

## VORONSKIJ AND VAPP

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IN A SOCIETY whose leadership demands that all man's life and works be brought within the compass of a single *Weltanschauung* one would expect considerable attention to be devoted to the problem of art and its position in the social complex, for art, and in particular literature, is one of the most direct and effective means for influencing the political, social, and philosophical ideas and attitudes of the mass of individuals of which the society is composed. In post-revolutionary Russia the role art was to play in a society based on Marxian socialism at once became the subject of intense discussion, but fifteen years were to elapse before any final "official" solution of the problem was reached. It was not until 1932 that the formula of "socialist realism" received the endorsement of State and Party, whereupon its principles became incumbent upon the members of the various unions of writers, artists, and composers.

This long delay was partly due to the preoccupation of the leaders with political and economic questions of more pressing importance and to the highly fluctuating state of Soviet society in general and its leadership in particular. But in large measure it was due to the absence of a clearly defined esthetic in the Marxian philosophy itself. The "founding fathers" of Marxism had left a number of interesting observations on various problems of artistic philosophy scattered through their extensive writings, but nowhere had they collated them into a final statement of esthetic principles. Of the Russian Marxists, G. V. Plekhanov had done most to work out an esthetic consistent with the doctrines of Marxism, but Plekhanov's name did not enjoy sufficient prestige among Soviet Marxists to give his statements on art that Scriptural authority which makes further discussion unnecessary. Consequently, the Soviet theoreticians were obliged to hammer out an artistic philosophy of their own.

Among those engaged in this project was Aleksandr Konstantinovič Voronskij, whose name stands out as one of the most sincere and original thinkers in Soviet criticism. It will be the purpose of this article to give an account of Voronskij's artistic theories and of some of the controversies in which he became involved, but it should be remembered that his case is only a part of the complex literary history of the 1920s. Voronskij was an Old Bolshevik, a member of the Party since 1904, with a long record of adventures in the revolutionary underground. Even before the Revolution he had displayed an interest in literary questions,<sup>1</sup> and during the Civil War he was

<sup>1</sup> He published some critical essays under the title of "Literaturnye zametki" in *Jasnaja zarja*, No. 56, 1911, under the pseudonym of Nurmin.

assigned to edit a newspaper in Ivanovo-Voznesensk. In 1921 he became the founder and editor of *Krasnaja nov'*, (Red Virgin Soil) a Soviet replica of the "fat monthlies" so famous in the Russian literary past.

As an editor Voronskij placed primary emphasis on artistic quality rather than upon the ideological purity or class origin of his contributors, and under his editorship *Krasnaja nov'* became a rallying point for that heterogeneous group of intellectuals whom Trotsky dubbed the "Fellow Travelers," i.e., persons more or less in sympathy with the Revolution and the new regime, but lacking a fully developed and "class conscious" ideology. This was inevitable, since the Fellow Travelers unquestionably possessed most of the literary talent available in Russia at that time. Voronskij's preference for the Fellow Travelers soon aroused the righteous indignation of those Communist and proletarian writers and critics who felt that literature should be regarded first of all as a weapon in the class struggle and that any concession to the "class enemy" in the province of ideology was nothing short of criminal, and they proceeded to voice their disapproval of Voronskij and all his works in no uncertain terms in their organs *Oktjabr'* (October) and *Na postu* (On Guard), founded in 1923.

The controversy reached such a pitch of vituperative fury that the Party felt obliged to take some sort of stand, and the issues were given a thorough airing in the Press Division of the Central Committee in May, 1924. This was really the peak of Voronskij's career, for the resolution adopted by this committee and for the most part confirmed by the Central Committee as a whole the following year represented an almost complete vindication of Voronskij's policy and a resounding defeat for the extremists of *Na postu*. His triumph, however, was short-lived. The advocates of a militant proletarian literature had formed the organization known as VAPP (The All-Union Association of Proletarian Writers) in January, 1925, and, after regrouping forces following a split in their ranks, proceeded to make VAPP the basis for a renewed attack on Voronskij and his supporters, using their new organ *Na literaturnom postu* (On Literary Guard), founded in 1926.

