The Soviet Novel

History as Ritual

KATERINA CLARK

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Introduction

The Distinctive Role of Socialist Realism in Soviet Culture

What is Socialist Realism? It is not, first of all, a *single* doctrine. We now recognize that that old bogey, "monolithic communism," does not exist—that there are, instead, many different communisms. In much the same way, there are many different Socialist Realisms. Different countries, different political parties, and critics with different *partis pris* have each evolved different definitions of it.

Even if Socialist Realism is confined to the meaning "officially sponsored Soviet literature," it soon becomes apparent that among the various canonical accounts of it there is no *one* that is incontrovertible or in any sense comprehensive. Some official pronouncements on the theory of Socialist Realism have been important (e.g., that literature should be "optimistic," that it should be accessible to the masses, that it should be "party-minded"), but they are too general to have guided such a distinctive practice.

It is not in theoretical writings but in practical examples that one should look for an answer to the question What is Socialist Realism? Soviet scholars have been arguing since the term was coined in 1932 over what it means, and their debates are, in essence, mere academic hairsplitting. Scholars still argue, for instance, as to how much "realism" and how much "romanticism" it should entail.[1] In the meantime, Socialist Realism has long since evolved into a highly conventionalized literary practice. Consequently, instead of going into the Byzantine arguments that surround the question What is Socialist Realism?, I shall use a strictly pragmatic approach and define Soviet Socialist Realism as a canonical doctrine defined by its patristic texts.

Nowhere has Soviet Socialist Realism been more conventionalized than in the subject of this inquiry, the novel. Although the clichés of the novel are in some measure officially fostered, the source for them has not been theoretical pronouncements but, rather, official "model" novels. Ever since 1932, when the

Writers' Union was formed and Socialist Realism was declared the sole method appropriate for Soviet literature, most official pronouncements on literature, and especially the addresses that open every Writers' Congress, have contained a short list of exemplars (*obrazcy*) that are to guide the writers in their future work (see Appendix B). Each new version of the list contains as its core the official classics of Socialist Realism; a few recently published works are then added on. No two lists are exactly the same, and additions to earlier lists tend to be left out in later versions. However, there is a core group of novels that are cited with sufficient regularity to be considered a canon. These include M. Gorky's *Mother* and *Klim Samgin;* D. Furmanov's *Chapaev;* A. Serafimovich's *The Iron Flood;* F. Gladkov's *Cement;* M. Sholokhov's *Quiet Flows the Don* and *Virgin Soil Upturned;* A. Tolstoy's *The Road to Calvary* and *Peter the First;* N. Ostrovsky's *How the Steel Was Tempered;* and A. Fadeev's *The Rout* and *The Young Guard.*

These canonical works have been a crucial factor in determining the shape of the Soviet novel. There was a good deal of external stimulus for following these exemplars besides the mere fact that they were cited by authoritative voices. In the early thirties a literary institute was founded to train new writers to follow the models. A preferential scale of royalty payments and other positive inducements, such as dachas and "creative" stays at writers' Houses of Rest, were dangled before the writer as positive inducements to follow the developing official traditions of the Soviet novel. In other words, when authoritative voices cried out "Give us more heroes like X [the hero of some model novel]," the cry did not fall on entirely deaf ears.

As a result, the business of writing novels soon became comparable to the procedure followed by medieval icon painters. Just as the icon painter looked to his original to find the correct angle for a particular saint's hands, the correct colors for a given theme, and so on, so the Soviet novelist could copy the gestures, facial expressions, actions, symbols, etc., used in the various canonical texts.

The Soviet writer did not merely copy isolated tropes, characters, and incidents from the exemplars; he organized the entire plot structure of his novel on the basis of patterns present in the exemplars. From the mid-thirties on, most novels were, *de facto,* written

to a single master plot, which itself represents a synthesis of the plots of several of the official models (primarily Gorky's *Mother* and Gladkov's *Cement*).

This shaping pattern does not account for everything in a given Soviet novel. Despite the frequent Western charge that the Soviet novel is clichéd and repetitive, it is not actually true that every novel is nothing more than a reworking of a single formula. In any given novel one must distinguish between, on the one hand, its overarching plot or macrostructure and, on the other, the microstructures, the smaller units, which are threaded together by this shaping formula—the digressions, subplots, and so on. If a novel is looked at in terms of these smaller units, much of it will be found to be somewhat journalistic and topical; it may, for instance, be geared to praising a recent Soviet achievement or to broadcasting or rationalizing a new decree or official policy. In other words, much of it is based on ephemeral material.

The overarching plot of a given novel is not ephemeral—that is, it is not tied to a particular time. If its plot were stripped of all references to a specific time or place or to a particular theme of the novel, it could be distilled to a highly generalized essence. This abstract version of a given novel's plot is the element that is, in effect, shaped by the master plot.

If a novel is to be written to the canon, this master plot controls the most crucial moments of the novel—its beginning, climax, and end. For the rest it may provide no more than general guidelines, together with a range of symbols, motifs, etc., to be used in certain formulaic situations. However, the most common variety of Soviet novel, the production novel, uses the full version of the master plot (see Appendix A): canonical functions in this case determine the whole course of the novel.

Not all Soviet novels follow the master plot. Not even all novels listed in the canon follow it completely. That official classic, Sholokhov's *Quiet Flows the Don,* for example, shows only occasional traces of the master plot, and these primarily in connection with lesser characters.[2] Thus, even though statistically my hypothetical master plot has been followed to a greater or lesser degree by the overwhelming majority of Soviet novels (or Stalinist novels, at any rate), its status as a defining trait of the novel tradition does not depend on the actual percentage of novels patterned

on it, for the master plot is not random or arbitrary in the sequence it sets up: it illustrates major tenets of ideology.

The master plot is the one constant that links most novels of the Stalin period and, to a lesser extent, those of the post-Stalin era as well. I would go so far as to say that it *is* Socialist Realism: in order for a Soviet novel to be Socialist Realist, it must replicate the master plot.

What are the sources of the master plot? Surely it did not evolve *in vacuo?* Did Soviet writers of the thirties know *which* gestures, tropes, etc., to copy from the disparate novels assigned as models? Did they know how to put all the pieces together to make a coherent narrative frame, and, if so, *how* did they know these things?

The evolution of the Socialist Realist tradition owes some debt to artistic ingenuity on the part of the writers themselves, but the process was larger in scope than its purely literary context. Obviously, politics played some part. One cannot analyze either the dynamic of the master plot's evolution or the meanings of its formulaic components without looking at its relations both to politics and ideology, on the one hand, and to literary traditions on the other. On the whole, the Western approach has been to assume that the contents of Soviet novels have in some way been "handed down" by the authorities or else have slavishly been designed to be pleasing to them. Westerners see this as an unnatural state of affairs, since they conceive it as normal for literature to be fairly autonomous; in this view, Soviet literature, if it achieves the lofty role the Russian intelligentsia has *traditionally* prescribed for it, should itself "hand down" ideas to society. Of course this "unnatural state of affairs" did not come into being without resistance. Western observers tend to see Soviet intellectual history as a long, epic struggle between "the regime" and "the intellectuals" or, among Soviet intellectuals, between the "diehards" or "conservatives," who support the regime, and the "liberals," who want less "straitjacketing" (e.g., being obliged to follow the master plot)—who want, perhaps, to express a more complex, even Western, account of reality. But the prominence of ultrarightest views among the most recent crop of Soviet dissidents should give us pause.

The trouble with this historical model is not that its categories are inaccurate but that it is an illusion to think that the two parties—

the "regime" versus "the intellectuals"—could in any circumstances be completely autonomous and free systems. They are implicated with each other more closely than in most other cultures. Moreover, in the Soviet Union there is not something extrahistorical called "the government" or "the Party." Both are subfunctions of the larger system of the complete culture to which they belong. Indeed, the Party itself is in a sense only one group of that larger class called the intelligentsia. Moreover, it houses within its confines much internal debate and has been known on occasion to adopt values previously held by a dissident group. Likewise, there is no such thing as an independent literary system, as we are increasingly beginning to suspect.

Thus, the master plot was not merely "handed down" to the Soviet writers from above. It is of course true that the leadership fostered the canonization of the master plot, and it is also true that they saw to it that the spectrum of possible literary approaches became very narrow. Nevertheless, the movement from politics and ideology to literature was far from being a one-way street.

The relationship of literary to extraliterary factors is always a complex one. Literature is, on the one hand, an autonomous series, having its own traditions and generating new forms within those traditions; on the other hand, it can never be completely independent of the extraliterary aspects of its own culture, for, if it were, its signs would have no meanings. Literature interacts with *many* other aspects of culture, not just with politics and ideology. I say "interacts with," because literature never merely "reflects" extraliterary matter; it always adapts it to fit its own traditions. Bakhtin ("Medvedev") sees the process of interaction as dialectical:

> The artistic work is . . . drawn into the . . . conflicts and contradictions [within the ideological horizon]. It is penetrated by and absorbs some elements of the ideological environment and turns away other elements external to it. Therefore, in the process of history, "extrinsic" and "intrinsic" dialectically change places, and, of course, do not remain unchanged as they do so. That which is extrinsic to literature today, is an extra-literary reality, can enter literature as an intrinsic, constructive factor tomorrow. And that which is literary today can turn out to be an extra-literary reality tomorrow.[3]

In the Soviet Union the interaction between literary and nonliterary

worlds has been even closer than is generally the case; the borders between literature and journalism, for instance, are often difficult to perceive. This is so because modern Russian literature and the functions of the forum have traditionally been close, and the political powers have actively promoted an intensification of this relationship. Still, "politics" or "ideology" should not be identified as some monolithic entity with which literature has interacted. Not only has the process of interaction been dialectical rather than a one-way street, but the "extraliterary" pole of the dialectic has been made up of several distinct components, each of which has in turn interacted with the others—and again dialectically.

