JPRS: 3377

10 June 1960

SOCIALIST REALISM IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

U. S. JOINT PUBLICATIONS RESEARCH SERVICE
205 EAST 42nd STREET, SUITE 300
NEW YORK 17, N. Y.

F O R E W O R D

This publication was prepared under contract by the UNITED STATES JOINT PUBLICATIONS RESEARCH SERVICE, a federal government organization established to service the translation and research needs of the various government departments.

JPRS: 3377

CSO: 3665-D

SOCIALIST REALISM IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

/Following is a translation of an unsigned article in Nova Mysl (New Thought), No. 3, Prague, March 1960, pages 323-328./

Nova Mysl published in past issues several articles discussing socialist realism which also drew comment abroad. The Soviet periodical Voprosy literatury (Literary Questions), 1959, No. 12, published an article "Discussion about Socialist Realism in Czechoslovakia" by I. Bernstejnova which informed readers about individual articles published by us and evaluated them. We are reprinting it as a contribution to the clarification of questions about socialist realism.

Editors

"One of the greatest theses of the current course of discussions about socialist realism is the general dislike of apriorism and mania for quotations," remarked one of the participants in a discussion which recently took place on the pages of the periodical Nova Mysl, organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.

The discussion was opened by the article "Remarks on the Artistic Characterization of Socialist Realism in Literature" by Radegast Parolek (Nova Mysl, 1958, No. 8); after that three more longer works on the same theme were published in the periodical. The greatest attention was centered on the questions of mutual relations between socialist realism and other methods, above all on its relation to modernism and to the problem of various directions within socialist art.

The authors of the articles fully agreed on the sharply negative relation toward the sadly renowned theory of "realism-anti-realism." Their views are identical with the standpoint taken by the majority of the participants in the discussion about realism which took place in the Soviet Union. They expressed far lesser unanimity in solving other questions which arose during the course of the discussion.

The core of the article of R. Parolek is the character of the two forms of relations to reality which in his opinion are always true of artistic creation and which he calls the "synecdochic" and "metaphoric" method. The synecdochic method "captures a piece of life, in it is revealed the essence of the greater living whole -- of the period, of society -- therefore part for the whole." The basis of realistic work is, according to Parolek, the enlarged synecdoche (a stylistic means resting on the exchange of the small for the large, the

part for the whole). Thanks to this method the realistic artist portrays life in forms of the same reality. For the basis of the second method which he calls the "metaphoric," Parolek takes the enlarged metaphor; in it fantastic, allegorical, idealistic and symbolic pictures come to the forefront. By the term metaphoric method Parolek then means also romanticism and various other kinds of allegorical arts. The critic is under the impression that the synecdochic and metaphoric methods existed in all stages of the development of art and one or the other came to the forefront depending on historical conditions.

Parolek also sees these two methods in socialist art. In his opinion, in addition to socialist realism there exists a large international school which he calls the "metaphoric wing" of socialist art. Here he includes the creation of Pablo Neruda, Nazim Hikmet, Paul Eluard, Vitezslav Nezval and many others. Both methods are of equal value and in their development mutually enriched each other. And while the synecdochic method remains the basis of socialist realism, the "metaphoric" -- fantastic and allegorical -- features play a great role in it. In Parolek's opinion in its future development a still greater rapprochement of both methods on the basis of the "synecdochic method" -- that is realism, will come about.

This concept seems to us quite controversial. It is natural that it brought about many objections as did the terminology proposed by a Czech critic. The majority of the participants in the discussion correctly doubted many of Parolek's theses but did this on the basis of various views.

Zdenek Mathauser in the article "Socialist Realism and Questions of Artistic Methods" (Nova Mysl, 1958, Number 11) emphasizes the complex dialectic character of the relation between the subject and object in art and deems it erroneous to derive the notion about the method only from the summing up of the means of expression. He considers it necessary to live in harmony with the significance of the idea of the picture and its role in the current concept of the work. For this reason fantasy and allegory can help in the realistic portrayal of reality. The Czech critic gives as proof examples of the use of allegory in Majakovsky's poem "Vladimir Iljic Lenin" and the fantastic pictures in the poem "O tom" /"About this"/.

On the other hand the critic reminds that the external probability does not yet make the picture realistic. For example, a rose can be, even while preserving the external marks of a flower, entirely only a symbol, an allusion to the "imaginary realism." As is known even the most accurate factographic description does not reveal the basis of the thing. From this standpoint he proceeds to various figurative means and infers that the enlarged synecdoche is not characteristic, as Parolek claims, only of realism. As an example of a similar construction in a work Mathauser especially considers Lermontov's poem "Novic" /"The Novice"/.

