

1923

## Sharp Phrases and the Classics (Regarding Our Literary Disagreements)

The next three essays from 1923 were prompted in large part by articles appearing in the newly founded journal *On Guard*. Its youthful editors made increasingly strident ideological demands, not only on all imaginative literature being currently written, but on the immense literary heritage of the past.

Voronsky's articles represent his vigorous response during the early stages of the NEP in Soviet Russia, when policies concerning many issues were being addressed at length for the first time since the Civil War had ended. Voronsky is clear in defending the tradition which developed in the nineteenth century in the writings of Belinsky, Chernyshevsky and Plekhanov. He also echoes many of the arguments presented by Leon Trotsky in articles written in the summers of 1922 and 1923, and later reprinted in the book *Literature and Revolution* in 1923.

Another group in the polemic were the writers, critics and artists around the journal *LEF* which was closely tied to the Formalist and Futurist tendencies in art. More of the fire was exchanged, however, between the *On-Guardists* and Voronsky.

As the polemic unfolded, it was temporarily eclipsed (or subsumed) by the "New Course" debate in the Communist Party which raged from October 1923 through January 1924. Then came the trauma of Lenin's death, which was followed by a power struggle in the party lasting more than four years

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From *Prozhektor*, no. 12 (1923): pp. 14–22.

and ending with Stalin's eventual consolidation of control over almost the entire party apparatus.

Taken against this background, the debates over literary questions might seem to have been a "side show," a minor spectacle overwhelmed by more colossal issues. But the theoretical issues being thrashed out in the journals and meetings of the time were intimately linked to the broadest questions of perspectives: What were the social, political and cultural tasks of the epoch? Trotsky posed the question of the role of art in his introduction to *Literature and Revolution*:

If the victorious Russian proletariat had not created its own army, the Workers' State would have been dead long ago, and we would not be thinking now about economic problems, and much less about intellectual and cultural ones.

If the dictatorship of the proletariat should prove incapable, in the next few years, of organizing its economic life and of securing at least a living minimum of material comforts for its population, then the proletarian regime will inevitably turn to dust. The economic problem at present is the problem above all problems.

But even a successful solution of the elementary problems of food, clothing, shelter, and even of literacy, would in no way signify a complete victory of the new historic principle, that is, of Socialism. Only a movement of scientific thought on a national scale and the development of a new art would signify that the historic seed has not only grown into a plant, but has even flowered. In this sense, the development of art is the highest test of the vitality and significance of each epoch.<sup>1</sup>

Voronsky was keenly aware of his responsibility in the nurturing of art under the fledgling Soviet regime. He knew that a new socialist culture could not be created overnight, and that the best elements of the pre-socialist, bourgeois culture had to be preserved and assimilated rather than simply "tossed overboard," as the On-Guardists were demanding. These issues had already been fought out in the Red Army and in the economy with regard to the use of former tsarist officers and bourgeois "spetsy" (specialists). Here, the conflicts led to bitter recriminations in the Central Committee and threatened to split

1. Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (University of Michigan Press, 1968), p. 9.

the party. But in the more abstract realm of art and culture, the confusion and disagreements seemed as great, or even greater. Trotsky's essay "Culture and Socialism" gives a succinct summary of the issues involved (see Appendix 6, page 461).

In response to the polemics, the Central Committee organized a now-famous conference in May 1924 and passed the resolution "On Party Policy in the Realm of Imaginative Literature," printed in July 1925 (see Appendix 2, page 443). Without going too far ahead, the May 1924 conference was probably Voronsky's finest hour. His positions received strong support from leading party figures and forced the On-Guardists into temporary retreat. But as revolutionary events ebbed in the West and the rapidly coalescing bureaucracy in the Soviet Union proclaimed the doctrine of building "Socialism in One Country," the perspectives outlined by Voronsky and Trotsky came under ever sharper attack. By the time that Stalin and his supporters began to sense that art was indeed a "test of the vitality and significance of each epoch," they acted to silence the views outlined in these articles.