There are at least six major elements in Soviet society and culture that play a part in the generative process of literature. First, there is literature itself; second, there is Marxism-Leninism; third, there are the Russian radical intelligentsia's traditional myths and hero images, which the Bolsheviks brought with them when they took power in Russia in 1917; fourth, there are the various nonliterary forums through which the official viewpoint is disseminated (the press, the political platform, theoretical writings, official histories, and the like), which I shall refer to in this book by the general term "rhetoric"; fifth come political events and policies; and, sixth, there are the individual persons who are the principal actors in these political events, together with their roles and values. In some respects, any change in any one of these elements is the product of ongoing trends within its own "series"; but for the most part they are interdependent, and change in any one of them *potentially* affects changes in any or all five of the others (even Marxism-Leninism can be changed).

In short, it is too much of a simplification to see the symbols or master plot of Soviet literature as having come from politics via the refracting medium of rhetoric. The principal actors on the political scene were themselves caught up in acting out roles suggested to them by revolutionary lore, and much of that lore, in turn, originated in literature. Ultimately, the question What caused what? must be a chicken-and-egg question.

The elements that make up the master plot come, at one level, from within literature itself. In general the master plot continues one strand of prerevolutionary literature: it reworks the prevailing myths and tropes of Russian radical fiction and rhetoric of the

second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Also carried over has been some influence from folk and religious literature (though pre-Soviet radical texts used these sources, too).

But the master plot is by no means an isolated or purely literary phenomenon. Indeed, it could not have survived solely on its literary merits or role. The master plot plays a distinctive role for the entire Soviet culture.

Socialist Realism is essentially a name applied to Soviet culture's literary system rather than to a way of writing that is particularly "socialist" or "realist." Indeed, the "socialist" aspects and "realist" aspects of Soviet literature are more functions of the "superstructure" than they are of the "base." The "base" is the master plot.

The one invariant feature of all Soviet novels is that they are ritualized, that is, they repeat the master plot, which is itself a codification of major cultural categories. Here I mean "ritual" in the same sense as it is used by anthropologists. Ritual is a term for those social acts that are felt by the participants to concentrate the greatest amount of cultural meaning in them (with respect to the Soviet novel's master plot, this does not, of course, necessarily mean that the participants are personally in accord with these "meanings"). Rituals are that part of the language of culture in which signs achieve the lowest degree of arbitrariness. This is somewhat paradoxical, because they are, at the same time, the most conventionalized. All rituals have form, and they are successful in focusing otherwise diffuse cultural energies precisely in the degree to which they are formulaic. They provide a kind of shaping force to the energies that are most powerfully abroad in the society; they are a focusing lens for cultural forces.

The one thing that rituals have in common in any culture, as anthropologists from Van Gennep to Victor Turner have pointed out, is a concern for transformation of various kinds. Rituals personalize abstract cultural meanings and turn them into comprehensible narrative. This is the way they make specific meanings that would otherwise be general. The subject of the ritual "passes" from one state into another, well-known examples being the progression from boyhood to manhood or from foreigner to citizen.

The primary function of the master plot is very similar to that of ritual understood in these terms. It shapes the novel as a sort of parable for the working-out of Marxism-Leninism in history. The

novel takes as its focus a relatively modest figure, usually a Soviet worker, administrator, or soldier. This subject is known as the "positive hero." However modest he may be, the phases of his life symbolically recapitulate the stages of historical progress as described in Marxist-Leninist theory. The novel's climax ritually reenacts the climax of history in communism. This crucial role played by the positive hero is, indeed, the reason he has received so much attention from critics. When the cry goes out "Give us more heroes like X!" one may be sure that the novel in which the stages of X's life are portrayed shows skillful use of the master plot.

The ritual form of conventional Soviet novels comprises both iconic signs for positive heroes and a catalogue of plot functions they normally perform. Both the signs and the plot functions are encoded symbols, derived largely from prerevolutionary lore but with meanings that ultimately derive from Marxism-Leninism. The master plot is, however, much broader in the range of meanings it encompasses and is not confined to Marxism-Leninism for its subtext.

It is by now a commonplace of Western histories of the Soviet Union that during the thirties all public activity became more highly ritualized and that much of it was geared to legitimizing the hegemony of the Stalinist leadership by identifying its links with Lenin and Leninism. This development more or less coincided with the institutionalization of Socialist Realism (which occurred between 1932 and 1934). Not suprisingly, therefore, the signs and functions of the master plot that had meanings in Marxist-Leninist historiography also acquired established associations with the Soviet leadership and its connection to Lenin. Soviet novels became simultaneously parables of Marxism-Leninism and myths for maintaining the status quo.

In view of the novel's role as repository of official myths, extraordinary measures were taken to ensure that the purity of the formulas be preserved from book to book. It was, for instance, not merely political caprice that motivated the Party's spokesman Zhdanov, in 1946, when he called for strict adherence to doxology.[4]

In Stalinist novels, whatever the context, whatever the year, events can be relied upon to follow the prescribed pattern. The symbolic forms of literature are remarkably constant because this very constancy affirms "Leninist" continuity.

Thus it would seem that the Soviet novel offers perfect material for making a structural analysis of the master plot in terms of its formulaic phases, somewhat as Propp has done for the Russian folktale.[5] That is, one could adduce a "grammar" of the Soviet novel. I have, in fact, provided something like a "grammar" of this kind in Appendix A. I have relegated it to this peripheral position because to provide a mere "grammar" of forms, an unvarying structural pattern in Soviet novels, ignoring contextual considerations, is to ride roughshod over the dimension of meaning, which, in the Soviet context, is all important.

The constancy with which the same signs recur in Soviet novels is in part deceptive. Continuity in the use of symbols need not be an accurate index to continuity of values. If, as most linguists now agree, the relationship between sign and meaning in ordinary language is not fixed but dynamic, then, surely, when language is used symbolically, this potential for change is increased. And in fact in the Soviet novel many of the formulaic tropes have, over time, changed or have at least been modified in their meanings.

The political anthropologist Abner Cohen has written about the relationship between political symbols (using "political symbols" in the extended sense as objects, concepts, or linguistic formations) and the changing world and power structure they are meant to support. Cohen cautions against seeing symbols as "mechanical reflections, or representations, of political reality" or of thinking that "Power relations and symbolic formations are . . . reducible one to the other." As he points out, power relations and symbolic formations are relatively autonomous, and the relations between the two are complex. "Symbols . . . stand *ambiguously* for a multiplicity of disparate meanings," and the same symbol can thus be used in different contexts to mean the same thing; we must "distinguish between symbolic *forms* and symbolic *functions*" or meanings. He continues:

> Symbols achieve a measure of continuity-in-change by their ambiguity and multiplicity of meanings. A ceremonial may be repeated over and over again in the same form though its symbols may be charged with different meanings to accommodate new developments. Thus there is a continuous process of action and counteraction between the symbolic order and the power order even when there is no significant structural change.[6]

In other words language—and highly symbolic language *a fortiori*—is multivalent. Symbols can have several meanings, even at the same time, and they can often be used ambiguously.

Shalom Spiegel has shown how a major symbolic text of the Jewish people, the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac, or Akedah, has been variously interpreted. Although the events of the story have remained substantially the same in each retelling, at various points in the history of the Jews the story has been interpreted in new ways, colored by their current aspirations and experiences.[7] Something like this occurred with the Soviet novel. During the different phases of the Stalin era various clichés of the novel were interpreted in different ways. Some changes were made in the master plot, too, but these changes were on the whole semantic rather than formal.

The symbolic forms of Socialist Realism have not been used as a medium of expression for the official viewpoint alone. The intellectuals are, after all, more immediately involved in the business of literature than the leadership is, and they have also been able to profit from the multivalence of literature's iconic signs.

The traditional role of Russian literature has been, since at least Belinsky,[8] to provide a forum for the most advanced ideas of the age, to bear witness to the grim realities of Russian life not admitted to in official sources; the self-image of Solzhenitsyn in our time provides a good example of this tradition. Most people in the West would contend that the various institutional controls placed on Soviet literature have all but robbed creative writing and criticism (at least that published through official channels) of this particular dimension. But they have certainly not done so entirely, and there is an incipient tension in fiction between its function as occasional writing and propagator of official myths and values, on the one hand, and, on the other, its more traditional role in modern Russia of standing in the forefront of intellectual life. This tension is not readily apparent, for it is expressed in the most delicate nuances.

When the formulaic patterns of the Soviet novel became fixed in the thirties, a system of signs became the core of the Socialist Realist system. These signs are polysemic in themselves, but, when incorporated in the master plot, they take on very definite, specific meanings. Nevertheless, as words, they must retain the potential for other meanings, and a skillful writer can play on this.

The Distinctive Role of Socialist Realism

If a writer wanted his novel to be published, he had to use the proper language (epithets, catch phrases, stock images, etc.) and syntax (conventional ordering of events in accordance with the master plot). To do so was effectively a ritual act of affirmation of loyalty to the state. Once the writer had accomplished this, his novel could be called "party-minded." But he had room for play in the ideas these phenomena expressed because of the latent ambiguities of the signs themselves.

Each novel was written in a context affected by change, controversy, and even the author's own position. All these factors bear upon the individual work and have the power to change its meanings. New meanings can come from within the system of signs by the slightest rearrangement or emphasis or shading—metaphasis—of the standard signs and sequences. Such changes may be scarcely perceptible to an outsider not schooled in the tradition, but they would be striking to most Soviet readers. The system of signs is, simultaneously, the components of a ritual and a surrogate for the Aesopean language to which writers resorted in tsarist times when they wanted to outwit the censors. Thus, paradoxically, the very rigidity of Socialist Realism's formations permits freer expression than would be possible if the novel were less ritualized.

The formulaic signs of the Soviet novel have been used as a medium for debates to this day. When Stalin died in 1953, many writers set about to criticize his legacy, including the stiltedness of Socialist Realist fiction. Yet when they produced fiction containing critiques of Stalinism, they often used the ready-made code or system of signs of the Socialist Realist tradition. Inevitably, the system of signs was modified as a result; some epithets, for instance, changed their value import from positive to negative. Nevertheless, the changes came from within the tradition the writers were opposing. In the post-Khrushchev era, literature became more variegated in style and approach, yet one can still sense the presence of the Socialist Realist tradition even in much unofficial literature (underground publications and literature published in the West).

