A Leaf of Spring

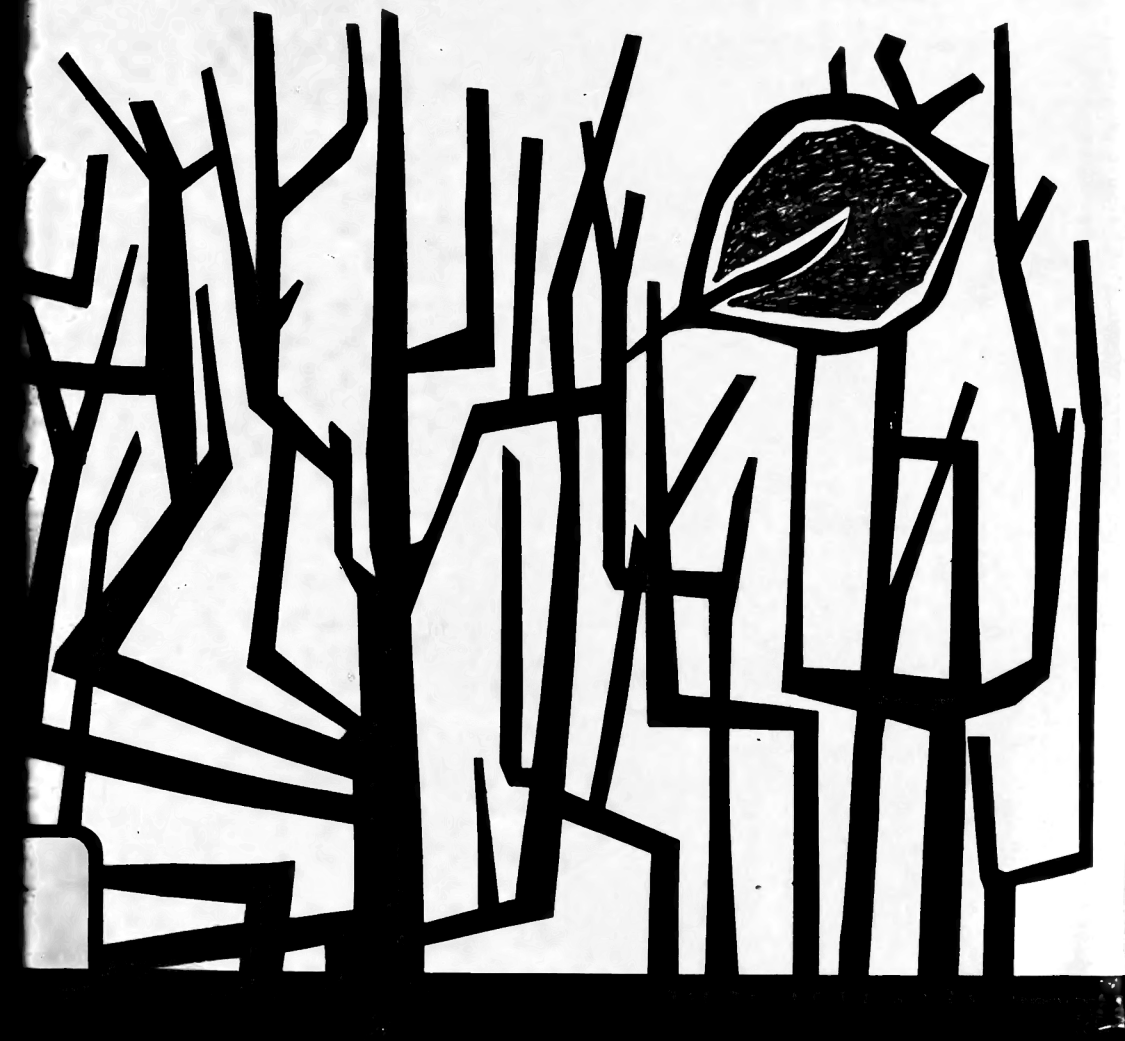
by Aleksandr Sergeyevich YESENIN-VOLPIN

ВЕСЕННИЙ ЛИСТ

Александр Сергеевич ЕСЕНИН-ВОЛЬПИН

"There is no freedom of the press in Russia, but who can say there is no freedom of thought?"

«В России нет свободы печати — но кто скажет, что в ней нет и свободы мысли?»



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Aleksandr Sergeyevich
YESENIN-VOLPIN

With the text appearing both in the original Russian and in an English translation by George Reavey.

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BOOKS THAT MATTER

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— Есенин-Вольпин.

I

INTRODUCTION

ПРЕДИСЛОВИЕ

A year and a half ago a young Russian poet and logician named Aleksandr Sergeyevich Yesenin-Volpin, fearing arrest because his work had already displeased the authorities, sat down and wrote an essay boldly entitled "A Free Philosophical Treatise" and gave the essay and copies of his poems to friends, requesting that the manuscript be published in the West and that, in doing so, his true name be used. He was arrested shortly thereafter and taken to prison. The Soviet regime claims that there are no longer political prisoners in the U.S.S.R. Therefore, as in the case of his previous political arrest, Yesenin-Volpin has been detained on the euphemistic charge of "mental instability."

The poems and the essay are among the most important documents to come from behind the Iron Curtain. They express a deep personal love of freedom which is characteristic of a whole new generation of rebellious Soviet youth. The following introductory remarks written in 1959 by Yesenin-Volpin himself give us an insight into his writings, personality, and motivations:

"Since 1947, I have written very little, and that only when the atmosphere of spiritual oppression has upset my balance.

"In 1949, I was arrested mainly because of my poems entitled 'I Never Put My Hand to Plowing' and 'The Raven,' which were reported to the organs of State Security.

"I was adjudged 'irresponsible' and locked up in the psychiatric prison in Leningrad. In the autumn of 1950, I was sent to Karaganda* for five years. I was freed during the amnesty following the death of Stalin.

* A newly developing industrial region in Siberia where there have been many forced labor camps.

"As to the official version of my irresponsibility, may I suggest that the reader judge my intellectual capacities from my scientific works and my poems. My so-called 'irresponsibility' did not prevent me from successfully defending my Ph.D. candidacy a few weeks before my arrest and at the very time when evidence against me was being collected.

"Actually, only a morally and mentally defective person can fail to reach a stage of extreme indignation in the Soviet Union. If this were not so, the Communists would have no reason to seal up their borders. In no other way could they have dealt with their flock while using Stalinist methods. Now the methods have changed, but not radically. The main point is that even the relative freedom which we have gained (a level of freedom which would seem to a person from another country to be the most shameful slavery) was not won by our society itself, but was granted to it by the government, or, more accurately, by the Communist "church," as a sort of cat-and-mouse game with the people, rather than for the sake of more civilized rule. And then only because Stalin's successors have lacked the imagination and courage to follow in the footsteps of their teacher.

"I ask the people in the West into whose hands these verses will stray to remember the fate which awaits me if some of them should be published. This applies especially to the poems 'The Heart is Broken' and 'O Fellow Citizens, Cows, and Oxen,' for which, strange as it may seem, I could be accused of 'incitement to war.' (Incidentally, the absurdity of such accusations is very well understood even by the accusers themselves. Our deepest tragedy consists of this unprecedented and universal hypocrisy.)

"I do not shrink from this fate because, in our country, I am only pleased with my conduct when I feel that I have been able to throw the hypocrites and weaklings

into confusion. I shall be very pleased if my poems will see the light of day in the West; of course, I do not want to force them on anyone, and I myself do not consider everything in them successful. But I should like certain of my works of the latest period to be published first. They are my justificiation for having written almost no poetry since 1951. When these works are finished and their publication arranged for, I shall go calmly to jail, if they should insist on it, in the knowledge that they had failed to conquer me.

"The publication of the poems written before August, 1946, does not endanger me with arrest here. Of the poetry written after this date, the poems mentioned above carry the greatest threat of this kind, as do also, to a lesser degree, the poems entitled 'The Raven' and 'Fronde' (because into them might be read a hint of incitement to rebellion) and, to a lesser degree, 'There Is No Freedom' and 'Yesterday I Still Frolicked in the Meadow.'

"The poems 'A Leaf of Spring,' 'I Looked at the World Upside Down,' and 'As a Child I Did Not Play with Children' can all be published in the West without risk of my being arrested here. I do not even take into consideration less severe forms of punishment (since, unfortunately, I cannot count on getting an exit visa anyway).

"If I should be arrested for any reason whatsoever, I emphatically request that everything considered worthy of publication should be published. Under Soviet law this would not significantly lengthen the term of my sentence.

"In any case, I insist upon absolutely no changes in the text if it be published in Russian.

"There is no freedom of the press in Russia, but who can say that there is no freedom of thought?"

Aleksandr Sergeyevich Yesenin-Volpin is a Soviet citizen who lived in Moscow until his arrest. He is the natural son of Sergey Yesenin (1895-1925), the famous lyric poet who was at the height of his popularity in the period following the October Revolution of 1917. His mother, Nadezhda Volpin, is known as a woman of culture and a translator into Russian of many works from the French and the English.

Sergey Yesenin was a peasant genius and a contemporary of Boris Pasternak and Vladimir Mayakovsky. He had a natural lyrical gift and is generally considered to be one of the most gifted Russian poets since Pushkin. His poetry has been praised by critics as diverse as Maxim Gorky and Pasternak. Of him, Pasternak has said: "Since the days of Koltsov, Russia has not produced anything so native, natural, appropriate, and inalienable as Sergey Yesenin. . . . At the same time, Yesenin was a living, palpitating particle of that spirit of pure art which Pushkin has called the highest Mozartean principle. . . . ." Sergey Yesenin, who had initially believed in the October Revolution as a realization of the old peasant dream of a rural Russia in which the peasantry was to own the land, soon found himself in a tragic dilemma as a poet of nature in conflict with the new industrial theories of the Bolsheviks and with the ideological tenets of Marxist philosophy. His refusal to knuckle under to Marxism made his later life—and poetry —tragic. As Maxim Gorky wrote in 1927: "This was a deeply instructive drama and of no less worth than Yesenin's poetry. Never had the village in conflict with the city smashed its head so effectively and torturingly. This drama will repeat itself often." Indeed, Yesenin had proclaimed in one of his poems: "I am the last of the village poets." In defending his position until his death, Yesenin also defended the freedom of poetical inspiration. In public he often behaved in an "undisciplined" manner

and, in the middle of the Terror, he had been known to wear a top hat and patent leather shoes—the symbols at that time of the persecuted capitalist. As a result, he was often in trouble, but he somehow managed to survive and write until his suicide. In 1923, he wrote:

> My hovel will fall down without me,
> And my old dog has died long ago.
> God has condemned me to perish
> On the crooked streets of Moscow.

This note of a devil-may-care challenge to destiny and the tribulations of his life, and the emotional, tragic content of his poetry, proved extraordinarily "infectious" in those grim, uncertain, and heroic years. Yesenin's poetry had therefore a tremendous impact on the population, and particularly on the youth. An enormous crowd of people, numbering tens of thousands, followed his body to the cemetery. The "infectiousness" of his poetry even alarmed the Soviet authorities, and a campaign was started to counteract the influence of "a dangerous political disease." In fact, little of his work was republished until 1959-1960, when, at last, advertisements appeared of a complete edition of the works. This itself is symptomatic of new and somewhat freer trends, of a more critical attitude among the readers of the younger generation, and of a somewhat increased maturity which insists on facing the facts of the immediate past.

Sergey Yesenin was born in 1895 in a small village in the province of Ryazan in central Russia. His early youth was spent in the impoverished environment of a small peasant family. After receiving some education in a parochial school, he came to Moscow in 1912. His poetry soon became known in the literary circles of Moscow and Petersburg, where he was lionized as a "village prodigy." The critics acclaimed the purity, freshness, and originality of his verse. By 1918, he headed the Imagist group of poets.

Essentially a pastoral poet, he had also a strain of typically Russian mysticism and messianism which are perhaps best exemplified in the poem "Inonia" (1918). His genius finally developed strongly tragic overtones under the impact of the city and the Revolution. Instead of resolving his contradictions, he dramatized them. In 1922, Yesenin married the famous American dancer Isadora Duncan. He traveled with her in Europe and the United States, but the Western world provided no solution to his problems. He returned to Moscow in 1924. In the grip of increasing disillusionment, Yesenin dramatized his isolation and compared himself to a tracked beast. In the theoretical and practical atmosphere of Soviet Communism, his spiritual values appeared increasingly superfluous. The crisis came in 1925. On December 28 of that year, the conflict between the ideal world of the "village poet" and Soviet reality culminated in his suicide. After slashing his wrists, he wrote a farewell poem in blood, then hanged himself from a radiator pipe in a room of the Hotel Angleterre in Leningrad.

Sergey Yesenin's powerful lyric genius reflected his passionate, nostalgic love for his Ryazan countryside and the soil of Mother Russia. His poetry—sometimes pastoral and pietistic, sometimes tragic and even blasphemous—became increasingly poignant and memorable not only because of its natural simplicity, exquisite melody, and deep feeling for nature, but also because of a sense of tragic destiny, personal as well as public.