A bitter struggle ensued over the formation of the "Federation of Soviet Writers," which was being organized in late 1926 and early 1927. Voronskij wanted to use this organization as a center for discussion of literary questions and as an agency for helping the writers to improve their economic position *vis-à-vis* the publishers and the government. The leaders of VAPP, however, saw the formation of the Federation as a welcome opportunity for achieving the "hegemony" of proletarian literature, for which they had clamored so long, by gaining control of the Federation from the inside. Voron-

skij appealed for aid to Lunačarskij, the Commissar for Education, but the latter was either unable or unwilling to intervene. Voronskij was obliged to carry on his losing battle for tolerance under increasingly unpropitious circumstances. In April, 1927, he published an article in *Krasnaja nov'* attacking the tactics of Averbakh, the leader of VAPP, accusing him of attempting to obtain domination of the Federation of Soviet Writers by "tyrannical methods" of vote-manoeuvring. He wrote: "Under such circumstances the Federation may turn into a cachectic bureaucratic undertaking, an organization in which everything seems healthy from the outside, but which inside is utterly false."<sup>2</sup>

At this the Party stepped in. On April 30, 1927, Sergej I. Gusev, at that time director of the Press Division of the Central Committee, published an article in both *Pravda* and *Izvestija* asserting that Voronskij's attack on VAPP was merely a cover for his political opposition to the Party. Gusev was not entirely certain to which opposition camp Voronskij belonged, accusing him of being either a Chernovite (i.e., a Socialist Revolutionary) or a Trotskyite.<sup>3</sup> He seemed to favor the latter alternative, however, adding, "By the way, Comrade Voronskij himself does not conceal his sympathy for the Opposition and even speaks of it publicly."<sup>4</sup> In spite of this warning from on high, Voronskij refused to submit. He published a spirited reply<sup>5</sup> to Gusev in the June issue of *Krasnaja nov'*, expressing his willingness to coöperate with VAPP if only Averbakh were removed from dictatorial control and sharply denying the political charges brought against him.

This was virtually his last act as a public figure in the Soviet literary world. Although his name was retained on the masthead of *Krasnaja nov'* until the following November, no article of his was ever again printed in the magazine he had founded. At about the same time he was expelled from the Party and banished to Siberia.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> A. K. Voronskij, "O federacii sovetских pisatelej," *Krasnaja nov'*, No. 4 (April, 1927), p. 216.

<sup>3</sup> Gusev performed a rather remarkable feat of verbal juggling to produce this conclusion. Voronskij had used the term "builders of socialism" in antithesis to the "new bourgeoisie," the Nepmen and kulaks. Gusev argued that if this term referred to both peasants and proletarians, it was a symptom of Chernovism, since the peasants are not "builders of socialism," but must be led by the proletariat. If it referred to the proletariat alone, it was a sign of Trotskyism, since it disregards the peasantry! Cf. S. I. Gusev, "Kakaja federacija pisatelej nam nužna?" *Pravda*, No. 96 (April 30, 1927), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Voronskij, "Ob užasnom krokodile, o federacii pisatelij, i o falšivyx frazakh," *Krasnaja nov'*, No. 6 (June, 1927), pp. 238-49.

<sup>6</sup> About 1930 he was permitted to return to Moscow, recanted his errors, and was readmitted to the Party. The years 1930-34 he spent editing editions of the classics and writing a biography of Željabov, the Populist leader of the 1880s. This biography appeared in 1934 and seems to be Voronskij's last published work. I am informed by private correspondence from Mr. Rodion Berezov, a former associate of Voronskij in the literary group *Pereval* and now a displaced person in Austria, that Voronskij "disappeared" in 1937.

It is against this background of organizational and political strife in the years 1921-27 that Voronskij's system of theoretical views and those of his opponents must be considered.

At the foundation of Voronskij's philosophy lies the fundamental epistemology of all materialist philosophy, namely, that matter is predominant over mind, that the external world unquestionably exists, that our sensations are the direct result of the effect of this external world on our sense organs, and that these sensations give us true and accurate, though incomplete, knowledge of the actual nature of our environment. As he states it:

The cardinal question for Marxism is the question of the relation of thinking to being, the subject to the object. Not only in philosophy, not only in science, but also in art, not a step forward can be taken until this problem is solved. . . . Those who accept the materialist view of Marx maintain that our sensations and perceptions are of not only subjective, but also objective significance, that they reflect reality both in science and in art not as hieroglyphics or symbols, but as real images of the world. By this we by no means infer that these images are an exact and absolutely faithful replica of the world. . . . The world which surrounds us is incomparably more varied and extensive than the reflection of it in our psyche . . . , but these reflections are relatively accurate, true, and objective.<sup>7</sup>

This point is absolutely fundamental in Voronskij's whole system of ideas: objective truth is attainable by man's senses and is defined by its degree of correspondence with external reality. On this basis Voronskij advances his definition of art as one of the *means* by which men obtain knowledge of this external reality. It runs as follows:

Primarily art is the cognition of life. Art is not an arbitrary play of fantasy, feelings, or moods; art is not the expression of the purely subjective sensations and experiences of a poet, nor does art aim primarily to inculcate "good" feelings in the reader. Art, like science, supplies us with knowledge of life. Both art and science deal with the same subject: reality. But science analyzes; art synthesizes. Science is abstract; art is concrete. Science is aimed at man's mind; art at his sensory nature. Science cognizes life by means of concepts; art, by means of images, as sensory contemplation.<sup>8</sup>

Thus Voronskij ties art in with the whole materialist epistemology. Art provides us with objective truth; it is directly dependent on external reality.

