technique. Therefore he has no need

74 М. Зощенко, "О себе, о критиках и о своей работе", Статьи и материалы, стр. 11.
to develop intricately complex plots. The simpler the motive, the greater can the contrast be in the manner the hero-narrator solves it. Zoshchenko himself is only a detached observer of the conflict; he does not take sides. His themes are repetitious. He does not write about the corruption of morals, but of the brute energy and awkward desire to conform, to understand and to stay alive in the changing times.

His stories are supposed to have a moral at the outset, but through the narration of his naive hero, the point gets lost. The hero loses sight of the moral or the main issue and often arrives at a completely unexpected conclusion.

The situations that provide "raw material" for Zoshchenko's tales are the everyday life of the average Soviet citizen: the inefficiency of consumers' services (The Kitten and People), the housing shortage (Pushkin), the scarcity of consumer goods (Economy Campaign), bureaucracy and red tape (The Receipt), bad roads, the juxtaposition of backwardness and the new ideology. These are not merely a setting for his stories: Zoshchenko intends to expose the frustrations of his fellow-men. Personal problems and griefs are reduced in scale or enlarged to the absurd. "It isn't fidelity or infidelity in marriage that counts, but the
availability of an apartment." The characters try to give the impression of their greater importance, but their actions and language consistently betray them.

Zoshchenko has a whole gallery of "small" men for his heroes. Nazar Il'ich gospodin Sinebryukhov is a failure, so are his associates: the miller who dies from an accidental stray bullet; the Polish beauty, Viktoria Kazimirovna, who gets her ensign, the old prince and happily settles for a peasant.

Nazar Il'ich has no strong identity: he is a peasant, his wife and his home are in the village, but he is also a soldier in the tsar's army, he "knows everything by the latest technology".

For the predecessors of Zabyeshkin, the unfortunate petty clerk, we do not have to look far in the novels of Gogol or Dostoevsky. He is the same failure in life as Nazar Il'ich. In fact, they are both striving for the same unobtainable goal: "financial security", a place to call home and a woman to look after them. Nazar Il'ich's plan to get the miller's money is frustrated by a freak accident: "... а как на пол ступит, так пол гремит — земля к себе покойника требует." 76

75 Scenes from the Bathhouse and Other Stories of Communist Russia by M. Zoshchenko. Introduction by Sidney Monas, p. viii.

76 Зощенко, Избранные произведения в двух томах, стр. 65.
The selection of a goat as a symbol of security is a satire. The goat is often called the poor man's cow; it is the most insignificant domesticated mammal one could own. Zabyeshkin's modest dreams are also frustrated: he is not to have the goat (that is, the fulfillment of his wishes for security and happiness).

The "Actor" is a victim of the unstable economic climate in Russia in the 1920's. The drama comes to a highlight in realism when the "actor" understands that he is actually being robbed in public, on the theatre stage, and there is nothing he can do to stop it. This "victim" is in kinship with the narrator of "The Crisis" and also with the hero (Ivan Fedorovich) of "Pushkin". In the two latter tales the housing shortage is so acute that they fall "victims": one settles in a communal bathroom with wife, child and mother-in-law; Ivan Fedorovich is put out on the street, because ninety years ago Pushkin might have lived in his new-found room. The irony in this story is that the organizers of the Pushkin anniversary are more concerned with setting up a shrine for the deceased poet than with looking after the needs of living human beings.

The story "Kitten and People" conveys the same general idea. The narrator's stove emits carbon monoxide fumes. The bureaucrats from the housing cooperative faint from the poisonous gas, but declare the stove safe: "... no repairs."
One can live." The narrator submits to his fate and when he comprehends that he is less significant than a flea -- "A man isn't a flea -- he can get used to anything" - he is content.

The socially conscious character of the "new man" is another of Zoshchenko's favorite heroes. This man is backward, his vocabulary full of poster slogans that he uses freely and almost always at the wrong time, for the wrong reasons. His glossary is of the proletariat, but his intonation and emotions betray his peasant background.

