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ANTI-STALINISM AND THE LIBERAL TREND IN SOVIET LITERATURE

SEVERAL WESTERN COMMENTATORS have concluded, on mature reflection, that the literature produced during 1956—the “year of protest”—did not, as had been suggested by some observers, mark a significant turning-point in Soviet literary history. As early as 1957 Gleb Struve said outright that the importance of the protest literature had been exaggerated and that in the long run the rehabilitation of those writers of the 1920s who had become “unpersons” under Stalin, many of whom were executed or had died in prison, held out more hope for the future of Russian literature.¹ More recently George Gibian has written:

During the four years following Stalin’s death, in works like Dudintsev’s *Not By Bread Alone* (1956), the stereotypes of approved Soviet fiction were inverted by turning high officials into villains, lonely wolves into heroes . . . as in orthodox socialist realism, some characters were given unqualified moral approval, others reprobation, . . . the basic criterion was still that of the greatest usefulness to the ‘collective’ and ‘future generations’.²

Indeed, this is true. With very few exceptions, including perhaps Daniil Granin’s short story “An Opinion of One’s Own”,³ but not his earlier novel *Those Who Seek*,⁴ the stories, novels and verse produced during the “thaw” do not amount to much as literature. Sometimes the pedestrianism of the effects sought by the writers is embarrassing. One of the most widely quoted stories written in 1956 is “The Levers” by Alexander Yashin.⁵ A group of men are preparing for a meeting at a collective farm; before the meeting begins they behave quite naturally and criticize with the utmost frankness what they think is wrong in the farm’s operations. Yet as soon as the meeting begins officially they close up, become “levers” instead of ordinary people. At the end of the meeting young people rush in wanting to listen to the radio:

Into the hut burst the cool air from the street. The flame in the lamp revived, stools were moved around, windows opened.

"You sure have smoke in here!" the girls clamored . . .

The radio, which had been turned on, suddenly spoke out loud and clear. Reports on the preparation for the Twentieth Party Congress were being broadcast. Everyone listened to this message. . . .

"Let's see now what the Congress will say!" they repeated from time to time. And again these were plain, warm, straight-forward people—people, and not levers.⁶

It is obvious that fresh winds of change are blowing through the Soviet Union, and that in some mystical way the Party is in control of the winds' direction and velocity. One recalls that it was at the XX Party Congress, held in February, 1956, that Nikita Khrushchev delivered his famous "secret speech" condemning Stalin and the Stalinist terror. Since that time the XX Party Congress has been mentioned time and time again as a catalyst which has changed Soviet life fundamentally for the better, of course. It may be that the ponderous symbolism of Yashin's story is a Stalinist survival, for, like a number of the bold authors of this period, Yashin had been much in favour during Stalin's last years: he was awarded a Stalin Prize in 1949 for a "kolkhoz" poem.

Max Hayward's point about what he calls "literary zubatovism" is certainly well taken.⁷ He suggests that from the time of Stalin's death until the "freeze" of 1957 several of the seemingly "protest" or liberal works were written by politically reliable writers, who had been advised or encouraged by the Party hierarchy to produce such works in order to take some of the wind out of the sails of the genuine liberals. Such "zubatovist" works, the Party hoped, might act as safety valves which it could open or close at will, letting off only that amount of liberal steam that seemed necessary and advisable. It has been suggested that Ilya Ehrenburg received word from on high that he might begin defrosting Soviet literature, or that at least he got wind of the fact that the new leaders were eager to achieve public acclaim by revealing and condemning the horrors of Stalin's rule. Whether this is so or not, the Party oligarchs have themselves often taken the lead in striking back at their former master and all his evil ways.