How is this process of cognition in art carried out? By what means does the artist provide us with knowledge which we cannot obtain

<sup>7</sup> Voronskij, *Literaturnye zapisi* (Moscow, 1926), p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> Voronskij, "Iskusstvo kak poznanie žizni i sovremennost'," *Krasnaja nov'*, No. 5 (July-August, 1923), p. 349.

from our own sensory contact with the world? The artist possesses a special gift, *intuition*, which enables him to perceive reality more directly and more accurately than is possible for the ordinary mortal. "Intuition, inspiration, creative ability or sensitivity is the name we give to the faculty which produces opinions, truths, conceptions, and ideas of the validity of which we are convinced without conscious analytical thinking."<sup>9</sup>

In order to explain the nature of this faculty more precisely Voroniskij borrows from Freud the concept of the "dynamic subconscious," though he is sharply critical of Freudian esthetics in general, because of its tendency to regard the individual artist in isolation from society and his environment.

The dynamic subconscious as advanced by Freudian psychoanalysis makes possible a more exact concept of intuition. Intuition is our subconscious in its active operation. Intuitive truths . . . are stored in the subconscious realm of life and reveal themselves in the consciousness suddenly, quickly, unexpectedly, as if independent of the ego, without any preparatory effort on its part.<sup>10</sup>

This may be clearer in the light of the metaphor, "removal of the veils" by which Voroniskij characterizes this process. The phrase is taken from Tolstoy's description in *Anna Karenina* of the Russian artist Mikhajlov, whom Vronskij and Anna met in Italy. He [Mikhajlov] was making a sketch for the figure of a man in a violent rage. A sketch had been made before, but he was dissatisfied with it. The paper with the discarded sketch on it . . . was dirty and spotted with candle-grease. . . . "That's it, that's it!" he said, and, at once picking up the pencil, he began rapidly drawing. The spot of tallow had given the man a new pose. He had sketched this new pose, when all at once he recalled the face of a shopkeeper of whom he had bought cigars, a vigorous face with a prominent chin, and he sketched this very face, this chin on to the figure of the man. . . . In making these corrections he was not altering the figure, but simply getting rid of what concealed the figure. He was, as it were, *removing the veils which hindered it from being distinctly seen*.<sup>11</sup>

Thus the artist's special faculty of intuition enables him to perceive the world in an entirely new light and from this perception to produce new truth. "The only true artist is he who sees with his eyes and hears with his ears something peculiarly and inseparably his own, something which is revealed only to him. The real artist does not

<sup>9</sup> Voroniskij, *Ob iskusstve* (Moscow, 1925), p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Voroniskij, *Literaturnye zapisi*, p. 18.

<sup>11</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, Constance Garnett, trans. (New York, 1939), p. 561. Italics mine. I have changed the phrase "stripping off the wrappings" (*snjatje pokrovov*) to "removing the veils" to make it conform to my own rendering in other parts of this article.

invent, compose, or create fantastic worlds, . . . does not seek embellishment for its own sake; he somehow reads the secret inscription of things, people, and events."<sup>12</sup> Voronskij further writes:

Out of trifles he synthetically creates the large, the great; he enlarges men and things in his artistic microscope, eliminating the familiar and the obvious. He makes of life a "pearl of consciousness"; the features, the characteristics which have been scattered and dispersed he unites into one, he distinguishes the typical. Then in his imagination he creates a condensation, a purification, a sifting of life, life better than it is and more like the truth than the realest reality.<sup>13</sup>

We see, then, that art and science differ not in subject matter, for both deal with reality, but in the *process* by which they cognize this reality. Art reveals reality intuitively, in images; science logically, in concepts. This does not mean that logic plays no part in art, nor intuition none in science. But for art logic is secondary. As Voronskij writes:

If our rationalists insist that for the artist intuition *alone* is not sufficient, that intuitive truths should be verified by analysis, and that intuition should be brought into harmony with reason, there is no ground for objection. Intuition is blind, speechless, and may be false. The ideal artistic type is the artist in whom a rich gift of intuition is combined with a subtle analytical faculty.<sup>14</sup>

Intuitive perceptions may be false; their truth is determined by comparison with external reality, while the *reasons why* an artist may produce false perceptions lie in his class psychology, which will be dealt with later.