During the 1920's, to cover up for desperate shortages, the party master-minded various economy campaigns. The population was regularly organized into "brigades" and sent scavenging around the countryside for scrap metal, paper, rags. Zoshchenko's "Economy Campaign" takes us into a factory, where the workers decide they will stop heating the toilet because "it isn't a living room." The campaign works out well during the winter: fifty feet of pine firewood is saved. The narrator is a shopkeeper at heart: "In a hundred years you could easily save three cords. In a thousand years you could just open up shop with firewood." To a Zoshchenko hero, success does not come easily: nature strikes at

77 Zoshchenko, Scenes from the Bathhouse . . ., p. 45.
78 Ibid., p. 35.
the "tsarist pipes" and they burst open during the spring thaw. "In general it is necessary to pull such pipes out by the roots" — the narrator is not critical of the economy campaign, he is good-natured, he tries to go along, he wants to see things as he is told they are. But he feels it might be a good idea to think it over carefully: "Otherwise, it turns itself away."

The "little men" of Zoshchenko's stories never win. The heroine of "No Need to Speculate" devises a foolproof method of obtaining money from ladies who are in search of a husband: she introduces her own husband as an eligible bachelor, collects the fee and a few days later the husband will return, the deal is off and she will end up having both husband and money. A scheme like this would deserve to succeed! But again the heroine loses her husband to a lady dentist. She also loses part of her livelihood: she is not allowed to deliver milk to the apartment house where her husband now lives. Zoshchenko here portrays the greedy philistine (meshchanstvo), who during the N.E.P. years made unconscionable gains and sold anything — or in this case, anyone — for profit.

In "The Aristocrat", Gregorii Ivanovich, the good-natured caretaker, has his troubles. His first encounters

79Ibid., p. 36.
with the "Aristokratka" (whose nobility derived from having a gold tooth and stockings) are limited to conversation on such topics as the condition of the plumbing. Gregorii Ivanovich overcomes his shyness and invites the "lady" to the theatre. The caretaker loves his new self -- the gentleman. Zoshchenko does not allow him to remain a "gentleman": the mask is ripped off when he publicly offends the "lady" for eating too many sweets. Gregorii Ivanovich cannot forgive the "Aristokratka" for the public embarrassment. "I don't like aristocrats" -- his view happens to coincide with the party's view, but his reason for disliking "aristocrats" is personal and not historical. The thin veneer of fake manners is off.

The dear incompetent man of "Rachis" has managed to stay in his job for thirty years at the post office's "Foreign Correspondences" bureau, even though he does not read Latin letters. His incompetence was covered up for years as his fellow-workers read the telegrams for him. In this story the narrator is as uneducated as the hero, for he does not see the necessity for Krylyshkin to know foreign languages:

And I feel very sorry for him! Well, where are you going to get an old-time specialist in foreign languages nowadays? Should have let him stay on!80

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80 Zoshchenko, Scenes from the Bathhouse ..., p. 41.
In his sketches Zoshchenko mostly criticizes the crassness (poshlost') of the "meshchanstvo", its condescending way of life, its purposeless greed. Seldom, if ever, does he criticize the regime. His faultfinding is usually aimed at a minority segment of Soviet society,— very often the bureaucrat, the heartless, inhuman machine. This quality of his stories was one of the secrets of his great success with the public and with the Party. His criticism was acceptable as long as it was not aimed against the shortcomings of Party policies.

In 1932, Zhdanov

. . . invited into a single Union of Soviet Writers all writers who support the platform of Soviet power and [who] wish to participate in building socialism.81

At the first meeting of the All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, Zhdanov left no illusion in the writers' minds that the Party would abstain from forming literary policies as it had hitherto. Zhdanov asserted categorically that socialist realism would henceforth constitute the exclusive artistic method of expression for Soviet literature. With this, the period of pathfinding and relative freedom of expression for the arts had ended. Some writers turned a new page in their creative lives and, if for no other reason

81"O perestroyke literaturno-khudozhestvennykh organizatsii, Postanovlenie CKVKP(b) ot 23 aprelya 1932 g." Sovremennaya Literatura (Moskva, 1946), pp. 14-18.
than self-preservation, they accepted the new rule. Mayakovsky chose suicide after a trial period; others were never heard of again.

Zoshchenko's stories were as popular as ever; even Stalin, allegedly, was amused by them. He seemed an unlikely candidate for Zhdanov's purges. As it happened, Zhdanov was just waiting for the opportunity to punish Zoshchenko for an earlier statement he had made: "I am not a Communist (or rather not a Marxist), and I think I never shall be" — it had not been allowed to go unpunished, only the time had to be ripe.