It is often hard to say just which works are "zubatovist" and which are the product of genuine feeling; probably many of them are a compound of sincerity and worldly wisdom. It would certainly not be wise to lump all the protest literature together and suggest that it was totally inspired by the Party leadership. It was natural enough that many Russians, in particular those at the centre of things, members of the artistic and political intelligentsia, should have breathed a sigh of relief at Stalin's death, and pressed for more humanity and warmth in human relations,

a more relaxed atmosphere, less back-biting and suspicion, after so many years of cringing and the constant fear of another mass purge with those sudden early-morning visits from the secret police. So one sees the Party both leading and being led; it has evidently been responding to a desire of the new Soviet intelligentsia for an easing of pressure.⁸ The literary spokesmen of the Party have condemned what they call the "conflictlessness" of post-war Stalinist literature, and also the attempt to "varnish reality". Writers have been, and are still, called upon to depict and of course condemn the "negative aspects" of Soviet life, yet one often gets the impression that what the writers are supposed to attack are no more than "Stalinist survivals", which have taken the place of the "bourgeois survivals" of the 1920s and 1930s. It is always carefully pointed out that the writers must attack and satirize in a positive and ultimately optimistic way—hence the appearance of that peculiar Soviet genre, the optimistic tragedy. While it has relaxed its hold on literature and allowed the treatment of formerly forbidden themes since the "freeze" of 1957-58, the Party has not shown any readiness to change its basic view of literature as a tool to be used for social and political ends. Furthermore, like all good Marxists, they are well aware of the power of the written word; in fact Russians have long made something of a fetish of the "evil word": they are pathological burners of "bad" books. One recalls that Marx placed great emphasis on the importance of such factors as the press and education, during the middle period of capitalism, Marx's fourth epoch, when the general public was lulled into the belief that all is well in society and the bourgeois leaders were able to hold on to power with a minimum of force and repression.

By early 1957 the Party leaders must have felt that they had raised the lid of Pandora's box. After the Poznan riots and the revolution in Hungary there was growing restlessness at home. A collection of verse and prose called *Literary Moscow* suddenly appeared, having been brought together and published with quite unusual speed.⁹ Some of the pieces clearly struck below the belt as far as the Party was concerned, and did not limit themselves to attacks on Stalinist survivals. The authorities were alarmed and counter-attacked at once, condemning "revisionism" in any form. Khrushchev won his conclusive victory over the "anti-party group" in the summer of 1957, and it soon seemed that Soviet literary life was sinking back to where it had been under Stalin.

But there were still some encouraging signs. Konstantin Paustovsky, an older writer and one of the editors of the collection *Literary Moscow*, refused to recant. Many of the genuinely liberal writers were hounded into silence, but nothing serious happened to them; they preferred to stay silent rather than toe the line.

In fact, the Party literary spokesmen accused them of a "conspiracy of silence". Ilya Ehrenburg, who has always been an accurate political weather-vane—indeed, he has been more than accurate, he has been prophetic, frequently changing direction even before the wind has—this time continued to point in the same direction. In an essay on Stendhal published in 1957 Ehrenburg wrote: "For me, the lesson of Stendhal consists first and foremost in the exceptional truthfulness of his books"; and also "tendentiousness does not harm a work of art if it is the product of genuine passion and goes hand in hand with the artist's inner freedom".¹⁰ In order to make his point quite clear, he quotes Stendhal himself: "Even if a king is an angel, his government destroys art: not by banning a picture on account of its subject, but by breaking the artists' souls."

At the end of the Third Soviet Writers' Congress, held in May, 1959, Khrushchev surprised everyone by saying that he found little time to do any reading and that it was up to the writers to settle their own affairs among themselves "in a comradely way". This statement appeared to leave the field open for a free and unhindered argument between the hard-line critics and writers, who say that literature must serve social ends and obey the laws of Socialist Realism, and the soft-line critics and writers, who say that literature must have literary quality and who attempt to generalize the prescriptions of Socialist Realism so as to weaken their effect, without attacking them openly.

It is difficult to know exactly what Khrushchev has in mind and what he hopes to achieve by allowing such a free discussion. One recalls that the Party has encouraged attacks on Stalinism, on the "bad old days", to which are opposed the happier present. Recently the Party has been employing more of a kid-glove, donkey-and-carrot approach, although it can always turn the screw again at any time it wishes. It is of course unlikely that Khrushchev would wish to return to the Stalinist terror, first of all because he has condemned Stalin's use of terror as quite unnecessary now that there is no longer any fear of a bourgeois counter-revolution in the Soviet Union, and secondly because he has been building up his own power by condemning Stalinists, removing potential rivals, and enhancing his own prestige. It is important to remember, then, that the withdrawal of the Party from the arena of literary politics does not represent a true liberalizing trend so much as a change of direction of Communist Party policy. In literature, as in politics and economics, the Party has changed its tack. As John A. Armstrong says, "Tactics may alter but, as recent Soviet statements have repeatedly stressed, 'peaceful co-existence' does not mean the abandonment of the drive for world Communism—only the application of different techniques".¹² In the very same way, the Party has been applying

different techniques to literature, feeling that it can get better returns for its money than it has in the past.

