

# FORE

28/29 Southampton Street, Strand, W.C.2  
Tel.: TEMple Bar 7103

PUBLICATIONS LIMITED

April 24 50

George Lukacs  
Prof. of Aesthetics University of Budapest  
Hungary

19425-1089/1

Dear George Lukacs

I am sending you with this a copy of my Dickens book  
- in proof form, but complete.

I promised last year to do this, and have been  
brought to the point by reading your magnificent  
Studies in European Realism, which I am reviewing for  
the New Central European Observer. *if only I had read it before  
writing my Dickens it would have helped my formulations.*

We are reorganising the magazine Arena, and I shall  
see that you are sent copies regularly. Any advice  
or contribution from you would be much appreciated,

yours sincerely

*Jack Lindsay*  
Jack Lindsay

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Lukács Arch.

Castle Hedingham. Halstead. Essex. Feb 7 1963

To George Lukacs, Budapest V, Belgrade Rkp 2 V E M S

My dear Lukacs

Martin Eve has sent me a copy of your The Meaning of Contemporary Realism. (Eve is an old friend of mine and has published a book of mine on my field archaeology.) I at once asked the Daily Worker if I could review it, but they had sent it out - I enclose the review - not so bad - that D. Craig did of it. I shall ask James Klugmann if I can do a long essay on it for Marxism Today, which will in fact be better than a short review.

There are a few points I'd like to raise out of the endless ideas which this very exciting and important work has stirred in me.

Terminology. One of the difficulties is that the terms Romantic and Naturalist have both an historical and a general critical significance. I think one way of getting over this unfortunate duality is to use capitals for the historical use (Romantic and Naturalist), lowercase for the critical (romantic and naturalist).

2. Naturalist as an historical term involves Tolstoy as well as Zola, Ibsen as well as Flaubert, etc. Historically it means a big advance in the handling of everyday material, a new sense of Time, a new sense of complex interrelations. It thus represents (historically) an advance on the romantic phase (which runs from Fielding and Sterne to Balzac and Dickens), which involved a new sense of the interrelation of individual and society, of the massforces and the individual; again a new time pattern.

3. The critical terms romantic and naturalist we use generally for the weak and failing side of these 2 movements. Thus, naturalist as a critical (and pejorative) term expresses the ways and extents to which the writer was weighed down by the new range, the new need to incorporate a vast amount of newly-realised detail and relationships inside the artistic form; "romantic" as a critical term is used to express the ways in which the writer lost himself in the necessarily confused aspirations of the new breakthrough.

4. Realism. If one is using this term to express the concrete grasp by the writer of life in its fullness, in its dialectical movement, then there is no one realism. There is a whole series of realisms from the days of the paleolithic painters on, and there is an accompanying set of evasions or distortions of reality.

Of course there is also continuity. There is something in common between, say, the painters in the French limestone caves and Renoir or Van Gogh (to take some of the latest examples of artists with a considerable realist element), just as there ~~are~~ is something in common between the abstractions of the late paleolithic period and modern abstract art. But one is going to create an extreme confusion unless one stresses that realism

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is an historical as well as a general critical term.

I have seen this confusion at work in the Soviet Union, partly because of over-rationalist elements in the working out of Marxism, partly because of the remarkably brief period of literature in Russia -- essentially only since 1800 (the patriotic efforts to inflate the preparatory work of the 18th century do not convince). Therefore the only realism that Russia has known is a variety of the Romantic (given its particular direction by Pushkin), and the Naturalist (given its classic and realist form by Tolstoy).

In talking with Russians I have found they are proud, rather than sorry, that they lack the great continuity of say English literature with its splendid beginnings in tribal forms (Beowulf) etc; its rich medieval or Gothic tradition (Langland, Chaucer, the Grene Knight etc etc), its Renaissance forms, its important Baroque developments.... All these forms of realism are very different from those of the Naturalism of <sup>the</sup> Tolstoyan Epoch and so are looked on as derelictions from a god-given (bourgeois-given) norm. In this sense Tolstoy overshadows Russian literature in a bad as well as a good way.

If Naturalism (in the historical sense) is taken as the climax and end-all of realism, then the road to the future is cut; and this is one of the critical ~~reasons~~ reasons for the confusions of Socialist Realism that you admirably trace, its turning into an abstract or utopian form. The basis is lacking for a new unification in which the relation of individual and ~~society~~ society is grasped within the new dialectical totality.

Of course many other factors have played their part in the turning of socialist realism into an abstract form - above all, social and political factors - but the above sort of critical confusion helps to make the distortion possible.

Another point I'd like to raise, on which you briefly touch. For The "modernist" beginnings of writers like Mayakovsky, Neruda, X Aragon, Eluard etc. Soviet critics with their usual opacity treat such beginnings as a mere pis-aller which the writer had to discard. True, he had to outgrow it, but by absorbing it in a larger whole, not by discarding it.