## 1

On Guard, the new journal edited by B. Volin, G. Lelevich and S. Rodov, has launched a campaign of literary criticism, the meaning and goal of which is to establish a unified Communist line in problems of literature by showing the fellow-travelers where they belong. In their criticism, the comrades are very decisive and, to use the words spoken by one of Turgenev's heroines, "very severe when it comes to manners." Severity "when it comes to manners," by the way, is an insignificant matter. What is much more important is that they have made a whole series of major mistakes and omissions. We will speak about them, and the general position adopted by the journal, in greater detail and in another place somewhat later. But there is one question which must be examined immediately, without delay. This is the question of the old, bourgeois art, or to be more precise, how we communists must assess it, what role we must give it in contemporary Soviet life, and what place we must assign it in contemporary communist imaginative literature.

We have inherited an enormous European and Russian literary heritage; everyone will therefore grasp the importance of the questions we have posed. What do the critics from the journal On Guard think about these matters?

There are no special articles devoted to these questions in the first issue of the journal, but in various places dealing with other topics there are a number of remarks which strike a definite chord. Thus, the lead programmatic article, "From the Editors," states: "We will fight against those outmoded thinkers who have adopted a reverential pose, and, lacking a sufficiently critical attitude, who stand frozen before the granite monument of the old bourgeois-aristocratic literature, showing no desire to remove its oppressive ideological weight from the shoulders of the working class." From the context, however, it is clear that what is being discussed is not only ideological weight, for earlier they write: "Most importantly, proletarian literature must free itself once and for all from the influence of the past both in the realm of ideology and in the realm of form." From Comrade Vardin's article "On Political Literacy" the reader learns: "Literature of past epochs was permeated with the spirit of the exploiting classes. It reflected the customs and feelings, the ideas and experiences of princes, nobles and the wealthy; in short, the 'upper ten thousand.'" This, of course, was not done "deliberately," nor always with "conscious intent," and so forth. Comrade Levman finds that "a dividing line must be drawn between proletarian and bourgeois literature. Cleansing our modern proletarian world from the vestiges which remained after the overthrow of the old ideals is a difficult but necessary task." Tarasov-Rodionov goes on about the old ironed-out meters and rhymes of the epoch we have shattered, while Bersenev proclaims the naiveté of those who propose that "one or another of the bourgeois writers" might evolve "in the direction of the proletarian construction of life."

To be fair, we must note that Comrade Sosnovsky's article about Demian Bedny strikes a different note. The reader, for instance, will find in his article these highly expressive comments: "We have eccentrics who feel that the language of Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoy and Chekhov has become antiquated, and that it is time to throw these masters of the written word overboard from the steamship of modernity. Oh, brave schoolboys, you have decided to go to Africa to hunt elephants with penknives." Although these words are directed against LEF, they might just as well be given broader meaning. In any case, to put it mildly, they are not quite in harmony or "in concordance" with the assertions noted earlier.

The reader has probably noticed that in all these statements, bourgeois-gentry literature is bracketed together and treated as something unified and whole. The entire position of the editors is permeated with this general point

