

KONTINENT *4*

contemporary russian writers .



Twenty-Three Works of Lasting Importance
from KONTINENT, The Russian Dissident Quarterly

EDITED BY GEORGE BAILEY

KONTINENT 4
CONTEMPORARY
RUSSIAN WRITERS

Edited by
GEORGE BAILEY



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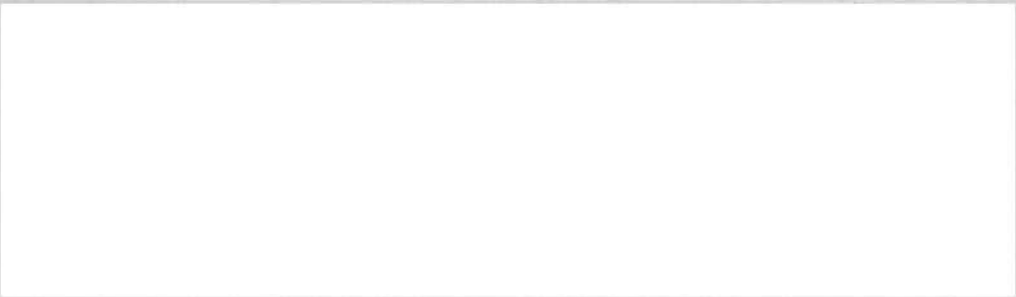
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GEORGE BAILEY was born in Chicago in 1919. A graduate of Columbia University and Magdalen College, Oxford, he has spent over 30 years in Europe, mostly in Germany and Austria, and has been a Fellow in Russian of the American Council of Learned Societies. During World War II Bailey served as an American Army intelligence liaison officer with the Red Army. He was interpreter/translator in Russian and German at the surrender negotiations, and from 1950-51 he was a resettlement officer for Soviet Army defectors. Since then Bailey has worked as a liaison officer with the German police, as a literary agent, and as an Eastern European correspondent. In 1959 he won the Overseas Press Club's award for best magazine reporting of foreign affairs. Since 1974 Bailey has been the coordinating editor for *Kontinent* magazine. He co-authored **THE EXPERTS, MUNICH,** and **C.S. LEWIS SPEAKS**, and is also the author of **KÜNSTLER IM EXILE** and of **GERMANS**, which is available in an Avon Discus edition. He now lives in France.

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Foreword

This book is made up of selected articles, stories, and other pieces from some sixteen issues of the quarterly dissident magazine *Kontinent*. It contains no poetry. As editor of this collection I could not bring myself to include any. I regret this decision, especially because it deprives the reader of this book of the opportunity of acquainting himself with examples of the work of Joseph Brodsky, among others. But there are simply too many difficulties involved in the translation of poetry. Unless the translator is a poet himself and virtually bilingual in Russian and the language into which he is translating, the result is almost certain to be at best a poor, pale reflection, and at worst a disastrous distortion of the original.

Nobody is happy with the term "dissident." For many people "dissident" connotes a kind of political professional, an activist with a definite, alternative political program. This is way off. Far closer to the truth is Ernst Neizvestny's definition: "In Russia everything that is not official is dissidence." Or Alexander Piatigorsky's statement: "I considered myself an absolutely model, first-class Soviet citizen . . . and all of a sudden—wham! I was kicked out!" The point, of course, is that regardless of what Piatigorsky considered himself, the Communist Party and government of the Soviet Union considered him a dissident. And rightly so. Anyone who chooses, however unwittingly, to assert his individuality in a totalitarian society can only do so by becoming a political activist against the state. This does not require a political program. The only requirement is "doing what comes naturally."

For this reason dissident literature is the literature of penal servitude, the work—for the most part—of men and women who have done time, and usually a long time, for "political crimes" against the Soviet Union or its satellites. It is the literature of suffering, the bearing of witness against injustice—testimonials in one form or another

from prisons, labor camps, and exile, in that order. This is a fact that poses several problems. In the first place it makes the authors a kind of an elite of sufferers. This in turn makes for invidious comparisons: say, of the Russian writer, like Solzhenitsyn, who is more than likely to have gone through various versions of hell and high water, with—well, with the British gentleman author (Laurie Lee comes to mind) who writes whimsical accounts of roughing it in high summer in the Toscana. Or to compare, as one must if one has read both books, Lillian Hellman's *Scoundrel Time* with Nadezhda Mandelstam's first book of memoirs.