This formulation of course does not mean that the arbitrary figurative means can express the arbitrary contents; as an example of the disharmony between the character of the picture and its function of ideas the Czech observer gives the picture of Christ in Blok's "Dvanacti" /"The Twelve"/. This thought of Mathauser is especially important because among a great many critics from various countries there appears some kind of a benevolent relation toward the artistic figurative means, especially toward the various means of modernism, as if they had the ability to fulfill some kind of function of ideas.

Mathauser comments that the romantic method of portrayal arose from the disharmony between man and society. In socialist society where this disharmony has been removed an interest in reality prevails and this will create the soil for the development of realism. On the other hand efforts for deduction, for a greater generalization which in a realistic work lead to the use of allegory, fantasy and romantic pictures is characteristic in an epoch of revolutionary tempests. For this reason, as Mathauser concludes, the use of similar means in socialist realism is lawful and even their predominance in a book is not yet reason enough to assign a writer to the borders of socialist realism. The process predicted by Parolek which would lead to the subordination of "metaphoric" elements to "synecdochic," seems unreal to Mathauser.

The Slovak critic Juraj Spitzer in the article "Apriorismus alebo nevyhnutelnost" /"Apriorism or inevitableness"/ (Nova Mysl, 1959, Numbers 1 and 3), is far more resolute when from another position, he expresses himself against a similar perspective.

Spitzer claims correctly that for the struggle with the revisionistic declamations about the fact that socialist realism is an "apriori invention of conformists," it is necessary to point out the historical necessity of its origin and that for this reason it is important to define the borders between the ideas of "progressive art," "socialist art," and "socialist realism." Spitzer is right even when he writes that for the definition of these borders it is necessary to defend the historical point of view. Also worthy of support is the critic's effort to avoid sectarianism in his approach toward various currents of contemporary art.

Spitzer doubts the correctness of the effort to apply without reservations the term "socialist realism" to creations of such artists as Brecht, Eluard, Picasso, Meierchold and Czech writers V. Nezval, Vl. Vancura and others. On the other hand he rejects the term "metaphoric wing" of socialist art because in his opinion this term does not give the concept regarding the origin and internal contrasts of the phenomenon. How does Spitzer understand the origin of the various directions of contemporary literature? Like Parolek he lives in harmony with the unhistoric concept regarding the two basic methods of creation; Spitzer calls it realistic and romantic. In the beginning in defining romanticism Spitzer apparently leans to the same

historical concept of this phenomenon (as the distinct literary direction created in the 19th century), to which a majority of Soviet literary experts also arrived. But he continues to reveal a tendency to examine romanticism as some kind of unchangeable category. Critical realism which originated as the result of the crisis of romanticism which was brought about by the disenchantment with the bourgeois method of life, is itself going through, according to Spitzer, a similar decline. Spitzer connects this decline with the restricted possibilities of ideas of a given method. This would apparently lead to a revival of romanticism in the form of "neoromanticism;" thus he calls modernistic art which basically he considers anti-bourgeois: "The modernists formed an anti-bourgeois program and in the decisive moments stood on the side of proletarianism."* (The quotation is not accurate. It actually is as follows: "In many countries avant-garde groups of modernist artists and writers were created which formulated their anti-bourgeois program and in the decisive moments openly made themselves known and finally crossed over to the side of the revolutionary proletariate." The inaccurate translation of the quotation evidently influenced some of the opinion of Miss Bernstejnova regarding the views of J. Spitzer. (Editorial comment).

This concept is in many ways exceptionally controversial. It seems that Spitzer, led by the effort to create the most general scheme of literary development, from time to time rejects the historical principle which he himself calls for. Thus, for example, the unproven theory regarding the uninterrupted decline of critical realism at the end of the 19th and in the 20th centuries has penetrated his interpretation. Thus appeared the exceptionally inaccurate concept of "neoromanticism," which bourgeois science often uses. It is known that by far not all modernistic movements have something in common with romanticism, not even when we understand this term broadly; on the contrary, many of them are connected with various kinds of bourgeois positivism. Finally wholly abstract and unhistorical is the concept of modernism as an anti-bourgeois art in its entire extent. It is too well known that many modernistic movements have in reality a reactionary character and this not only with regard to its program, but also, oftener, in regard to the objective sense of its own creation.

Spitzer himself, when he evaluates the concrete phenomena of contemporary art, points out correctly to the sharp polarization among artists who began to create within the framework of one school. But the abstract interpretation of his article is in conflict with the conclusions which are paradoxical and diametrically opposed to many of his claims: every abomination of the bourgeoisie is, it seems, connected with realism, while membership in some kind of modernistic "ism" is proof of anti-bourgeois reliability. Similar abstractions can hardly help a truly objective evaluation of various avant-garde groups, some of which actually maintained progressive political positions (for example in the thirties in Czechoslovakia).