The genuine liberals are certainly quite well aware of this policy. Most of them have taken part willingly in the officially inspired liberal trend—the opening up of themes, criticism of Stalinist excesses and of the rampant Soviet bureaucracy. They have been quick to pick up the Party-promoted theme of “humanism”. A “Moral Codex” was published with a great fanfare in 1961: the Party propaganda machine went into high gear. It lists twelve rather Biblical virtues which the “builder of Communism” is supposed to possess. The earlier revolutionary virtues of toughness and a well-developed class consciousness have been replaced by those of kindness, honesty, and a willingness to help others. The liberals have welcomed this change and have urged more human understanding in Soviet life. They evidently hope that they may be able to bring about a creeping liberalism by going along with the new Party attitude towards literature.

Last autumn the two literary events that attracted most comment in the Western press were the publication of a poem, “Stalin’s Heirs”, by the young writer Yevtushenko in *Pravda* on October 21, and the appearance in the November issue of the leading monthly *Novy mir* of a short novel called *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, written by a high-school mathematics teacher.¹⁸ In his poem Yevtushenko asks the government to treble the guard around Stalin’s grave “lest Stalin rise up, and with him—the past”. By the past he means “forgetfulness of the people’s welfare, slander, and the arrest of the innocent”. He fears Stalin’s heirs: “We have removed Stalin from the Mausoleum, but how are we to remove Stalin from Stalin’s heirs?” In *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* we find a vivid description of life in a concentration camp in Siberia two years before the death of Stalin.

The publication of such works would have been unthinkable in the years immediately following the death of Stalin, and it is tempting at first sight to regard them as an indication of a growing freedom of expression in the Soviet Union. Such a conclusion would be quite unjustified. Yevtushenko’s poem was published in *Pravda*, which shows at once that it says precisely what the Party leadership wanted said. It is rumoured that “Stalin’s Heirs” was written last spring and that, although it had been very popular at poetry readings, Yevtushenko could not get it published. Its appearance in October coincided with Khrushchev’s renewed campaign against Stalinist hard-line critics abroad. Significantly, we find Yevtushenko saying in the poem that he seems to see a telephone in Stalin’s tomb: “Stalin is giving his instructions to Enver Hoxha”, and the poem also contains the line: “The Party

has commanded me to be on my guard". "Stalin's Heirs" is an example of court or troubadour literature. This is not to say that Yevtushenko wrote it to order, but simply that the Soviet government is using his talent as a tool of propaganda in the Sino-Soviet cold war.

The wretched and brutal existence of prisoners in a concentration camp is revealed for the first time in Soviet literature in Solzhenitsyn's *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. But this is by no means a bolt from the blue: it is the culmination of a theme which was introduced into literature as long ago as 1956. The existence of such camps and the fact that innocent victims spent many years in them was of course one of the revelations in Khrushchev's "secret speech" of February, 1956. In April of that year the second part of Ilya Ehrenburg's *The Thaw* came out;¹⁴ it had been due to appear in February, but its publication was delayed, presumably so that it could be revised to meet the requirements of the censor. In this second part one of the characters is a former professor named Vyrubin who has just returned from spending seventeen years in Siberia. Much to the surprise of the people he meets, he is quite cheerful and declares that he and his fellow prisoners never lost hope; they were all sure that justice would triumph in the end! This theme of the returned political prisoner has cropped up again and again.¹⁵ At times we are shown how haggard the men look, but we rarely get a chance to overhear their thoughts, and we never see the inside of a prison camp itself. Often young people are horrified and ashamed to learn that such things used to happen, and they are determined that this "will never happen again". A returning political prisoner, who has spent twenty-two years in Siberia since being arrested as a young man in 1937 (the height of the Great Purge), is one of the chief characters in Victor Nekrasov's novel *Kira Georgievna*.¹⁶ We hear very little of what actually happened to the prisoner in Siberia, although we are told that he tells his family his story. When his sister suggests that he write about his experiences, he merely smiles.