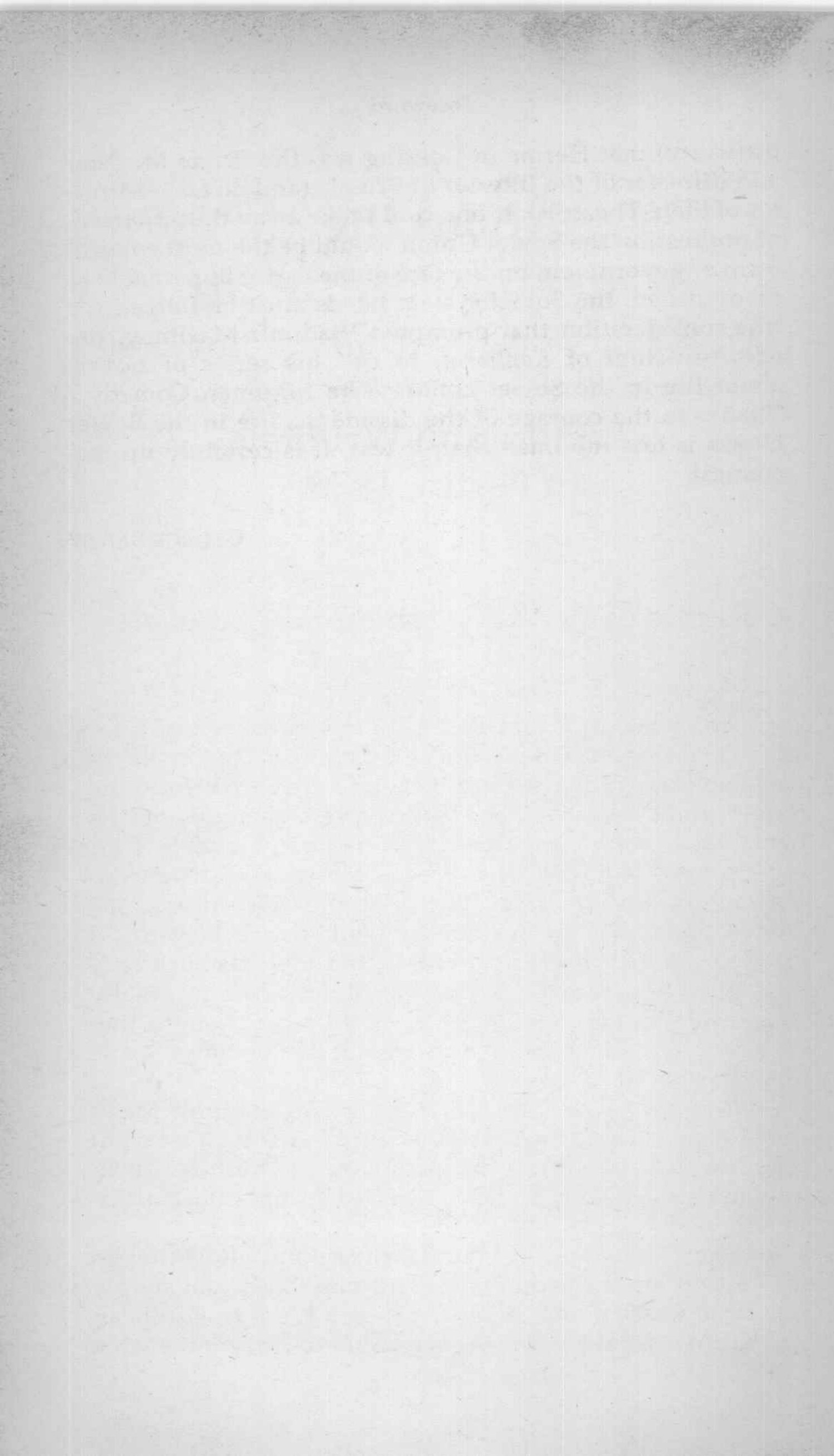
In the second place it poses problems for the Western reviewer, commentator, or critic coming to grips with dissident literature. I am reminded of the young British author who reviewed Vladimir Bukovsky's *To Build a Castle*. So overwhelmed was he with the catalogue of calamities visited upon Bukovsky by the Soviet state that he felt obliged to confess to his readers the magnitude of his own worst ordeal: an appendectomy.

There is, and it is better to come right out with it, an arrogance that comes with suffering—even if it is only the determination not to suffer fools, particularly fools without power (after having been forced to suffer fools *with* power for years and years on end). No, the dissidents of the Soviet Union and its satellites (the exceptions prove the rule) will never harbor anything but contempt for the Left. The setting of their ordeal is socialism. The Soviet Union has preempted the position of bulwark of the international Left. This may be fortunate or unfortunate, depending on one's point of view. But nothing can be done about it. The dissidents have been there. They have seen the "future" and they know it doesn't work. As a result they are filled with horror, loathing, inspired defiance, and—strangest of all—laughter.