It would be too glib to conclude that this lingering attachment to the tradition was due to Soviet citizens' having been inculcated in its language for so long that they could not throw it off. But then one must ask why the conventions of Socialist Realism have this power.

I would suggest that the reason so many of the symbols of Socialist Realism continue to resonate is that they ring not just for the Bolsheviks. They are sufficiently broad and flexible to contain most of the separate currents that make up Soviet culture.

When Socialist Realism was launched in the early thirties, it led to the homogenization of Soviet literature. A major effect of this homogenization was that all writers henceforth began to use the same language. However, just as all speakers of English can express differing views while using roughly the same language, so likewise (although of course to a more limited extent) all Soviet writers could express varying views via the "language" of Socialist Realism. The linguistic imperialism that occasioned the influx of so many new speakers into the language group of the Bolsheviks had an effect not uncommon in cases of linguistic imperialism: while the writers were being issued the "uniform" of the new power, the agents of this power were simultaneously receiving the "mufti" of their new subjects. The ideas and values of divergent groups within the intelligentsia began to color the associations of the various elements of the official language. The result was a dynamic of cross-fertilization that involved not just literature but also five other major elements of Soviet culture, which, as I said above, interacted with it to produce Socialist Realism: Marxism-Leninism, revolutionary lore, rhetoric, political policies, and historical events, together with the actors within them.

For this exchange to occur, there had to be an effective medium for focusing it. This brings us back to our earlier remarks about ritual. The formulaic signs of the Soviet novel have proved so tenacious over time because they catch some of the burning issues and beliefs of the entire culture, not just of the official culture. The master plot is not merely a literary plot or even the formula for a literary plot. It is the literary expression of the master categories that organize the entire culture.

The problem posed in this book is thus a variant of the perennial question of continuity and change. Because the Soviet government is ideologically conservative and anxious to establish a "Leninist" connection for the current leadership, the novels written during its regime have used, to a remarkable degree, the *same* signs over the years, signs whose origins can in fact be traced back to well before 1917. But when are these signs really the *same*, and when are they *different* (because differently deployed)?

The Distinctive Role of Socialist Realism

The signs of Soviet literature do not remain the same just because, as a ready-made code, they can be used as pawns in the ongoing contest between "conservatives" and "liberals," nor do they represent empty affirmations of allegiance to the status quo. In this book I hope to show that the *same* signs are used with such frequency because they encapsulate the polemics and dilemmas of the Russian intelligentsia that have been constant from at least the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. Bolshevism made its contribution to these polemics, and it promised a way out of these dilemmas; but the debate continues. Bolshevism simply gave it a new focus and a new language.

The "Spontaneity"/"Consciousness" Dialectic as the Structuring Force That Shapes the Master Plot

Rituals, as pointed out above, always involve some kind of transformation: the subject of the ritual goes from one state to another, and his progress, or "passage," enacts some central idea of the culture. Since the master plot of the Soviet novel provides a ritualized account of the Marxist-Leninist idea of historical progress, one might expect that the transition charted would involve movement from a class society through proletarian hegemony and on into that ultimate state, the classless society, i.e., communism. Actually, however, the class struggle per se has not been a consistent theme of the Soviet novel and has certainly not provided the structuring force for the novel's master plot.

The subtext that does shape the master plot is another fundamental idea of Marxism-Leninism, one that is a somewhat déclassé and more abstract version of the class-struggle account of history. In this version, historical progress occurs not by resolving class conflict but through the working-out of the so-called spontaneity/consciousness dialectic. In this dialectical model, "consciousness" is taken to mean actions or political activities that are controlled, disciplined, and guided by politically aware bodies. "Spontaneity," on the other hand, means actions that are not guided by complete political awareness and are either sporadic, uncoordinated, even anarchic (such as wildcat strikes, mass uprisings, etc.), or can be attributed to the workings of vast impersonal historical forces rather than to deliberate actions.

According to the Leninist model for historical progress, society from its earliest days has been locked in a dialectical struggle between the forces of "spontaneity" (which predominate in the earliest, most primitive social forms) and the forces of "consciousness" (which are present from the very beginning, although largely only as a potential). This dialectic provides the driving force of progress and leads to history's end in communism. It affects a series of increasingly higher-order syntheses ("leaps forward," or revolutions) resulting in ever-higher forms of both "spontaneity" and "consciousness." The ultimate stage of historical development, communism, is reached in a final synthesis, which resolves the dialectic once and for all. That final synthesis or ultimate revolution will result in the triumph of "consciousness," but the form of "consciousness" will then be such that it will no longer be in opposition to "spontaneity"; there will no longer be conflict between the natural responses of the people and the best interests of society. In other words, the end synthesis will resolve the age-old conflict between the individual and society.

The task of literature as generator of official myths is to provide object lessons in the working-out of the spontaneity/consciousness dialectic. As is generally true of ritual forms, the master plot personalizes the general processes outlined in Marxist-Leninist historiography by encoding them in biographical terms: the positive hero passes in stages from a state of relative "spontaneity" to a higher degree of "consciousness," which he attains by some individual revolution.

It has been possible to allegorize the spontaneity/consciousness dialectic because of the range of meanings these two terms can encompass. In the narrower context of the individual human being, as distinct from society at large, "consciousness" means political awareness and the complete self-control that enables the individual to be guided in all his actions by his awareness, whereas "spontaneity" refers to purely visceral, willful, anarchic, or self-centered actions. The great historical drama of struggle between the forces of spontaneity and the forces of consciousness is unfolded in a tale of the way one individual mastered his willful self, became disciplined, and attained to an extrapersonal identity. Thus, if you discount such trappings as the factory or kolkhoz setting and the Party meeting, the Socialist Realist novel might in effect be seen as a

politicized variant of the *Bildungsroman,* in which the hero achieves greater harmony both within himself and in relation to his society. Such a comparison cannot be taken very far, however, because the Socialist Realist novel is so highly ritualized that the hero's progress is neither individual nor self-valuable.

Why did the Socialist Realist novel end up with the spontaneity/consciousness dialectic as its underlying subject rather than the class struggle? This outcome can scarcely be described as having been sought "consciously" (rather than arising "spontaneously"), yet it was far from random or arbitrary. The answer to this question—an answer that is actually twofold—explains why the Soviet novel is a key document in Soviet cultural history.

In the first place, the spontaneity/consciousness dialectic is itself not an innocent doctrine, for it has always been at the center of the main controversies within Russian Marxism. Initially, when the first Russian Marxist groups were formed in the 1890s, the debate centered around what is often described as the voluntarist/determinist controversy, that is, briefly stated, the question whether history is made by the conscious efforts of people, or whether historical change occurs of its own accord ("spontaneously") as a result of changes in such extrahuman factors as, for instance, the means of production.

In classical Marxism the voluntarist/determinist dichotomy was already problematical. In general, however, the Marxist sense of history favored the notion that historical change occurred as the result of vast, transpersonal forces rather than by the action of "self-consciousness," "spirit," or outstanding figures. In his accounts of history Marx emphasized the determining role of transpersonal material forces. Nevertheless, he did allow for some interaction—for the notion that not only do "circumstances make men" but that "men [also] make circumstances."[9]

For the Russian Marxists this question was more than a purely speculative one. It was central to the major issues of political practice. This was because Marx's observations were based on the relatively advanced industrial society of western Europe, where the notion of a "proletarian" revolution seemed more plausible. But Russia had not yet evolved to a point where it met the Marxist preconditions for a communist revolution. The country was at least four-fifths peasant, and even the relatively small working class

comprised largely persons of recent peasant origins. The educational level of both workers and peasants was poor; indeed, most were illiterate. In short, it was unlikely for a significant segment of the population to have revolutionary consciousness. Some Russian Marxists argued that a revolution would therefore have to wait until the proletariat was larger and more developed; others believed that there could be a shortcut to the revolution by raising worker consciousness and by other deliberate actions.

This debate came to a head in 1903, when Lenin's treatise *What Is to Be Done?* (1902) split the Social Democratic (Marxist) Party into the Bolshevik (Leninist) and Menshevik factions. In this treatise Lenin introduced his highly controversial departure from the original Marxist theory (or addition to it, depending on one's point of view): the doctrine of the "vanguard." Lenin contended that it was possible to get around the various ways in which contemporary Russia did not meet the canonical Marxist preconditions for communist revolution by forming a "vanguard of the proletariat," comprising a small group of highly "conscious," disciplined, and dedicated revolutionaries who would guide the less "conscious" masses first to greater "consciousness" and then to revolution. The division in the Russian Marxist movement over these issues became exacerbated once again in 1917, when Lenin returned from exile after the initial (February) revolution and declared, in his April Theses, that this first, "bourgeois," revolution should be pushed further into a communist revolution. Many opposed this view, including prominent Bolsheviks, because they felt Lenin was being too rash and impatient.

It might be expected that the success of the October Revolution would have put an end to this controversy. This was far from the case, however, and Soviet Russians are still debating whether the revolution was premature and whether history can be "made" to any significant degree. Moreover, once the revolution had occurred, the continued reliance on the "vanguard" as an agent of control, in the sense of a centralized controlling elite, made it difficult to reconcile Soviet practice with that central Marxist doctrine, the "withering away of the state." Lenin himself believed that, once the revolution had occurred and the masses had become even more "conscious" in the postrevolutionary environment, the need for the "vanguard" as an agent of control, discipline, and enlightenment

would end. The vanguard and the apparatus of state control (police and the like) would then progressively "wither away" as, Marx had stipulated, they should in a "classless" society.

Perhaps "circumstances" were against them, but the Bolsheviks fell somewhat short of realizing this prediction. In the early postrevolutionary years, various internal and external threats to Bolshevik hegemony (such as the Civil War and the Allied intervention) made it necessary for them to build up the institutions of state control rather more than they had envisioned. Later, under Stalin, there was less external threat (except during World War II) and, arguably, less internal threat as well; yet under him the state apparatus became larger and more powerful than before. Although public controversy over political questions was virtually impossible in those years, it is clear that the state's resistance to its scheduled "withering away" troubled even the leadership. One symptom of their discomfiture is the fact that in the thirties almost every issue of the Party's bimonthly theoretical organ, *Bolshevik,* contained an article that directly or indirectly tackled the questions of why the state had not begun to "wither away" and when it might be expected to do so.