To summarize: external reality exists; it can be known; art is a means by which we obtain this knowledge through the medium of the artist's intuitive faculty. This materialistic epistemology of art is central in Voronskij's thinking; it was the fortified line from behind which he could fire his charges of "idealism" at those of his critics who maintained that art was but a weapon in the class struggle. It was this epistemology which enabled him to defend both the Fellow Travelers and the classic bourgeois or feudal writers on the ground that, despite class distortions, their works reflected reality, contained new truth about the world, and were thus of inestimable value to the proletariat.

Passing to the field of "esthetics proper," i. e., the philosophy of beauty, we find Voronskij's ideas somewhat less fully developed and less consistent. If the purpose of art is to reflect reality, to produce

<sup>12</sup> Voronskij, *Ob iskusstve*, p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

new truth about it, what purely esthetic criteria can we apply to it? If reality is beautiful of itself, i.e., objectively beautiful, then any correct intuitive reflection of it will necessarily be beautiful too. We then have "beauty is truth, truth beauty," and the problem is solved without further ado. Such a solution appears to have attracted Voroniskij, for it seems to fit in with his materialist epistemology. In *The Art of Seeing the World* he writes: "Art has always sought and must seek to recover, restore, and reveal the world, which is *beautiful in itself*, to represent it in the purest and most direct perceptions."<sup>15</sup> Or this: "Beauty is not only a subjective state; it exists in nature. But we are burdened by the cares of life and do not perceive it. It is the artist who discovers it for us; he finds it in nature."<sup>16</sup> This theory appears rather late in Voroniskij's work. It seems to have been designed to reinforce his theory of artistic cognition: the artist reflects not only objective truth, but also objective beauty. One more reason for supporting the Fellow Travelers! But nowhere does Voroniskij make clear just what this objective beauty is, how it differs from objective truth, and why we need these two separate concepts.

So far the discussion has been of beauty as an absolute category, as something existing independently in nature, and it has been seen that Voroniskij really failed to produce a very coherent explanation of what that beauty is, and why men regard some aspects of nature as beautiful and others not. This problem, however, interested him less than the problem of specific beauty in a man-made work of art. The beauty of a work of art, says Voroniskij, depends directly on the relation between its content, i.e., its "idea," and its form.

But first let him define his terms. Do form and content exist as distinct entities? The artist Mikhajlov, in the same chapter of *Anna Karenina*, cannot conceive of form as distinct from its content; he regards the two as inseparable and indissoluble. Is he right? "He is right," Voroniskij answers, "from his point of view, the point of view of the artist."

In the process of creation the artist's work is one and indivisible. Mikhajlov, therefore, could not understand how his one and indivisible work could be split up into content and technique. . . . In the realm of the concrete form and content are organically joined.

Likewise the esthetic process of perception of any artistic work cannot be broken down into form and content. Esthetically we perceive and evaluate a work of art as a single whole, since we perceive it concretely. But we can . . . translate the work from the language of the image to the language of logic. As soon as we do this, we cease to evaluate it concretely and regard

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in *Literaturnaja enciklopedija* (Moscow, 1929), II, 316.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

it abstractly, rationally. In regarding it abstractly, we find it useful to break the work down into content and form. . . . This delimitation enables us to criticize the work logically and from various points of view. . . . But in dividing the work thus, we must not for a moment forget that the division is conditional. A work of art is concrete; of itself it is indivisible. For the sake of analysis we regard this indivisible work from two sides—external (form) and internal (content)—; but both are aspects of a single work. . . . Form and content exist separately only in abstraction.<sup>17</sup>

How then, does Voronskij apply form and content, as thus defined, to the esthetic evaluation of a work of art?

To evaluate a work of art esthetically means to determine to what degree its content corresponds to its form, or in other words to what degree its content corresponds to objective artistic truth, for the artist thinks in images: the image must be artistically correct, i.e., it must correspond to the nature of the thing represented. . . . A false idea or false content cannot find a perfect form.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, in the case of esthetic evaluation of a specific work of art, the esthetic and cognitive criteria are again virtually identified: Voronskij equates the correspondence of form to content with the correspondence of content to objective truth. In order to produce good art, the artist must reflect reality correctly, i.e., must produce objective truth by accurate cognition of reality. And since the artist thinks in images, in order to cognize reality correctly, his images must correspond to the nature of the reality represented, i.e., their form must correspond to their content. Once again truth=beauty. If the images of a work of art truly represent objective reality, they may be called "beautiful," as this word is now defined. But how this ties in with the theory of "objective" beauty existing in nature is not made clear.

The fundamentals of Voronskij's esthetic have now been presented: the epistemological function of art, its role in producing knowledge of reality, and the criteria by which it can be evaluated esthetically. Social reality, however, consists of a society divided into classes. In Voronskij's philosophy this division of society into classes appears in art in two ways. First, it is manifested directly through reflection of reality in art. This is quite simple and is wholly in accord with his cognitive theory. If the artist cognizes reality, and reality consists of a society divided into classes, then obviously art will reflect this class division. Secondly, however, the artist himself belongs to a class, and his psychology is to a very large extent determined by his position in this class.