Aleksandr Yesenin-Volpin, the son whose work is presented in this volume, has evidently inherited some of his father's poetic talent and freedom of attitude. As a poet, it must be admitted, he is less consistent and less talented than was his father. His bravery is never in doubt, and he has written some memorable lines. His poetic activity thus far has been much interrupted and is, as he himself notes, secondary to his major interest of

mathematical and philosophical speculation. In this latter sphere he has a daring and unorthodox mind, which is indeed reflected in the poems written between 1941 and 1951. In these poems, the early ones especially, we also find a pastoral strain, but the element of novelty which distinguishes some of the other poems is not so much any technical innovation or any extraordinary command of language or creative construction as it is an astonishingly honest critical attitude and a deep-rooted sense of irony. In fact, judging from the poems as well as the "Treatise," we are confronted in Yesenin-Volpin with a complex personality, both poetically emotional and deeply rational. The personality of the son, like that of the father, is faced by the problem of isolation. The problem, however, is presented and discussed in a different way. Yesenin-Volpin attempts to resolve it philosophically, as in his "Treatise." He is, above all, concerned with the problem of truth, and in this domain he arrives at an extreme point of skepticism. It is a skepticism which, however modern and nihilistic it may seem, is also fundamentally Socratic, since he is prepared to stake his life on his right to be a skeptic. This is, of course, an extremely dangerous position to defend in the Soviet Union, where collective conformity is not only an ideal but also a *must*. In this way, Yesenin-Volpin is an example of that rebellious, anti-dogmatic spirit which characterizes at least some of the intellectuals of the younger Soviet generation.

Aleksandr Yesenin-Volpin is now thirty-six years of age. He holds a Ph.D. candidate (*Kandidat Nauk*) degree from Moscow University and he has made his living chiefly by writing articles on mathematics and logic, as well as by making translations and abstracts from foreign publications in the Russian, Spanish, Italian, French, German, Portuguese, and English languages. He has never been outside the Soviet Union; and none of his poems has ever been published there. His most recent article was published in the November, 1959, issue of the

Soviet publication *Voprosy Filosofii* (*Problems of Philosophy*). Without a Ph.D. degree, Yesenin-Volpin has not been permitted to teach at Moscow University, but he has conducted a well-attended seminar there on mathematical logic.

During the summer of 1959, Yesenin-Volpin was officially invited by the organizing committee of "The Symposium on the Foundations of Mathematics: Infinitistic Method," which was to be held in Warsaw from September 2 to 8, 1959, under the sponsorship of the Institute of Mathematics of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the International Mathematical Union, to attend as one of several recognized Soviet mathematicians and to present a paper there. As a result, he immediately applied to the appropriate Soviet authorities for permission to go to Warsaw, but his application was rejected summarily. Despite his inability to travel to Warsaw, his paper entitled "The Superintuitionistic Program for the Foundation of Mathematics" was considered significant enough to be read to the mathematicians assembled at the symposium.

Because of his unorthodox, non-Communist outlook, Yesenin-Volpin experienced at various times, even before his most recent arrest, more serious difficulties with the Soviet authorities. It is reported that he had been arrested and interrogated a number of times by the Soviet security police, and he was, as he himself has said, confined for a number of years in a concentration camp in the Karaganda region. There is no certainty as to his present whereabouts, except that he is in prison somewhere in Russia.

—THE PUBLISHER.

II

THE POEMS
IN RUSSIAN AND IN ENGLISH

СТИХИ

Русский текст и английский перевод

THE OLD MAN OF THE SWAMP

He emerges from a swamp at dawn,
And then frolics on a meadow in the breeze;

In a hollow on a stretch of green he turns
Many a somersault and cartwheel then;

But should he see a running rivulet,
He'll dash over and throw himself across it;

The old man seemingly enjoys the water,
And the water gurgles down his longish beard . . .

Afterwards, when he emerges from the stream,
See the sunshine glitter on his scaly skin!

And later, when he sprawls upon the sand,
On the hottest sun-baked spot of all,

Only whistling and snorting all the while,
How greenly fresh he looks, how gay and clean!

. . . And emerging from a swamp at dawn,
He slides back into its depth at evening.

ASHKHABAD,
MARCH 18, 1942.

IN CORNERS FLIES SIT DROWSING

In corners flies sit drowsing
Where greedy spiders grab them;
Hideous hags are mending
Socks thick-lined with sweat.
A one-eyed hag in spectacles
Now picks a quarrel, squealing
About some thirteen rubles lost.
Like a wicked witch she nags:
"Everyone is quick to steal!"
Another hag insistently
Refuses to give back a mite
(A black shawl, wrinkled, wraps
The "crow"; her mouth is sagging;
She seems to snivel, or is it worms
That crawl along her wrinkles? . . .)
. . . A boy under the icons sleeps;
He knows absolutely nothing;
He stares through tight-shut eyes
At a dream that's like a book.
The sinister, one-eyed hags
Appear to be darning socks,
While four small snakes in corners
From boredom curl up in sleep;
It's deadly chill outside;
And, to one side, go past
Half-octopi, half-men,
Leaving all behind them broken . . .
"Have pity on the infant;
Don't shout: he is asleep!"
So Pelageia says,
Blowing her nose in a towel.
With finger pressing to her lips,
She blesses flesh and blood . . .

"O Lord, to paradise admit
All of us, who sin and suffer!"
. . . The polisher with his big spoon
Stuffs his mouth with millet,
And fellows in the street
Sing to the accordeon;
And bitterly the comfort drips
On the souls of all who suffer;
And the boy, half-octopus,
Beneath his blanket shudders.

Moscow,
JANUARY 7, 1941.

IN THE ZOO

In the zoo, so renowned for its fierce lions,
A live crocodile wept in his low-roofed den.
In his narrow ditch, he was so bored
Recalling the Pyramids, the Nile and Egypt.
Then perceiving me nailed to the window frame,
He tried to approach and crawled to the glass;
But he slipped and hurt his eyes painfully
Against the rough and slippery walls,
He took fright, his cheeks quivered helplessly,
He whimpered, plunged in tremblingly . . .
I turned slightly pale and, putting my hands to my face,
Went back home, oblivious of the way.
. . . The sun chanted, shimmering and glittering,
And it fascinated me with its play.
I resolved then to brick up the window,
But the reviving sunbeams made the brick crumble;
And I broke with the Heavens as I'd done with the Earth,
But abandoning vengeance, I fell sound asleep.
Then I saw the shattered body with hurt eyes
Tremble, whimper and drown in the water . . .
. . . The evening flame leapt above the houses,
And when, at last, the gloom engulfed them,
I awoke and, for a long time, knocked with my eyes
Against the harsh, frigid walls of my corner.

FEBRUARY 4, 1941.

THE LAST SONG

I stand upon the very brink
Of a lofty tower.
The sun is setting. I'm very glad
It is the sunset hour;
If I jumped now—then the world entire,
It seems, would be bereaved . . .
Because a reveler with a guitar
Had walked the whole wide earth . . .
The Danube, Volga, Guadalquivir—
The whole of the habitable sphere—
Stopped all they were engaged in doing
When my flowing song passed by!
Whatever house I entered,
All men were gracious and kind;
And even the feasting king in his cups
Poured out for me a beaker of wine . . .
But only one woman in all the world
I thought was beautiful . . . But my strength fails:
She always was cold as the moon
Despite my prayers and entreaties.
. . . For hours I gazed upon her face;
Yet she remained as the winter snow.
But when I gave her a golden ring,
She followed me in my wandering!
. . . That was some fourteen years ago,
And fourteen different times,
Year in, year out, night after night,
The same thing happened over again:
As soon as the heavens' radiance paled,
Her eyes would then begin to burn;
And I'd be happy, very happy, I swear,
To whatever lands my feet might carry . . .
For my head to rest on her soft shoulder
And so forget—can I ask for more?

But I stand on the very brink
Of a lofty tower;
And may a rumor fly the whole earth over
That I was happy as a god;
Yet, in an instant, this my head
Will fall below my feet!

Moscow,
JULY 28, 1943.

TO OPHELIA

With wild flowers you'll climb on a willow,
Beneath which a torrent is rushing,
And an unconscious tune you will follow,
Which an angel could hardly be singing . . .
Wilder words, and more wanton your song,
Till, unmindful, you slip in your stride,
And fall down from the willow headlong,
While your flowers are strewn far and wide;
And the willow will weep its regret
For the man whom the love of you filled . . .
But must beauty against you be counted,
Or his mind prove the cause of his guilt?

FEBRUARY 17, 1944.

DRUNKARD

I drink a lot unfalteringly;
And I am one of those
Who, at every evening party,
Gets drunker than the rest.
And when our host calls out: "Here's brandy,
And, there, caviar!"—
To make our drinking through the night
Less dull;
Then I, at first, like all the rest,
Go to the table.
Not counting then
On too much approbation,
I exclaim: "Let us recite some verse!"
"Not now!" comes the answering groan . . .
And the guests dance on till morning
To the gramophone,
While I drink and drink from grief or disillusion
And recite aloud—but very soon
Come to a stop . . .
. . . And returning home,
A desperate alcoholic,
I place a mirror on the table
Before my face;
And each time sadness brims me;
Tears rise;
And I can never stare enough
Into my eyes . . .

MARCH 17, 1944.

MORPHINE

I'm emptied, and a hospital awaits me.
Within its walls the madman's not alone.
The malignant chain of disconnected thoughts
Will always stay with me till hair goes gray.
My soul's a sepulchre of sorrow—
A wondrous giant lies interred therein;
Unlike a youth, I'll not be ravished by
The beauty of unfathomable depths . . .
. . . Today I wait renewal—from a needle!
I wait salvation—not only for a day!
Do not depart, you crazy chain of blissful
Visions, but stay with me till hair goes gray . . .
Then through my blood the stream of morphine runs;
I see the swarms of blue-winged birds . . .
And like a brigantine in storm, my eyes
Go rushing from my sockets in their wake . . .
The parquet floor looks like a quivering cobweb.
I hear a crash . . . The gods have fallen on their faces!
I'm king of all! . . . I'm pleased, Inna, extremely
Pleased, as if a needle pierced my heart.

JULY 5, 1944.

FULL MOON

In mirrors' glass our faces petrify;
The moon's a corpse in a puddle coldly lying;
On a night like this no man feels drowsy;
It is full moon—no time for sleeping!
... Blue faces glimmer, and dresses flutter by;
Unevenly a voice chants poetry;
A couple crawls into a mute embrace;
Bridegrooms stretch towards their brides;
Lips, to each other, bring disease;
And everywhere the moon is shining . . .
Women repeat their eternal promise:
"I will . . . I will be true to you!"
For a millionth time some fool is strumming
The same old note upon a string . . .
O to see the moon in person
In a puddle—no mere reflection!
The moon was gazing at your window,
And out you came to her shrill whistling;
We had greater need of the moon than the sun,
For we were two; each of us pure;
I was all absorbed. But you were acting.
I had staked my freedom and my life.
Stinging, a bee will lose its sting
And die . . . And thus I, too, shall die . . .

October 6, 1944.

SCHIZOPHRENIA

I waited for the doctors to stop their chatter,
Then went to call on her. Dusk was falling.
I entered and said: "I shan't be in good health" . . .
She laughed aloud!
. . . I told her everything (I, paler than a corpse),
From the end to the beginning;
She laughed and laughed as if expecting
No other conclusion from me . . .
. . . But in the street the moon shone quietly.
It shone not for the poets only:
On this moonlit night a war
Of dark and light broke out,
And she (if this were in a dream,
The dream would be hypocritical)
Spoke at length, and always of the war . . .
I kept silent, disbelieving
They were burning Warsaw, Paris, Moscow,
For the sake of territory or coin:
It must be a giant schizophrenic
Biting the grass in a violent fit.

SEPTEMBER 7, 1941.

DEATH

My soul, abandoning the body,
Did not fall, luminous, in the void:
In flashing flight it plummeted
Inside you deeply like a swallow;
And you and I make only one!
—But mamma moans, hysterical.
Yet we are calm. We find it odd
To watch a young boy's funeral.

DECEMBER 12, 1942.

HE STRIDES ALONG CHEERFULLY

He strides along cheerfully, swinging
His loosely hanging, empty sleeve;
And I could only call the sparkling
In his eyes a gleam of festive light . . .
He is happy! It is we lack happiness!
. . . His eyelashes had been singed,
And like an opera's last chord,
The sights of war persist . . .
But what cares he for the victories and feasts
Of kings that rot beneath the ground,
Now that men's bones, picked clean by wolves,
Have dewdrops gathering upon them . . .
It's calm now on the field . . . The groans of wounded men
Had blended there in one long howl . . .
The tears of eyes, already misted,
Had vaporized into the air . . .
. . . Of those who later came upon the scene,
Not one dared speak a word aloud—
Only the wolfpack had left the field
And howled its satiety close by . . .
He strides along now, swinging his sleeve:
He had lain there and had survived!
And this gleam sparkling in his eyes,
I tell you, is a festive light!
He walks declaiming! And he is happy,
I do believe! He'd live for ages!
What need has he—oh yes, what need,
To claim the use of a second arm!
. . . One arm or two . . . What matter! For
In his eyes I read that he'd shrugged one arm away;
And swinging now his empty sleeve,
He strides, whispering, on the road.