Since the Bolsheviks were always more exercised by polemics with their detractors in the left-wing movement than they were by right-wing adversaries, it is not surprising that, instead of providing edifying tales about the class struggle, official Soviet literature generated myths for rationalizing the Bolshevik position in the perennial radical controversy over the roles of consciousness and spontaneity in history. Indeed, literature's de facto role as apologist increased over time. The Socialist Realist tradition began with parables (such as *Mother*) illustrating the workings of the spontaneity/consciousness dialectic, but, under Stalin, extra conventions were added to the master plot so that it also affirmed symbolically that the progress to communism was specifically assured under the present Soviet leadership.

While all this is true, it represents a somewhat limited explanation of the master plot's role in Soviet society. The role of the spontaneity/consciousness opposition as *the* subtext of Socialist Realism must not be viewed solely in the context of Russian Marxist controversies and the machinations of the Leninists or the Stalinists. Literature is not merely the handmaiden of politics, not

even in times of severe repression. Moreover, the Party did not have a fixed interpretation of the dialectic to impose on literature, even if it were possible to impose one.

If one follows Bolshevik discussions of the spontaneity/consciousness dialectic over time, one will be struck by three features: ambivalence, controversy, and polysemy. I would suggest that this semantic diffuseness results from the fact that the spontaneity/consciousness opposition is broader in resonance than its place in Marxist-Leninist doctrine would imply. It is one of the key binary oppositions in Russian culture, comparable to, for instance, the ideal/real oppostion in Scholasticism or the subject/object distinction in nineteenth-century German thought.

The spontaneity/consciousness dichotomy was particularly well adapted to the ritual needs of the entire country. It is perhaps no accident that its scheme for historical progress is very like the Hegelian model for the working-out of *Geist* in history (Hegel had a profound influence on the Russian intelligentsia during its formative period in the mid-nineteenth century). More important, the opposition provides master tropes that focus major cultural energies and order the key dilemmas of the Russian intelligensia. The dialectic is a natively Russian version of the dynamic known to Western thinking as the nature/culture opposition, which has attracted a great deal of attention among contemporary anthropologists. We can detect Russia's root ambivalence on modernization lurking behind the various controversies concerning the Leninist model of historical progress. The spontaneity/consciousness oppostion was, in effect, an efficient formula for transcoding German Marxism into Russian culture.

The Leninist version of historical development did not differ from Marx merely in degree—by a change of emphasis, let us say, from Marx's view of historical change as effected 90 percent by necessity and 10 percent by deliberate actions, to ascribing the giant's share of the influence to the forces of "consciousness" (i.e., the vanguard). A more fundamental change had occurred.

The Russian Marxists began by adopting a *German* ideology to solve *Russia's* chronic social dilemmas (such as poverty, autocracy, and inequality). This ideology, once transplanted in Russian soil, became "russified." Marxism was an ideology that came out of an advanced industrial society. It was to be applied in a backward,

peasant society with very different political and intellectual conditions. Inevitably, Russia's culture colored its version of Marxist ideology; as a result, it became less and less a western European political program and more and more the ideology characterizing a certain branch of the Russian radical intelligentsia.

A surface indicator of the differences between the two views is the change in terminology. In classical Marxism the spontaneity/consciousness opposition does not exist *as such*. Marx did describe an analogous model for historical development, but he discussed it in terms of the dialectic between "freedom," where men rationally regulate their interchange with Nature, and "necessity," i.e., the circumstances that effect historical development.[10] Marx also gave a central place in his theories to the concept of "consciousness" (*Bewusstsein*); but, though the concept "spontaneity" can be found in Marxist writings (as *"Spontanität"*), it is much less central than "consciousness" and is certainly not its explicit opposite.

When the Russian Marxists of the 1890s and the early twentieth century argued about the way forward for Russia, their debates centered not around the roles of "freedom" and "necessity" but on "consciousness" and "spontaneity," which, in Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?* (1902), became the two poles of the primary dialectic of historical development. Moreover, whereas "consciousness" and "spontaneity" in classical Marxism were relatively technical terms (this is less so for "consciousness," *Bewusstsein,* which had Enlightenment connotations), the two words the Russian Marxist chose for rendering these concepts both had connotations that identified the terms with ongoing preoccupations of the Russian intelligentsia.[11] The word chosen for "consciousness," for instance, *soznatel'nost'*, has the coloration of something inspired by one's conscience and could hence be associated with the intelligentsia's tradition of assuming the role of Russian society's conscience.

The most striking instance of transcoding is the word chosen for "spontaneity," *stixijnost'*, which carries with it a vast range of connotations—both positive and negative—all of which were central to the existential dilemmas of the Russian intelligentsia. The root of *stixijnost', stixija,* means "element" (as in "elemental"); the word can thus be used both in expressions like "in his element," with positive valorization, and to mean wild, uncontrollable "forces" (such as storms in nature and human rage). Thus it can

mean both what is natural and good, as distinct from something artificial, alien, or constricting, or, alternatively, it can connote what is wrong with what are termed the "blind forces of nature"; it can connote things that are out of control and even menacing.

When the word *stixijnost'* was placed together with *soznatel'nost'* in a binary opposition, that opposition potentially embraced all the most obsessive dilemmas confronting the Russian intelligentsia. This was in large measure because of the rich and even contradictory associations that the word *stixijnost'* conjured up for them, associations that were all germane to its existential concerns. The oppostion suggests, for instance, that much-celebrated gulf in Russia between the vast, uneducated peasant masses (the "spontaneous") and the educated elite (the "conscious") or, to put it slightly differently, between backward rural Russia (the realm of "spontaneity") and modern urban Russia (the realm of "consciousness"), or, again, between those seething masses, capable of spontaneous popular uprisings, and the autocratic, heavily bureaucratized, and hierarchical state, which seeks to control these masses and direct them.

The spontaneity / consciousness opposition can also be seen as a schematization of some aspects of the old Slavophile versus Westerner controversy, i.e., the question whether the way forward for Russia could be found in Western models and ideas, in bringing reason, organization, order, and technology to this backward, anarchic country, or whether Western civilization was sterile and spiritually impoverished as compared with the native Russian or Slavic ethos, which was antirational, spontaneous, instinctive, perhaps even antiurban and against state order. Many favored a return to the social order of traditional peasant Russia, based on the village commune or *mir;* others developed a cult of the folk rebel or *buntar'*. The latter maintained that the dry theorizing of the intellectuals was sterile and that the most potent and effective forces for bringing about positive change in Russia were contained in those broad, illiterate peasant masses (the "spontaneous"), who had not been corrupted by Westernized education or by working for the autocratic state and could therefore express that pure, gut "rage" of the Russians against the defilement of their land by alien forces. For every intellectual who favored a "folk" remedy for Russia's dilemmas (whether in the folk rebel or in the traditional way of

life) there was another who saw the way forward in terms of making those "spontaneous" masses more "conscious," in bringing enlightenment and culture to the darkness of the ignorant and wretched peasants.

Lenin himself was strongly on the side of "consciousness" in the sense of favoring reason, order, control, technology, and guidance and enlightenment for the masses. His rhetoric is full of imagery about bringing "light" to the "darkness" of the Russian people. Lenin's wife, Krupskaya, was to make her major contribution to the Soviet cause by dedicating herself to the literacy campaign and other programs for raising the cultural and educational level of the masses.

And yet, although Lenin favored "consciousness" over "spontaneity," he, like the intelligentsia class from which he came, was himself ambivalent about "spontaneity" and its role in history. Although "spontaneous" elements could, in his analysis, indeed be retrograde and dangerous if left unchecked or unguided, he did not see "spontaneity" as an essentially negative category. In *What Is to Be Done?* he maintained that, even in its most primitive expressions, "spontaneity" contains a sort of "embryonic" potential for "consciousness."[12] Moreover, being a shrewd tactician, Lenin was able to recognize the crucial role the peasantry would play in any Russian revolution; one therefore periodically finds in his speeches extremely flattering references to that "spontaneous" element.[13]

This equivocation did not end with Lenin, for it has continued in official rhetoric down to the present day. The terms "spontaneity" and "consciousness" and the meaning of their dialectic have been differently interpreted with each major change in political culture.

Thus the spontaneity / consciousness opposition is, on the one hand, a defining tenet of Leninism and the locus of the greatest controversies about how to put theory into practice. On the other hand, it catches some of the Russian intelligentsia's obsessive dilemmas. Indeed, Leninism, being itself in large measure a Russian ideology, also reflects the intelligentsia's own ambivalences.

This pattern of complexity is ramified when one looks at the role the spontaneity / consciousness dialectic plays in the Socialist Realist novel, i.e., as the shaping force behind the master plot. There it certainly serves the Party's interests by turning novels into ideological parables and, very often as well, into myths of maintenance for

the status quo. Yet, paradoxically, it also provides some sort of medium, however reduced, for discussion and even for self-expression. The richly evocative terms "spontaneity" and "consciousness" not only provided an umbrella under which that eternal debate about Russia's way forward could continue; they also reverberated with some pervasive themes of Russian literature itself. These include such unlikely views—for Soviet literature—as the one commonly found in nineteenth-century literature, that surface reality is a mere semblance, a veneer; the notion that the underlying reality is in the grip of dark, elemental forces; and that cult of libidinous expression that one can find in literature from at least Appollon Grigoriev through Dostoevsky, Blok, and Bely, and on, even past the Revolution, into Scythianism. Although such views could of course never become actual themes of Socialist Realism, they often colored the symbols conventionally used for translating the spontaneity / consciousness opposition into novel form.

Thus, by studying the changing contours of the master plot and the complexity of forces that interact with it, this book will follow the broad patterns of Soviet culture through several transitions. Moreover, it will follow not only official culture but also, to a lesser extent, the dissident Russian voices that are in dialogue with it. In the finite context of the master plot, with its ideological underpinnings, the book will chart the vagaries of the dialectic between sign and meaning and the dialectic between what is intrinsic to literature and what is extrinsic to it. In this way it will provide a dynamic model of cultural change in the Soviet period.

