Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 31

ISSN 0276-8178

Volume 31

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

Excerpts from Criticism of the Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers Who Died between 1900 and 1960, from the First Published Critical Appraisals to Current Evaluations

世界工业学院图书馆
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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 76-46132
ISBN 0-8103-2413-X
ISSN 0276-8178

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

Guide to Gale Literary Criticism Series

When you need to review criticism of literary works, these are the Gale series to use:

If the author's death date is:	**You should turn to:**
After Dec. 31, 1959 (or author is still living)	***CONTEMPORARY LITERARY CRITICISM*** for example: Jorge Luis Borges, Anthony Burgess, William Faulkner, Mary Gordon, Ernest Hemingway, Iris Murdoch
1900 through 1959	***TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERARY CRITICISM*** for example: Willa Cather, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Henry James, Mark Twain, Virginia Woolf
1800 through 1899	***NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE CRITICISM*** for example: Fedor Dostoevski, Nathaniel Hawthorne, George Sand, William Wordsworth
1400 through 1799	***LITERATURE CRITICISM FROM 1400 TO 1800 (excluding Shakespeare)*** for example: Anne Bradstreet, Daniel Defoe, Alexander Pope, François Rabelais, Jonathan Swift, Phillis Wheatley ***SHAKESPEAREAN CRITICISM*** Shakespeare's plays and poetry
Antiquity through 1399	***CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL LITERATURE CRITICISM*** for example: Dante, Homer, Plato, Sophocles, Vergil, the Beowulf Poet

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Preface

It is impossible to overvalue the importance of literature in the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual evolution of humanity. Literature is that which both lifts us out of everyday life and helps us to better understand it. Through the fictive lives of such characters as Anna Karenina, Jay Gatsby, or Leopold Bloom, our perceptions of the human condition are enlarged, and we are enriched.

Literary criticism can also give us insight into the human condition, as well as into the specific moral and intellectual atmosphere of an era, for the criteria by which a work of art is judged reflect contemporary philosophical and social attitudes. Literary criticism takes many forms: the traditional essay, the book or play review, even the parodic poem. Criticism can also be of several types: normative, descriptive, interpretive, textual, appreciative, generic. Collectively, the range of critical response helps us to understand a work of art, an author, an era.

Scope of the Series

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC) is designed to serve as an introduction for the student of twentieth-century literature to the authors of the period 1900 to 1960 and to the most significant commentators on these authors. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of this period are by far the most popular writers for study in high school and college literature courses. Since a vast amount of relevant critical material confronts the student, *TCLC* presents significant passages from the most important published criticism to aid students in the location and selection of commentaries on authors who died between 1900 and 1960.

The need for *TCLC* was suggested by the usefulness of the Gale series *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC),* which excerpts criticism on current writing. Because of the difference in time span under consideration *(CLC* considers authors who were still living after 1959), there is no duplication of material between *CLC* and *TCLC.* For further information about *CLC* and Gale's other criticism series, users should consult the Guide to Gale Literary Criticism Series preceding the title page in this volume.

Each volume of *TCLC* is carefully compiled to include authors who represent a variety of genres and nationalities and who are currently regarded as the most important writers of this era. In addition to major authors, *TCLC* also presents criticism on lesser-known writers whose significant contributions to literary history are important to the study of twentieth-century literature.

Each author entry in *TCLC* is intended to provide an overview of major criticism on an author. Therefore, the editors include fifteen to twenty authors in each 600-page volume (compared with approximately thirty-five authors in a *CLC* volume of similar size) so that more attention may be given to an author. Each author entry represents a historical survey of the critical response to that author's work: some early criticism is presented to indicate initial reactions, later criticism is selected to represent any rise or decline in the author's reputation, and current retrospective analyses provide students with a modern view. The length of an author entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English, and from foreign criticism in translation. Critical articles and books that have not been translated into English are excluded. Every attempt has been made to identify and include excerpts from the seminal essays on each author's work.

An author may appear more than once in the series because of the great quantity of critical material available, or because of a resurgence of criticism generated by events such as an author's centennial or anniversary celebration, the republication or posthumous publication of an author's works, or the publication of a newly translated work. Generally, a few author entries in each volume of *TCLC* feature criticism on single works by major authors who have appeared previously in the series. Only those individual works that have been the subjects of vast amounts of criticism and are widely studied in literature classes are selected for this in-depth treatment. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* are examples of such entries in *TCLC,* Volume 31.