of view, and it is not hard to be convinced of this by merely picking up their journal. Is such a wholesale approach to literature of the past correct? It is of course true that bourgeois-gentry literature has common features unique to itself. Nevertheless, to view it exclusively as something unified and homogenous would mean to become tangled up in general phrases and commonplaces which speak neither to the mind nor the heart. That is the best case. In the worst, such a point of view must lead to a number of the most unfortunate misunderstandings and errors. Bourgeois literature lived and developed along with its class. There was a time when the bourgeoisie fought against feudalism, when it was revolutionary. At that time, both science and art were revolutionary; after victories came a period of maturity, balance, full-bloodedness, good health and flourishing development. During this epoch the bourgeoisie produced incomparable examples of creative thought and feeling both in science and in literature. Finally, we come to our epoch—the epoch of the decline, collapse, decay and withering away of bourgeois society. And this is joined by a corresponding fall, regression and counterrevolutionary mood both in science and in art. The difference between the literature written by the bourgeoisie during the epoch of *Sturm und Drang* and the literature of the last decades is approximately the same as the difference that exists between the materialism of Holbach and Helvétius and the modern philosophy of Bergson, Keyserling and Spengler. Roughly the same distance can be noted when comparing our epoch to the epoch of the maturity and flourishing of the bourgeoisie. The works of Holbach, Helvétius, Feuerbach, Darwin and others still serve as the foundation for communist education. In like manner there can be no doubt about the positive and beneficial role played by Molière, Beaumarchais, Heine and Goethe, and, from the earlier writers, by Cervantes, Shakespeare and others. To lump together this literature with today's Marinetti and D'Annunzio, to pile them all together by applying the label "bourgeois" means to remove a serious question by offering an empty, but sharp phrase.

Or let us take our own Russian literature. It is not true that the old Russian literature reflected only the customs and feelings of rich people, nobles and princes. It reflected the customs and feelings, for example, of the non-gentry intelligentsia, the "intellectual proletariat," the "children of cooks," the sons of sextons, and the poverty-stricken, urban, lower-middle classes. One could say without exaggeration that, beginning with the 1860s, the mainstream of our native literature was fed by the non-gentry intelligentsia [raznochintsy—Trans.].

We are certain that no one would dare to say that this literature reflected the moods of the wealthy, or that it played second fiddle to the literature of the bourgeoisie and landowners.

Our non-gentry intellectuals wrote not only about their own customs and feelings; in their works they focused their main attention on the peasant, on the village poor, and on the general conditions of tsarist society. It is enough to recall the writers Nekrasov, Uspensky and Korolenko, and among the critics and journalists—Belinsky, Chernyshevsky, Dobroliubov and Pisarev. Of course, in depicting our decrepit, peasant-shirted, backwater Rus', in calling for the overthrow of tsarist society, our populist enlighteners inevitably embellished their works with petty-bourgeois moods which have become archaic for our times. But in the final analysis this cannot overshadow the objective value of their artistic and journalistic work, even for our times. For instance, G. I. Uspensky, despite his subjectivism, left us artistic works about the Russian peasant which are unsurpassed to this day. Even when the Russian intelligentsia began to "grow wiser" after 1905 and step back from the revolution, the continuity and linkage between this literature and the literature of the *raznochintsy* was never broken. M. Gorky, I. Shmelev, V. Veresaev, Iv. Volnov, Serafimovich and Skitalets all proceeded from the best traditions of the writers from the 1860s and 1870s.

We do not doubt for a minute that the editors of *On Guard* are any less familiar than we are with this history. But their propensity to operate at will with the words "bourgeois" and "counterrevolutionary," their general schematism, their fascination with sharp phrases, their inattentive and sloppy attitude toward questions of literary life both in the past and in the present, their unthinking audacity when a more precise and cautious attitude toward a problem is warranted, their free-and-easy manner, and their certainty that the reader will swallow anything as long as it's warmed up—all this leads to commonplaces and propositions that sound firm and rigorous, but that unfortunately lack sufficient foundation. If, that is, to use the expression of a certain village constable, you don't feel that "ease and robustness in functioning," as well as a heroic determination to lose one's way in broad daylight, are sufficient foundation. As a whole, what results is "the confession of an impassioned heart turned upside down."

By the way, about greater precision. Above we contrasted Russian and European classics to literature from the period of the bourgeoisie's decline. But

here, too, we need to be more precise. Otherwise what might happen is that people will at the very least take Wells and Kellerman, if not Anatole France, and place them on the list of out-and-out White Guardists and counterrevolutionaries. We cannot forget Comrade Bersenev's stern warnings addressed to those who naively believe that "one or another of the bourgeois writers" might on their own accord pass over to the side of the proletariat.