2 The Positive Hero in Pre-revolutionary Fiction

The "positive hero" has been a defining feature of Soviet Socialist Realism. The hero is expected to be an emblem of Bolshevik virtue, someone the reading public might be inspired to emulate, and his life should be patterned to "show the forward movement of history" in an allegorical representation of one stage in history's dialectical progress. A novel's positive hero(es) stand primarily for "what ought to be," and it is left for lesser protagonists, or sometimes for "negative characters," to represent "what is." Not surprisingly, Western critics consider the positive hero the main culprit in the Soviet novel's modal schizophrenia, and he has been treated by them with almost universal scorn.

However, the positive hero has always played a role in the great tradition of Russian literature (consider, for example, the heroes of Dostoevsky). This reflects the greater moral fervor to be found in modern Russian literature than in the West. Since the mid-nineteenth century, Russian critics have joined Russian writers in setting out two tasks for literature that, although found in Western literature, have certainly not characterized it for roughly the past hundred years. These tasks were, first, to draw "typical" characters—characters who were not so much individuals as representatives of commonly found social types through which the writer was to present a critique of Russian life—and, second, to set forth models of behavior who might, by their example, show the way out of Russia's social ills.

The Socialist Realist hero is not merely a successor to the positive hero of nineteenth century fiction. Although he became a cornerstone of Socialist Realism, the idea behind the positive hero—that he should be "typical," should exemplify moral and political (or religious) virtue, and should show the "way forward" for Russia—was, as happened so often when an intelligentsia convention was adopted into Soviet culture, interpreted with great

literalism, extremism, and rigidity. The nineteenth-century positive hero was necessarily, because of his didactic function, less individualized (more "typical") than his counterpart in Flaubert or James, and this was even truer of the Socialist Realist hero; he was, in fact, so deindividualized that he could be transplanted wholesale from book to book, regardless of the subject matter.

Despite the Socialist Realist hero's *surface* resemblance to a nineteenth-century epigone, he is actually so deindividualized that he seems closer to a figure in one of the various genres of the Old Russian written tradition that tell the virtues of some positive figure. His image is reminiscent not just of hagiography, which tells of a saint's religious virtue as illumined in his life, but also of those sections of the old chronicles that tell of the secular virtues of princes, of the feudal sense of honor, duty, valor, and service to one's country. Whether the text told of a saint or a prince, the biographies were in both cases historicized. If actual historical figures were chosen as subjects, the details of their lives were pruned, embellished, or even ignored in order to make the subject fit the conventional patterns of the virtuous life.

Much Soviet literature and history has also been written in this way. Although an amazing number of Socialist Realist classics are based on actual events, their protagonists' lives always manage to follow the conventionalized stages of the master plot. One can compare the portrait of the Socialist Realist hero and that of his counterpart in medieval texts not just in function and genre but (as will be shown below) even in terms of the actual clichés used to characterize them.

The saints' lives were arguably a much more formative element in modern Russian culture than in the West (in Russia, people were still often brought up on them). Thus it is not surprising to find continuities when we compare the clichés used to describe medieval positive heroes with the clichés that describe both their Socialist Realist counterparts and the heroes of nineteenth-century revolutionary fiction.

I point these similarities out not merely to posit some line of genealogy or influence linking Christian iconology with the revolutionary or Bolshevik iconology, for one must be wary of seeing too much significance in continuity (or similarity) of signs. Still, one can trace a process whereby new meanings and new layers of complex-

ity were added to the original signs as they were taken up in a new context (a staggered system). In medieval texts the clichés for the prince or saint formed a relatively simple system (indicating Christian virtue and/or civic virtues appropriate to social status and, possibly, the role of martyr). In nineteenth-century radical texts there was an influx of new intellectual influences (such as utopian socialism) that modified the meanings of the old clichés and introduced new ones into the pool as well; there was also a change in the nature of the texts in which they were deployed (i.e., novelization), so that the signs were used more randomly than before. In Bolshevik-inspired Socialist Realism, this revised roster of clichés is used again, giving Bolshevik literature the stamp of carrying on the old intelligentsia traditions; but the signs now carry several extra layers of meanings, which they acquired progressively, over time.

There were two important moments in this sequence. First, with Gorky's *Mother* (1907), the clichés of nineteenth-century radicalism acquired significances in terms of the Bolshevik model for historical deveopment, the spontaneity/consciousness dialectic. Later, from the thirties on, they took on two new sets of functions: they were used to legitimize both Stalinist succession and the reign of terror and to reinforce the new hierarchical social structure. The clichés became both highly codified and multifunctional.

This, then, is why the positive hero is so important in Soviet Socialist Realism: not because he is so "positive" but because he is society's official mandala. In this chapter we will follow his evolution through his first major transformation, in Gorky's *Mother*.

Pre-Bolshevik Models

During the second half of the nineteenth century the assorted radical groups in Russia sought to convert large numbers to their cause. To this end they began to produce works of fiction that painted an inspiring picture of the radical activists and their good works. These works were of two different kinds: tracts and novels. The tracts were written for the masses and were geared to counteracting the influence of the so-called *narodnye izdanija,* which were mostly penny dreadfuls or religious chapbooks. To this end, authors strove for accessibility and so for the most part imitated genres they believed would appeal to the masses: folktales, folk epics (*byliny*),

short stories narrated as if told by a peasant or worker, and religious writings.

Most of these tracts were relatively short, but the various radical movements also produced some novels intended to inspire the educated classes (people like themselves) rather than the masses. The two most seminal of these have proved to be N. Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* (1863), written to inspire the idealist populists of the 1860s and 70s, and A. Stepnyak-Kravchinsky's *Andrey Kozhukhov* (1889), written to inspire the populists' successors, the revolutionary terrorists.

Generically, these novels were very different from the short, popularized tracts that the radicals also produced (their *narodnye izdanija*). Nevertheless, both novels and tracts drew on the same store of myths and symbols of revolutionary lore, and the three types of symbolic patterns that were also common to them should be mentioned here because they were later to play a major role in Bolshevik myth.

In the first of these symbolic patterns, the particular political movement being championed is directly or indirectly identified with a "family." Often, and especially in the case of movements influenced by utopian socialists, this "family" was to supplant members' natural families; their ties were to be redirected to this "higher" family.[1]

The second is the pattern in which a relatively naive person is brought to see the light by some emissary of the new enlightenment. The stages of the conversion process often structured an entire work of fiction, and the two actors in this process were usually identified explicitly as "mentor" and "disciple" (*učitel'* and *učenik*).[2]

Third, an almost ubiquitous element in radical fiction was some kind of martyrdom. Minimally, the revolutionary hero was expected to lead an ascetic life of extraordinary dedication and self-deprivation. There were many conventionalized ways of providing palpable evidence of this, such as the hero's working late into the night while ordinary mortals slept.[3] Ideally, however, the hero should make the supreme sacrifice of his life, and this event was commonly followed by a secularized version of the Christian death-and-transfiguration pattern: the hero's "resurrection" in the ongoing movement, often symbolized by one of his comrades picking up the fallen banner.[4]

This penchant for depicting martyrdom is related to the second feature common to both varieties of radical fiction, their religiosity. Scarcely a text can be found that is not rich in biblical and liturgical language and imagery. Many are even stylized along the lines of traditional religious genres (sermons, saints' lives, and religious songs). Whatever the genre ostensibly used, a heavy-handed didacticism and religiosity soon entered the narration; consequently most radical fiction (including even the pseudo-folk and simulated low style/oral) soon surrendered its generic identity to the language of rhetoric and the church.

Despite the martyrology and religiosity, nineteenth-century radical fiction never became what one could call hagiography or even secular hagiography. It was never sufficiently formalized, and its heroes never attained that essential timeless guise. They were too individualized for that; that is, the texts were too "novelistic." This can be sensed even in that most famous segment of all Russian revolutionary fiction, the life of the revolutionary superhero Rakhmetov in N. Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* Rakhmetov's life provides a good test case because it follows very closely the pattern of a popular Russian saint's life, *The Life of Alexsey, A Man of God* (earliest version C12).[5] In both texts an upper-class dandy undergoes a conversion, gives away his property, leaves his home, eschews worldly success and true love, dedicates himself to the faith, and uses incredible means of self-mortification to drive out temptations to waver in his resolve (Rakhmetov trains his will by lying on a bed of nails).

The practice of inserting a section of pseudo-hagiography was quite common in fiction of the late nineteenth century: consider the life of Father Zosima in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), which is very self-consciously hagiographic. Other varieties of medieval biography were also used in literature. For instance, the poet N. Nekrasov attempted to write a folk-epic hero (Savely the *bogatyr'*) into his long poem "The Red-nosed Frost" (1863). This trend must be seen as an attempt to appropriate the semantic overtones of the medieval text; authors hoped in this way to conjure up the lionhearted hero who helps his fellow men (a *bogatyr'*) or the truly dedicated champion of the faith (a saint).

When the saints' lives were inserted into fiction, the purity of the original form was never recaptured because of the tension between its aim of depicting a timeless hero and the novel's centrality of

idiosyncrasy and contingency. In the novel, at every point in the "saint"'s life his actions could equally well realize or violate the conventions of the *vita*. Dostoevsky essentially demonstrates this freedom at the end of Zosima's life, when Zosima's stinking corpse contravenes the formal expectations that, after death, the saint's body should exude an aura or occasion some miracle.

Rakhmetov's character and actions are open to change, however slight. The possibility that he will surprise us is reinforced by the playful and self-conscious narrative tone of the text. The reader senses the presence of a narrator who frequently interpolates his own jesting speculations on the reader's probable reactions and expectations of what is to follow. Moreover, Chernyshevsky leaves the end of Rakhmetov's life as "open-ended" as his narrative: Rakhmetov disappears without trace.

The various radical movements' essays in hagiography failed to take them far from contemporary fictional norms because they lacked that essential ingredient for epic genres—a completed historical world view. Merely to see the way forward as assured by following a particular revolutionary program is not to provide that *total*, unambiguous account of reality that makes possible, in protagonists, complete consonance between their individual identity and their social role. Without this, there could be considerable overlap between the two genres but never absolute correspondence.