<sup>17</sup> Voronskij, *Ob iskusstve*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>18</sup> Voronskij, "Iskusstvo kak poznanie . . .," p. 365.



As Voronskij states it:

Consciously or unconsciously the scientist and artist fulfill the tasks imposed by their class. The products of their work serve primarily the interests of that class. The success, nature, direction, and methods of scientific and artistic work are conditioned by the prevailing psychology of a given class, a psychology which in the last analysis depends on the state of the productive forces of a given society. Consequently, in examining and discovering reality [*bytie*] the artist and scientist regard this reality *through a psychological class prism*. But among the tasks which a class imposes on the artist or scientist, the most important is an exact, empirical cognition of life *insofar as this is in the interests of the given class*.<sup>19</sup>

When is it most likely to be in the interests of a class to reflect reality correctly? Voronskij answers this question thus:

There are instances when the reality of life has been represented erroneously; there are others when it has been entirely distorted, and there are still others when it has been rendered clearly and distinctly. The last is usually the case when the artist is reflecting the thoughts and feelings of a class which is in flower, a rising class, in short a class which at the given historical moment most clearly represents the over-all interests of society as a whole, the interests of forward motion.<sup>20</sup>

Note that Voronskij does not lose sight of his cognitive basis of art in this theory of psychological determinism. Art's purpose is still to produce knowledge, insofar as that is in the interests of the class to which the artist belongs. The task of the Marxian critic is to uncover the class intentions of the artist, and using them as a guide, to find out to what extent objective reality is reflected in the work of art. Art cannot be regarded, as Voronskij felt the On Guardists regarded it, merely as a tool of propaganda in the class struggle. Its primary purpose is to know the world, and feudal, bourgeois, and fellow-traveling artists are of value to the working class to the extent to which they perform this primary function.

Sticking close to his fundamental cognitive theory of art, Voronskij turned to the problems of the social basis of art under the dictatorship of the proletariat. In this his views were essentially in agreement with those of Trotsky, though he did not state his conclusions in such a categorical form. He agreed with Trotsky and Lenin that in capitalist society the proletariat had been unable to develop an art of its own, although the *bourgeoisie* had been able to do so in feudal society. Under capitalism the proletariat was given "mere wretched crumbs from off the luxurious table of bourgeois culture."<sup>21</sup> Thus after

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 362. Italics mine.

<sup>20</sup> Voronskij, *Ob iskusstve*, p. 25.

<sup>21</sup> Voronskij, "O proletarskom iskusstve i khudozhestvennoj politike našej partii," *Krasnaja nov'*, No. 7 (November-December, 1923), p. 257.

winning power in a victorious revolution the first and foremost problem which the proletariat faces is not to attempt to burst forth all at once with a full-blown proletarian class culture, but to master the cultural heritage of the past. "In order to reorganize society on a new basis [the proletariat] must first of all master its cultural heritage in science, art, and other fields. Without this it cannot fortify and strengthen its victory; without this it cannot create a socialist order."<sup>22</sup>

Feeling as he did that the proletariat's primary task was the assimilation of past culture and that there was great danger in a contemptuous rejection of this culture as one "imbued with the spirit of the exploiting classes," Voronskij believed that the demand for a proletarian class culture was premature. He agreed that there were proletarian *writers*, if one define that term as meaning either writers of proletarian origin or writers with a fully Communist ideology, and he agreed that these writers should be helped and encouraged in every way possible, but he denied that any proletarian art as such existed in Russia in the 1920s. He wrote:

In short, we do not possess a proletarian art in the same sense as we possess bourgeois art; the attempt to represent the contemporary art of proletarian and Communist writers as proletarian art, opposed to and independent of bourgeois art, on the grounds that these writers and poets reflect in their works the ideology of Communism is naive and based on a misunderstanding, since at most what we have is an art organically and inextricably bound up with the old art—an art which we are trying to adapt to the requirements of the transition period, the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>23</sup>

It is, however, inaccurate to state that Voronskij endorsed Trotsky's famous assertion that "there is no proletarian culture . . . and there never will be any."<sup>24</sup> Voronskij never marked out the future in such a categorical way. He wrote as follows:

It is clear that this "militant regime" of the transition period is not something fixed, frozen, and immutable. This regime itself changes, goes through a number of stages in its development. It is also indubitable that elements of the "productive and cultural organization of the new society" are already present here and there, even in such a backward country as Russia. It is entirely possible and *in fact inevitable* that later, when a new material base (socialized production, coöperatives, etc.) has been laid, a new cultural pattern will be established and will develop. This pattern in turn will make it possible for the new art of the transition period to occupy an independent position with respect to the art of previous ages, after assimilating all basic and essential elements of this heritage. This vital dialectic of social de-