JULY 28, 1942.

A SOLDIER'S BODY LIES

By the roadside, in a ditch,
A soldier's body lies:
His stiff, uncovered feet
Protrude like wooden sticks.
Like a log, in water soaked,
He lies in a lilac puddle . . .
You ruthless soldiers—what,
What have you done with death!
. . . Headlong, a drove of horses
Gallops over the endless land;
For a good ten miles from here
The stench makes horses sick;
The soil decays beneath the dead,
And dampened stones glow red;
Not every corpse is laid in boards,
And jackals claim their share . . .
I saw my lucent childhood fears,
The lanterns dimming in the silence.
In the middle of a lofty church
A girl lay in a bower of flowers . . .
The people, gathered by the porch,
Waited for the requiem to begin;
But I stood staring at
The transformation of her face;
As though, despite the heart that stopped,
The tissues still appeared to strive . . .
Then patiently and warmly
A deep voice rose and chanted slowly,
And death glowed quietly within her
Just as an agate glitters darkly.
. . . In putrid water, like a log,
A soldier's corpse lies stripped and bare.

JANUARY 20, 1945.

IN AN ALIEN LAND

In an alien land I grieved,
But I'm back in Moscow now;
Yet, the ingrate that I am,
Not a shade of joy I show.
Bitter memories are gone—
But if my choice had a free hand,
Festively a cosmopolitan
I'd rather live in a foreign land.

OCTOBER 17, 1944.

OF MY NATURAL FATHER WAS I BORN

Of my natural father was I born,
Or more immediately of fame;
With subtle curiosity endowed,
I turned my back on children's play.
At nine I knew that, on the Moon,
The Sun burned in a black sky by day.
I often thought: That's where I'll go . . .
With this in view I studied Science,
And, without concealing my contempt for life,
I disciplined my thinking at fifteen . . .
For madcap fellows such as I
Kantor had already blazed the trail.
. . . But early dreams are very fickle:
At the age of seventeen (it was in summer),
Enamored with the easy access to the void,
I became a poet almost;
But my language is penurious
And my rhythm stilted, artificial.
Of my natural father was I born,
Or more immediately of fame?

JANUARY 23, 1946.

NOTE: George Kantor (1845-1918) was an Austrian mathematician who propounded the theory of Tranfinite Numbers. He died in a mental institution.

DEDICATION

(On the Occasion of Proving a Certain Theorem)

Accept this offering, thou Ancient Science!
The deduction made, I saw your eyes grow glad;
I knew my duty, uttered my defiance,
"Indeed, I'll prove it!" But my start was bad.
You turned away. Then, after some confusion,
I tried again: the second try did not avail.
What should I seek? There seemed no quick salvation;
And I was not the only dunce to fail.
Again I labored. Finally, the proof!
No errors. Yours I was entirely.
As from this day I'll only seek new truths,
Spurning renown and complacency.
No bitterness of forced renunciation
Shall poison my clear mind: You—the destiny
Before me: Doubt and Knowledge here in fusion;
Mother to Science, Mind, Simplicity!
Though love's sweet moments may elude me always,
Though merriment may never be my lot,
Long live the joy that artifice creates:
My daughter, child of my ingenious thought!

FEBRUARY 22, 1946.

I NEVER PUT MY HAND TO PLOWING

I never put my hand to plowing,
Nor labored manually at all.
Poetry is all I ever read,
Only verses, and nothing else besides . . .
But, inasmuch as leaders will insist
That their pronouncements should be heard;
Every locksmith, every soldier too,
Instructs me in morality:
"In our society all men are free
And equal—thus teaches Stalin.
In our society all men are loyal
To Communism—thus teaches Stalin."
. . . And when they thrust on me, as sacred law,
"The dream of all the ages," the dream
Requiring no vindication,
And add moreover, "You must love,"
Then, even if being sent to prison
Is no mere penalty, but spells my doom,
I answer back: "I just can't stand that crap!"
. . . As if no blow could make me fear,
As if the right of mocking people
Were the most sacred art to me,
As if my abuse were smarter far
Than a soldier's homespun speeches . . .
But what am I to do, for it is spring,
The inevitable time of year,
And one goal alone is crystal clear,
The irrational goal of liberty!

AUGUST 31, 1946.

QUIET IN THE DARK

An ashen willow stands in darkness, hushed,
And scurrying clouds are torn, and glimmer bright.
The earth retains its warmth, and patiently
The stooping trunks await the sunrise light.
. . . Away, you dreamer, seeking after freedom!
Do not attempt to rouse the aimless night:
The lightning rods project from every roof,
But, were they missing, no storm will break this day . . .

AUGUST 24, 1948.

THERE IS NO FREEDOM

"There is no freedom, never was" . . .
Joke on, my son: I press your hand:
Smite down their power! These jokes amuse
And horrify a father's mind . . .
Big children do not fear the whip,
And adults lock them up in prison;
But this has no effect at all;
They just don't care, who still are children.
Joke on, my son! Mere sound and fury, yet
I love your fresh and caustic wit,
Though the foe will ridicule your pranks.
As for the friends, they've ceased to care
For what they cannot justify:
The anger of an adult babe!

FEBRUARY 3, 1950.

THE RAVEN

Once at night, in time of terror, I was reading Thomas
More,
Lest ignoring his Utopia might be laid at my own door.
In the long, dull exposition I was seeking confirmation
Of arrests for vagrancy in the land exempt from war,
Since this sort of vagrancy necessitates no form of war.
Is he deep, this Thomas More?

. . . And I pondered on the nation in whose land debased
was freedom . . .
Suddenly I heard a rapping . . . Who so late? A
frightful bore!
Racked with doubt and sorrow, whispered: "It could
hardly be a friend;
All my friends have been imprisoned . . . Must be thief
come to the door."
In ecstatic expectation I called: "Thief, come in the
door!"
Someone croaked out: *"Nevermore!"*

All was clear. Of course, it was the ancient Raven. In
great haste,
I unlatched the window, saw the stately Raven of before!
In he rushed impatiently, and stared about the premises . . .

NOTE: This shortened adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's famous poem, here given an undercurrent of political rebellion, was one of the poems for which Yesenin-Volpin was arrested in 1949.

In his *Utopia,* More laid down the principles of an ideal state whose strict laws made special reference to vagrants, a sixteenth-century social and economic problem. Here the word "vagrancy" may well be intended to connote freedom of movement and mental divagation.

The poet's use of the word "folklore" seems to mean fiction in the sense of the political and social mythology of the Soviet regime.

In confusion I informed him: "You may sit here on the floor;
In this house we have no Pallas, please be seated on the floor.
There's the floor, *and nothing more!*

Sullen and ungainly, like a brooding fowl he settled down . . .
Somehow Pallas was unearthed . . . I have a heap of bookish lore!
Fluttering, he perched once more; and, black as pitch in his appearance,
Blinked there like a drowsy demon, pecking at the title "More"—
Suddenly aroused, his beak kept pecking at the title "More,"
And pronounced he: *"Nevermore!"*

I was startled. O, Plutonian! Like a Teuton taciturn!
Perched above, with bitter words my conduct subtly you deplore!
Stop grimacing, wizzard bird; reveal at least half of your mind;
Your abyss, how penetrate? For I have feared since time before
Yet another such abyss in realms corrupted heretofore . . .

Croaked the Raven: *Nevermore!*

Raven, Raven! All the planet waits the warrior, not the poet;
In Plutonia you may not quite understand our discord sore!
O, what genius of tomorrow will compose about our strivings
In this age a crown of creations, making cunning use of folklore;
And most likely take as subject our own fancy-fashioned folklore!
And croaked the Raven: *Nevermore!*

O Prophet, plainly no mere bird! Impatience has a limit;
Then Voltaire comes in most handy, bombs and hatchets, what is more.
Now that shame has made us pallid—may it come, though not too soon,
Since the terror's at the summit!—will it come, this Thermidor?
. . . Danton fell, and Robespierre was stricken down by Thermidor?
Croaked the Raven: *Nevermore!*

O, Prophet, plainly no mere bird! Is there no foreign country,
Where to argue freely about art portends no peril sore?
Shall I ever reach that region, if such be, and not get shot?
In Peru or Netherlands, I'd solve that old contentious chore
Of the realist and romantic still disputing as before!

Croaked the Raven: *Nevermore!*

"Never, never!" quoth the bird . . . That foreign land's
beyond the sea . . .
Hereupon in burst two soldiers, drowsy doorman and
a major . . .
I did not click my heels before them, merely spat into
a face,
But the Raven, somber Raven, simply croaked out:
Nevermore!
Now I push and push a barrow, keep repeating
Nevermore!
There's no rising . . . *Nevermore!*

FEBRUARY 21, 1948.

STAR

It was erroneous to think that jailbirds
Can easily ridicule the law in jail,
And there dispense with all authority.
Not so! in prison, too, the word is jailed!
. . . A gray-haired Marxist argues, strict and stubborn,
Propounding speeches reeking of the prison!
An evangelist most likely, cunning too,
Scratches his belly and swallows the stale air,
But nothing can induce the door to open . . .
Hope will not enter flying through the window!
Then I perceive what I had not imagined—
That star I see, where I am standing now! . . .
The star is white and, with a playful twinkle,
It whispers that I am a wretched scoundrel,
Who compromised with prison and the grave,
Whereas restriction can be broken down—
Most easily too—through regeneration.
Blend without delay with her, the Star!
Yes! She appeared upon the firmament,
Thus prison-framed—for she has freedom's gift!
And she shines bright, alluring, impudent . . .
The astronomer, alarmed, can't understand
Why so mockingly she treats the law,
This very law which had just laid me low.

LUBYANKA, MOSCOW,
AUGUST 10, 1949.

FRONDE

We were dispirited, when free, to chant those psalms,
To pour forth praise without disturbing order—
And live in shame, repeating in a horrid age
A putrid text about the arbitrary past.
And carelessly we laughed like boys at school;
And finding it amusing, we repeated
To those who glorified the universal leader:
"All praise, all praise, to great Loyola!"
...But then the game was up: we were in jail...
But have we courage? What the threat? But through
Our minds flash only hopeless guesses . . .
. . . On sunny days we locked our doors, it seems,
And then indulged in very restless talk . . .
How foolish to have a *fronde* without a sling!

PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL,
PRISON NO. 2,
LENINGRAD,
NOVEMBER 7, 1949.

NOTE: A *Fronde* is a hostile militant minority deriving its name from a faction during the reign of Louis XIV which was opposed to the Court and to Cardinal Mazarin. The word comes originally from the Latin *fronda,* meaning a "sling."

THE HEART IS BROKEN

The heart is broken, passion's lost—
An alien power has sundered us.

An alien faith, an alien law,
Have tracked me down on every side.

. . . I waited mutely, a beetle in a wall.
Secretly you came to visit me;

You trembled, shedding tears of shame,
While I was hesitant to answer "yes";

And yet behind the wall of being,
We were most happy, you and I . . .

Now you're in exile, and I in jail,
All day in darkness, bright-lit at night,

Among the bandits, among the thieves,
The gray-haired priests and the professors.

. . . The end! But deeply an anguished hope
Lives warm: perhaps, if war break out . . .

Hope will survive without the newspapers,
And waiting might take some fifteen years . . .

. . . In the frozen tundra winds and blizzards blow . . .
We all have scurvy in the frigid mineshaft;

Your father will not raise his eyes again,
He's deaf to us beneath the stones!

... But there, in freedom ... there's more to eat:
The end's obscure, but clearer there!

... But he, the chief, is silent always,
And in this silence pass the years;

And no one questions: why or wherefore
You've crossed the Volga, and I'm in jail!

JUNE 11, 1950.

HOWEVER HARD YOU TRY

However hard you try to mend a sock
That's torn, it's never quite the same when darned;
But I am not afraid of jail or shock!
I still have everything in me! . . . I'll live!
Then comes this prose injunction suddenly:
"Henceforth don't hiccup when you smell the slops!"
And like a fly caught in a matchbox, I
Shall silently subside after a minute.
About that freedom, what shall I declare,
With which my reason was engaged in play,
Wearing my patience to a ragged despair,
Making me wish I were aboard a steamer
On seas that never had espied a Russian? . . .
Alas! That freedom hardly did exist . . .

PRISON OF CHERNOVITZY,
JULY 21, 1949
(THE DAY I WAS ARRESTED).