Nineteenth-century radical fiction may have been different generically from Socialist Realism, but, paradoxically, its myths and imagery were the mainstay of official Soviet lore and hence of Socialist Realism. This paradox is only seeming, because there is a distinction between, on the one hand, isolated event and the meaning of that event in its isolated context and, on the other, the same event when put into the context of Socialist Realism's interdependent semantics and morphology.

This paradox is most strikingly caught in the case of *What Is to Be Done?* The life of Rakhmetov (and, to a lesser extent, that of Andrey Kozhukhov) was consistently cited by the founding fathers of the Soviet nation as the text that had most inspired them in their revolutionary work.[6] Every Soviet schoolchild has been brought up on Rakhmetov's life. Yet one is hard pressed to find any specific parallels between its formal features and those of a Socialist Realist novel.

The general impact of the nineteenth-century radical tradition on

Soviet culture was considerable, but only as single elements, not as a total system. Its influence can be felt even in the lives of the nation's leaders. When, for instance, Lenin is said to have been "simple like the truth" *(prost kak pravda)*, this is not just empty rhetoric, for Lenin in his extreme dedication seems to have felt role-bound to lead the austere life of the revolutionary and also be accessible to the common man. And when, as Solzhenitsyn shows graphically in the opening chapter of *The First Circle,* Stalin would stay up until all hours working on affairs of state, this may not have been a sign of madness or that "conscience robs him of his sleep," but an acting-out of the role of the revolutionary leader of radical myth.

Gorky's Mother

Most Soviet historians describe *Mother* as the novel that spawned the numberless Socialist Realist progeny.[7] This metaphor, though appropriate to the book's title, does not take into account *Mother*'s relationship to earlier revolutionary fiction. I prefer to use another, borrowed from Pushkin, who once described translators as the "post-horses of civilization." *Mother* was that post, or station, where Bolsheviks coming out of the old intelligentsia tradition were able to stop and take on fresh horses to bear them on into Socialist Realism itself. *Mother* provided a system for translating the clichés of tsarist radicals into the determining formulas of Bolshevism.

The plot of *Mother* fuses historical reality and revolutionary myth in a coherent political allegory. The novel describes an actual incident, a May Day demonstration that took place in the Volga town of Somov in 1902 and was broken up by the police. Those arrested insisted on conducting their own defense at the trial. This event heartened the Social Democratic (i.e., Marxist) party, for they took it as evidence of growing consciousness among workers. Gorky's attention was attracted to the incident; he spent some time with the defendants and their families and then wrote about one of their leaders, Pavel Zalomov (who appears in the novel as Pavel Vlasov), and his mother.[8]

The story has been idealized somewhat. Pavel Zalomov complained, for instance, that *his* mother was both more daring and more intelligent than the mother in the novel.[9] Also, if one compares the transcripts of the actual Somov trial with the trial speeches in *Mother,* one can see that Gorky made his Pavel much more politically conscious than Zalomov was.[10] In part these changes can be seen as adjustments made so that the story would fit the stock patterns of the preceding generation of revolutionary fiction. In order to create the conventional mentor/disciple pair, for instance, Pavel (the mentor) had to be more conscious than in reality, and his mother (the disciple), less. Additionally, as can be seen in the following plot outline, Gorky worked into the story such familiar radical symbols as the "family" of revolutionaries, the picking-up of the fallen banner, and martyrdom:

> Pavel Vlasov, born into an oppressed, working-class family, has a bitter drunkard of a father and a pious, submissive mother, who suffers endless beatings from her husband. Even as a child Pavel stands up to his father. A factory accident brings the father to an early grave, and the young Pavel has to go out to work. Initially he seems destined to repeat his father's bad habits (he starts to drink, etc.). But Pavel escapes this fate when he is attracted to a small group of underground socialists: he stops drinking and begins to dress neatly. Gradually, his mother becomes curious about Pavel's interests. He explains some of his new beliefs to her, and she is shocked by his sacrilege in presuming to go against God and tsar. Then she meets his comrades and is attracted to them as people. When Pavel is imprisoned, her love for him leads her to help his comrades in his absence. This begins her gradual transformation from illiterate and pious housewife to inspired radical activist. As she changes, so does her sense of family change from one comprising merely Pavel and herself to one embracing the entire revolutionary group. At a May Day demonstration Pavel bears the red banner and is arrested again. His mother picks up its remnants and carries them home. Pavel is sentenced to exile for his role as leader of the demonstration, but by then his mother has become a convinced and fearless revolutionary. The novel closes as she is being beaten to death for her beliefs, defiant to the end.[11]

Not all the discrepancies between historical reality and *Mother*'s version of the Somov affair derive from *earlier* revolutionary clichés. Some come from a stock of discernibly new conventions. For example, the historical Pavel, Pavel Zalomov, complained about Gorky's having killed off the mother at the end of the novel,

pointing out that his own mother had continued as a political activist well into her eighties.[12] In this instance Gorky's embellishment reflects changing times. Whereas earlier a martyr had normally been a male revolutionary leader, in recent fiction the vogue had favored political melodrama with beloved family members (very possibly females) as the sacrificial victims. Most radical authors of *Mother*'s times centered their plots around a particular family, selecting members of it to play "mentor" and "disciple" and ending the work with a mass demonstration at which a close relative would be killed.[13]

One such contemporary novel, A. Mashitsky's *In the Fire* (1904), seems to anticipate the plot of Gorky's *Mother* almost exactly: a drunk worker is killed in a factory mishap, his pious wife is converted to the revolutionary cause by her son, named Pavel. The son carries the banner at a May Day demonstration. His mother is beaten to death by the police, but the novel closes on an optimistic note: the revolution goes on.[14] It is generally assumed that Gorky did not know *In the Fire* at the time he was writing *Mother*.[15] Even if he did not have the benefit of its example, however, there were enough other works with similar plots for it not to be surprising that, in treating the Somov affair in fiction, he chose to focus on a mother and son rather than on the revolutionary group itself or just one revolutionary, that he charted the mother's gradual conversion through her son, and that he embellished her actual biography with a premature, martyr's death.

In comparing the conventions of revolutionary fiction from Gorky's time with earlier examples from the nineteenth century, one is struck by how much more coherently the various elements of the older radical tradition were now organized. The old standard motifs ("family," "mentor"/"disciple," and "martyr") all became part of one narrative strand in works like *In the Fire*. With *Mother* this streamlining process went even further, and a single myth emerged. This development made possible the single master plot of Socialist Realism, which patterns the various motifs into one sequence.

This process was not just a matter of depicting with ever greater skill the same features in the same landscape, for *Mother* represents a radical *generic* departure from the sort of fiction written before (including *In the Fire*) in the service of the cause. That revolutionary

fiction had been "novelistic"; with *Mother*, a new variety of secular hagiography was introduced.

Several biographical reasons make it almost logical that Gorky would cast his revolutionary fiction as a form of secular hagiography. At the time he wrote *Mother*, for instance, he was already gravitating toward the position he articulated in 1907, when he espoused the Bolshevik heresy known as "God-building."[16] The adherents of God-building believed that in communism man would attain such heights of human development that he would become as God. And so, to Gorky, Bolshevism was *literally*, and not just functionally, a secular substitute for religion.

Mother's heroes seem to share Gorky's views, for when Pavel and a revolutionary friend explain their new beliefs to Pavel's mother, they say, "We have to change our god," for in truth man is like god.[17] And throughout the novel Gorky has used his ingenuity to provide secular substitutes for most of the major symbols and institutions of Christianity.

Besides Gorky's attraction to the God-building heresy, he came to consciousness surrounded by an environment drenched in Russian iconology. Among the many jobs he had in his youth was one in an icon factory. In his childhood his grandfather had seen to it that he had a thorough grounding in the saints' lives, and Gorky even learned by heart the particular saint's life on which Chernyshevsky seems to have patterned Rakhmetov's biography, *The Life of Aleksey, A Man of God*.[18] But despite all this, the plot of *Mother* contains very few identifiable parallels with the formulaic stages of the saint's life.

Nevertheless, *Mother* was more hagiographic than Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* or, indeed, than any of the quasi-religious writing that had emerged thus far out of the various Russian revolutionary movements. While Chernyshevsky used hagiographic patterns to create something superficially like a saint's life, which served as a substitute, Gorky broke ground for a new and distinctive Bolshevik tradition of secular hagiography, which bore less surface resemblance to the old tradition but was closer to it on a deeper level.

What has converted *Mother* from an idealized biography to a ritualized one is the pervasive presence of the Bolshevik account of history. One can sense the axial role played by the spontaneity/consciousness dialectic in both character and plot. This is not to

make claims for the novel's genesis. It need not follow that *Mother* was consciously written by a Bolshevik to illustrate the dialectic. After 1907 *Mother* became a more or less official Bolshevik tract. Thus, whether or not Gorky was much of a Party man at the time he wrote it (a moot point),[19] thereafter—to reinvoke Borges' term used in the last chapter—the distinctive patterns of *Mother* could be "perceived" as encoded representations of the Bolshevik model for historical development.

A good way to get at the differences between *Mother* and earlier fiction would be to compare it with two comparable texts, Stepnyak-Kravchinsky's *Andrey Kozhukhov* and the Rakhmetov biography in Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* The three texts are comparable because in each a young male hero (Pavel Vlasov, Andrey Kozhukhov, and Rakhmetov, respectively) becomes the true revolutionary. What differs in each case is *how* he becomes the true revolutionary, and these differences catch important distinctions between the text types.