Organization of the Book

An author entry consists of the following elements: author heading, biographical and critical introduction, list of principal works, excerpts of criticism (each preceded by explanatory notes and followed by a bibliographic citation), and an additional bibliography for further reading.

- The *author heading* consists of the author's full name, followed by birth and death dates. The unbracketed portion of the name denotes the form under which the author most commonly wrote. If an author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the real name given in parentheses on the first line of the biographical and critical introduction. Also located at the beginning of the introduction to the author entry are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose languages use nonroman alphabets. Uncertainty as to a birth or death date is indicated by a question mark.

- The *biographical and critical introduction* contains background information designed to introduce the reader to an author and to the critical debate surrounding his or her work. References are provided to past volumes of *TCLC* and to other biographical and critical reference series published by Gale, including *Children's Literature Review, Contemporary Authors, Dictionary of Literary Biography,* and *Something about the Author.*

- Most *TCLC* entries include *portraits* of the author. Many entries also contain illustrations of materials pertinent to an author's career, including manuscript pages, title pages, dust jackets, letters, or representations of important people, places, and events in an author's life.

- The *list of principal works* is chronological by date of first book publication and identifies the genre of each work. In the case of foreign authors with both foreign-language publications and English translations, the title and date of the first English-language edition are given in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.

- *Criticism* is arranged chronologically in each author entry to provide a perspective on changes in critical evaluation over the years. All titles by the author featured in the critical entry are printed in boldface type to enable the user to easily locate discussion of particular works. Also for purposes of easier identification, the critic's name and the publication date of the essay are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the journal in which it appeared. When an anonymous essay is later attributed to a critic, the critic's name appears in brackets at the beginning of the excerpt and in the bibliographic citation. Many critical entries in *TCLC* also contain translated material to aid users. Unless otherwise noted, translations within brackets are by the editors; translations within parentheses or continuous with the text are by the author of the excerpt. Publication information (such as publisher names and book prices) and parenthetical numerical references (such as footnotes or page and line references to specific editions of works) have been deleted at the editors' discretion to provide smoother reading of the text.

- Critical essays are prefaced by *explanatory notes* as an additional aid to students using *TCLC.* The explanatory notes provide several types of useful information, including the reputation of a critic, the importance of a work of criticism, the specific type of criticism (biographical, psychoanalytic, structuralist, etc.), a synopsis of the criticism, and the growth of critical controversy or changes in critical trends regarding an author's work. In some cases, these notes cross-reference the work of critics who discuss each other's commentary.

- A complete *bibliographic citation* designed to facilitate location of the original essay or book by the interested reader follows each piece of criticism.

- The *additional bibliography* appearing at the end of each author entry suggests further reading on the author. In some cases it includes essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights.

An acknowledgments section lists the copyright holders who have granted us permission to reprint material in this volume of *TCLC.* It does not, however, list every book or periodical reprinted or consulted in the preparation of the volume.

Cumulative Indexes

Each volume of *TCLC* includes a cumulative index listing all the authors who have appeared in *Contemporary Literary Criticism, Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism, Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800, Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism,* and *Short Story Criticism,* along with cross-references to the Gale series *Children's Literature Review, Authors in the News, Contemporary Authors, Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series, Dictionary of Literary Biography, Concise Dictionary of American Literary Biography, Something about the Author, Something about the Author Autobiography Series,* and *Yesterday's Authors of Books for Children.* Readers will welcome this cumulated author index as a useful tool for locating an author within the various series. The index, which lists birth and death dates, is particularly valuable for those authors who are identified with a certain period but whose death date causes them to be placed in another, or for those authors whose careers span two periods. For example, F. Scott Fitzgerald is found in *TCLC,* yet a writer often associated with him, Ernest Hemingway, is found in *CLC.*

Each volume of *TCLC* also includes a cumulative nationality index, in which authors' names are arranged alphabetically under their respective nationalities.

Title Index

An important feature of *TCLC* is a cumulative index to titles, an alphabetical listing of the literary works discussed in the series since its inception. Each title listing includes the corresponding volume and page numbers where criticism may be located. Foreign language titles that have been translated are followed by the titles of the translations—for example, *Voina i mir (War and Peace).* Page numbers following these translated titles refer to all pages on which any form of the titles, either foreign language or translated, appear. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while all individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks. In cases where the same title is used by different authors, the author's surname is given in parentheses after the title, e.g., *Collected Poems* (Housman) and *Collected Poems* (Yeats).