For me the most striking characteristic of dissident writing is its humor. Albert Camus pointed out that totalitarian regimes were forced to resort to terror in order to be taken seriously. The Third Reich was billed as "the fiercest political order since Genghis Khan." Necessarily so: With its absurd program, the Nazi party pullulated with perfectly ludicrous figures. One only need remember (I admit the

difficulty) that Hermann Goering was the Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior of Prussia (and de facto Minister of State Theatres). If one could take away the apparatus of oppression the Soviet Union would be the most comical form of government on the face of the earth. But, unable to be dignified, the Soviet system needs must be fierce. It is this consideration that prompted Vladimir Maximov, the editor-in-chief of *Kontinent*, to call his series of novels about life in the Soviet Union "The Inhuman Comedy." Thanks to the courage of the dissidents, life in the Soviet Union is less inhuman than it was. It is certainly no less comical.

GEORGE BAILEY



About the Magazine *Kontinent*

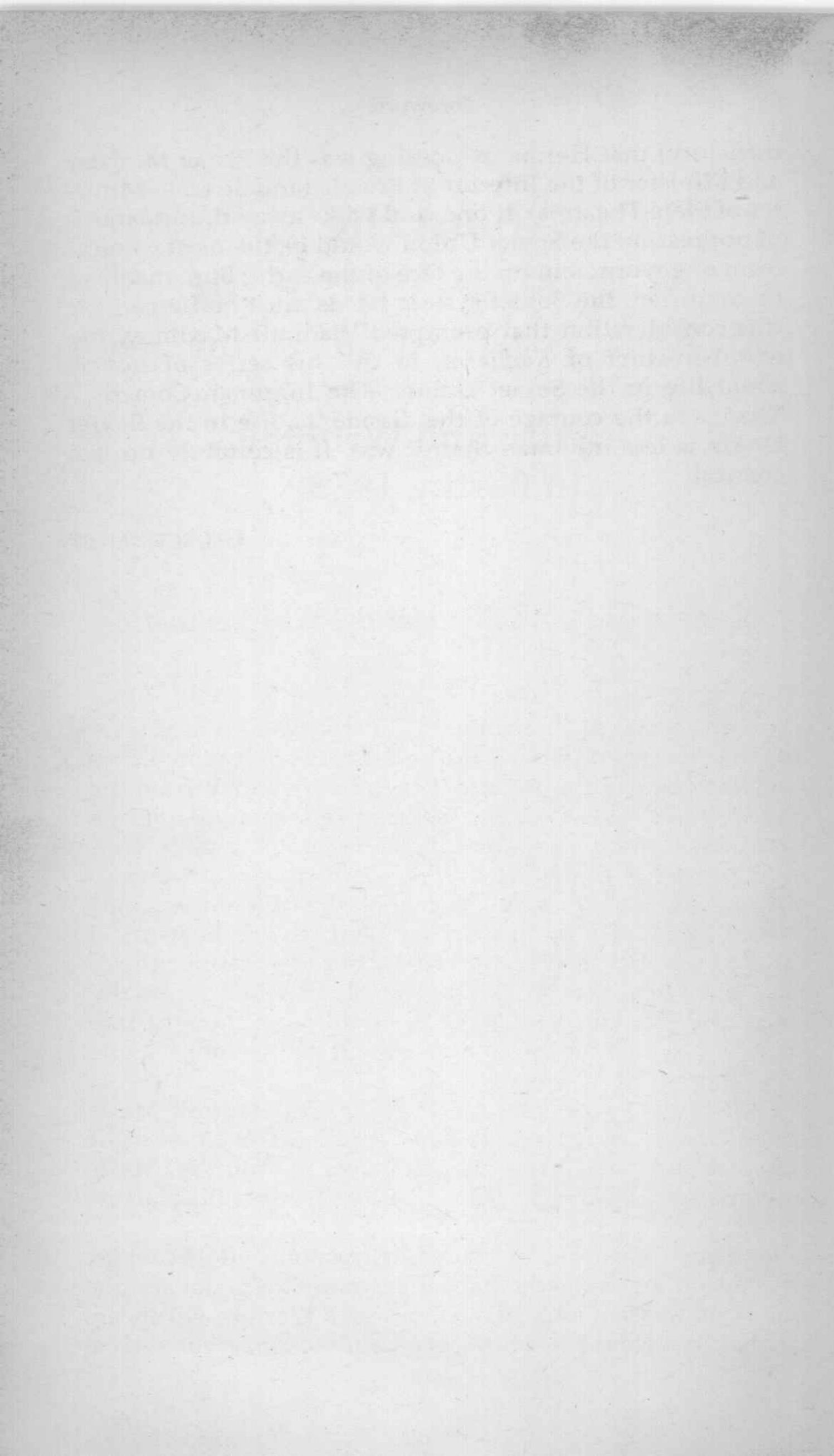
An Address by Vladimir Bukovsky
at the *Kontinent* Conference of
Editors and Writers
in Berlin, 1978