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>24</sup> Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (New York, 1925), pp. 185-86.

velopment must never be lost sight of. . . . But at the present time we are a very long way from this.<sup>25</sup>

Voroniskij's enemies later found it convenient to identify his views on proletarian art with those of Trotsky, but this passage shows that there was a fundamental difference: Trotsky felt that the brevity of the transition period and the militant character of its social structure would prevent the development of any proletarian class art. Voroniskij, on the contrary, actually predicted that such a class art would be formed; he merely denied that it yet existed in Russia.

On questions of Party policy in literature Voroniskij favored essentially the line taken in the Central Committee resolution of 1925. He denied the allegations of the On Guardists that the Party had had no art policy until that time. That policy, he said in his speech of May, 1924, was this:

The Party has carried on a decisive struggle with our internal and external emigrés in literature; the Party has coöperated with all revolutionary groups rooted in the soil of October; it has not endorsed the line of any individual group; it has given active assistance to any group which accepted the Revolution and was willing to work on its behalf; the Party has given full freedom to artistic self-determination.<sup>26</sup>

He felt that such a policy was still sound. Above all, he urged caution, tact, and tolerance toward the artistic forces of the nation which, though not yet fully Communist in their ideology, were nonetheless firm supporters of the Revolution and the Soviets. "Art," he said, "like science, is of such a nature that it cannot be subjected to such easy regulation as certain other aspects of our life. Art, like science, has its own methods, its own laws of development, its own history."<sup>27</sup>

On the Party's attitude toward the proletarian writers he had this to say:

I am deeply convinced that from our worker and peasant masses, from the government employees, from the various other organizations, from the universities, from the Red Army, new writers will spring up. New writers will come from the "sticks," from the provinces—and these writers will be bound blood and bone to the workers and peasants—for the time being more to the peasants. That these writers will occupy the first place, that we must orient ourselves towards them and help them—about this there can be no disagreement.<sup>28</sup>

Still stressing the cognitive function of art, he continued to advocate support of the Fellow Travelers both for the educational and

<sup>25</sup> Voroniskij, "O proletarskom iskusstve . . .," p. 269. Italics mine.

<sup>26</sup> Voroniskij, "O politike partii v khudozhestvennoj literature," *Voprosy kul'tury pri diktature proletariata* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1925), p. 56.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

esthetic value of their work. The Party, he thought, should use cultural and educational means for winning them over to a proletarian ideology. He greatly feared that if the "hatchet swingers" from VAPP were granted full dominion in the field of art, the result would be that some of the best talents in Soviet literature would be killed or maimed. He hoped that narrow clannishness could be broken down by forming a large and inclusive writers' organization, and he bitterly opposed all efforts of a single clique to obtain control of Soviet letters.

Finally, he had the following interesting remarks to make on form, in his written theses for the Press Division meeting of 1924:

While allowing complete freedom of artistic creation, freedom to search for new forms and style more in keeping with our era, and regarding as beneficial all the latest achievements in this field, the Party believes that the fundamental form which stems from the essence of dialectical materialism is *realism*, interpreted as empirical artistic cognition. Moreover, the Party calls the attention of the writers who support the Revolution to the need for careful attention to the requirements of the new and developing worker and peasant readers, to the need for comprehensible, simple, clear, but fully artistic works.<sup>2</sup>

It is noteworthy that the two elements stressed here by Voronskij, realism as an offshoot of dialectical materialism and comprehensibility as the antidote to artistic elitism, are integral parts of the official theory of "socialist realism," as it evolved after 1932. To what extent the later theorists were indebted to Voronskij is very difficult to determine, since political considerations made any favorable mention of him impossible in the later period. However this may be, one can only regret that the application of this theory in practice has not always been characterized by that spirit of tolerance and broad understanding of cultural values which Voronskij so consistently displayed as a critic and editor.

The nature of the conflict between Voronskij and the critics of *Na postu* and VAPP on questions of actual policy is quite simple and has been noted above. The VAPP-ites maintained that proletarian literature already existed, that it should be guaranteed hegemony through direct Party action, and that the Fellow Travelers were for the most part a harmful influence and should be brought under much sharper and more direct ideological control by the proletariat, i.e., in practice, by VAPP. Voronskij opposed them on all these counts, for reasons which are evident from the exposition just given of his philosophy of art. It is their theoretical criticisms which interest us here, but it must be remembered that for VAPP esthetic theory

<sup>29</sup> Voronskij, "O 'tekuščem momente' i zadačakh RKP(b) v khudožestvennoj literature," *Proletariat i literatura, Sbornik statej* (Leningrad, 1925), p. 52.

occupied a secondary place and was never more than an auxiliary weapon in its all-out campaign for "hegemony."