The Soviet viewpoint cuts the writer off from reality and shows the typical contempt for the realities of art tradition - as if a writer's aesthetic was a sort of spontaneous combustion from his social position. In fact, all that you so powerfully define as modernism is also a true reflection of bourgeois reality (in the spiritual sense). To ignore it and to try to start from some abstract point of "absolute realism" is to run at once into the abstract socialist realism you define. The bourgeois or modernist forms are a part of social reality, an essential part though not the whole part. The writer must take them in and transform them by adding what is missing in them.

Otherwise he cannot truly define bourgeois alienation, which comes over into socialism (I will do so <sup>in</sup> the ending of the State) as division of labour.

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What he will take, the exact angle of his absorption and new-departure, will of course depend on many factors - his artistic character, his social position, his age etc etc. But he must struggle with modernism, not ignore it. Why Soviet pictorial art is so barren and empty is ~~not~~ because it ignores Cezanne and all the following developments -- does not struggle with them and in the process transform them. It tries to start from an abstract point of socialist realism, which is in fact an abstraction from bourgeois Naturalism (in both its historical and its critical pejorative senses).

If Mayakovsky had never been a futurist, he would never have been the revolutionary poet he was. If Eluard had never been a surrealist, he would never have attained the subtle definition of personal relationships in a series of new (fundamentally socialist) harmonies.

These points are I think in the key of your argument though you do not make explicit this particular point.

There are many other things I'd like to say, out of the stimulus of your short though wonderfully rich and fecund book. I'll try to say some of them in Marxism Today.

....

I know you are very busy, but I am going to send you a copy of the 3rd vol. of my autobiography, Fanfrolico and After. Though couched in personal terms, this is the story of the transformation of modernist and subjective-idealist existentialist positions into those of marxism. Told not in abstract terms but in terms of personal struggle involving all aspects of the personality. I think I am correct in saying that it is the only book in any language to attempt to do so.

Its theme is therefore very close to your own critical theses, to the question of Marxist ethics etc etc. And I would like you very much to read it. The full dialectical picture needs the 2 previous volumes (Life Rarely Folds, youth in Queensland - spontaneous poetic and revolutionary outbreak without understanding; The Roaring Twenties, the surrender to a particular brand of modernism, Australian Nietzscheanism etc); but the 3rd volume in which the two opposites are brought together and resolved can stand by itself and is the one that I think would most interest you.

with all good wishes for yourself and your work

Jack Lindsay  
Jack Lindsay

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Lukács Arch.

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Castle Hedingham. Halstead. Essex. England. May 24 1963

Georg Lukacs, Budapest

Dear Lukacs

I am writing a notice on the Historical Novel and the Meaning of Contemporary Realism for Meanjin, the main Australian literary quarterly (connected with Melbourne University). The editor asks if it would be possible for you to send him a short unpublished piece of literary criticism, or, say, some 2,000 words of literary reminiscences. (I think you met him a few years ago -- C.J. ~~Christesen~~ <sup>Christesen</sup>).

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*to appear in the same issue*

If you can do so, perhaps you would send it direct to him:

C.J. ~~Christesen~~ Christesen  
Editor: Meanjin  
University of Melbourne  
Parkville N2, Victoria, Australia.

... I am at the moment working on the book of literary and artistic criticism of Modernism -- taking your summary as my starting-point: with a considerable analysis of Bergson, Proust, Joyce, DH Lawrence, Sartre, Picasso, Dadaism etc - trying to bring out individual points of positive contribution amid the over-all movement to Abstraction - and then to discuss exactly

The question of "Time" comes much into it.

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these contributions leave permanently when one has rejected the dominant trend - in other words, how far the (largely passive) reflection of alienation contributes towards the active understanding and ultimate overcoming of alienation. Of course in many fundamental ways it strengthens alienation, but one needs also to discover the ways in which it permanently modifies the human consciousness as the expression of a necessary phase of historical development.

yours sincerely

*Jack Lindsay*

Jack Lindsay

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APENA. 28/29 Southampton Street. London. WC2

July 1

Lukacs George  
Budapest IV  
Belgrad BPK. 2. v. em 5

My dear George Lukacs

Thank you for your letter and the essay on Raabe, which  
which is very interesting, and which I shall write to you  
about later.

I enclose with this the review of your book. It only  
touches on some main points; and I should like at some  
time to ~~xxx~~ go more thoroughly into the many subtle  
points and their implications.

Thank you for these magnificent essays.

I shall send you copies of our magazine in its new  
and livelier form, which I hope will begin from September

with the best wishes of myself and my wife

yours sincerely

*Jack Lindsay*  
Jack Lindsay

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Jack  
Lindsay

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Castle Hedingham  
Halstead  
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Ann  
Lindsay

Georg Lukacs  
Budapest

Sept 30

Dear Georg Lukacs

*a mention*  
Thank you very much for your letter. I agree wholly with your position about Form and Content, and must make sure that I get it clear in the book. It is indeed the crucial issue, and only by getting it quite clear can one bring out the inner struggle in such a writer, and make what is good in him of service for the positive development of culture today.

For our literature Meredith is, I am sure, very important. He stands behind a large number of other writers, directly or indirectly -- Hardy and Gissing in chief, but also Shaw and Wells, Galsworthy and James in a more complex way - not to mention D.H. Lawrence whom he powerfully affected in his formative period.

