Book Review and Commentary

Editors Introduction: USSR, Russia, and the American Ambivalence

The feelings of the United States towards the USSR and its post-Soviet states (especially Russia) have been deeply ambivalent. Proud of its credo of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness by all, as well as its Jeffersonian declaration that all human beings are created equal in the eyes of God, the United States has viewed the Soviet Union with derision. The latter’s totalitarianism, anti-religious doctrine, socialistically inclined factory base, and disdain for free market enterprise stirred up deeply negative sentiments in North American political consciousness. Matters were further complicated by the rivalry between the two nations for supreme status among the world nations, Cold War suspiciousness and mutual espionage, Soviet expansionism (towards the Eastern European block of nations, and, later, Afghanistan) and support of military operations in nations that harbored strong anti-American feelings (e.g., the Cuban missile crisis). Soviet, and especially communist, bashing became a popular American political sport. Senator McCarthy’s rantings never fully faded; their echo was discernible in President Reagan’s designation of the USSR as the “evil empire”.

Clearly, complex sociopolitical factors were at work here. At the same time, it is hard to deny that this hostility drew its strength from projective defenses as well. America’s own curtailments of freedom of its citizens (the pre-Civil Rights Movement situation of Blacks, for instance) became a powerful unconscious fuel for the contempt of the Soviet Union’s atrocities in this regard. Thus, anxiety regarding its own “self” also underlay America’s hatred of the Soviet Union.

Moreover, such hostility coexisted with a history of collaboration (the Soviets were, after all, among the “allies” during the Second World War; note, also, the recent collaborative outer space ventures of the two countries), curiosity, sequestered ideological flirtation (see the John Reed affair), envy (e.g., the American reaction to the Soviet launching of the Sputnik), and a split-off, focal idealization of the musical, literary, and artistic talents of the people of Russia. North Americans hated the Soviet Union but

59
continued to respect Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekov, and Tchaikovsky. They were awed by Nabokov’s piercing script, Barishnikov’s graceful agility, and Solzhenitsyn’s wisdom and conscience (even when it offered a less than flattering view of the American society itself, as, for instance, in his commencement address at the Harvard University).

It is in the context of such American ambivalence, that we present the review of two books pertaining to Russia and the Soviet Union in this volume. The first book is titled *Tolstoy on the Couch: Misogyny, Masochism, and the Absent Mother*. It is written by Daniel Rancour-Laferriere and reviewed by the Philadelphia-based novelist Simone Zelitch. The second book, *Freud and the Bolsheviks: Psychoanalysis in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union* is written by Martin Miller, a Professor of History at Duke University, and is reviewed by Homer Curtis, a highly respected psychoanalytic clinician and teacher and a past-President of the American Psychoanalytic Association. Rancour-Laferriere’s book seeks to elucidate the impact of childhood maternal loss upon Tolstoy’s works and indeed his weltenschwang. Issues of repudiated dependent longings, matricidal rage, narcissistic withdrawal, and moral masochism form the centerpiece of this book. Zelitch (whose latest novel *Louisa* is soon to be published by Putnam), however, takes exception to the psychoanalytic tendency of equating a novel’s protagonist with its author. Speaking from a novelist’s perspective, she deftly highlights the pitfalls of such reductionism, while opening up the works under consideration to be examined differently.

Miller’s book chronicles the history of psychoanalysis in Russia from its vigorous development during the pre-Revolutionary times, through its suppression during the Communist regime, to its recent revival. Not many are familiar with this history. It is barely remembered that Moscow was the third psychoanalytic society to be formed (after Vienna and Berlin), and that two very important figures from the earliest days of psychoanalysis originally hailed from Russia. These were Max Eitingon, the “affluent, generous, and self-effacing Russian Jew” who became an important member of Freud’s inner circle, and Sergei Pankijeff, “the twenty-three year old Russian who came to consult Freud in February 1910” (Gay, 1988, p. 179, p. 286) and subsequently became renowned as the Wolf Man. In his review of the book, Curtis highlights the diverse personal, historical, and political forces that have impacted upon the developments chronicled by Miller. Curtis lauds the author for his painstaking archival research but laments that his historical survey ends with the demise of the Soviet regime in 1991. Curtis, who has had extensive personal involvement with the current psychoanalytic revival in Russia, then appends a brief note about the more recent developments, thus enriching the experience of those who would read about Miller’s book in these pages.