One of the most persistent critics of Voronskij's ideas was Lelevič, the chief theoretician of the early *On Guard* movement. Lelevič grudgingly accepts Voronskij's definition of art as cognition of life but regards it as incomplete and inadequate. In its stead he advances a definition borrowed from Leo Tolstoy's *What is Art?*, which, conveniently enough, had also been quoted with approval by Bukharin, who was then a leading figure in the Party. Art, says Lelevič, is an instrument of emotional "infection," a means for organizing the psyche of the masses in the interests of the class which issues the "social command." For Lelevič, reflection of objective reality in art is secondary; its main purpose is to "infect" the readers with the ideology of the ruling class. Reality, Lelevič maintains, can be reflected in a work of art only in small portions, in isolated scenes or incidents.

If art were nothing more than the registration and depiction of disparate phenomena or types, Comrade Voronskij's efforts to search for "objective truth" in the work of any writer might be crowned with success. The fact is, however, that the depiction of an isolated incident divorced from a definite over-all perspective and not harmonized with a general view of nature and society amounts to a kind of photography and not art. Isolated sketches and fragments, consequently, may sometimes (but by no means always) be objective and true regardless of the class origin of the artist. But the creative systematization of these diverse fragments, without which a work is not artistic, is defined by the class factor.<sup>30</sup>

He then goes on to accuse Voronskij of ignoring the class factor altogether and of permitting "our journals and publishing houses to be turned into citadels of the petty-bourgeois corruption of the Revolution."<sup>31</sup>

The charge that Voronskij had ignored the class factor was certainly unfounded, as the latter pointed out in his reply. Also, it appears that Lelevič had misunderstood what Voronskij meant by artistic cognition. For Voronskij, the knowledge we obtain from art is not merely knowledge of facts, details, bits of information about the world, but a much broader, intuitive, emotional grasp of the essential nature of the world and of human life in it. Voronskij disapproved of Lelevič's definition of art as "emotional infection" on the grounds that it failed to include the fundamental premise of materialistic philosophy, the relation of thinking to being, the relation of art

<sup>30</sup> G. Lelevič, pseud. (Laborij Gilelevič Kal'manson) "Naši literaturnye raznoglasija," *Proletariat i literatura*, p. 81.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

to external reality.<sup>32</sup> He accused Lelevič of "subjectivism," of turning "the theory of the class struggle into an absolute, metaphysical category." With the *On Guard* critics, he observed, "the delicate instrument of Marxist criticism is turned into the blunt end of an axe, with which they hack to right and left without either sense or discrimination."<sup>33</sup>

One of Voronskij's most relentless critics of this period (1924-1925) was Ivan Majskij, the future ambassador to the court of St. James, who was at that time editor of *Zvezda* and a strong supporter of VAPP. Majskij, unlike Lelevič, did not accept Voronskij's definition of art as merely incomplete; he rejected it *in toto*. He went even further: he denied the very existence of "objective truth." He wrote: "It is strange to hear from the lips of a Marxist statements about 'objective truth' as applied to art at a time when 'objective truths' are being shaken from their throne in the most 'objective' of sciences, mathematics."<sup>34</sup>

This served to confuse the issue thoroughly, and the bitter polemical atmosphere made it impossible to straighten things out. Voronskij replied, with a personal bitterness unusual for him in this period, that he recalled that Majskij had been a Menshevik until 1919 and that he, Voronskij, had heard of "objective truths" "from such Marxists as Marx, Engels, Lenin, Plekhanov, Ortodoks, etc." "But for Majskij, all this is 'strange to hear'. You have revisionist ears, Comrade Majskij. Look out or they will stick out a whole *aršin*."<sup>35</sup> Both contestants marshalled various quotations from the Marxian Scriptures without really analyzing where they differed. The difficulty seems to be this: in spite of his cry that "what we need most is clarity, clarity, and again clarity,"<sup>36</sup> Majskij had confused the distinction between "objective" and "absolute" truth. The two are not the same. In materialist philosophy "objective" truths are truths derived from sensory, empirical cognition of external reality. "Absolute" truth is the complete and final cognition of reality which can only be approached, but never reached. To be a materialist one must recognize that truth is "objective"; otherwise there is no point of contact between our knowledge and the external world. Thus Voronskij (as a materialist) was right when he said: "Absolute knowledge

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Voronskij, "Polemičeskie zametki," *Proletariat i literatura*, p. 138; also *Literaturnye zapisi*, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> Voronskij, "Iskusstvo kak poznanie . . .," pp. 363-64.