Very well then, the reader may argue, now we have been shown the inside of a concentration camp—isn't this a sign of a liberalizing trend? Yes, it is, insofar as writers have been allowed to develop this theme and former brutality and injustice have been revealed and condemned. But the fact remains that this theme has been handed down from on high; it has not been developed independently, and the stages in its development have been carefully watched and sanctioned by the Party: it is reported that Khrushchev himself read and cleared *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* for publication.¹⁷ Nearly a hundred and fifty years ago the Tsar Nicholas I used to censor Alexander Pushkin's works before they were permitted to be published.

The Party-controlled easing of pressure is to be welcomed, but in the long run, for a true, stable atmosphere of social and political freedom, what is required is a plurality of forces in Soviet society—and such a plurality does not exist. Visitors to the Soviet Union frequently return greatly encouraged by the relaxed atmosphere they find there, but they can never show how this atmosphere might be institutionalized. For true literary freedom—the prelude to a revival of the best traditions of Russian literature—the chief hope does not lie in the publication of such works as Yevtushenko's poem in *Pravda*, nor in the development of such anti-Stalinist (and by implication pro-Khrushchev) themes as the innocent political prisoner, which has now found its culmination in *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. "Stalin's Heirs" has no literary interest whatsoever. Solzhenitsyn's story is in fact a work of considerable literary merit, but I think it is fair to say that its primary importance was political and social. The reviews of the work published in the organs of the Party and the government apparatus made it clear that *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* was welcomed as a weapon to be used against Stalinists, both at home and abroad.¹⁸

For a revival of Russian literature what is required is the dismantling or abandonment of Socialist Realism and a return to the Russian literature of the twenties and, more important, to modern Western literature: Russian writers badly need nourishment, and they must take their place once again in the Western European cultural tradition. Rufus W. Mathewson, Jr., in reviewing the development of modern Russian literature, has traced the stages of Russia's cultural relationship to the West:

There are three stages in relations with the West, all of which have been repeated: self-sufficiency (the periods of Ivan IV and of Stalin), when Russian culture, unable to generate its own forms or traditions, is monumental, ornate, and sterile; apprenticeship (the eighteenth century), when imported forms are blindly imitated and much is learned but little of value produced; independence (from 1830-1930), when Russia maintains full and nourishing contact with Europe but makes her own incomparable contribution to world culture.¹⁹

The date at which Russia's century of great cultural achievement came to an end is significant. It is not 1917, which had no talismanic power over cultural life, but 1930. It was in the early thirties that the great blight settled upon Russian literature, with the enforced application of the theory of Socialist Realism²⁰—a series of literary prescriptions which are a contradiction in terms and which in the final analysis meant that all writers were either silenced or became court poets, praising

the Communist Party and urging their readers to strive for a brighter future under Communism. Russian writers have of course never been free; in the nineteenth century they were obliged to submit everything they wrote to the Tsarist censors. But the Tsarist censorship was "passive": the censors' job was simply to blue-pencil offensive passages. Russian writers also had to endure the "censorship of the left", which was an "active" censorship: it was prescriptive, it instructed the writers on what they should write about and on the attitude they should take to their subject-matter. But it was not until 1930 that both active and passive censors were united into one single dominating force that writers had to obey. The results have been disastrous for Russian literature: it has not been able to produce much of value, it has languished without "full and nourishing contact with Europe".

It would be unreasonable to expect that after a generation of Socialist Realism we shall suddenly find genuine works of literary merit ready-made and just waiting for publication, or indeed that their publication will be permitted. The literature of the "thaw" was precisely that: it broke the ice. The years following Stalin's death were a period of apprenticeship, during which the ground was laboriously prepared for an improvement in Soviet literary standards. The efforts of the older writers Ilya Ehrenburg, Konstantin Paustovsky and Alexander Tvardovsky have borne some fruit. Ehrenburg's contribution to the cause has been particularly important because he has spoken out in quite forceful terms for the autonomy of art, he has given sympathetic portraits of a number of writers of the twenties, and he has introduced his readers to some of the cultural leaders in the West.