A LEAF OF SPRING

A leaf of spring, the gift of foul weather,
Burst, spinning wildly, through a prison window . . .
Was it not I who once affirmed that nature
Need live no longer than a day or two? . . .
Was it not I who once declared I wished
To love and live with novelty my urge?
Did I not once maintain I wished to suffer,
Having no use for all the flowering of spring?
. . . One day a cornflower fell into my hands;
I raised it to my nose, yet smelled no fragrance;
But then it drooped and agonizedly grew still,
Like some young girl that's murdered in the bushes . . .
Now I feel sorry for that flower! Its shame
And trouble are the very same I feel;
And here, in prison, I have grasped the awe
Men sense when faced with nature plain and simple!
But I'll prove cunning—and, when free again,
I'll trample down and tear the blissful flowers!
And I shall laugh and laugh again, because
Pain is the only beauty that I know.

AUGUST 22, 1950.

I LOOKED AT THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

Once I stood like an arch,
With legs wide apart
And head down, bending over
In the middle of the road.
Thus the trees, the very earth,
All things, did look suspended,
And the houses, hanging high,
Made no sense at all . . .
And if anyone said, "Fool!"—
(A comic thing it was:
The sky as small as a hammock,
Hanging there below me) —
I would answer: "What need of brains?
Crude presumption's better!
In this life, the only blight
Is constancy!
. . . Men can tolerate all things—
The hypocrites!
But my law will advocate—
So be it!—no love, no faith!"
But I loved again and again,
And, for fear of publicity,
Trampled on love with my boots
To balk any tender caress . . .
But it's useless to remember
Those days and years gone by . . .
In-between now and then
A precipice yawns!
Not by chance I knew prison,
Hunger and fear;
I had to accede to every demand;
I am not so young . . .

I'm out of love with living
In a world of dreams,
And with innocent beauty:
The world is upside down.

KARAGANDA,
MARCH 23, 1951.

YESTERDAY I STILL FROLICKED IN THE MEADOW

Yesterday I still frolicked in the meadow,
And, once in bed, I gave no thought to prison;
Yet here I awakened in the Lubyanka
And to this very day I have no notion why.
The soldiers gave me no inkling of a reason,
And no interrogation faced me in the morning . . .
Then, what signifies this menace of the end?
Could it be my partiality to writing?
But what's the point here of "why" and "could it be"!
Everything is obvious without the "why":
Since I'd dispensed with all belief in human aims,
Was it a wonder I was locked up in prison!

I have seen its façade, known its seamy side, too.
But I might claim that nothing would astonish me
If, inside the Lubyanka, a spark of freedom
Might annihilate this unbounded prison!
Because, though routine may crushingly deaden
All those implanted within this nauseous hole,
I'm a spider, and proficient in cobwebs:
Interrogated, I'll invent no lies at all;
With the effluvia of final corruption
I shall infiltrate their minds and protocols!

No trace of a doubt or belief will remain,
No liberty, no Russia, no prison . . .

. . . I have no need of any hope or bait
To make me laugh or grimace before one man!
I'm satisfied: this day, in Lubyanka Street
I have seen with my eyes a famous prison!
All right, but what if I learn far too soon
That I've become involved in a hopeless game?
Why, even then I stand to lose nothing at all
If I happen to suffer a cut and then die . . .
With a gracious look and a triumphant smile,
I shall leave this building of my own good will;
And they will avoid the mistake of burying
Me, too, in a graveyard where Communists lie!

LUBYANKA — KARAGANDA,
JULY, 1949—MARCH 23, 1951.

AS A CHILD I DID NOT PLAY WITH CHILDREN

As a child I did not play with children,
And childhood lasted as long as prison . . .
Playing, I knew, was just a pastime,
And I must grow to maturity of mind!

. . . When growing up, I was convinced
That all truth would be revealed to me,
That, by thirty, I would make a name
And die most likely on the Moon!

How much I had expected! But now
I have no notion why I'm living
And what I want from the savage brutes,
Who inhabit the malicious city of Moscow!

. . . Here women by life are quickly mangled.
Their beauty by thirty is gone forever . . .
Their husbands maul and beat them hard
And, like tomcats, screech when they are drunk.

And yet they still believe in progress,
In a social order based on justice;
Incarcerate the disaffected,
And finish up in jail themselves.

. . . It is regrettable, but not my job
To exterminate these philistines.
Instead, by way of execution,
I'll lead astray their stupid children!

These lads are well able to understand
The ridicule of loving or believing,
That their mothers and fathers are tyrants,
Who should have been killed long ago!

These lads will end with their necks in a noose
But no one will condemn me for that;
And a hundred years from this time
Only madmen will read these verses!

KARAGANDA — MOSCOW,
APRIL, 1952 — DECEMBER 25, 1953.

O FELLOW CITIZENS, COWS, AND OXEN!

O fellow citizens, cows, and oxen!
Just look what the Bolsheviks have done to you!

But once again we'll see a frightful war,
And different times will then knock at the door . . .

. . . If I survive the war and all its hunger,
Then, perhaps, I'll stick it out for one more year,
Inspect all those most unattractive places
Where I grew up and was so frightened of the lash;
And I'll converse with a residue of friends
From the prison camps of Ukhta and Ust'vym;
But when the trains will start to run again,
Then I shall abandon Russia for all time!
I'll arrive in Byzantium and Algiers,
And, though short of cash, I'll land in Cairo,
And there, above the sea, espy white vapor
Rising beyond the rock where sits Gibraltar!
. . . And to the extent I still remain a child,
I shall admire the Louvre, and not grieve!
I shall preserve enough of my ascetic outlook
To continue hoping past the forty mark;
And I shall be sufficiently myself
To challenge all the Catholics to battle!
. . . But if it emerge that the West is old
And crude, and an unbeliever there a dunce;
And it emerge that the enduring winter
Has frozen the rage of a despairing mind,
And that, far from Russian places, my protest

Appears quite meaningless and wanting wit!...
What shall I do? Even then I'll not go back!
Drunk from despair, I'll shoot myself,
So as not to watch the ruthless simplicity
Of man's dismal, everyday existence,
And with all the holy bitterness of gloom
Not spoil the life of some young person;
And, in addition, make absolutely sure
That Russia gets no vestige of my ashes.

KARAGANDA — MOSCOW,
APRIL, 1952 – OCTOBER, 1958.

MY ANXIETY BEING SO STRONG

My anxiety being so strong, that I'm unable to work,
I am rhyming instead. And, as from now, the work is not aimless:
For, perhaps, I'll remember that doubts have assailed me before,
If I should grow exhausted again and afraid of the void . . .
But my alarm has arisen through involvement in human affairs:
I am losing my passion for Science though that's my main topic . . .
I am writing some verse, but it's bad, as you see;
And there's nothing I love. I keep smoking, and that's merely waste!
. . . And yet only a short time ago I felt strongly the urge,
And I thought: I shall master all knowledge, finding books and strength . . .

But I'm weary, and nothing affords any sense of relief:
Apathetically, like a convict, I still try to work . . .
The blue stars are my only love . . . And if freedom
were mine,
I would fly to the stars, a casual traveler always . . .
Only sky and the stars . . . But can Nature assist me at all
To discover in abstract science the pulsation of Nature?

APRIL 8, 1946.

III

TRANSLATIONS OF BAUDELAIRE AND POE

Yesenin-Volpin ends his collection of poems with translations of a poem by Baudelaire and one by Edgar Allan Poe. Both of these love poems are highly romantic and idealistic, and, certainly, neither is the type of poem that would fit into the official requirements of socialist realism. Against the background of Soviet conditions, Yesenin-Volpin's very choice of the poems can be interpreted as a sign of nonconformity.

Here the translator has provided a rendition of each poem in the Latin alphabet for the benefit of the English reader, and, in the case of the Baudelaire poem, he has also given a literal translation in English of the Yesenin-Volpin's Russian translation.

—The Publisher.

ПЕРЕВОДЫ ИЗ БОДЛЕРА И ПО

Есенин-Вольпин кончает свой сборник стихов двумя переводами из Бодлера и Эдгара Аллана По. Эти стихотворения о любви очень романтичны и не принадлежат, конечно, к разряду тех творений, которые отвечают требованиям социалистического реализма. В советских условиях, выбор Есенина-Вольпина можно истолковать, как свидетельство отказа подчинения официальным догмам.

Переводчик дает нам транскрипцию каждого из этих стихотворений в латинском алфавите для облегчения читателю. Кроме того, русский перевод стихотворения Бодлера переведен дословно на английский язык.

— Издатель.

OSSENNAYA PESNJ
(From Charles Baudelaire)

1.

Skoro myi pogrouzimsya v pot'yemki i holod—
Tak proschay zhe, korotkovo lieta krassa!
Slyshen stouk topora . . . Ha polen'ya raskolot
Goulko padai'yet doub i redei'yout lessa . . .
Drozhj . . . No zloba i strakh tou't pomochj n'ye mogli byi,
Pokoritj'sya pridet'sya zim'ye i troudou!
Leesh sverkn'yot ledyano'you i krasno'you gliboy
Mo'yo serdze, kak solntze v polyarnom adou . . .
N'ye nad plakho'you plotnik stouchit n'yeoustanno,
Eto na zeml'you kto-to kidayet drova!
I, kak bashnya ot myernikh oudarov tarana,
Sodrognoutsya gotova mo'ya golova . . .
Rovnyi stouk oubayoukal menya—i skvozj dremou
Slishou: naspekh mogiljschiki delai'yout krest!
Dlya kovo? Vot i ossenj . . . I vdroug po-inomou
Zazvouchal etot stouk — i napomnil ot'yezd . . .

2.

Ya liubl'you vashikh gláz chutj zeléno'ye plámya —
No teperj, krassota, nichemou ya n'ye rad,
I n'ye vyi, i n'ye nochj, proved'yennaya s vami,
N'ye zamenyat mn'ye solntza morskovo zakat...
I, odnako, prostit'ye mn'ye kosnostj i zlobou —
O syestra i nyevesta! Liubite menya!
Boudjt'ye matj'yer'you m'nye, chto razverzla outrobou,
I mgnovennoy krassoy ouhod'yaschevo d'nya . . .
No nadolgo li? Zhadnaya zhdet nas mogila . . .
Tak pozvolj'te zhe mn'ye, vozle vashikh kolen,
Sozhalei'ya, chto znoynoye lieto ouplilo,
Etim zheltym louchom nassladitsya vzamen . . .

AUTUMN SONG

1.

Soon we shall plunge into the twilight and cold—
So farewell then, of the short summer the beauty!
Heard is the thud of an axe . . . To logs split
Boomingly falls the oak and thinned are the forests . . .
A shudder . . . But anger and fear here to help un-able
would be,
To submit we shall have to the winter and to labor!
As soon as will flash as an icy and red lump
My heart, like the sun in a polar hell . . .
Not over an execution block the carpenter hammers
unceasingly,
It is on the earth some one throwing logs
And, like a tower from the measured blows of a
battering-ram,
To shudder is ready my head . . .
The even thud has lulled me — and through my
somnolence
I hear: in haste the gravediggers fashion a cross!
For whom? Here is and the autumn . . . And suddenly in
a different way
Resounded this thudding—and reminded me of
departure . . .

2.

I love of your eyes the barely green flame—
But now, beauty, of nothing I am (not) glad,
And not you, and not the night, spent with you,
Not will replace for me of the sun-sea the setting . . .
And, yet, forgive me my inertia and spite—
O, sister and bride! Love me!
Be a mother to me, that has made gape her womb,

And the momentary beauty of the departing day . . .
But for how long? A greedy awaits us grave . . .
So please allow me, close to your knees,
Regretting, that the sultry summer drifted away,
This yellow beam to delight in instead . . .

ANNABEL LEE
(From Edgar Allan Poe)

Eto bylo davno, mnogo liet nazad
V korolevstve ou kraya zemli.
Prelestnaya devochka tam zihla
(Nazovou yei'o Annabel Lee),
I dishala v niey tolko ta liubov,
Bez kotoroy myi zhit'j nye mogli . . .

My oba byli togda detj'mi
V korolevstve ou kraya zemli.
No liubili myi, kak nikto nye liubil, —
Ya i Annabel Lee —
I krilatiya angely v nebessakh
Ne zavidovatj nam nye mogli . . .

I vot pochemou mnogo liet nazad
V korolevstve ou kraya zemli
Moroznyi veter dokhnoul iz-za tuch
Na nezhnouyou Annabel Lee,
I liudi iz yei-o znatnoy siemi
Daleko yei'o ounesli . . .
I nin-ye lezhit ona v grobou
V korolevstve ou kraya zemli . . .

Schastlivi'ye angeli v nebessakh
N'ye zavidovatj nam n'ye mogli!
Tak vot pochemou (kak izvestno vsem
V korolevstve ou kraya zemli)
Zloy veter noch'you prishel iz-za tuch
I skhvatyl i oubil moy'ou Annabel Lee!

. . . No liubvi bilo bolshe ou nas, chem v serdzakh
T'yekh, chto moudrost'you nas prevzoshli,
T'yech, chto vozrastom nas prevzoshli!

— I ni radostnym angelam v nebessakh,
I ni demonam v nedrakh zemli
N'ye dano, ne dano nashi doushi raznyatj —
Moyou i Annabel Lee!