He is the English example of the very involved and difficult phase ~~xxxxxx~~ of European culture to which Zola, Strindberg, Dostovesky, Ibsen also belong: and though he is in many ways unlike any of those others, he has certain deep points of contact - in that he is struggling with the advanced pressures of bourgeois alienation, in part succumbing, but also in large part fighting beyond them.

I think the clarification of values in this phase of European culture (to which from another angle Baudelaire and Rimbaud belong) is perhaps the most difficult one that Marxist critics have to face. It is easy to see the decadent elements here, but these writers do struggle with the extreme pressures of bourgeois alienation at the phase before the organised proletariat has decisively appeared - and with all their weaknesses they add something of great significance to human culture, something that throws the final light on the hell of alienations under capitalism in its later phases.

This anyway is what I think. I should like to write to you later when I have had time to go into your book.

The delay in this reply is owing to the fact that I have been in Rumania on a most delightful holiday.

All good wishes

*yours sincerely*

Jack Lindsay

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Lukacs Arch.



Castle Hedingham  
Halstead  
Essex

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Georg Lukacs  
Budapest V. Belgrad Rkp 2 VEMS

Dear Georg Lukacs

My friend Martin Eve has just sent me the English translation of your work on the historical novel. I shall write again when I have read it - but I should like to say at once that I read a large section of it (mainly on Scott) in the old international Literature in the 1930's, and your remarks had a fundamental effect on my whole thinking about the novel and on my own work in the historical novel.

I think I sent you a while back the German version of The Great Oak (set 1549), which is an example of my more lyrical approach. Unfortunately almost all my historical novels are out of print and hard to get.

I have just finished a translation of Giordano Bruno's dialogues on Cause, Principle and Unity - with a long intro. and apparatus. It is astonishing that Marxists have missed out this great precursor of Marxism. Among recent works of mine is a study of the painting of the French Revolution (The Death of the Hero), which I think would interest you; and I have in the press A Short History of Culture (up to 1600). Am working on Roman Egypt at the moment, and then will write a satirical novel on the Common Market. So you'll see I move about!

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An old friend of mine is <sup>Lukacs Arch.</sup> teaching at the Budapest University at the moment -- Alick

West. I hope you get in touch with him. He has a very fine mind.

all good wishes

Yours sincerely

Jack Lindsay

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28/29 Southampton Street, Strand, W. C. 2

Tel.: TEMple Bar 7103

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Dear Georg Lukacs  
Herewith a copy of Arena I: which I mentioned to you.  
It is the first effort made here for a periodical  
which will lift our literary development into the  
full ~~mainstream~~ worldstream. This issue is only a  
start, but with fair power of impact on the situation  
here, I think.

I have sent a copy to the Cultural Attache of the  
Hungarian Legation, as we should of course like to  
sell a few copies in Hungary and to become known to  
leading literary circles there. We should be obliged  
if you could help in any way by drawing the attention  
of your chief writers to the magazine, suggesting  
material, or giving me the names and addresses of  
writers whose work could be useful.

We trust to have essays of yours from time to time.  
with allgood wishes  
yours sincerely

*Jack Lindsay*

Jack Lindsay

MTA FIL. INT.  
Lukács Arch.

Budapest IV  
Belgrad rakpart 2.V. 5

Jack  
Lindsay

BANGLAPPERS  
Castle Heddingham  
Halstead  
ESSEX

Ann  
Lindsay

To George Lukacs  
Budapest  
Dear Lukacs

Thank you very much indeed for your book on Russian Realism, which I know I will find most interesting and from which I will learn much.

I shall send you a copy of my book on Byzantine history and culture -- BYZANTIUM INTO EUROPE - when it appears later this year. I have just finished a book on George Meredith - a neglected novelist, at whom I looked seriously for the first time since youth last year. He has many vices of form, but his content is remarkable. A man of 1848, he carried on the Radical principles right till his death in 1908 -- hailing the Russian masses in 1905 in a fine poem The Crisis. He sought to define the positive and revolutionary hero - in Sandra-Vittoria of the national-liberation movement, Beauchamp (the Radical moving to proletarian revolution), and Alvan (a fantasy picture of Lasalle, but going to the root of the matter, showing how the "social-democrat" betrays the revolution and himself by wanting

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at a certain point to justify himself in the eyes of the bourgeoisie. Throughout he keeps a political focus (in the marxist sense) and has almost a dostoevskian insight into the process of alienation, plus a faith in progress radical-revolutionary. If only his form was equal to his content, he'd be one of the greatest...

But he has, I see, great importance for our culture, being the one writer who over the bad period, 1850-1900, unhesitatingly keeps his faith in the masses, plus insight into the alienating process. Hardy, Gissing, Wells, James - all can only be seen in the focus of his achievement, which clears the ground. Even DH Lawrence began from his work

Again thanks. I shall write again later when I can properly absorb your book

*Yours sincerely*  
*Jack Lubbock*

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