Let us continue.

Griboedov, Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Tolstoy, Turgenev and others were poets and writers from the gentry. This is beyond doubt. Does this mean, however, that their works are lacking any objective value, and that the proletarian writer and reader must first of all free themselves from their artistry, both in the realm of "ideology" (i.e., content) and in the realm of form? This would be true only if our classics were exclusively subjectivists in art, if the objective element in their works was completely absent. But they were truly great artists. And genuine art consists in thinking with the aid of images. Such thinking can be just as objective as scientific, discursive thinking with the aid of concepts. Such true art takes its material from reality. It is by no means the fruit harvested from the play of poetic fantasy, moods, experiences and feelings; it has nothing in common with subjective "making it up as you go along," or with idealist metaphysics. It is fundamentally realistic and it always must be true; that is, it must correspond to one degree or another to reality. Works of art are not exact copies of the real or ideal world (the world of tomorrow, but already given in its elements or in its potential in the present), but its most typical, characteristic features are given or fixed in them. It was for this reason that Belinsky, Plekhanov and others who have been our teachers never tired of repeating that poetry is truth in the form of contemplation, that the poet thinks in images but does not fantasize at will, and that art is the same as philosophy, the same as science, but that it simply takes the form of contemplating ideas in images. That's the way art always was with our classics. Hence their brilliant artistic generalizations: Famusov, Molchalin, Onegin, Pechorin, Sobakevich, Nozdrev, Manilov, Pierre Bezukhov, Platon Karataev, Natasha and others. All these are undeniable artistic truths and genuine discoveries which frequently are in no way inferior in their objective significance to scientific truths obtained by means of analysis. Yes, our classics illumined the Famusovs and Sobakeviches in a one-sided way; they didn't show them to be people sitting on the backs of the peasants (although even here we must make some exceptions); but the one-

sidedness of their depictions remains only that: one-sidedness, incompleteness. They gave not the full truth, but only a part of it. But that's the way it always is with science as well. Of course, in a work of art, even when it is realistic, it is easier to introduce subjective coloration than in the various scientific branches of human knowledge. But then the scientific disciplines are widely divergent from each other in this regard. Mathematics is the most objective science, it is the "purest." But when we come to biology the subjective element is introduced quite readily (let us recall the debate over Darwin). Biology, however, does not therefore cease to be considered an exact science.

If our comrades who have united around the journal *On Guard* were to direct their attention toward the objective element in the works of a genuine artist, our literary differences would be significantly attenuated concerning the fellow-travelers, too. In the first issue of their journal, however, there is unfortunately not a hint that this element has been taken into account by our critics.

Since reality in the epoch when our classics were living was developing not to the benefit of the nobility, and was even revealing its negative sides to a certain degree, then our artists, who were realists in art, couldn't help but reflect this negative reality, often despite their subjective intentions. Belinsky was right in reproaching Griboedov when he appealed in his famous comedy for "a Chinese ignorance of foreigners," supposing that all misfortunes originated from the fact that Russian society was slavishly imitating foreigners. Griboedov's conclusions were reactionary. Despite all that, *Woe from Wit*, by giving us the Famusovs and Molchalins, has played and continues to play a revolutionary role. The same is true with Gogol, with Tolstoy, and with a whole number of other first-class writers. These examples, by the way, explain how subjective feelings are usually introduced into a work. There are times, however, when the image itself, the very type, is distorted either unconsciously or deliberately. Then a tendentious work results. If the critics from *On Guard* had in mind the struggle against these willing or unwilling distortions, or against an author's false interpretation of the types, images and in general the products of his creativity, we would be willing to support them fully. But nowhere do they draw a line between the subjective and objective in a work of art, so for them, "ideology" completely coincides with content.