In recent years Czechoslovak critics like very much to use the concept "modernity" by which they mean some kind of general qualities of contemporary art as a whole. On the one side in the enchantment with this concept a valid effort arose to understand the general qualities given this realism by the 20th century by which it differs from preceding states, on the other hand however this term is used by some admirers of bourgeois modernism. The abstraction of the "modern man" is revealed, independent of social conditions, and the uniform "modern" literature which would apparently correspond to his taste; in it Kafka is calmly set in the company of Hemmingway and finally also Majakovsky. Spitzer's concept expresses the ingloriously known influence of similar abstract concepts.

Spitzer sees in socialist art a definite renaissance of realism. Nevertheless he warns against understanding this process as a return to "traditional" realism, since between the realism of the 19th century and socialist art of the 20th century there lies a period of the "supremacy of modernism." This concept, as he correctly states, leads to epigonism of which there are examples in painting.

It is of course on first sight striking that even here there appears a general concept of modernism as a progressive stage which preceded socialist realism. This prevents the critic from developing correct thinking regarding the new features of contemporary art and regarding the doubtless newness of socialist art.

Spitzer correctly emphasizes the inevitability of the eventual transfer of respectable progressive artists into the socialist camp and the complexity of this transfer. But the non-historical character of his concept forces him to understand the process of "polarization" in contemporary literature as a struggle between subjective and objective tendencies. This however does not do justice to the true picture of contemporary art. We believe that Spitzer's abstract approach to the question will make it difficult to overcome the sectarian relation toward contemporary non-socialist art. It is evident that it is possible to overcome this attitude only by a historically concrete evaluation of its various tendencies by examining their national specificity and objective value.

Spitzer also finds differences in Parolek's evaluation of both tendencies of socialist art: "What Parolek did not want to say directly from 'respect and reserve' toward the masters of the metaphoric wing he said indirectly: 'Socialist non-realists' will become realists -- and that is the end of the equivalence of both courses."

Spitzer himself sees the future of socialist realism in the removal of the antitheses between the "objective" and "subjective" method, which is in his opinion possible by the removal of classes and the development of art on the basis of Marxist dialectic understanding of reality: "Side by side both factions of esthetic reaction can be useful here in endless possible variations, while their individuality will be dependent on the subjectively material and spiritual

adaptability of the creator freed from the influence of opposite class influences. Thus will evolve the conditions for an endless amount of individual styles over which will hang the style of the period characteristic of the humanism of communism." Spitzer sees the manifestation of this richness and variety in the best works of socialist realist literature.

Another participant in the discussion, Miroslav Drozda, approaches the same questions slightly from a different angle. In the article "Socialist Realism and the Reality of the 20th Century" (Nova Mysl, 1959, Number 4) he attempts to examine the historical suppositions during which socialist realism arose. Drozda briefly explains the opinion of a number of Soviet researchers, agrees with them regarding the stages in the development of realism and directs his attention to the condition of contemporary literature.

According to Drozda's opinion the basis of contemporary art flourishes in the new situation emanating from the relations of man toward society during imperialism: the individuals who are joined to society only by bonds of personal interests, still more isolated, and in this period, in comparison with the preceding stage, there exist many coarser forms of human bondage (wars, fascism, colonialism). All this leads toward the dissolution of personality on the one side and on the other creates the ground for rebellion. The position of artists in this society "can hardly be a relation of objective analysis. It is some kind of inflammatory, anarchistic negation, in which not only imperialism is supported but also reality in general." Thus arises an artistic movement which does not attempt to repulse life but creates an autonomous artistic "reality." Drozda like Spitzer sees in this negation a moment of protest against imperialism, but he comments that this viewpoint finally leads to formalism. Drozda decisively comes out against understanding modernism as a common style for the 20th century and shows that revolutionary reality creates contemporary new art, socialist realism, that many of the best and respected artists tend to a close union with it and that this circumstance cannot remain without influence on the character of their creation which gains recipients -- revolutionary masses -- and cannot restrict itself to a non-binding formal play. For the individual who understood his position in society, who became a participant in the struggle for its transformation and is, as Drozda judges, "much more objective," anarchistic negation is not at all proper, but rather a revolutionary analysis -- and realism best suits this aim in art.

Drozda's attempt to define the artistic specificity of socialist realism is interesting. Here Drozda supplements Parolek on many points: both, agreeing on the known theses, make interesting, fresh observations. Drozda like Parolek emphasizes that in socialist realism the new relation toward the world has not only a rational but also an emotional character. So that the writer could portray the new reality he must

not be lacking in what both observers call, -- using Gorky's term -- "emotional literacy." Drozda sees examples for this "emotional literacy" in the lyrics of Majakovsky, Isakovsky, J. Wolker, S. K. Neumann.