<sup>34</sup> Ivan Majskij, "O kul'ture, literature, i kommunističeskoj partii," *Proletariat literatura*, p. 65 footnote.

<sup>35</sup> Voronskij, "Polemičeskie zametki," p. 140.

<sup>36</sup> Majskij, "Eščë raz o kul'ture, literature, i kommunističeskoj partii," *Proletariat i literatura*, p. 195.

consists of the sum total of relative, imperfect bits of knowledge. . . . If the object exists, then there is objective truth."<sup>37</sup>

Majskij goes on to give his endorsement to the "emotional infection" definition of art, and criticizes even Lelevič for partially accepting Voroniskij's "cognition" theory. He concludes:

The view that "art is cognition of life" in its actual concrete manifestation leads to a passive and contemplative approach to the processes of art, to carelessness with the nature of artistic work (in "cognition" anything goes), to negation of proletarian literature, to orientation toward the Fellow Travelers, to glorification of esthetic criticism—in short, to everything we call *Voronščina*.

On the other hand, the view that "art is a means of infecting the masses" in its practical manifestation leads to active intervention in the processes of art, to careful attention to the nature of artistic work (by no means everything goes for purposes of infection), to full support of proletarian literature, to recognition of the primacy of content over form, to the strengthening and development of Marxist criticism—in short, to everything that makes the "soul of souls" of proletarian literature.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, Averbakh. Averbakh was not particularly distinguished as a literary theoretician; he himself admitted that "until a short time ago we approached problems of Marxist literary theory only insofar as that was necessary for our literary activity."<sup>39</sup> However, he played such an important part both in bringing about Voroniskij's downfall and in Soviet literature in general in the following period that he cannot be overlooked.

Averbakh retreats from Majskij's categorical rejection of Voroniskij's cognition theory; he tries to make a compromise between it and the "emotional-infection" theory: "It is unquestionable that art is a means for the specific cognition of life. But it is no less unquestionable that art is a means of emotional infection. . . . By cognition art serves to transform life. Thus cognition of life on the one hand and emotional stimulus on the other are inextricably and immutably joined in a work of art."<sup>40</sup> With this statement Voroniskij might perhaps have agreed, at least if he had not known that it came from Averbakh, his bitterest enemy.

Averbakh goes on, however, to criticize Voroniskij's "equating" of art and science.

The equating of art and science—this is the principal mistake of Comrade Voroniskij. Science—we speak obviously of the so-called "exact" sciences—

<sup>37</sup> Voroniskij, "Polemičeskie zametki," p. 139.

<sup>38</sup> Majskij, "Eščë raz o kul'ture . . .," pp. 194-95.

<sup>39</sup> Leopold Averbakh, *Naši literaturnye raznoglasija* (Leningrad, 1927), p. 24.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

unquestionably gives us objective truth. The truth of scientific law is determined by empirical verification. . . . The law of the conservation of energy is extra-class in the sense that it has become an indispensable part of the culture of all classes. Is a work of art of the same character as a scientific law? *War and Peace* is a magnificent achievement of classical art, but who would say that it gives us an "empirically" valid picture?<sup>41</sup>

In this, Averbakh misinterpreted Voronskij. Voronskij did not "equate" art and science. He drew a clear distinction in principle between them, with respect to both their medium of conveying knowledge and the process by which this knowledge is obtained. Art conveys knowledge in images and obtains it through intuition; science conveys it in logical concepts and obtains it through conscious observation and reason. They are "equated" only in the sense that they deal with the same object, reality.

Averbakh then tries to turn Voronskij's "psychological determinism" theory back on him by saying that the Fellow Travelers, Voronskij's god-children, were "organically linked" with a decadent class, the pre-1917 *bourgeoisie*, and were thus incapable of producing objective truth. He and the proletarian writers, he proclaimed, would study the classic writers with profit, but would have nothing to do with decadent bourgeois-fellow-traveling literature. Both he and Voronskij, however, neglect to point out that most of the Russian "classical" writers of the nineteenth century were noblemen, i.e., they belonged to a class which was in an even more disastrous state of "decline" than the *bourgeoisie*. Why a nobleman in 1864 is more "likely" to produce objective truth than a bourgeois in 1910 is a question left unanswered in both versions of this theory of "psychological determinism."

In any case, Averbakh winds up his attack by the usual charge that Voronskij was ignoring the class struggle in literature, was furthering the growth of bourgeois ideology, and was greatly hindering the development of proletarian literature, and tops it off with a heavy barrage of exclamation points: "Against straddling and mediation—for a sharp ideological line! Against extra-class and all-class confusion—for a Marxist class analysis! This is why, O Reader, this Carthage, this Voronskij, must be destroyed."<sup>42</sup>

He was.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.