In creating the Manilovs, Sobakeviches and Onegin, and sometimes decorating their works with reactionary feelings, our classical gentry writ-

ers nevertheless managed to glimpse, note, capture, describe and reveal in them, in these types and images, not only the psychological traits of social estates, but also those shared by various classes during differing epochs. The comrades from On Guard hurl thunder and lightning at those who acknowledge the existence of such traits. They are wasting their time. There are no universally human feelings in a society divided into classes if one speaks of these feelings from an absolute point of view, as idealists of every stripe and hue so often do. But there are, there have been and will be universal human feelings which are relatively common, and relatively stable. “The dominant psychology in society,” writes Comrade Bukharin, “can be reduced to two basic elements: first, to the general psychological traits which can be found within all classes in society because, despite all the differences in the disposition of these classes, there also can be points of similarity in their positions; secondly, to the psychology of the ruling class, which ‘protrudes’ to such an extent that it sets the tone for all social life, thereby subordinating other classes to its influence” (The Theory of Historical Materialism, p. 242).<sup>2</sup> N. Bukharin was also right when he noted that Marxists explain these traits by the course of social development, not by “simply pointing our fingers at them.” That is how Marxists differ from idealists or subjectivists, not by the fact that they deny the existence of such traits. The scale of these feelings is different in different epochs. They shrink to a minimum during epochs of sharpened class struggle, especially in revolutionary epochs, and particularly in epochs like our own. The scale widens in “organic” and relatively peaceful periods. Our classics lived in precisely such a period. Class differentiation in the realm of consciousness was in its most embryonic state in Russia. In general the people, i.e., the peasantry, submissively bore the yoke of the landowners. It is therefore natural that our great artists, who belonged to the class of the gentry and reflected this class in their works, were able to notice general psychological traits which were rather stable and assign them to their types and images. Precisely for this reason the Sobakeviches, Korobochkas, Molchalins and others remain common names to this day. For this reason we are still influenced and infected by Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey (Hector’s farewell to Andromache, etc.), or by Shakespeare’s Hamlet and Othello. Our emotions are “in tune” with R. Tagore’s sacrificial poetry, Longfellow’s Song of Hiawatha, and many other works. In her superb

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2. For an English translation, see: Nikolai Bukharin, Historical Materialism: A System of Sociology (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1925, p. 210.

book about Tolstoy, L. I. Akselrod (Orthodox)<sup>3</sup> correctly writes about the creativity of this great writer of the Russian land: “While standing firmly on the soil of the real world, this great master was able to embody in his works those general traits, thoughts and feelings which in one form or another are characteristic of civilized humanity over the course of long historical periods” (p.16). Anatole France writes wonderfully about the secret of genius: “Great writers do not possess meager souls. Herein lies their secret. They are magnanimous. They have an all-embracing heart. They sympathize with all suffering. They endeavor to ease all suffering” (Conversations with Anatole France). With certain changes, the character of which we spoke about earlier, we could agree with this sentiment.

The world develops not according to Spengler, but according to Marx. There are no closed cultures. And when one class gives way to another, or one social structure replaces another, if the “destruction of culture” does not occur, economic and cultural acquisitions are in one form and shape or another passed on from the old to the new. Otherwise there would be no progress, no movement “onwards and upwards.”

Thus, we cannot enclose bourgeois literature in one general set of brackets. Bourgeois literature possesses enormous reserves of artistic, objective truths, discoveries and observations. Bourgeois (and gentry) literature, in the form of its best representatives during the best of times, embodied the general psychological traits which were common to mankind throughout whole epochs, although, of course, class psychology dominated in this literature.

What follows from all that has been stated?