Zoshchenko must have overestimated his invulnerability or underestimated Zhdanov's ever-increasing powers when he submitted "The Adventures of an Ape" and his autobiographical story "Before the Sunrise" for publication. They both proved fatal for his literary career until after the death of Stalin in 1953.

"The Adventures of an Ape" begins in the Leningrad Zoo. During a bomb attack on the city, the zoo is hit and a monkey escapes. On this sad occasion there is something to rejoice about: the three snakes are killed, since biblical

82 M. Zoshchenko, "Druzheskie parodii", Literaturnye zapiski, No. 2 (June 23, 1922), pp. 8-9.

83 Zvezda, May-June, 1946.
times they are the most universal symbol for all evil: "not in itself a very sad fact perhaps", says Zoshchenko. Unfortunately the ostrich is killed too,— meaning that even those who do not commit themselves to one ideology or another, the so-called "neutrals", are not safe from destruction.

Among all the animals the monkey is the most frightened. Maybe he is the most intelligent and he can tell when his life and security are in danger?

At first he is reluctant to leave: he has more freedom and security behind bars than the free people on the streets.

He is captured three times soon after he leaves the zoo: first by a kind military man, then by a profiteering old man, lastly by a warm-hearted little boy. Until he is permanently settled in the little boy's apartment, he is being chased by different groups of people. The order in which they run after him is always the same: "The boys at the head. Behind them, the grown-ups. Behind the grown-ups, the policeman."  

During the monkey's escapade, Zoshchenko does not forget to make a few jabs at his favorite unsophisticates, the ordinary city folk. When the monkey takes grandma's candy: "Well, an ape. It's not a man. A man, if he takes

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something, wouldn't do it right under grandma's nose." In the bathhouse: "no one knew it was an ape." The edge of irony is sharp here: it wasn't recognized as an ape, because it is so much like the others who use the bathhouse. When the monkey jumps on the lady selling the tickets, she shouts: "A bomb fell in my office. Quick, some iodine!" She is "knowledgeable" in pharmacology, she demands iodine, the good old remedy that cures all!

The dog, which chased the monkey once and had its nose almost twisted off in the process, when urged the second time, didn't go after him. The dog only looked at the fleeing ape, felt a sharp pain in its nose, and stopped running; even turned around. Probably thought: "They don't supply you with noses -- running after apes."

This is a reference to the Pavlovian dog's conditioning; but instead of learning through reward, it learned its lesson through pain. Also another universal human trait: never volunteer!

Zoshchenko makes a few references to the shortage of food:

He ate a fly to recoup his strength. And then a couple of worms.

Where could he eat? There wasn't anything edible in the streets. All the more he had no money. Ration coupons he does not have.

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85 Ibid., p. 179.
86 Ibid., p. 181.
87 Ibid., p. 182.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid., p. 177.
90 Ibid., p. 178.
At last the ape returns to the little boy, who takes very good care of him and trains him. The monkey learns very good manners, and eats at the table. Children, and many adults, can learn manners from the monkey.

This story has been interpreted in many ways. The Central Committee of the Communist Party had the following opinion:

"Adventures of a Monkey" ... is a vulgar lampoon on Soviet life and on Soviet people. Zoshchenko disfigures and caricatures Soviet customs and Soviet people, slanderously portraying Soviet people as primitive, uncultured, stupid, with philistine tastes and customs. Zoshchenko's malicious, hooligan-like depiction of our way of life is accompanied by anti-Soviet attacks.

Zhdanov's report was just as strongly worded:

Of necessity, Zoshchenko had to give monstrous, caricatured, and vulgar portrayal of the life of the Soviet people in order to make the monkey utter the foul, poisonous, anti-Soviet quip that it is better to live in the zoo than outside it, that one can breathe more freely in a cage than among Soviet people.

Is it possible to sink any lower morally and politically? And how can the people of Leningrad tolerate such filth and obscenity on the pages of their journals?

In fact, Zoshchenko did not write specifically about Soviet people in this sketch, but about mankind in general. Life in the "civilized" world is so confusing that the monkey would much rather choose the sheltered security of a cage. There are zoos in almost any large city; there was a shortage
of food in all European cities during the war. Alcoholism, stupiditity and greed are not peculiarly Soviet qualities. The manners of children, and of some adults, could stand improvement in any country. There is nothing outrageous in this story, except that there is no identifiable progressive positive hero, which is a must in socialist realism.