In both *Andrey Kozhukhov* and Rakhmetov's life the relationship between the hero's inner and outer selves is a crucial factor in his progress. *Andrey Kozhukhov,* for instance, stresses the contrast between the two. Andrey is a man of seething passions, of uncontrollable emotions and violent jealousy, but, by supreme efforts on his part, he is able to appear outwardly calm, strong, and dedicated to the cause. In Rakhmetov's case the relationship between the inner and outer man is not so much one of conflict and discrepancy; rather, it is from the inner self that the outer gains its power. Rakhmetov's conversion or "rebirth" is effected by dint of sheer will and "working on himself."[20]

Chernyshevsky shows the before and after of Rakhmetov as he undergoes his conversion, but Gorky keeps the personality of Pavel fairly consistent throughout. Pavel remains to the end that strong and fearless character the reader first saw when Pavel, at the age of fourteen, forbade his father to lay a hand on him. He did change, first when he went to work and began to drink, and then again when he was converted, but Gorky does not *show* his hero during that time; he gives only sketchy reports of his hero's early activities. Gorky presents a full portrait of Pavel only after his conversion, and so the picture we get of him remains fairly stable.

Pavel's mother is not so static a figure. Indeed, the novel is ostensibly about her development. In this sense *Mother* might be called a *Bildungsroman,* with the mother as the one being "formed." But, unlike a *Bildungsroman* hero, her final incarnation has already been determined when she begins her progress to "consciousness." She merely assumes in her turn the likeness her son had assumed before her (but modified in her case by the essential "motherliness" she retains to the end and by her relative lack of education).

Rakhmetov and Andrey Kozhuknov *make themselves,* whereas Pavel and his mother are inspired by others to *assume their likeness;* their development is not, strictly speaking, one of character, for their inner selves play no significant role in it. The strength of the outer self is derived from *extrinsic* factors. In part it is due to the instruction and example of others, but these amount to no more than a ritual conferral of "consciousness." The dialectic of passion and reason that in earlier novels was played out in terms of divided selves has in *Mother* been transformed into an impersonal dialectic (between "spontaneity" and "consciousness") in which "characters" are merely a symbolic medium.

The crucial differences between the two varieties of revolutionary biography do not derive just from the fact that the more "novelistic" hero effects changes in himself by willpower and that his outer self is his own achievement. Nor do they derive even from the fact that the heroes of *Mother* are not in danger of becoming passion's slaves. The differences are based rather on the extraordinary degree to which the depiction of heroes in *Mother* is depersonalized.

This depersonalization has left its mark on the actual mechanics of character depiction. In *Mother* one can detect a shift to greater abstraction as compared with earlier revolutionary fiction. Two main techniques are used to draw the positive heroes in *Mother.* One is a technique also commonly used in earlier radical fiction: symbolization of physical features. The furrowed brow or pinched face, for instance, are signs of the revolutionary's dedication and sacrifice. The other technique is the use of code words, or epithets: a select group of adjectives that indicate moral political qualities and/or corresponding nouns or adverbs (e.g. *ser'ëznyj,* "serious").

Such epithets are widely used to describe positive heroes both in earlier revolutionary fiction and in *Mother,* but there is a crucial

difference in the function they perform in the two types of text. In revolutionary fiction they are essentially just the tersest of the various symbolic attributes that make up the roster of clichés. In *Mother,* on the other hand, the revolutionaries' portraits are so depersonalized that they are reduced almost completely to functions of their roles, which are themselves ideologically determined. As a result, the epithets (which are used much more frequently than in the early revolutionary fiction) do not simply constitute a pool of indiscriminate associations, available to be deployed. Instead, they form a system. They stand for ideas, already covered at greater length in theoretical writings, which they represent in more economical form. They have ceased to be really descriptive and have become cryptological.

This mode of sketching the positive hero by means of sparse, formulaic details is reminiscent of the way the saint or ideal prince was depicted in medieval texts. The medieval scribe usually limited his written portraits to a catalogue of virtues plus an account of the subject's face and general mien. The motifs used were not only conventionalized but were restricted to a very select number. These motifs were themselves geared to showing the subject in a generalized, timeless guise—as he should be. As is frequently pointed out, his aspect was eminently comparable to that of a saint or prince on an icon.[21] In fact, passages describing a saint or prince are often called "word icons."

As mentioned earlier, the similarities between the portrait of the positive hero in medieval texts (the saint or prince) and in *Mother* extend beyond the techniques employed and include, to a significant degree, the actual clichés used. The Soviet medievalist D. S. Likhachev cites a portrait of the Ryazan prince as a prototype, and I will use it here as a source of examples (the passage is actually from a chronicle of the thirteenth or fourteenth century).

Before I introduce the prince's portrait, some qualifications must be made. One obvious difference between the portrait of the medieval prince and that of the modern revolutionary hero is that the former served Christ while the latter serves the revolution. A second one lies in the prince's *joi de vivre* as compared with the revolutionary's asceticism. This asceticism and the revolutionary's lust for martyrdom are in fact reminiscent of medieval saintly conventions, but medieval texts did not distinguish absolutely between civic and religious virtue; saints often exemplified civic virtues and princes saintlike virtue. Thus the revolutionary hero and Pavel could best be compared with a saintlike version of the medieval prince. A revised version of the Ryazan prince's portrait, one pruned of the most clearly inapplicable attributes, would read:

> Loving Christ [cf. revolution], loving toward his brothers, fair of face, with shining [*svetly*] eyes, and a stern [*grozny*] countenance, extraordinarily brave, good-natured [alternative translations of this epithet—*serdcem legky*—include "open" and "simple" in the positive sense], good [*laskovy*] to his men [actually, "retainers"], majestic, strong in mind, stands for truth, keeps himself pure in body and soul.[22]

The roster of clichés used for the positive hero of nineteenth-century radical fiction, of *Mother,* and, ultimately, of Socialist Realism itself is amazingly similar to the ones in this abbreviated list.

One suspects that initially, in the nineteenth century, the saints' *vitae* were spectral presences guiding revolutionary writers in their choice of epithets. This can be sensed in the following examples of revolutionary portraits taken from both novels and chapbooks. Note that in all of the examples of revolutionary portraits, I have supplied in brackets the Russian words I regard as epithets and have consistently given the same English translation for each epithet in order to indicate recurrence, regardless of how stilted the resulting translation might seem.

The first example comes from *What Is to Be Done?* Significantly, Chernyshevsky does not provide us with a portrait of Rakhmetov; the description below is of another revolutionary, Lopukhov.

> With a proud [*gordyj*] and brave [*smelyj*] look. "He's not bad looking [she thinks] and must be very goodly [*dobr*] but a bit too serious [*ser'ëzen*]." . . . It's a long time since anyone has led such a stern [*stroguju*] life.[23]

Compare this with the description of a mentor, from a populist tract of 1874:

> His large, dark brown eyes had a fine look, which was brave [*smelyj*] and open [*otkrytyj*].[24]

Finally, in a pseudo-folktale, a simple peasant woman describes her mentor:

The more I looked at him, the more my heart was drawn to him. I have never seen a face more goodly [*dobroe*] and intelligent [*umnoe*]. His brown eyes shone [*svetilis'*] with light and were full of intelligence [*uma*] and goodliness [*dobroty*] . . . [he is] loving [*laskovo*] and calm [*spokoen*].[25]

In these quotations a typical nexus of attributes emerges: the hero is good-looking, serious, stern and calm, proud and brave, with a light in the eyes, yet also open and full of an infectious human warmth and of intelligence and goodness. These attributes bear comparison with the following, exemplified by the Ryazan prince: fair of face, stern, majestic (proud equals majestic minus the role of potentate), brave, open (as one of the alternative meanings of "good-natured"), with shining eyes, good to others, strong in mind. Incidentally, nineteenth-century revolutionaries—and Pavel Vlasov—also "kept themselves pure in body and soul" and axiomatically "stood for truth." In addition to the general correspondences of the epithets, in two cases the same epithet was used: "shining eyes" (*svetlyj*) and "loving" (*laskovyj*), in the sense of a loving father.

There are also differences. The epithets are, for instance, deployed more randomly. Also, the revolutionary hero is "serious" and "calm," qualities the prince did not have explicitly. These epithets are of course signs of the hero's revolutionary dedication, but they also mark an important shift that occurred in the modern period, a shift in the way characterization is conceived. They indicate something about the relationship of the inner man to either his outer self or action: "serious" tells us something about his attitude to the cause, and "calm" something about how he has mastered his inner self.

The roster of epithets used for Pavel in *Mother* is, generally speaking, closer to those of revolutionary fiction than to hagiography. This can be appreciated from the following representative sample of passages describing Pavel after his conversion to the revolutionary cause.

[He has become] simpler [*prošče*] and gentler [*mjagče*].

[His mother thinks to herself:] My he's stern [*strog*].

[Pavel explains his beliefs to her:] Without looking at her, he started talking sternly [*strogo*]; for some reason . . . he looked at her and answered softly and calmly [*spokojno*]. . . . His eyes glowed with determination [*uprjamo*].

Her son's eyes shone attractively and brightly [*svetlo*].

. . .[his] swarthy, determined [*uprjamoe*] and stern [*strogoe*] face.

His calmness [*spokojstvie*], his gentle [*mjagkij*] voice and the simplicity [or "openness": *prostota*] of his face gladdened the mother's heart.

He said seriously [*ser'ëzno*].[26]

This selection from *Mother* provides considerable overlap with the first group, from revolutionary fiction. Some of the epithets are the same—"loving," "calm," "stern," "serious," and "with shining eyes"—and some are near equivalents, such as "determined" for "brave" ("determined" was actually commonly found in nineteenth-century radical texts) and, possibly, "simple" for "open." There are also some differences. For instance, Pavel is not described as "intelligent." The fact that he is not so described gets at a basic difference between the function of these epithets in *Mother* as compared with earlier revolutionary fiction. No matter how conventionalized "intelligent" may have been, it suggests a degree of individuation that is not present in hagiography.

Every epithet used in *Mother* also has to have a meaning in terms of the Bolshevik model for historical development. In consequence, even when the *same* epithet is used in both text types, this sameness is illusory, for in the different context it must have a different meaning. By the time *Mother* was written, "calm," for instance, had become such a highly charged word that it could not be used casually: *only* if the hero was politically "conscious" could he be called "calm"; in fact the word's primary function was to indicate that this was so.