. . . Viedj n'ye svetit luna, ne darou'ya mn'ye sna
O prekrasnoy Annabel Lee!
I zvezda n'ye zazhglass'j, n'ye napomniv mn'ye glaz
Prekrasnoy Annabel Lee!

I v nochnoy priboy Ya lezh'ou vozle toy,
Chto zovou dorogoy, nezabvennoy zhenoy,
V toy mogile ou kraya zemli,
V toy grobnitze ou kraya zemli!

IV

PUBLISHER'S INTRODUCTION

TO

"A FREE PHILOSOPHICAL TREATISE"

ПРЕДИСЛОВИЕ ИЗДАТЕЛЯ

К

«СВОБОДНОМУ ФИЛОСОФСКОМУ ТРАКТАТУ»

It is not unusual for each new generation to begin its historical career on the world scene by repudiating some, if not all, of the cultural values acquired by their fathers. Sometimes this rejection of the ideological heritage may be superficial, and, at a later date, it may either be completely reversed or at least greatly minimized and softened when the "children" themselves become the "fathers." There are times, however, when the transition from one generation to another may bring about or may coincide with an epochal change in history. In this event, the transition is accompanied by a cardinal change in the basic concepts of philosophy as well as of the *Weltanschauung.*

Forty-five years ago the famed Russian poet Mayakovsky, while addressing an audience consisting mainly of persons who belonged to the category of "fathers," had the temerity to proclaim:

> Glorify me!
> For me the great are no match.
> Upon every achievement
> I stamp *nihil.*

This sounds like "bombastic nihilism"; but upon closer examination of Mayakovsky's words and actions, we find that his most radical pronouncements reflect at bottom his deep-rooted individualism, couched, to be sure, in Bolshevik jargon and colored by his inclination for extravagant, futuristic self-advertising. Mayakovsky was greatly influenced by the urbanism of the Western world, but he combined this influence with a native Russian tendency toward self-indulgence and with a penchant for disregarding rules and laws in an anarchistic manner. It was only Mayakovsky's exceptional poetic talent and his forceful temperament that made his protest, for all its "nihilism," in some degree "consonant with the historical epoch."

But the generation which succeeded Mayakovsky half a century later has arrived not only at a complete rejection of socialism, but also at an almost complete repudiation of the social-humanistic philosophy of life. The phenomenon which the Soviet press has labeled "nihilism" and criticized as "a menace to socialist society" represents in fact an emotional and mental attitude of much deeper and far more devastating consequence than actual nihilism. This new brand of "nihilism" is very different from the simple emptiness of the so-called existentialism of the West: it is rather an inbred skepticism of the deepest and most penetrating nature, which prompts a complete reappraisal and re-evaluation of practically all the established concepts of our cultural past. The new "nihilism" rejects all notions of faith. This unbounded skepticism of the current Soviet generation represents, perhaps, a normal reaction on the part of the freedom-striving human intellect against the shackles of an already petrified and deadening Communist dogma. It represents a spiritual revolt against the prison of the social and economic theories and practices of Marxism; and it is also aimed at the very foundation of the philosophy underlying Marxism.

Yesenin-Volpin's writings, and his own introductory remarks to them, are a vivid and forceful expression of this revolt. His "Free Philosophical Treatise" constitutes an emphatic appeal to skepticism as that element which should bring about a reappraisal of all the intellectual baggage of ideas, tastes, and aspirations that has been assembled in Soviet society during the last decades.

Reading Yesenin-Volpin, one cannot fail to be reminded of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*. Dostoevsky, too, advocated the "most advantageous advan-

tage" of living according to one's own fatuous will and of not even believing in the immutability of 2 x 2 = 4.

Discussing the same subject, Yesenin-Volpin writes: "I reject an orderly system; but what do I propose in its place? Nothing, for the present; in fact, I want nothing but freedom of opinion on this question. Freedom does not tolerate dogma. Freedom is a vacuity." Further, he writes: "Thought consists in a search for truth; life, in a search for advantage. These two ideals represent opposite poles to anyone who must choose between them."

Yesenin-Volpin rejects any attempt to organize his opinions into a system. He maintains that *every system* is false, because it is finite, organized, systematized, and numbered, whereas existence and life, by their very nature, are infinite." But Yesenin-Volpin's own thinking is precise and logical and, for this reason, he does not even over-criticize Marxism, being of the opinion that the latter is so illiterate that it would be ridiculous to criticize it, especially in Russia.

The author considers that Marxism constantly resorts to a mixture of expedience and scientific truth (take, for example, the argument that what is *true* and *moral* is that which is *expedient* for the proletariat in the person of its organized and thinking part, namely, the Communist Party). According to Yesenin-Volpin, Marxism constantly resorts to a mixture of the dialectics of thinking with the dialectics of existence; it suffers from the absence of correct or even simply intelligible definitions of the most basic concepts, such as *matter, time, space, consciousness,* and so forth. All this has obliged Yesenin-Volpin to pass on from the criticism of Marxism to the criticism of the very foundations of the social-humanist world outlook, which strives to reduce to a single system the celebrated *laws of nature, the principles of justice, the laws of consciousness,* and the moral categories.

Yesenin-Volpin writes: "I cannot resist being sarcastic

about the quibbling definition of 'freedom' as 'realized necessity.' This definition implies that, if I find myself in prison, I am not free only until I have realized that I cannot walk out; but, as soon as I have become aware of this, I shall immediately discover 'freedom.' Need I explain that such a terminology is very convenient for the 'liberators of mankind'? They make good use of it . . .

"Since I am speaking of freedom, I should like to remark that we value freedom conceived as the possibility of choice; certainly not because we like to choose (the necessity of a choice is sometimes simply horrible and almost always unpleasant!), but because we desire to choose without compulsion."

Even a purely scientific compulsion is unacceptable to him, and if it should be demonstrated to him that, just as $2 \times 2 = 4$, one must act, according to the laws of nature, in a certain way and not otherwise, then he would not wish to desire to act in this way. Who wants to wish according to the logarithmic tables?

This sort of argument naturally leads us to anarchism, an unattainable idea to be sure, as Yesenin-Volpin well understands, but yet an ideal (for all ideals are unattainable which still direct our efforts and improve our existence by increasingly diminishing the pressure and power of the State and by augmenting more and more the possibility of freedom for the individual).

Yesenin-Volpin's extremely independent and original thinking has its roots, nevertheless, in the traditions of great Russian literature and its ideas; and, by virtue of this, it contains some of the reflections and ideas which Dostoevsky, too, had expressed in some of his works. Yesenin-Volpin's arguments concerning the fear of death and the horror of dying, his ideas of God, as well as a whole series of his other ideas, are also to be encountered, though perhaps in a somewhat different form, in the works of Dostoevsky. This affinity of ideas, however,

detracts in no way from Yesenin-Volpin's originality. First of all, to philosophize freely in Soviet conditions is a lonely and isolated intellectual task, for, to share one's ideas with others constitutes a risk to one's life. Taking all this into account, Yesenin-Volpin makes the following reservation at the conclusion of his "Treatise": "Much that is written here is not new. But every student in Russia who has arrived at philosophical skepticism by his own thinking can consider himself a new Columbus."

This same philosophical skepticism leads Yesenin-Volpin to cultural and aesthetic skepticism. In present-day practice we easily admit the dethronement of God and a certain skepticism toward religion. But, in their place, we have created new idols—those of science, culture, and aesthetics. We have established a new Holy Trinity: the true, the good, and the beautiful. We have accepted all these traditions of culture and aesthetics so much on faith that even the philosophers, as Yesenin-Volpin says, have become a species of "cultural" rather than "thinking" beings.

In many respects, Soviet foreign policy and propaganda are founded upon the skilled exploitation of an attractive façade. The application of this method varies merely in form, not in substance. In science and technology, these results are achieved by the effective launching of *sputniks* and *luniks*. In art, they are achieved exclusively by the harmonious coordination of massed choirs, orchestras, and ballets. In international politics, the same effects are achieved by the coordinated actions of huge masses of people organized into fifth columns or into anticolonial rebellions. Everywhere we discern the application of the same methods. Their success is the success of ORGANIZATION. It is founded on the thorough drilling of the human masses; but this success is realized at the expense

of the development of the individuality and of the innate originality of talent.

The effective use of an imposing façade creates a hypnotic spectacle for the masses: they easily fall for such bait, since they are carried away by well-organized parades, the appeal of multicolored uniforms and banners, and the dramatic effect of alluring but superficial slogans. In the majority of cases, the masses respond much better to this sort of appeal than they do to the individual expression of a creative genius who is so often misunderstood by his contemporaries.

If we take into account the new trends in Soviet life, then the thoughts and feelings which Yesenin-Volpin has expressed here assume special significance.

The revisionism and criticism which we meet in such authors as Dudintsev have proved annoying but not dangerous to the Soviet authorities, because these criticisms did not question the foundations of the system itself. To this sort of criticism, the champions of the system could easily reply: "There are bound to be some untidy corners and some waste in a world-wide construction job! . . . When you cut down a forest, the chips fly!" But the philosophy and ideas contained in *Doctor Zhivago* and in the writings of Yesenin-Volpin cut deeply, in their very different ways, into the foundations of the Communist catechism. Yesenin-Volpin belongs to the new generation of Soviet intellectuals. Born thirty-six years ago, he was brought up exclusively within the hermetic confines of the Communist world. The fact that he has now turned to skepticism and that he questions the very foundations of dogma and belief would suggest that Soviet society is not quite so monolithic as its champions would like it to be or to have us believe.

—THE PUBLISHER.

V

"A FREE PHILOSOPHICAL TREATISE"

or

An Instantaneous Exposition of My Philosophical Views

Moscow,
July 2, 1959.

«СВОБОДНЫЙ ФИЛОСОФСКИЙ ТРАКТАТ»

или

Мгновенное изложение моих философских взглядов

Москва,
2 Июля 1959 г.

I have only a few hours in which to give a brief exposition of my views. This is difficult. Therefore, I am not certain that I myself shall be satisfied with what I write. For the sake of speed, I am writing in Russian. I make no claim to a systematic presentaion.

Incidentally, philosophy is not really obliged to be a system. I shall readily concede that it cannot become a system.

One of the most important problems is that of the validity of our knowledge. This problem interests me more than all the others.

We like to divide things into "yes" and "no"—probably because this is the simplest way. It is achieved by a single act of division, resulting in two spheres corresponding to "yes" and "no." In the same way, a straight line bisects a plane.

We apply this division in many instances. We desire some kind of practical result, and we divide the sphere of all possible assumptions into two parts. One corresponds to "yes"; the other to "no." We adopt the assumptions of the first part (as favorable), but reject those of the second.

We explore reality and also divide the sphere of possible assumptions into two parts corresponding to "yes" and "no." We accept the hypotheses of the first part as reality, but reject those of the second.

Besides, we very often forget that these two divisions differ from one another, and as a result we adopt as reality that which is favorable.

The fallacies of the vicious circle or *petitio principii* are very natural, probably just for this reason. They are

related to a striving for simplicity, as a result of which the desired is accepted as reality.

The very logic behind such a simple division into two parts is no more than a mere hypothesis. People were accustomed to it long before they had learned to recognize it as a hypothesis.

Actually, both reality and ideas are amorphous; i.e., they are diffuse and (in general) have no defined limits. The belief in defined limits is connected with our belief in personal concepts. This belief is not obligatory. Neither is the principle of *tertium non datur* obligatory in this connection.

In nontrivial cases, this principle does not merit any trust. But this should not discourage us. Deep convictions are also possible within the terms of diffuse concepts. For instance, we are convinced that the statement $2 \times 2 = 4$ is true, despite the fact that the concept of truth is diffuse.

I also grant there may be "discreet" situations when *tertium non datur* or an analogous principle is applied. But it is conceivable that the very possibility of such situations is the result of idealization. In "uninterrupted" instances, which are most natural, the depth of conviction will usually diminish as it approaches the subject of the clause which expresses it—"the center," i.e., the actually nonexistent area where we should like to draw the boundary line. If we admit the unconvincing nature of debatable propositions which arise in this manner, then many, if not all, contradictions will probably disappear.

If Hegel and his followers had understood this better, they would probably not have erected the principle of identity expressed in the formula $A \supset A$ [if A, then A]. As regards the *A's,* which are sufficiently convincing in

themselves (as in the example cited above), this principle is evident in the assumption that we are capable of thinking. (But let skepticism flourish!) The so-called "unity of contradictions" or the possibility of their gradual transition from one to the other, characterized as "the transition of quantity into quality," is quite a different thing. The time has come to speak of these things in the language of the twentieh century.

It is difficult to subject many convictions to analysis because of the unsuitability of our language, which —alas!—was developed least of all for philosophical interchange. This unsuitability of language engenders many "pseudo problems" which, however, by virtue of their obtrusiveness, manage to merit the honorary title of "eternal issues." As long as we have not achieved clarity in the comprehension of these things, we should not dismiss these pseudo problems. I shall enumerate the most important ones.