Our comrades from the journal *On Guard* are indissolubly sure that “various fellow-travelers are incapable of assisting the proletariat and Soviet citizens in organizing their emotions in pursuit of finite, i.e., socialist goals.” But the fellow-travelers of the revolution are not only the modern-day Ivanovs; they are mainly the Russian and European classics. By dismissing the fellow-travelers, our critics have naturally dismissed this literature too, as they advance the thesis about emancipation from the content and form of art from the past, indiscriminately looking upon this art as a unified whole. But to say this is the same as saying approximately the following: since the bourgeoisie has been overthrown in Russia, and since the proletariat is in power, then down “once and for all” with bourgeois science (physics, biology, psychology, chemistry,

3. L. I. Akselrod, L. N. Tolstoi: *Sbornik statei* (Moscow: GIZ, 1922).

and so forth). These sciences were created by the brains of the bourgeoisie and are products of the bourgeois-gentry social structure. No friend of the working class who is of sound mind and memory will say this. He will say: In order to be free “once and for all” from the bourgeoisie, in order to organize socialist society “once and for all,” following the physical victory over the bourgeoisie it will primarily be necessary “once and for all” to master bourgeois science and philosophy, after freeing them from their reactionary vestiges and from subjective bourgeois scientists. New proletarian science will be created only in this way. Particularly valuable in this sense is the period of the rise and flourishing of bourgeois society, when the bourgeoisie was revolutionary or at least not reactionary. Having said this, he would be right. But with a few changes the same thing must be said about art in general and about literature in particular. And if our imaginary comrade would say further that the other point of view, which recommends “emancipation” before all else, is a “complete” absurdity, muddle and confusion, then he would also be right as far as we are concerned.

The editorial board of the journal *On Guard* addresses mainly the working class and the younger generation of worker-peasants. In the editorial and other articles, as soon as discussion began about the literature of past epochs, the editors should have said what our imaginary comrade would have said, and what we communists should always and everywhere now say. Instead of this, the editors preferred to sprinkle their pages with ideas about “emancipation,” “throwing overboard,” and about the literature of wealthy people, the gentry, and so forth. Like Gogol’s *Khoma Brut*, the critics from *On Guard* have been drawing a magic circle around themselves so that the bourgeois Viy will not hand the Russian Revolution over to every kind of evil spirit and phantom. This is praiseworthy, but such action must be taken wisely. The circle must describe a certain radius, and the literature of Shakespeare and Goethe, Gogol and Pushkin, Shchedrin and Uspensky by no means resembles the beautiful witch who scratched the poor seminary student.

People might object that the editorial board has in mind the absence of a “sufficiently critical attitude.” But it is not hard to become convinced that, in their minds, a sufficiently critical attitude means not to examine bourgeois-gentry literature dialectically, that is, in connection with the growth, development and fate of the bourgeoisie and gentry in order to force one to study and then assimilate the brilliant works of the great masters. Rather it means to

toss everything together into one great trash heap in order to completely finish with both the form and content of the supposedly dead art of past epochs (the “granite monument”).

Once again, we have no doubt that the editors would not draw such conclusions if the question were posed more concretely. That’s what happens as soon as our critics try to descend from the lofty summits of sharp and general judgments about bourgeois-gentry literature and return to our sinful earth. Their criticism of contemporary literary tendencies such as LEF is, to be sure, also rather one-sided. It is conducted from the standpoint of commandments: from the standpoint of forms which dominated in literature of the past. The dividing line between the epoch of the classics and the epoch of decline also shines through in places, although not clearly. Nevertheless, their declarative statements and constant juggling with revolutionary terminology leave no doubt concerning their position with regard to the final emancipation from the ideology and forms of the old art.

Oh, cursed ink,  
Our heart has dried up.  
Both paper and quill  
Cause us high degree of ill.

What comprises a sufficiently critical attitude from our point of view is obvious from everything we have said. And greater detail can be found about this topic in Belinsky, Chernyshevsky, Dobroliubov, Plekhanov and Akselrod.

We must once again emphasize: insofar as we must recommend the bourgeois classics with all the means at our disposal, so too must we wage the most ruthless struggle against bourgeois literature of the epoch of decline. But, we repeat, even here we must exercise caution and not follow after the overzealous Bersenevs.