Translated by Albert C. and Tanya Schmidt

I was an inmate of Zone 35, at the Perm penal complex for political prisoners, when I learned that the magazine *Kontinent* had come into existence. I found out about it from the Soviet press. As usual, the Soviet press camouflaged its own attacks on the magazine by using quotes from the foreign press—Yugoslav and West German, for instance—without indicating, moreover, that the references came from Communist publications. “Well, thank heaven,” I said to myself with a sigh of relief, “our idea has been realized.” The realization was not exactly as I had originally imagined it would be. For who would have thought that they would start throwing writers out of the country one after another?

Shortly before my arrest I suggested to Vladimir Maximov that a magazine be published, proposing that it be put together and distributed entirely inside the country. Maximov has revived that original idea and brought it to fulfillment.

Kontinent does not, of course, correspond altogether to the conception we had of it at that time. This is not simply one more Russian journal; it is, rather, a Western European journal: We would not have been able to carry out such a



of illegal and artificial barriers, are exercising their civil rights in the broadest sense of the term. In this way the conscience of society becomes actively imbued with the notion that each individual bears responsibility for actualizing those rights with which he is endowed.

At the editorial office I was told of the complications that arise in connection with publishing *samizdat* manuscripts. All of these problems have to do with the question of copyright. In the first place, they tell me, there are no controls over the distribution of *samizdat*, and it happens that material chosen to be printed in *Kontinent* may turn out to have been published elsewhere previously. Well, in my opinion, this is the editors' job. They should establish contacts so close as to insure that *Kontinent* does receive each manuscript which a writer or his trusted representative would like to have published in the magazine. This question is almost solely one of administrative procedure. A great deal depends, of course, on what channels are used—that is, on the persons in the West who do (or who do not) agree to help Soviet citizens. Everyone tells me in this context that the situation is considerably worse than it was in my day. Foreign journalists, diplomats, and tourists are becoming increasingly better acquainted with the ways in which Soviet authorities disregard legality in dealing with transmittal of manuscripts abroad, and as a consequence they are either afraid to lend a hand at all or else they do it haphazardly. During the months that have passed since I came to the West, I have heard dozens of complaints from all kinds of people who say that the transmitted documents either have not arrived at all, or have arrived very late, or in many instances have reached the wrong destination.

The second problem mentioned to me in connection with *samizdat* manuscripts is a more complicated one. The Russian editors of *Kontinent* will hardly be able to solve it without assistance from the Western publishers. As you know, the copyright arrangement is such that no piece of writing printed in *Kontinent* is authorized to appear in Western languages except in the respective non-Russian editions of the magazine. What does this mean? The Western editions appear much later than the Russian edition, and consequently the material of current interest to the Western reader either does not reach him at all or else is

stale by the time it does. Here is an example. In *Kontinent* Number 9, a whole year ago, there appeared an article by Marchenko entitled "*Tret'ye dano*." The author, a veteran political prisoner, wrote from his exile in Siberia, presenting his thoughts on the subject of détente with interestingly reasoned arguments. To this day, however, not one of the Western editions of *Kontinent* has gotten around to publishing a translation of this article.

I am not a legal consultant, and I am not about to give concrete advice, but I do believe that the Western editors who enjoy a copyright on all *Kontinent* material should remain fully aware of its special character and should take certain definite obligations upon themselves. For us and for our compatriots, *Kontinent* is not a purely literary enterprise and even less a commercial one. Those persons here in the free world, those free citizens who have undertaken to let the West hear the voice of free Russia and the voice of free Eastern Europe, must find it within themselves to assume at least a share of the risks, and to display at least some of the spirit of active self-sacrifice that has become a matter of course for so many people who live under the most suffocating of all totalitarian regimes.

I have been dwelling on what may appear to be details because actually they have to do with fundamentals, namely, with what people inside our huge "socialist camp" expect from *Kontinent*. The journal should provide as complete a reflection as possible of the literary, political, and social thinking of our peoples. It should be a platform for the discussion of basic and essential issues having to do with our past, our present, and our future. It should be a forum for democracy, for tolerance, and for pluralism. Yet concomitantly its task is to become our "window to Europe"—our window to the West—and it ought to be a place where East and West meet and achieve a common understanding. And a place where the peoples of Eastern Europe themselves can foregather and attain mutual comprehension.

I believe that *Kontinent* is coping, to a certain extent successfully, with these problems, and that it is improving with each issue. But none of us can be entirely satisfied with the level thus far attained. The opportunity is always there to do the thing better, to do it in a more serious and a more responsible way.