1. *The reality of being.* Doubt in reality is expressed in the Cartesian principle that everything is doubtful except *cogito ergo sum.* Berkeley's solipsism is a logical continuation of this. The ignorant scoff in vain at it. Collective laughter proves absolutely nothing, even when such persons as Bertrand Russell, not to mention Lenin, are included in the crowd.

I shall not repeat well-known facts. The position of "isomorphism" between solipsism and realism is well known. To be more specific: from the point of view of realism, the imperceptible is possible, since this isomorphism does not extend to it.

At an early age—if not in my childhood—I experienced doubts concerning the principle of realism. This does not demonstrate the depth of my mind, but rather points to the natural character of this doubt, with which every man with an independent mind must be endowed. At the age of sixteen, I broke with my belief in realism and

never again returned to it. At about the age of twenty, I adopted the viewpoint of isomorphism (with the above-mentioned reservation). And in another three years or so, I had evaluated all this as a pseudo problem.

I have long ceased to insist on any of these viewpoints. The logical possibilities here are innumerable. In analysis, it is useful to regard the phrase "it seems to me" as a logical operator, and then to develop a corresponding formal logic. I think that the possibilities here are no fewer than in the case of the construction of the modal systems of Lewis, Von Wright, Parry,* and others.

In view of the logical insolubility of the problem, the position of agnosticism is here fairly closely and logically allied with the position of solipsism. If prejudices be discarded, then it must be admitted that complete clarity has not yet been achieved in this question, probably because of the backwardness of logic and the inappropriateness of our customary language. Intuition usually makes us lean toward realism, but here we must not trust intuition until such time as it has been emancipated from language.

It is difficult to imagine a cruder error than to mix solipsism with idealism. And there is no cruder device than to refer to the "unconscientiousness" of Berkeley, whose arguments may, of course, be directed against the belief in God as well as against the belief in matter.

In our age, Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* should not be considered as "the foremost and truest of all sciences," since it is time we admitted the complex nature of the concepts of *ego* and *sum* (in general, "to exist").

2. *Materialism.* Having emancipated themselves from belief in God, people have fallen into the other extreme—

* Clarence Irving Lewis (1883-), American logician; Georg Henrik von Wright (1916-), Finnish logician; and William T. Parry (1908-), author of papers on symbolic logic.

materialism. This has come about according to the principle of *tertium non datur,* as applied in its crudest form.

Actually, here we have a very tangible "third."

I term a phenomenon "material" if it is perceived through the sensory organs (in modern science, the readings of instruments are added to "the senses," and, in conformity with this, the concept of "materiality" can be expanded). I term a phenomenon "spiritual' if it is perceived through the aid of the intellect. (This does not exclude the possibility that the senses may also be used —for instance, sight for the reading of a book in which ideas are set forth. The problem of the *Fremdenpsychisches* is involved here, but, ultimately, the analysis is not very complex. In altering the conception of *ego* and in attributing *ego* to the actually thinking subject rather than to the biological individual, we shall in all probability be able to abstract ourselves from the part played by the sensory organs in the cognition of these phenomena, just as, during the logical analysis of ideas, we abstract ourselves from the processes occurring in the brain. Cybernetics should contribute far greater clarity to this question, and perhaps it has already done so.) I call a phenomenon "psychical" if it is perceived directly as an emotion, or if it is not perceived at all.

This classification does not claim to be definitive. However, it is better than that crude dyadic classification of all phenomena into "material" and "spiritual," to which the Marxists—and not they alone—have devoted a quantity of not very profound exercises. Nor is this classification new. For instance, in the last century, Vladimir Solov'yev expounded on something very near it, and in our day, Carnap,* who, if my memory does not deceive

* Solov'yev (1853-1900), Russian religious philosopher and poet; *Rudolf Carnap* (1891-), Viennese logician and exponent of the "scientific method."

me, also referred to Dilthey* (in connection with a corresponding classification of sciences).

Here is an example of the difference between the spiritual and the psychical: When Dante was writing his *Comedy,* he experienced a psychical process usually called "inspiration." When this work became part of literature (under the title of *The Divine Comedy*), the phenomenon had already become spiritual. In the spirit of nominalism, one may, of course, dispute the existence of this phenomenon and merely speak of that which, from a realistic (in the scholastic sense of the word) point of view, is a "manifestation of this essence"—i.e., simply of those psychical processes which occur with readers and subsequent authors. To act thus amounts to a refusal to study the essential role of this poem in the development of literature. This is why I do not wish to act thus, despite my full adherence to nominalism in other instances.

Materialism consists in the conviction that all phenomena may be reduced to the material state. That this very reduction is unthinkable without the aid of the intellect is bashfully ignored. But I wish to examine critically this belief in the possibility of such a reduction.

In essence, this belief affirms that everything that can be thought can, in the last analysis, be seen or touched. This is, so to say, a belief in the eyes and hands. Very often this is undoubtedly useful, but here it is refined to the point of loss of consciousness.

Chess is played according to definite speculative rules. The fact that it is played on a board is immaterial. In fact, it is not even necessary, as everyone knows who has played a chess game blindfolded, or watched such a game. The physiological processes, which occur in the player's

* Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), German philosopher who was one of the first to claim the independence of the spiritual sciences as distinct from the natural sciences.

brain, may accompany the psychical process of the game. They are material, whereas the rules of the game are spiritual, so that all three types of phenomena fuse here into one.

Are the psychical processes here determined by material ones? Let us assume that the player may take a pawn on *D*-5 with a bishop or a knight. He thinks that material processes are taking place. But he wins the pawn according to the chess rules, which he knows and which are spiritual. Just how successfully he applies them may depend on his psychical condition and, thereby, in its turn, also on material causes (for instance, on the distinction in the properties of vodka or coffee, if he drank either of these before the game). But all his psychical processes must adjust to such a spiritual factor as the rules of the game; otherwise he simply will not be able to play.

Logically, such a degree of harmony between these three kinds of processes makes it conceivable that everything would actually be reduced to one kind of process, and in that case "matter" could apparently claim the universality of its role. From this circumstance, perhaps, the materialists draw their reliance on the validity of their doctrine. However, the belief in such harmony (founded, incidentally, not by the materialists—let us recall Leibnitz) is no more obligatory than belief in God.

Do we conceive of a law by which such a reduction could take place? Let us attempt to imagine its formulation. It must be applicable in every instance (since it is a question of a law), including also our example. Therefore, it must include a formulation of the interrelation which exists between the physiological brain processes and the chess rules. Another example: on first reading Pushkin's "The Bronze Horseman," I perceive the images through the printed text:

On the shore of a waste of waves
He stood, replete with lofty thoughts
And gazed afar . . .

The formulation of the proposed law must incorporate a description of the *forms* of letters of the Cyrillic alphabet (which in themselves are not material!) and be sufficiently general so as to explain the immutability of the brain's physiological processes, corresponding to the image arising in the imagination and taking into account the changes in orthography which occurred in Russia in 1918.

But which of the materialists will succeed in proving that the formulation of such laws may some day be accessible to us? Of course, they can make an attempt to outline the evolution of the situation just described in its historical aspect. This is their favorite method, and in this instance it promises interesting results. Their scientific usefulness will be accepted as a "proof of materialism."

Yes, but the usefulness of the materialists and the truth of materialism itself are two different things. Herein lies the danger of the fallacy of *ignoratio elenchi,* this intellectual basis for every kind of demagogy!

(In the demagogues' place, I would not build a base—Marxist or Christian—upon this or that practical doctrine. Instead, I would announce in appropriate form the purified principle of *ignoratio elenchi* as a manifest ideological dogma. This principle would be stated approximately thus:

I. In order to prove the required premise *A,* we must prove premise *B* which is similar to it, and we shall then consider that *A* has been proved by it.

The second postulate, without which they could not do, would read as follows:

II. No thinking person would argue with us as to whether *B* resembles *A,* for, otherwise, he would not be

a thinking person because he does not understand his personal or public usefulness.

For a practical application of their theories in life, they should add a third postulate, consisting—in the case of humane demagogues—of two parts:

III. a.) He who does not understand his personal usefulness is sent to an insane asylum;

b.) He who does not comprehend public usefulness is sent to jail or is condemned to death.

According to this, metatheory requires these principles:

M-1. "To understand" means to understand as we understand, and sometimes as another person understands;

M-2. He who does not wish to understand something does not understand this thing.

This would at least be an honest system, the convincing nature of which would be proved for all by postulates III-a and III-b, assisted by M-1 and M-2.)

I apologize for this digression; unfortunately, thought develops in different directions, while the text does so in a straight line. At present, I do not have the time to write otherwise.

Returning to the problem of materialism, I shall say that the aforementioned attempt at a "historical" solution of the problem is at any rate allied with the hypotheses of time or something similar. It is doubtful that it can be liberated from the aforementioned nonmaterial components (like the "forms of letters") without a supplementary hypothesis about world harmony, in which no one is obliged to believe. In any case, the materialistic solution of a problem has only been declarative, but in no way as yet realized. This is why it must not be said to exist.

If we accept the materialistic hypothesis of reducing all processes to the material, then we are at a loss how to explain our faith in our own thinking, without resorting

to the version on harmony. Indeed, if thought develops along physiological channels, why must it satisfy logical and intuitive requirements? However, I do not insist on faith in thought.

I reject an orderly system; but what do I propose in its place? Nothing, for the present: in fact, I want nothing but freedom of opinion on this question. Freedom does not tolerate dogma. Freedom is a vacuity.

As regards the Marxist version of materialism, it is full of additional petty discrepancies, which I propose as food for thought to those who wish to defend this doctrine. For example, this definition is frequently cited: "Matter is objective reality, given to us in sensations." In that case, everything which occurs around us is not material, because it has not yet been given to us, but is merely being given. In general, only the past can be material. There is yet another definition of matter in which the words "given to us in sensations" are replaced by "existing independent of our consciousness." According to this definition, only the present can be material. The incompatibility of both definitions of the same concept of matter is evident (at least for realists). I shall not undertake to judge which of these is correct, inasmuch as the Marxists themselves usually do not know what is a definition and what is not. For them, "fact," and only that, is important. "Marxism is not a dogma, but a guide to action." For fear of contradiction, I shall not term this a Marxist dogma.

3. *Determinism.* The representations of *necessity* and of *law* are not identical. Therefore, we can conceive of determinism in at least two senses. Both are subjective, simply because they are representations. Necessity and especially law are beyond my conception. I simply do not understand them. Perhaps this is why I must not judge such a great problem. Nevertheless, I shall risk the af-

firmation that what I do not understand, others do not understand either.

(Alas, I wish to make use of principle M-1 by applying a contraposition to it! But I console myself with the fact that M-1 does not follow from the result because of the absence of *tertium non datur.*)

If we adopt the principle of universal determinism, then again it is impossible to explain faith in thought without resorting to the version of harmony. Thought is indeed predetermined, and therefore it is not at all necessarily predetermined to be the truth or admissible in other respects. (Of course, we may cut the Gordian knot by rejecting as metaphysical every notion of this admissibility—in which case, my congratulations on the result!) Moreover, without any supplementary hypotheses on harmony, one may consider that harmony really exists and is, in addition, very contrary; so that it is predetermined for us to be deluded, and to consider our delusions as truth, and not to know about this situation or, suspecting it, not to be in a condition to overcome it. Logically, this is possible. I have been living under the weight of this irrefutable thought for twenty years. I have not rejected it, nor have I lost my reason over it.

At any rate, it is a pleasant consolation that the very concept of law has evolved (though this is only hypothesis) from our striving for systematization, and the concept of necessity from our habit of separating, in our logical thinking, premises from that which is to be inferred from them. If this is so, then it is not necessary to give excessive significance to these concepts because, being the result of thought, they need not reflect the reality which subordinates thought to itself.

Having understood this, I would also regard the existence of God in a different light—as a hypothesis, in which a philosopher has no reason to believe.

As to the question of "primary causes"—i.e., "the cause

of all causes" (or the analogous question of aims)—we are dealing here with a pseudo problem which we can easily discard. To be precise, "cause" or, to state it better, "causality" is a relation with, unfortunately, an indefinite number of argumentative points, so that it is impossible to imagine it (without distortion) as a predicative symbol. Thus, we have become accustomed to seek for a cause in a phenomenon. It is not obligatory to think that each phenomenon must have a cause (why should there not be a spontaneous phenomenon?). Nonetheless, we think that we understand the meaning of the expression "*A* is the cause of *B*." But this is when *A* and *B* are phenomena. But who has proved that there is a "universal" phenomenon which consists of a totality of all phenomena and which may be termed "universe"?* (I do not speak at present of the logical difficulties connected with such universal concepts: these difficulties are well evidenced in the theory of numbers.) Besides, because of their diffuseness, it is impossible in this case to examine these "phenomena" as elements. And even if such a phenomenon does exist, why must it have a cause?

Having rejected universal causality, do we arrive at the notion of freedom? For all the importance of this concept in other areas, I do not think it is essential for that area of epistemology of which I now speak. To answer this question, we should have to give a more precise definition of the concept of "freedom." This we can do in various ways. Apparently, to get a positive reply, it would be desirable for the concept of "freedom" to be in a negative form or, in any case, for it to admit the rule of eliminating the double negative.