New communist art has its own themes and its own tasks. It must reveal the new man who is maturing in the bowels of the proletarian-peasant masses. His collectivism, his audacity, his hopes, his struggle, his joys and sorrows, his defeats and victories must be brought into focus by the new writer. As he places them under the lens of his creativity he must not turn away from the reality of today, rather he must become thoroughly immersed in it. But the new man will straighten up and rise to his full height as he emerges from the

old Adam. He is surrounded by these old Adams. Around him and within him there are indeed a great many demons, evil spirits and black masks. It is only possible to discover this new Adam—who hungered for his own new paradise, created in his own image and likeness with the calloused hands and the minds of preceding generations—by tirelessly fighting against the old Adam who is both outside and within us. But in this endeavor the classical literature of past epochs is one of our most loyal friends. We must do a bit of studying with this literature about how to fight against the old Adams. It expended no small effort in this direction. We must learn how to create the Sobakeviches, the Nozdrevs, the heroes from Shchedrin, and so on, for to this day they swarm about us. This literature said little about the worker and his psyche, but it fought in no small measure for the kinds of feelings and customs which will enter as indispensable elements into the psychology of the new man. Therefore, even now it is no granite monument or shard, i.e. something dead which must be preserved as a monument to the past, but something living and vitally needed by us in our struggles and our victories. And the heads of the noble Pushkin, Gogol, Lermontov, or the non-gentry Uspensky and Korolenko were not crowned with laurel wreaths and grape leaves by their contemporaries. It was with crowns of thorns that they followed the path of sorrow and torment which is called Russian literature.

A few words about form. We are deeply convinced that the basic form of the new art, the art of our days, is realism, i.e., the form which was employed with such inimitable and unsurpassed mastery by the classics of bourgeois-gentry literature. Without going into detail—we will do so elsewhere—let us note here that realism as a whole coincides incomparably well with the spirit of dialectical materialism as developed by Marx and Engels. It seems that this is sometimes, but not always, clear even to our critics. In any case, there are muffled statements in “October’s” declaration about the use of old forms. It is true that the declaration is printed as literary material, but the relationship between the journal and “October” is not only obvious, but, so to speak, is demonstrated in every possible way, right up to mutual exchanges that greatly resemble those made between the rooster and the cuckoo in Krylov’s famous fable. Then why, one might ask, all the talk about “once and for all” freeing ourselves from the forms of the past? It’s all in the heat of the moment; cunning words and an altogether unnatural degree of idle talk.

New achievements, as well as the reworking and perfection of old manners

and old forms are, of course, necessary. We believe that modern art is pursuing a special combination of realism with romanticism, a neorealism, but one in which realism nevertheless remains the dominant element.

The innovations which some of the writers grouped around the journal are preparing to make sometimes seem questionable. Thus, in reviewing "Worker's Spring," Tarasov-Rodionov objects to the proletarian poets who have shown that their "rhymes are limping." He then discloses to the reader what the secret of new communist poetry is. It turns out that it actually consists of the fact that, "in contrast to the ironed-out meters and rhymes from the epoch we have shattered," the new communist poetry offers ruffled verses written without consideration of meter or rhyme. We, however, feel that the poetry of Demian Bedny, for instance, who receives such enthusiastic support from the indefatigable Comrade Sosnovsky (and who, according to the apt comments of the same Comrade Sosnovsky, is in no great need of such support), traces his lineage, as noted once again by the same indefatigable Comrade Sosnovsky, from Pushkin and various other classics. This lineage can be noted not only in language, but in the wrinkle-free nature of the classics, whose verses were very well "ironed-out." A new and more audacious approach to versification and vocabulary must be welcomed, but from this observation it by no means follows that it is no longer worthwhile to iron out one's verses. For instance, Comrade Tarasov-Rodionov has written the novella *Chocolate* using lines that are "ironed out," but the ironing he has done is very poor in places. In any case, the poets from "Worker's Spring" would be better served by heeding the advice given in the spirit offered by Comrade Sosnovsky, and not in the spirit of those who "iron things out" like comrade Tarasov-Rodionov and his ilk, imagining in vain that they are somehow standing "on guard."