On August 14, 1946, the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, in a public statement, reprimanded the literary journal Zvezda for publishing certain works of Zoshchenko and Akhmatova. After this, it was only a matter of time: in fact, on September 4, 1946, the Presidium of the Board of the Union of Soviet Writers expelled Zoshchenko and Akhmatova from the Union, on the ground that only writers who "stand on the platform of Soviet power and participate in socialist construction" were entitled to membership.\textsuperscript{91}

The charge against Zoshchenko was the publication of his story "The Adventures of an Ape", printed in the issue of Zvezda of May-June 1946. Particular attention was also drawn to his autobiographical novel Before Sunrise, written during the war. One of his major alleged crimes was that he had done nothing during the war to help the war effort and the fighting people of the Soviet Union.

\textsuperscript{91}Rezolutsija Prezidiuma pravlenija Sojuza Sovetskikh pisatelej ot 4 sept. 1946 g., Oktiabr, No. 9 (1946), pp. 182-187.
His fall was all the more surprising because he was so very popular among Soviet readers. His fellow-writers had elected him to the presidency of the Union of Soviet Writers. In 1939 he had received the medal of the Red Labour Banner "for outstanding progress and achievements in the development of Soviet belles-lettres." 92

It is very difficult to comprehend how "Zoshchenko the villain" could have "misled" so many Soviet readers, his fellow-writers, and members of the Party for twenty-five years.

His expulsion from the Union of Soviet Writers put an end to his brilliant stories. When the world next heard of him, it was an uninspired, humourless Zoshchenko. On reading such a sketch as "Rogul'ka", 93 one can only be dismayed: what had Zoshchenko gone through to abandon his principles and produce a story like that?

Zoshchenko's expulsion was revoked soon after Stalin's death in 1953. Unfortunately, he never returned to his former style, with its former excellence. He died in 1958, at the age of sixty-three, from a heart ailment he had contracted as a result of gas poisoning during the First World War.

92 Literaturnaja Gazeta, February 5, 1939.
The official Soviet critics did not write about him until two years after his death. Zoshchenko is still frowned upon by the Soviet literary critics. They are still unable to "forgive" him for coming out strongly against the "politichestkaya tendentsiya". "Всякую тенденциозность мы отрицаем в корне." 94 "Нет у меня ни к кому ненависти — вот моя точная идеология". 95 Despite the small volume of reprints of his works (50,000), he is still very popular among Soviet readers, and he is gaining popularity among western readers of Russian literature. More of his works have been translated into English since the late 1950's than during his most productive years in the twenties and thirties.

As for the Serapion Brothers — they came quietly and they left quietly. They ceased to meet regularly in the mid-twenties. They were no longer an influential literary group by 1929. 96 Their main accomplishment as a group was in filling the vacuum:

Bourgeois art was quitting the stage of history, whereas the new art, the art of the Revolution, had not yet emerged. Some provisional forms of art had to patch the gap separating the prospective socialist art from the fading bourgeois art.

94 Peterburgskij Sbornik.
95 M. Zoshchenko, "O sebe, ob ideologii i ishcho koe o chom", Literaturnye zapiski, 1922, No. 3, p. 28.
Pil'nyak, the Serapion Brothers, Esenin and others produced this transitional art.\textsuperscript{97}

From a fifty-year historical perspective, one must come to the conclusion that the Serapions' literary achievements were modest. They did not manage to establish a literary trend like the Symbolists or the Formalists. According to Lunc, they never wanted to establish a literary school — in that they did succeed.

Some of the Brothers were short-lived; for instance, Lunc died in Germany in 1923. Others became better known abroad; for example, Pozner was best known for his critical works in Paris.

After Zhdanov's persecution of Russian writers, many of them changed their literary styles; they developed new characters to complement the new plots. The quality of Zoshchenko's stories written after 1946 can be described, at best, as mediocre. Shklovsky lost his spirit, his "tiger-tooth" had been pulled by Zhdanov. Tikhonov had to turn 180 degrees to survive. (He not only survived, but managed to live well.)

Polonskaya, Gruzdyov -- they faded away in Soviet literature. Ivanov, Nikitin and Fedin are still read in the Soviet Union. Only Zoshchenko has the same popularity as he

\textsuperscript{97}H. Oulanoff, \textit{The Serapion Brothers. Theory and Practice}, p. 34.
enjoyed during the twenties and thirties. His most popular works are still those that he wrote during the unsettled era of the New Economic Policy.
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