Freedom has certainly not always been understood in a negative sense, as the absence of necessity or compulsion.

* The author states: "In this instance, I have restored the pre-Revolutionary orthography of the word *'mir,'* meaning 'universe.'"

It is often understood as a possibility of choice—and then the rule of eliminating a double negative is inapplicable (*a priori*).

Since I am speaking of freedom, I should like to remark that we value freedom conceived as the possibility of choice; but certainly not because we like to choose (the necessity of a choice is sometimes simply horrible and almost always unpleasant!), but because we desire to choose without compulsion.

This desire is, to me, very far-reaching. I do not know what to say about good and evil, for I am not accustomed to regard them as philosophical categories. In any case, it is my wish that the choice between various representations of these matters should be free and that, within the limits of each choice, the choice between good and evil should also be free—in the sense of the absence of compulsion. (It is evident here that "freedom" cannot always be understood as a possibility of choice, for otherwise I should never get out of this impasse which the Georgian philosopher Gokieli has called a "regression into infinity.")

Alas, our language once again does us a disservice here! We use the word "voluntarily" (*dobrovolno*) in the same sense as the word "freely"—and here the root "good" (*dobro*) has crept in. It is easy to cope with this if one notes—but it takes time to notice it (and I was already past thirty when I did this)—how many years you have lived under the unrealized influence of the concept of good, which has sneaked into the place of freedom! This is again the result of the habit of simply dividing phenomena into two spheres, of which I spoke initially—and, as a result, how many possibilities there are of fallacies of the type of *ignoratio elenchi!* I note that this defect in our thinking is a paradise for poetry, which likes nothing better than this obscurantism. For this reason precisely, I have reacted with scorn during the past eight years to this genre of art which had earlier so fascinated

me. Yet to this day I love poetry, simply because a wedge is the best means for knocking out another wedge; and the former illusions, engendered by poetry, can best be destroyed with the aid of new poetry. For instance, I like the following lines of verse, which I should like to insert somewhere:

> You will not force me to believe in good,
> Hangmen, hangmen, hangmen!

But to this I can only add something rather mediocre and naïve. Thus an inferior kind of poetry is born—a poetry I detest.

So that is the role of contemporary poetry, the kind which a thinking man can love. O women, wenches, bitches! Why have you for centuries loomed before the eyes of dreamers, inciting them to search for "Love, Good, and Beauty"? Indeed, what do you yourselves understand in these matters! In order to understand, one must have freedom, but you even forbid any mention of it, because you understand nothing and fear everything. (All that your art amounts to is to present this sweetly—i.e., to impose it in a delicate manner.)

Oh, you men who strive for a female's love and who form an army in which glad rags are as important as they are to women! Glad rags, superiors, force, authority, power! Life is accursed if one must constantly remember this corruption. Give us freedom!

The concept of freedom, of which I now speak, is, of course, negative.

Demagogues, who are merely interested in attaining their ends at the price of confusion in people's minds, can do nothing but grunt like pigs.

But we must free ourselves from the influence of people with their docked language and find a scientific expression for the concept of freedom. Only when we

attain this shall we be able to trust our own thoughts. But, until that time, people are merely the captives of that language in which biped males and females offer each other candy.

I realize that I am saying things which are crude and harmful for life. In this way, I express my attitude toward life and thought. Thought consists in a search for truth; life, in a search for advantage. These two ideals represent opposite poles to anyone who must choose between them. (Speaking of "the search for truth," I, of course, do not assume the existence of truth.)

There is a conflict here:

I. As a living being, I place life above thought.

II. As a thinking being, I place thought above life.

To attempt to reconcile these opposites is the same as to attempt to serve both God and Mammon. Nor is it very interesting, for nothing sensible can come of it. Many will dispute the last statement.

Therefore, I shall specify: I mean "sensible" as far as thought is concerned. As for life, I have nothing better to suggest than demagogy, for I have now turned my back on life.

I realize that this is not the way philosophical treatises are written, but I have no time now to express the stated conflict otherwise. To those who are not lazy, I would suggest that they express all this in an elegant style. I think I have made it clear that I myself have chosen Path II.

The following is important: this is the only honest path for the thinker and, therefore, the only one possible in this treatise.

I have said much, but to little purpose, about pseudo problem Number 3. The most important thing that I wished to say is the necessity to free ourselves from the influence of language which, in this and in the following problem, proves a greater obstacle than anywhere else.

(For instance, how could I manage here without using the words "necessity" and "to *FREE ourselves*"? And when can these words be tolerated here, for we are concerned with the stage preceding the study of the problem of freedom and necessity?)

I should like to add the following to what has been stated:

a.) I have sidestepped the difference between "metaphysical determinism" or "fatalism" (in Marxist terminology) and "dialectical determinism" because I do not know what "dialectical determinism" means. Perhaps it may be possible to conceive something reasonable by this, but no one has as yet clarified this subject. Thus, perhaps, a new variant of this pseudo problem will evolve in the future (and important scientific problems may become connected with it). However, at present, it is not clear what we are to understand by "dialectical determinism." I think it is a child's rattle, invented to preserve the terminology of dogmatic Marxism where it is necessary to pay homage to science.

b.) The study of the *principle of authority,* its role and its limitations, is an important problem in practical philosophy. The concepts bearing on this problem must be worked out on a scientific level, and the conclusions which suggest themselves must be made accessible to all. This problem may acquire important practical significance in the matter of liberating minds from various orthodoxies. Only the imperfections of this treatise can explain that here it comes under the rubric of pseudo problems.

c.) I cannot resist being sarcastic about the quibbling definition of "freedom" as "realized necessity." This definition implies that, if I find myself in prison, I am not free only until I have realized that I cannot walk out; but, as soon as I become aware of this, I shall immediately

discover "freedom." Need I explain that such a terminology is very convenient for the "liberators of mankind"? They make good use of it. . . .

But whoever said this first might have made an apt statement. Can we think of a better example of distorted dogmatism?

The thing over which I now try to trip the Marxists—essentially, this obsession with "nimble borrowings" which are then arbitrarily introduced as proof, whether they apply or not—is, unfortunately, not peculiar to them alone. This has a grave bearing on "the principle of authority"—insofar as we cannot forgive anyone who uses the above device.

Elegant literary language is, alas, crammed with misleading misappropriations of this kind. Another example is Renard's aphorism: "Freethinker? That's too long [a word]. Plain 'thinker' is simpler!" The problem that arises in this connection is how to regard these types of "thinkers," who are no less numerous than the Marxists.

4. *Monism.* One system is simpler than two or several, not only because fewer systems need be studied, but also because there is then no need to examine the relationships between different systems. This is why unitary systems of views on the "universe" attract us. Thus, the desired is taken for the actual (which we discussed at the beginning), and, further, the simplest system is selected which would contain an integrated whole corresponding to the unity of the system itself (a transition deserving the attention of philosopher-logicians!), and this integrated whole is then declared to be the "universe."

It would be impossible to derive this concept from a different formula, if only because of the difficulties inherent in the concept of "the multiplicity of all objects." The "multiplicity of all material objects" (if we include phenomena in the number of objects and insist on "discreetness" in an admissible way may even

be acceptable, but only the materialists would term such a thing "universe," and the acceptance of their thesis in the given question would bring us back again to the difficulties inherent in "the multiplicity of all multiplicities."

It is sometimes considered that the unity of everything is guaranteed by the unity of the perceiving subject. The argument is presented thus: only that is real which is perceived; thus, everything perceived relates to some definite subject and is, in this sense, unitary.

Here one may still object to the word "everything," but, in my opinion, it is more important to inquire: Why is it possible to arrive at any unity by such a method? Obviously, the subject we are considering in this dissertation is a purely hypothetical one. The very idea of the subject is based upon an examination of *many* subjects....

If we push our inquiry further, why must I believe in the unity of my own personality? Here I am approaching the aforementioned problem of the complexity of the *ego* concept. I do not imagine myself at all as something unitary! There is within me an entire chain of experiences which are unrelated to each other. They so little resemble each other that no philosophical desire arises to consolidate them into a single *ego*. If we still believe in the *ego*, then we are motivated by three things: instinct, moral considerations, and our dependence upon language (of which I have already spoken; it is allied both with instinct and the phenomena of a moral nature, and with the fact that language has developed, very possibly, as the result of human intercourse, which demanded the *differentiation* of each *ego* and, to a lesser degree, of its further partition).

I use the word "instinct." But others perhaps think that there is also an intuition of the ego? Of course, there is; but then we also possess intuition which relates to concepts of our fantasy—for instance, to the gods, and to contradictory mathematical theories. (As long as we have

not arrived at a contradiction in the process of proving something from the opposite position, we often rely on intuition.) Thus, the intuition of the *ego* merely speaks of the clarity of this concept to us, but not of the *actual existence* of the *ego.*

Instinct is in itself very important. But it would be an innovation to refer to it in philosophy as a proof of something or other. At any rate, monists do not proceed in this way; at least, not until they resort to pedagogical methods.

In the problem of the unity of the *ego,* the arguments of instinct and moral arguments, too, may have only a practical, but not an epistemological, value.

There are also psychological arguments in favor of the unity of the *ego*: for instance, those which may be extracted from the Freudian theory. But these arguments, which are very important to psychology, have no bearing on the *ego,* which is necessary for the foundation of philosophical monism. To endow them, in this instance, with conclusive force would amount to committing the fallacy of *ignoratio elenchi.*

I do not wish to dwell on that advantage which dictators and demogogues elicit from monistic hypotheses, since I assume this to be well known. Religions—consciously or instinctively—have propagated monism, and materialism has inherited this from other religions. With the possible exceptions of the most modern Western culture, which deserves tremendous gratitude, and Indian culture, which has evoked in me a corresponding admiration even though I am not well acquainted with it, every culture demands of its adherents and dependent members some kind of a unity of views, without which it would disintegrate. Christianity and Communism would certainly disintegrate. Pedagogues and scholars, who have a predilection for pedagogical motives, imitate culture in this respect. I cannot see how this can be avoided. But

what do I care about it, if I have decided, in connection with the aforementioned pseudo problem, to follow Path II?

History is probably one of the monistic fictions. Nature is another fiction, in which everyone has believed until now. It is only the difficulties of language—permeated as it is with monism on all general questions—which have prevented me from disposing of this fiction. In a philosophical sense, I do not believe in the existence of Nature any more than I believe in God. I would add that, if people had more leisure for philosophical reflection and were in no hurry to receive an answer, they would probably not be satisfied with monistic theories.

5. *Faith.* So much has been written about God that I do not wish to touch on this subject at present. I only think that there has never been a belief in God which has deserved any serious epistemological treatment, because belief in God has been instilled by compulsion. Compulsion, by its fatal consequences, undoubtedly evokes the most profound questions.

In our time ontological evidence no longer demands criticism. What is interesting in this connection, and even more so *per se,* is the recording of all meanings which use the word "to exist."

Every reasoning must obviously originate from something. It is said that these initial premises are accepted on *faith.* No deductive theory could do without them. (However, you may doubt this also, since *no one has yet proved* even this assertion without the use of premises.)

But the philosophical method is a descriptive-analytical rather than deductive one. Thus, I do not see the necessity for the presence of any belief at its foundation.

It is sometimes said: If we analyze everything, we shall destroy everything and fail to arrive at anything. You

cannot reach down to all the depths. Is it not better, then, to argue more calmly?

(This phrase "more calmly" astounds me. In my opinion, daring is required to believe in any hypothesis, but not to feel any doubts concerning it.)

But, pray, why not apply this argument to our activity in general? It likewise has no finality. (So it seems to me now.) For instance, you cannot prove all the theorems in the axiomatic theory. But this does not hinder anyone in the study of mathematics. Why should we then stop short before the analysis of axioms?

Incidentally, it is well known that, in analyzing axioms, we do not destroy the theory; and, to develop this latter, we have absolutely no need of "faith" in axioms, although it is an advantage to be able to imagine their meaning. But it is no harder to imagine the meaning of false assertions than that of the true ones.

The question as to whether the forms of the following assumptions are equivalent—"We assume *A*" and "We assume that *A* is true"—is not clear in every context. I think that these assumptions must be distinguished from each other. But assuming that *A* is true, and deducing a corollary from this, I am in no way obliged to believe in the truth of this assumption.

In the philosophical sense, the meaning of "believe" is not clear. It usually seems to me that this is a philosophically (but not psychologically!) hollow concept. Consequenty, I relegate this question to the number of pseudo problems.

For instance, if I am asked whether "I believe that $2 \times 2 = 4$," I would very likely reply in the affirmative. But this reply would, in all probability, be a purely reflex one. In any case, I permit people to doubt this. If I am asked whether "I believe that I am a man," I would reply affirmatively. I would have some arguments, but my trust in them would be only a reflex. I would allow doubts

about this, too, although perhaps less willingly. In general, the inadmissibility of doubt usually signifies the absence rather than the presence of psychological certitude.