In conclusion, let us direct the attention of the reader to the tone and language used by certain people (whose portraits hang in any lecture hall for workers) in speaking about our past literature, notwithstanding its gentry, bourgeois and petty-bourgeois origin. In the article "V. Korolenko" printed in the second issue of *Red Virgin Soil* for 1921, Rosa Luxemburg writes the following as she offers a general evaluation of our native classical literature:

The rays of light penetrating from the West were preserved in the form of a hidden force; the seeds of culture waited in the earth for the right mo-

ment to send forth their sprouts. Russian literature emerged suddenly, as an indisputable member of European literature; in its veins flowed the blood of Dante, Rabelais, Shakespeare, Byron, Lessing and Goethe. With the bound of a lion it made up for what had been missed during the previous hundred years, and it became a full-fledged member in the family circle of Western literature.

What is most characteristic about this Russian literature which arose so suddenly is that it was born in opposition to the existing social structure, and infused with a martial spirit. This was its distinguishing characteristic throughout the entire nineteenth century. This explains the richness and profundity of its intellectual content, the perfection and uniqueness of its artistic forms and even more so its creativity as a driving social force. In no other country and in no other epoch was literature such a social force as Russian literature during the epoch of tsarism. It remained at its post for an entire century until it was replaced by the real force of the popular masses, until word was transformed into flesh. In a semi-Asiatic, despotic land, literature, imaginative literature, won a place in world culture; it broke through the Chinese wall erected by absolutism, extended a bridge to the West and appeared there not only in order to take but to give, not only as a pupil, but as a teacher. We only have to mention three names: Tolstoy, Gogol, Dostoevsky!

And further:

The awakening in Russian society of an elevated civic spirit, which undermined the deep psychological roots of absolutism, is a contribution made by Russian literature. From the very beginning of its activity, from the start of the nineteenth century, it never renounced its social responsibility, it never forgot the consuming and agonizing spirit of social criticism.

From the time when, represented by Pushkin and Lermontov, Russian literature unfurled with incomparable splendor its banner before society, it held as its fundamental life principle the struggle against ignorance, the knout, and lack of culture. With powerful desperation it shook the political chains of society, wounding itself in the process and honorably paying the price of such battles with blood spilled from its own heart.

And still further:

Russian literature unites a high moral pathos with an artistic understanding of the entire gamut of human feelings. Within the enormous prison and material poverty of tsarism, it created its own kingdom of spiritual freedom and resplendent culture, in which it was easy to breathe and join in the interests and intellectual currents of the cultured world. Because of this it became a social force in Russia, educated generation after generation and was able to become, for the best representatives from its own midst (such as Korolenko), a true homeland of the spirit.

It is not hard for the reader to become convinced that the language, method and approach employed by Red Rosa are very distant from the arguments, language and method used by comrades from the journal *On Guard*. They are distant from the journal's wild and unrestrained manner, from its loud words and slogans, both well-aimed and out of place, which set one's teeth on edge. On the contrary, Luxemburg raises precisely the same points made in our article.

At the present time, Gosizdat is devoting five-sixths of its publishing efforts in the realm of imaginative literature to the republication of the classics. We are certain that these classics are our foremost and best fellow-travelers, who must be imitated, lovingly studied and propagandized in every possible way, and before all else. In doing so we will create a firm aesthetic bridge between the old and new art, keeping in mind that the bold comrades from *On Guard*, given the extremism of their declarations, fully intend to destroy it. These "brave little schoolboys" with penknives in hand truly don't know what they are doing.