Among Ehrenburg's readers are the young writers of the post-war and post-Stalin generation. Several of these writers have declared an interest in Soviet literature of the 1920s and also in Western literature. For example, Vasili Aksyonov recently mentioned Hemingway, Faulkner, Böll (a post-war German writer), and Salinger as being entertaining to read and also "a first-class school" in which to study.²¹ Aksyonov himself, and also the somewhat older Yuri Kazakov and Vladimir Tendryakov, have been producing some interesting stories and short novels. In Soviet literature one can often measure a writer's talent by his attitude towards the prescriptions of Socialist Realism: several of the young writers simply ignore them altogether. This has not gone unnoticed and such "tendencies" are frequently attacked,²² but if the writers can get away with just having their knuckles rapped and continue ignoring Socialist Realism, then there is some hope for Russian literature.

We must not hope for too much too soon. And we must distinguish between "protest" literature, much of it either Party-inspired or Party-approved, and genuine

efforts on the part of the writers themselves to raise artistic standards and seek new forms. The liberal writers are obviously feeling their way, trying not to attract too much attention from the Party hierarchy. At the same time they are being firm in their altercation with the "hard-line" critics. They will no doubt consider themselves lucky if all they have to contend with is a "passive" censorship and yapping, snarling critics at their heels demanding that literature serve social ends. Under conditions similar to these, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Turgenev wrote their great novels in the sixties and seventies of the last century.

NOTES

English translations are listed wherever possible for the interest of those who do not read Russian.

1. Gleb Struve, "Soviet Literature After De-Stalinization", *Bulletin of the Institute for the Study of the USSR* (May, 1957), pp. 27-34.
2. George Gibian, "New Trends in the Novel: Kazakov, Nagibin, Voronin", *Soviet Survey*, No. 36 (1961), p. 49.
3. Daniil Granin, "Sobstvennoye mneniye", *Novy mir* (August, 1956), pp. 129-136.
4. Daniil Granin, *Iskateeli* (Leningrad: Sovetski pisatel, 1955). Translated as *Those Who Seek* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, n.d.). In this novel we find the genesis of the theme later explored in "An Opinion of One's Own": the villain of the novel, Victor Potapenko, feels ashamed for a moment of his machinations, but consoles himself with the thought that when he becomes chief engineer and is in a safe position, then he will be able to act honestly. "Sobstvennoye mneniye" appears as "A Personal Opinion" in Edmund Stillman (ed.), *Bitter Harvest: The Intellectual Revolt Behind the Iron Curtain* (New York: Praeger, 1959), pp. 260-271. (Granin's first name is incorrectly given as Dimitri.)
5. Aleksandr Yashin, "Rychagi", *Literaturnaya Moskva: Sbornik vtoroy* (Moskva, 1956), pp. 502-513.
6. "The Levers", *Partisan Review* (Summer, 1958), p. 420.
7. Max Hayward, "Introduction: Soviet Literature 1917-1961", p. 356. In "Dissonant Voices in Soviet Literature" (edited by Patricia Blake and Max Hayward), *Partisan Review*, Nos. 3-4, 1961. (Later published in expanded book form under the same title by Pantheon, New York, 1962.)
8. For an interesting account of the new Soviet intelligentsia, its likes and dislikes, and a suggestion that it may be able to bring pressure to bear on the Party leadership, see Klaus Mehnert, *Soviet Man and His World* (New York: Praeger, 1962).
9. This is the famous *Collection No. II. Literaturnaya Moskva* that was published in the normal way in 1956, but later in the year the editors quickly gathered together some more material, of a far more seditious nature as far as the authorities were concerned. This was then published as a second *Literaturnaya Moskva*.
10. Ilya Ehrenburg, "Uroki Stendalya", *Inostrannaya literatura*, June, 1957.