I may believe that the city of Paris does not exist, because I cannot get to it. To me, this is a very unpleasant doubt. People prefer to dismiss such doubts. But Path II in pseudo problem Number 3 enjoins me not to do this.

One of the sources of faith is a hostility toward many doubts, a hostility based, in the final analysis, on the indolence of thought. (I should like to point out that it is often necessary to overcome great indolence in order to grasp a mathematical theorem.) In this respect, there are frequently unjustified instances when the law of the excluded middle is applied.

On the other hand, I may doubt the existence of the city of Leningrad, even though I was born there; but since I am not at present located there, it may no longer exist. And I can also question the existence of Moscow, even though I am now living there; for what I see around me is not Moscow, but merely my table and a sheet of paper. And, if I look out the window, I shall see only the walls of buildings, which show no proof *per se* that they are in Moscow.

There exist as many different doubts of this type as there are different meanings of the word "to exist."

In a certain sense, I believe in Greek mythology; I do so whenever I obtain more specific information about it in a dictionary.

All doubts are permissible, but not all of them excite identical curiosity. The assertion "2 = 2" is beyond doubt, not because of the blasphemy of such an undertaking, but because here a sufficiently interesting alternative is wanting.

Psychologically, faith is a custom. Here, I agree with

Russell, in *Human Knowledge* (which, by the way, has been translated revoltingly badly into Russian).

6. *Death and Immortality.* There is no problem which excites so great a number of people. Nevertheless, it is a pseudo problem. In reality, there are two moments which disturb us in death: the impossibility of participating in the events of the distant future and the impossibility of realizing many intentions.

It would be more honest to call the second circumstance by its proper name, and not to connect it with the question of immortality. If I could realize everything I needed, I would not complain about my mortality. But if I still complain, then it is evidently not a question of mortality in itself, but more specifically a question of my own limitations. The same applies to the limitations of my desires in general.

Alas, I shall not live to the middle of the next century. But why should this trouble me? After all, I have reconciled myself to not having lived in ancient Greece or on a satellite of Sirius.

I am disturbed, of course, by the necessity for resignation. It is evidence of my limitations. But, to call things by their proper name, why must I lament human mortality rather than my own limitations?

After all, it has not been proved that, if I were immortal, I should not also be limited.

I do not understand the Christian consolation in the legend of paradise, because the prospect of my becoming an angel does not evoke the slightest enthusiasm in me.

The problem in reverse: It is a pity to die.

Here we have two aspects: a.) a pity for my *ego;* b.) a pity that life must end in torment.

The second aspect is undoubtedly unpleasant from an

aesthetic point of view; but I am not so helpless as not to be able to change this (remember, there is always morphine). Of course, death is unpleasant, but no more so than various illnesses and anti-aesthetic experiences. It is a problem, but not one with which I am presently concerned. It is another sort of problem, far from a philosophical one. (Anyhow, what sort of a problem is it?)

As regards the first aspect, does not my *ego* die and revive every minute? I am certainly not the same man who will die at about the age of eighty. My present "I" will be hopelessly lost by that time.

This aspect of the problem tortured me a great deal when I was fourteen. But, a year later, I had arrived at the argument which I have just mentioned. Since then, I merely marvel at my wisdom at such a youthful age. Twenty years have passed since then, and the suggested solution still retains its original force for me, so that the only aspects of the problem of mortality which still disturb me are those which I have previousy relegated to the class of pseudo problems.

At the same time, I cannot understand why Christians are so convinced that the idea of Hell will restrain people from sin. If I am a sinner, then of what concern to me is some creature in Hell who will curse me and who possibly will be listed under my name in a celestial office, but who does not have flesh and, therefore, resembles me no more than does a thinking and screaming protoplasm? And quite a few of them have got to Hell without me! (I have in mind the consistent, inveterate Christian-sinner, to whom I am giving this philosophical advice.)

I have examined a sufficient number of pseudo problems. It is time now to concern myself with genuine problems. But I have almost exhausted my time; therefore, I shall proceed in a more concise manner.

The problem of the conscious and the subconscious. This is very important in the light of the Freudian doctrine. Freud was a brilliant scientist, but one could also have arrived at his conclusions by way of a purely philosophical analysis of the problem—which, however, almost did not exist before Freud, since it remained, as it were, in the realm of the subconscious!

Is this not the way new philosophical problems arise as a result of the development of the sciences?

The matter is not too complicated. We relegate thought, emotion, or memory to the conscious sphere only when we can express it in words. But language is a means of communication; and what is not a subject of communication cannot be expressed through language. (Of course, it is possible for man to communicate "with himself"—the future with the past.) But there are quite a few processes occurring in us which do not have it as their purpose to be related or recollected at a later date. Many phenomena are determined by cause rather than by purpose. In such instances, they may elude registration in the conscious mind. And if we talk of processes, even psychical ones of such a kind as do not knowingly serve as a subject for being retold, then why should they be perceived?

It might even be interesting if we could perceive them. But we are powerless to effect this because of an oversight or a deficiency on the part of the intellect. Directing our attention within our soul, we shall be able to note something there and, by analyzing it, endeavor to express it in language. But we shall succeed in this only if we assume that these phenomena are, in a grammatical sense, related to those which we are capable of discussing.

It is well known that there are psychical experiences which we are powerless to express through the medium of speech. We attempt to achieve these through the medium of music.

Much that is important may be destined to remain in-

expressible. Nevertheless, the success of Freudian determinism implies that the role of the inexpressible, if such a thing does indeed exist, is not too great in the conscious life.

Apart from the inexpressible, there can always exist important expressible, but as yet unexpressed, things. There is no reason to express them. It is they that comprise the realm of the Freudian subsconscious.

In the vital interests of the personality, it is often better not to express them. In this connection, I should like to point out that an unperceived tendency is invulnerable, and it can therefore expand to staggering dimensions, while remaining unobserved by the intelligence.

When we think that we have triumphed over some kind of tendency, we assert its antithesis, but the former continues to develop gradually. If we are not aware of this process, we are bound to be amazed by the explosion which can ensue. It matured in the subconscious. Will is loyalty to a tendency. It also can develop in the subconscious sphere with the aforementioned consequences.

This has a bearing on the life of a person, as well as on the life of human collectives—in particular, those of nations, states, and cultures. In this instance, the role of the conscious interprets that which the state formulates, that of which it is aware. This is not necessarily the same as that which it allows its own press to publish. Its high priests may be much more intelligent than its press, and they may judge this "distance" necessary to keep the consciousness of the people from rising to the level of their understanding.

In this connection, what shall we say about the obvious error of so-called historical materialism, which sees in economically originated relationships the basis for all others and, in particular, the basis for moral and juridical relationships?

This is inapplicable, for instance, to Soviet society,

where a powerful state authority can change the economic system from an agrarian to an industrial one. How then can the state authority remain the "superstructure over the economic basis"?

The Marxists use sophisms, with the help of which they endeavor to conceal this paradox or, to state it better, this self-deception. These self-deceptions are well known. I shall merely say that, if they themselves believe in their theory, they will perish from their own blindness. I have the impression that they are not quite so stupid as not to understand this, all the more so because they have long since converted their theory into a convenient carriage-shaft. Will they be able to indoctrinate their successors adequately? I shall avoid prophecy.

The important thing is that a purely political tendency toward power or authority is prevalent in the Soviet Union. There is nothing original in this.

They are as blind as moles in their Marxist classification of philosophical systems into "clerical," "bourgeois," "proletarian," and so forth. Are they really incapable of understanding that the difference between materialism and idealism, for instance, corresponds first of all to the nature of the intellect, to a greater or lesser predisposition for analytical thinking, and that this has nothing in common with the social origin of the thinker? (Of course, I am withdrawing from the possible impression of this origin, which it is always possible to overcome with sufficient critical persistence.) Their blindness may be deliberately simulated. That is not such a stupid method. Their first teachers, Marx, Engels, and Lenin, were not primarily philosophers. Therefore, they could permit this oversight and ignore it for a certain length of time. Later, the demagogic line may have gained the upper hand. In any event, their attempts at a sociological approach to

these problems had some intrinsic value which, however, we should not overestimate.

People are often loyal to ideals, because this gives them strength. Hence the concept of the strength of people and that of an omnipotent God. Believe in Him whosoever will.

I must conclude. I was unable to touch upon moral problems. I do not at all consider them unimportant, but I do think that the foregoing should precede their judicious formulation.

I am opposed to moralistic norms interpreted as dogmas, whatever they may constitute. But there are natural norms, a departure from which disturbs me to a greater or lesser degree.

It is important, above all, to be honest. This means: not to lie and not to act as a traitor. This sometimes requires courage, which one must possess. The rest will fall into place.

A true classification of society should proceed according to a psychological principle. In political issues, the psychological attitudes of various groups toward authority have primary importance.

Much depends upon education.

Man can overcome in himself. any education. To withdraw from one's self is the most difficult thing of all. He who does not think so has simply never been himself.

What is to be said about anarchy? It is my political ideal. But the attempt to realize it in practice would, in our time, prove to be a revolting crudity, brigandage, demagogy, and it would probably terminate in usurpation.

Well, the role of ideals does not lie in their realization. It is good if fine but unattainable ideals exercise some influence on our morals.

One should develop the principles of modal logic. They would prepare the ground for more absolute thinking, whereas there is clearly a dearth of existing systems of logic.

Unfortunately, here, too, language presents obstacles. In our worldly pursuits we permit ourselves unceremoniously to distort modality; we even consider this a refinement of our speech.

For instance, instead of telling a scoundrel that he *must* go, he is *politely* told, "You *may* leave." In his place, I would not leave on any pretext until I had been requested to do so in clear and precise form.

In the negative tendency characteristic of Russian speech, it is constantly said: "You *must not* do this" instead of "You are obligated *not to do* this." At the present moment, I find it difficult to say whether this is characteristic only of the Russian language. In any case, this phenomenon does no credit to the veracity of people who can tolerate such language.

Reforms are necessary here. The simplest grammatical reform in Russian speech would consist of introducing this "not to do" as a single word, with an accent shift in colloquial speech on the "not."

The matter is simpler where the affirmative and negative modalities of speech are concerned. It is true that sometimes one modality is used in place of another, and this is termed *irony*. In colloquial speech, this is expressed by a shift in intonation or by laughter, the logical role of which always consists of a change in modality.

The habit of applying modalities correctly would evidently have a wholesome effect on the juridical relation between people, as well as between the individual and the state.

In view of the diffuseness of the majority of concepts, modal logic should be developed without the law of the excluded middle. There, the *implication* will be different from the material one (or there will be many *implications*), and the principle of 7 $A \supset (A \supset B)$ will, generally speaking, no longer apply.

A great number of such logical systems have been examined. We need many of them. But no useful purpose is served by applying the law of the excluded middle, which is almost always present in them.

In questions of equity and ethics, one should develop those logical systems which are close to the Deontic ones, but without this law.

It is time, also, to put associations in their proper place. A vast number of popular theories are based on associations, whereas they should be based on analysis. In a creative sense, this may be wonderful. But it is untenable in a philosophical sense.

If the philosophers were a species of thinking rather than cultural beings, I would not discuss such an obvious matter.

Neither a state nor a culture should have any authority over the convictions of individual persons!

I have stated my views on most questions. I shall be very glad if this manuscript is published in the West. In Russia, this would be impossible.

I give my permission to publish it without any alterations in Russian, and also in English, German, French, and Italian.

I am not concerned about the consequences.

I have written in haste. I have not checked or reread any of this, because I had to deliver this quickly.

I do not claim to be the most intelligent person in Russia. Much that is written here is not new. But every student in Russia who has arrived at philosophical skepticism by his own thinking can consider himself a new Columbus. (Actually, Columbus was not a great man.) *

There is no freedom of the press in Russia, but who can say that there is no freedom of thought?

Vol[pin]†
JULY 1, 1959,
Moscow.

P.S. I have written as much as I could in one day.

NOTES

A friend of mine, when he heard [the statements on] this page and a summary of the treatise, said: "In other words, you believe only in thought and reason? Yes, of course, there is nothing else in which to believe. But even these matters need not be *believed.* It is not necessary to *believe* in reason. It is sufficient for the thinking man *to be* reasoning.

Let us apply here what I have said about Renard.

* See notes following the author's signature for material which Yesenin-Volpin intended to insert here.

† The last part of the signature is illegible in the original manuscript.

(Not for Publication) *

In the event that this *Treatise* is published, I beg to be sent at least one copy. I did not keep the text. I apologize for the carelessness in style. I was obliged to complete this in one day and had no time to reread what I wrote. I should be happy if the opportunity presents itself to continue it.

In any event, I am extremely glad to have fulfilled the duty, which I have long regarded as the most important one, even though it be in its initial stage.

Should anyone find this treatise uninteresting, kindly save it for others. But if all this is familiar to everyone and, because of this uninteresting, I shall be very pleased, too. In that case, please offer it to the museum of Russian oddities.

* The publisher feels that, in the light of present circumstances, these paragraphs should be printed.