Also important is the criticisms which Drozda makes regarding one question about the explanation of which, until recently, there was considerable speculative, dogmatic unclarity. The active relation toward reality forces the artist to seek the most effective method of reaction to life. Various fantastic and hyperbolic means can be subordinated to the principles of realistic typification (as in Gorky and Majakovsky); the author who attempts to activate the reader's fantasy to the maximum heights can prevail upon him to understand what he read with the help of associated imagination (poetry of Nezval, Majakovsky, Martynov) or with the help of lyrical philosophic subtexts and realistic symbols (given as examples are the novels of V. Nekrasov, and "Rusky les" /Russian Forest/ of L. Leonov). Various means of composition, such as for example, the shifting of the phases of events in the "Russian Forest," can serve the same purpose. All these means, as Drozda comments correctly, have nothing in common with the formalistic disfigurement of reality, but on the contrary help to deepen the reality of its portrayal.

In various stages and in various national literatures there appear such or other tendencies of style in various ways. In Drozda's opinion the portrayal of reality in forms of reality is itself easier to master, and for this reason this tendency of style prevails in socialist realism; however gradually with the raising of the cultural level artistically more complex forms are becoming more accessible to wider stratas of socialist countries. At the same time Drozda correctly rejects the claim that simplicity is equal to bad quality (the "traditional" Solochov created great artistic treasures!). For this reason one must not measure the value of a work by the "modernism" of artistic means which also often have an anti-realistic character.

Drozda is on the one hand with those Soviet leaders who point out the changed characteristics of critical realism of the 20th century: the greater use of fantasy, the effort for more penetrating pictures, a finer psychological analysis, etc. In connection with this the Czechoslovak critic claims quite correctly that the same characteristics necessarily appear also in socialist realism which far more deeply reflect the continually complex reality of the 20th century.

"The suppositions for such a development are contained in the very object of the art, in the socialist social reality, in the revolutionary activity of man, by which it will not only reflect art, but which rightly appears in the effort of the socialist artist to strengthen the dynamics of life," thus Drozda concludes his article.

*****

One of the main questions of the discussion, the existence of a diversity of artistic forms in socialist realism, was sharply and interestingly presented at the all-union conference on questions of socialist realism held in March 1959 in Moscow. The conference convincingly showed that our creative methods presuppose a wide use of the most diverse artistic forms (including allegorical, romantic, and symbolic), if they are to truly reveal the legality of the historical process. If the question is posed so widely the ground is lost for the interpretation of ideas according to our views so skillful as is the "metaphoric wing" of socialist art of "socialist romanticism," "socialist impressionism," etc. The majority of the Czechoslovak participants in the discussions (Mathauser, Spitzer, Drozda) generally recognizes this wide concept of socialist realism. It is right that the Czechoslovak comrades joined in the working out of this little examined question.

Perhaps still less worked over and more complicated is the question of modernism. In Czechoslovakia as in some other people's democratic countries an abstract, non-differentiated, seemingly positive concept of "modernity" has arisen. The introductory discussion shows that a number of Czechoslovak writers are not satisfied with the plainly apologetic relation toward all manifestations of "modernity." That is one of their positive sides. But it is also evident from the discussion that for the clarification of the theoretical basis of modernism and also for the concrete historical evaluation of these or other artistic phenomena of the 20th century there is still a great deal more to do. It is too bad that the participants in the discussion made little comment on questions of contemporary Czech literature, especially on the effort of the young writers for whom the problem of modern tendencies is often a stumbling block. The concept of "other methods" contrary to realism which some authors suggested, complicated the solution of a number of questions, to say nothing of the fact that it is lacking in historical concreteness and esthetic precision.

In general according to our opinion it would be possible to expect from the participants in the discussions greater attention to the concrete literarily historical material, above all to the phenomena of Czech and Slovak literature. We suppose that for the clarification of many controversial questions which remained unexplained in the course of the discussion a truly concrete literarily historical analysis would help.

The Czechoslovak discussion showed how profitable is the discussion of the basic questions of realism and socialist realism which took place recently. On the other hand it again warns us of the necessity of solving theoretical problems of art jointly with our friends from socialist countries. Many theses of the participants in the discussion seem controversial to us, but no discussion is without this. In conjunction with this however the articles contain a whole

series of new observations and conclusions and all without exception are evidence of the lively and sincere interest of the authors in the development of the socialist realistic method. For this reason the accusations made toward some of the participants in the discussion by the authors of the leading article in the periodical "Voprosy filosofii" [Questions of Philosophy] (1959, Number 7), seem to be unjust and out of place.

5026

- END -