11. Quotations are taken from Ilya Ehrenburg, *Chekhov, Stendhal, and other Essays*, trans. Anna Bostock and Yvonne Kapp (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1962).
12. John A. Armstrong, *Ideology, Politics, and Government in the Soviet Union: An Introduction* (New York: Praeger, 1962), p. 149.
13. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Den zhizni Ivana Denisovicha", *Novy mir*, November, 1962. Solzhenitsyn's short novel has appeared in two English translations. The first by Max Hayward and Ronald Hingley was published by Burns & MacEachern, and the second by Ralph Parker was published by Doubleday. Of the two I prefer the former translation. For my reasons and an estimate of the literary and political significance of this work, see my reviews in *The Globe and Mail*, February 2, 1963, and *The Ottawa Citizen*, February 23, 1963.
14. Ilya Ehrenburg, "Ottepel", chast vtoraya. *Znamya* (April, 1956), pp. 23-90. The first part appeared in *Znamya* (May, 1954), pp. 14-87. Both parts have been translated and appear as *A Change of Season*, trans. Manya Harari and Humphrey Higgins (New York: Knopf, 1962).
15. For a review of the treatment of this theme, see V. Aleksandrova, "Vernuvshiesya", *Sotsialisticheski vestnik* (October, 1959), pp. 189-191.
16. Viktor Nekrasov, "Kira Georgiyevna", *Novy mir* (June, 1961), pp. 70-126. This is a sensitive treatment of the human problems involved when the prisoner returns to his wife. Nekrasov is one of the few writers who have retained their self-respect, and hence the respect of their readers. This short novel has appeared in English: *Kira Georgievna*, trans. Walter N. Vickery (New York: Pantheon Books, 1962).
17. "Liberal Soviet Writers Gaining In a Fight for Freer Expression", *The New York Times* (November 26, 1962), p. 1.
18. The name of Tolstoy is no more than a meaningless tag. What the Party is really looking for in such works may be seen from an article by V. Yermilov entitled "In the Name of Truth, and in the Name of Life" (*Pravda*, November 23, 1962). Yermilov declares: "The process of the re-establishment of Leninist norms in the life of the Party and the country and the unfolding of socialist democracy are having a beneficial effect upon the development of literature. It (literature) is taking a more active part in cleansing our life of the influence and consequences of the cult of the individual." A few days previously (*Izvestiya*, November 18, 1962) Konstantin Simonov had written: "The Party has called writers its assistants. It seems to me that A. Solzhenitsyn in his story has shown himself a true assistant of the Party in the sacred and essential cause of the struggle against the cult of the individual and its consequences." It would be hard to put it better than that.
19. Rufus W. Mathewson, Jr., "Russian Literature and the West" *Slavic Review* (September, 1962), pp. 412-3.
20. For a brilliant, satirical account of Socialist Realism in theory and practice, see Abram Tertz (pseud.), "On Socialist Realism", *Dissent* (Winter, 1960), pp. 40-66.
21. "Molodyye o sebe", *Voprosy literatury* (September, 1962), p. 118.

22. Following Khrushchev's unfavourable comments on modern art at an exhibition of paintings by Moscow artists, *Pravda* published an article on December 3, 1962, entitled "Art Belongs to the People"—the phrase is Lenin's. Khrushchev's earlier statements on literature were recalled and writers were advised to read them again: "The false tendencies which have appeared in the work of certain writers and artists are evidence of the serious neglect on the part of artistic organizations, which have not been exacting and have permitted themselves to be liberal in their evaluation of certain phenomena, deviating from a fundamental and pointed statement of the vital questions of art."

Both the sentiments and the style in which they are expressed are typical of *Pravda*.

The modernism and experimentalism of the Moscow artists brought about a drive for ideological purity in all the arts by the Party authorities. Artists and writers were summoned to the Kremlin in the second week of March this year and lectured on "the responsibility of the artist to the people" by L. F. Ilyichev and also by Mr. Khrushchev. It seemed that literature was again about to endure another "freeze". However, despite many rumours, the liberal Alexander Tvardovsky was not removed from the editorship of *Novy mir* and this journal has continued to publish the serialized memoirs of Ilya Ehrenburg, who was subjected to a vicious attack by Ilyichev in his speech at the Kremlin on March 7.

THE VISITOR

Sanora Babb

Safe in the light, walled against the lion and the thief,
Lulled by the evening rite of women in ancient rhythms
Of the meal, forming the unformed into an offering of love,
She moves enclosed in the work without dream, unwary
Of the windowed dark and the dark's great company
Crowding the air, weightless on flowers, unpierced by thorns,
Unhindered by matter spun from motion, their easy element.
Is the grass startled by their amorphous feet?
Do the trees shudder in the cosmic winter's cold?
Or, by the strange intelligence of other living things,
Accept?
What being defies the lock, flows past, makes for the stair
Unseen, unheard, raising the fine hairs of her arms
And bristling the dog's hackles? His eyes focus on the empty air.