The epithets in *Mother* are not only more abstract; they are also more systematized. If we delete "shining eyes," a traditional sign of grace, which in *Mother* is used more or less as the sign of Pavel's positivity, we find that most of the remaining epithets fall naturally into two groups: on the one hand, there are signs indicating Pavel's dedication and discipline, such as "serious," "stern," and "de-

termined," and, on the other, there are signs indicating his human warmth, such as "gentle," "simple," and "loving." This dichotomy is not merely latent; it is quite often brought out in the text when Pavel is said to change his expression from one involving a combination of epithets from the first group to one involving some combination of epithets from the second. The following quotations provide examples:

> . . . his blue eyes, which were always serious [*ser'eznye*] and stern [*strogie*], now burned so gently [*mjagko*] and lovingly [*laskovo*].
>
> His stern eyes shone more gently, and his voice sounded more loving [*laskovo*], and he became more simple [*prošče*] altogether.[27]

This dichotomy translates the spontaneity/consciousness opposition into patterns formed by systematizing the epithets. This is not to say that the dialectical opposition is directly translated into the dichotomy. It is not the case that the group "serious," "stern," and "determined" means "conscious," whereas the group "simple," "gentle," and "loving" means "spontaneous." Rather, the two clusters of epithets represent alternative external guises, which are not in conflict. This is because Pavel is the incarnation of higher-order, Bolshevik "consciousness," one in which the dialectical tension between "spontaneity" and "consciousness" (or tension between individual interests and the collective good) has been resolved in a state where "consciousness" prevails and is nevertheless in harmony with "spontaneity." In Pavel there is a dichotomy between two contrasting (but not conflicting) aspects of the one higher-order "consciousness"; although he is completely dedicated to the interests of the collective, he has not lost his capacity for human interaction.

The primary sign of Pavel's consciousness is the epithet "calm." As can be sensed in the following two quotations (also cited earlier), "calm" can be used in combination with epithets from either side of the dichotomy:

> Pavel talked sternly . . . he . . . answered . . . calmly. . . . His eyes glowed with determination.
>
> His calmness, his gentle voice, and the simplicity of his face gladdened his mother's heart.

That it can be so used is of course due to the fact that "consciousness" must be present in both of the hero's two guises. Historically, however, "calm" has indicated the hero's triumph in transcending his turbulent inner self to appear externally calm.[28] In *Mother,* interiority is not a significant element, and the inner/outer split has been transformed into a much milder, and totally external, *contrast:* the "loving"/"stern" dichotomy. At the same time, thanks to its prehistory, the epithet "calm" still carries some of the aura of triumph over dark, inner forces.

The other epithets used for Pavel are also signs of his "consciousness" first and foremost, although at the same time they retain some of their customary meanings and some of the more metaphorical meanings they had acquired in the nineteenth-century revolutionary texts. The narrator could not, for instance, say that Pavel looked "stern," when it was not feasible that he should look "stern." Thus one can trace, over time, a gradual process of abstraction in the meanings of the clichés and of accretion of new layers of meaning.

The semantic prehistory of the patterns of verbal symbols found in *Mother* does not begin with the nineteenth-century radical texts. The epithets used in characterizing medieval stereotypes probably cast their semantic shadows over Pavel's portrait, enhancing his role as a quasi-religious figure who stands firm in the faith. This possibility is particularly present in that characteristic dichotomy in Pavel's portrait, the stern/loving opposition. This dichotomy corresponds to the old dual image of the prince (and later the tsar) as a figure both stern (or statesmanlike) and loving (or paternal), which is now virtually a commonplace in Western conceptions of traditional Russian popular attitudes to their heads of state.[29] One can see this dualism reflected in the above example of the typical prince, who is said to be loving, generous, hospitable, and good-natured, but also stern and majestic. Since Pavel, a Bolshevik revolutionary, was both an emblem of "consciousness" and a leader of the masses, his portrait conflates the traditional Russian sense of the authority figure with that of an incarnation of Bolshevik virtue. The traditional leader image left its mark on the depiction of "consciousness," providing yet another instance of a general dynamic to be followed in this book: how basic Marxist concepts, once transplanted in Russian soil, tended to be shaped by native habits of mind.

Pavel's portrait is not unique in the novel: it is depersonalized and is in large measure a function of his political (rather than individual) identity. *All* "conscious" revolutionaries in *Mother,* qua "conscious" revolutionaries, are given identical and highly formalized portraits. Gorky goes to some pains to differentiate their physical appearance, but only in such minor externals as "blue eyes" and "a swarthy complexion" (in the case of Pavel). There are no external signs indicating a distinctive inner self.

Mother is thus more austere in its characterization, more economical in its expression, than its forebears in revolutionary fiction were or even many of those short pieces in the populists' chapbooks. Where earlier one might find prolix character description or homily, now one most often found terse verbal symbols involving several layers of meaning.

In the plot of *Mother* there is also a high degree of abstraction and ritualization. This is quite striking in the novel's martyrological patterns.

Martyrdom, a recurrent motif in *Mother,* was a commonplace of earlier radical fiction and lore. From at least Turgenev's Insarov in *On the Eve* (1860), virtually all revolutionary novels ended with the hero dying of tuberculosis, moldering in prison or exile, or expiring from a mortal wound inflicted by the revolution's oppressors (even the tuberculosis victim was a martyr, for he had given his health to the cause). But, no matter how myth-inspired this convention was in committed literature, its execution was novelistic in the sense that the martyrdom was the hero's individual feat, that supreme moment when he rose above his worldly ties, silenced the storms within, and stood, fearless, to confront his fate. When, for instance, Andrey Kozhukhov made an unsuccessful assassination attempt on the tsar, knowing that he would in all probability be executed and never see his true love again, he might just as well have echoed Darnley's words from *A Tale of Two Cities:* "It is a far, far better thing I do. . . ."

The "conscious" heroes of *Mother,* by contrast, always wear the mask of one who has transcended selfhood, and their acts of self-abnegation are consonant with, and even logical for, their static identity. The mother, for instance, is actually less in revolutionary virtue than her son, but she outdoes him in martyrdom in the sense that she pays the supreme sacrifice (her life). Yet this sacrifice does not elevate her above the others: hers is essentially not an individual

act of sacrifice in the name of the many (as is Andrey Kozhukhov's) but one that might equally well have been performed by any one of the characters who embody "consciousness." To use Propp's terms, then, the action is a function. The mother's having performed it enhances not just her image but the image of all the others in the novel who exemplify "consciousness."

The structure of *Mother* is comparable with that of a saint's life in that it is teleological: in *Mother* the hero's goal is a state of grace (albeit revolutionary rather than religious) enhanced by sacrifice, and all the stages of the novel's plot are subordinated to that end. Gorky wrote this pattern into a fictionalized version of an actual uprising by ill-educated workers in a minor provincial industrial town in early twentieth-century Russia. But in the novel neither the setting nor the local identities of the protagonists are important (except that they are proletarian), for Gorky has given them a timeless guise, like that of the saints and princes in medieval icons and manuscripts.

The plot of *Mother* represents a departure from medieval hagiography in that it uses twinning: not just one protagonist reaches out toward grace, but two. But the two are not equal, for mother and son are to each other as disciple and mentor. Although that particular relationship was common, even explicit, in revolutionary fiction, in earlier texts the disciple did not often, as in *Mother,* attain such complete revolutionary consciousness that he could then play mentor for others. In *Mother* the disciple advances so far because this enables her life to provide an allegorical account of one stage in the working-through of history's great dialectic toward its ultimate resolution in Communism.

The plot formula Gorky worked out for *Mother* (i.e., the disciple acquires the likeness of the mentor and hence acquires "consciousness") proved so efficient for structuring any novel as a parable of historical progress that it became the basis for Socialist Realism's master plot. Or, at any rate, it was a beginning: most fully fledged Socialist Realist novels have a dual plot, combining a version of *Mother*'s plot—what I call the "road to consciousness" (or to greater "consciousness") plot—plus an account of how some state-assigned task was fulfilled.

After *Mother* emerged from comparative obscurity to be reinstated as an exemplar in the early thirties, many of the patterns used in it became hallmarks of Socialist Realist fiction. These in-

clude the "road to consciousness" plot formula and the positive-hero character type. Additionally, almost the same set of attributes that indicate "consciousness" in *Mother* became the icon of "consciousness" in the Stalinist novel. The formulaic epithets for the positive hero constitute the core of the Socialist Realist novel's "system of signs," consisting in part of code words ("calm") and in part of symbolic traits and gestures (the hero's pinched face or his picking-up the banner of a fallen comrade).

The post horses that *Mother* provided for Bolshevik literature were to take it a long way, but they could not deliver it to Socialist Realism in its most developed form. When Gorky wrote the novel in 1906, he could not have been expected to anticipate all the changes Bolshevik culture and ideology would undergo in the almost thirty years intervening between *Mother* and the time the canon was instituted. By comparison with Socialist Realist novels of the Stalin period, therefore, *Mother* seems much purer, simpler, and even quainter.

A striking example of change would be the various transformations that Gorky's plot formula had to undergo. They occurred partly because, heartwarming though the tale of a simple old mother rising to consciousness might be, it was not very usable or appropriate for a Soviet literature that had become the repository of official myths about the status quo. Most commonly in Soviet fiction it was an aspiring member of the vanguard who displaced the mother as "disciple"; humility and ignorance were not appropriate traits for him.

The greatest difference between the master plot as it began in *Mother* and its later expression in a Soviet Socialist Realist classic derives from Gorky's narrow sense of revolution and "consciousness." For him revolutionary "consciousness" is almost synonymous with enlightenment (as was the original German word for "consciousness," *Bewusstsein*). In fact, in several sections of the novel, Gorky effectively warns his readers of the dangers of uprisings by ill-educated peasants and of the urgency of educating them, to avert disaster.[30] For many, however, the primary attraction of revolution had been energy and action rather than "light." In Marxism, action is regarded as a greater ingredient in historical change than ideas.

Therefore, the static, icon-like image of the revolutionary in

Mother was, in later Socialist Realist novels, complemented with a dynamic hero who had a different literary pedigree and who gave the novel color and suspense. It was he who supplanted the little old mother of Gorky's novel as "disciple," and the main official model for him was Gleb Chumalov, the hero of Gladkov's novel *Cement*.

The Soviet Novel

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KATERINA CLARK

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