

1/210 GURT --- HUNGARY: TRUE VOICE OF REVISIONISM.

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The hottest piece of revisionism in literature (but with echoes going far beyond it) has dropped out of the Hungarian peasant writer Peter Veres's public dialogue with Jozsef Baras. Is the Hungarian farmer a peasant first, determined in his responses and thinking by his class, or is he human and Hungarian in the first instance and peasant only in the second place, or, increasingly, not at all? ought literature to depict the first, blending up, as it were, the Government's blueprint for the transformation of society with photographic illustrations, or ought it to do something else - closer to literature but less "socialist" and immediately useful? These were some of the questions a number of writers sat down to answer at their recent symposium, and it was here, and, later, more expensively in What is Socialism (Nov. 25), that Peter Veres threw down the gauntlet to the purveyors of socialist writing.

Technically, Veres is no "socialist", but he has written as much and so astutely on the fringes of Party-literature that a demand for more freedom coming from him is probably an indication the way thinking is going both within the Party and outside it. His formula is that he is not to serve socialism, but the ways in which, he says, socialism ought to be served are so much at variance with what the Party normally understands by that term that Veres's means would corrupt the ends as surely as the seven points (impeccably socialist) he read out to the demonstrators in front of the Dem statue started the Revolution rolling on October 23rd, 1956. This, one may suspect, is his real purpose, and he leaves only to the most unscrupulous of sibilantes. What, then, are his points?

To begin with, he berates the writers' paper for suppressing vital parts of the discussion which sparked off the controversy: "It is a great pity that those of my remarks which started the present discussion have not been printed". He then advances a number of points which amount, in their totality, to the clearest common platform one can think of between the potential Berghs in the Party and non-Party writers on Veres's right.

Finding that "realism" is a programme which is unrealistic unless it is interpreted in the widest possible fashion, he says, in effect, that resistance to realism (and, by inference, to "socialism") should itself be portrayed and understood. If, for instance, the stream of melancholy (or, as he himself says, the spirit of 'narodnik nationalism') with which Hungarian writers are periodically afflicted stubbornly returns in literature, then this, too, must be accepted as part of the world in which we live: it is neither a disease nor a conspiracy, but a sign which merits the attention of historians and sociologists.

Indirectly, of course, this is an apology of nationalities, for melancholy is one of the red threads which runs through much Hungarian writing and folklore, and the source of this melancholy has always been the people's ordeals under the Turks, Austrians and other liberators. An official showing, the Hungarian farmer sought by now to be released from this depression, but, without saying why, Terecs pointedly announces that it is still there and writers ignore it at their peril. The reader has no difficulty in guessing the reasons.

Terecs then goes on to argue that the wanted new man of socialism has got to be born, and that his suggestion that literature should, as far as dog-and-farm topics are concerned, cease to be programmatic, is another way of saying that the farmer has been emancipated. Once you stop, he says, treating the peasant as peasant and recognize what is universally human in him, you have reflected the progress the country has made under socialism.

This is a dangerous, even heretical thought, but extremely difficult to fight or to ignore. Socialism and, especially collectivization have upgraded the farmer from his class to a level where he is, or will soon become, all-national, if you like: classless, in short: human. Under socialism, we have it on good authority (since 1956), the class-struggle decreases in ferocity, ceases to go on treating the peasant as though he were alien to the body of society in testament to admitting that 'once a peasant always a peasant', and *that*, surely, is admitting that socialism has failed. But, Terecs seems to argue, socialism is a success and this means that literature must be jerked out of the groove of infantilism and stop acting as though it were a tool in the hands of Marxist adolescents.

This is a smart and invulnerable argument, underlined by Terecs's insistence that, if literature "serves" any cause, it can, and should do so at levels other than the stupid level, "People grow up and so does the reader". To "serve" need not always mean a call to action. Terzok's monologue in *Hamlet*, although addressed to a skull, is as effective in serving the cause of mankind in the largest perspective as any we can think of. He protests that literature must not become a comment on the progress of society, not even a critique of this progress. Nor must writers betray their trust by showing out tones which no-one in his senses would bother to read. This surely is not the way to serve socialism.

Terecs altogether denies that it is technically possible to write about the "present". To think is always to think in the past because time is a flux, a river into which it is impossible to step twice, and as soon as we write of the past, experience assumes a poetic dimension and becomes literature. This, in turn, probes into what is universal and refuses to be used for propaganda.

Shakespeare, he argues, writing about Troilus and Cressida has more to say to us about our own problems than any number of topical

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days and death's started up to parade as literature.

And this brings Torcs to a point where, cautiously but unambiguously, he voices a demand for freedom. "I can almost feel people gently digging me in the ribs and whispering into my ears at this stage: 'For Heaven's sake, say it at last -- this is what it's all about -- : We want more freedom for literature!'. This sentiment, he adds, is entirely justified, but, he says, (and this is a feeble rider) so far neither the freedom the Yugoslavs enjoy, nor the freedom the Hungarian exiles enjoy in the West, has produced great works of art. But there is, surely, virtue in his admission that the Hungarian writers are less free. Torcs ends with these remarkable words:

"Let us say in conclusion that great literature needs great talents and great souls and such are not born every day, no matter whether we expect them to come from Mother-people or Mother-age; but if such talents arise and, from time to time, we recognize one, let us make sure that we help them and appreciate them. Let them walk the earth, let them seek down to the very depths of reality, according to their own tastes and will; and let them fly and soar if they want to, let them think in great distances, look into the past and into the future; because from there they may bring something to us. This is not sceptical thinking but responsible realism" (Kisfaludy, November 25, 1961).

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