Acknowledgments

No work of this scope can be accomplished without the cooperation of many people. The editors especially wish to thank the copyright holders of the excerpted criticism included in this volume, the permissions managers of many book and magazine publishing companies for assisting us in securing reprint rights, and Anthony Bogucki for assistance with copyright research. We are also grateful to the staffs of the Detroit Public Library, the Library of Congress, the University of Detroit Library, the University of Michigan Library, and the Wayne State University Library for making their resources available to us.

Suggestions Are Welcome

In response to suggestions, several features have been added to *TCLC* since the series began, including explanatory notes to excerpted criticism, a cumulative author index listing authors in all Gale literary criticism series, entries devoted to criticism on a single work by a major author, more extensive illustrations, and a title index listing all literary works discussed in the series since its inception.

Readers who wish to suggest authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to write the editors.

Authors to Be Featured in Forthcoming Volumes

Henri Bergson (French philosopher)—One of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century, Bergson is renowned for his opposition to the dominant materialist thought of his time and for his creation of theories that emphasize the supremacy and independence of suprarational consciousness.

Edgar Rice Burroughs (American novelist)—Burroughs was a science fiction writer who is best known as the creator of Tarzan. His *Tarzan of the Apes* and its numerous sequels have sold over thirty-five million copies in fifty-six languages, making Burroughs one of the most popular authors in the world.

Samuel Butler (English novelist and essayist)—Butler is best known for *The Way of All Flesh,* an autobiographical novel that is both a classic account of the conflict between father and son and an indictment of Victorian society.

Stephen Crane (American novelist and short story writer) Crane was one of the foremost realistic writers in American literature. *TCLC* will devote an entry to his masterpiece, *The Red Badge of Courage,* in which he depicted the psychological complexities of fear and courage in battle.

Theodore Dreiser (American novelist)—A prominent American exponent of literary Naturalism and one of America's foremost novelists, Dreiser was the author of works commended for their powerful characterizations and strong ideological convictions.

James George Frazer (Scottish anthropologist)—A social anthropologist who spent a lifetime examining and attempting to explain the primitive bases of human social behavior, Frazer is often linked with Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Albert Einstein as central to the shaping the modern consciousness. He is best known as the author of *The Golden Bough,* a massive anthropological study that had a particular influence on the development of twentieth-century literature.

Thomas Hardy (English novelist)—Considered one of the greatest novelists in the English language, Hardy is best known for his portrayal of characters who are subject to social and psychological forces beyond their control. *TCLC* will devote an entry to *The Mayor of Casterbridge,* a tragedy of psychological determinism in which Hardy introduced his belief that "character is fate."

William James (American philosopher and psychologist)—One of the most influential figures in modern Western philosophy, James was the founder of Pragmatism, a philosophy that rejected abstract models of reality in an attempt to explain life as it is actually experienced.

Nikos Kazantzakis (Greek novelist)—Kazantzakis was the author of works embodying Nietzschean and Bergsonian philosophical ideas in vividly portrayed characters, the most famous of which was the protagonist of *Zorba the Greek.*

D. H. Lawrence (English novelist)–Controversial during his lifetime for the explicit sexuality of his works, today Lawrence is considered one of the most important novelists of the twentieth century for his innovative explorations of human psychology. *TCLC* will devote an entry to his highly esteemed novel *Women in Love,* which is often identified as the fullest exposition of Lawrence's complex personal mythology.

Thomas Mann (German novelist)—Mann is credited with reclaiming for the German novel an international stature it had not enjoyed since the time of the Romantics. *TCLC* will devote an entry to his novel *Buddenbrooks,* a masterpiece of Realism which depicts the rise and fall of a wealthy Hanseatic family.

Arthur Wing Pinero (English dramatist)—Once the most popular playwright in England, Pinero is remembered today for his topical "problem plays," which brought dramatic realism to the English stage, and for his well-crafted, highly successful farces.

Marcel Proust (French novelist)—Proust's multivolume *A la recherche du temps perdu (Remembrance of Things Past)* is among literature's works of highest genius. Combining a social historian's chronicle of turn-of-the-century Paris society, a philosopher's reflections on the nature of time and consciousness, and a psychologist's insight into a tangled network of personalities, the novel is acclaimed for conveying a profound view of all human existence.

Joseph Roth (Austrian novelist)—A chronicler of the last years of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Roth is best known for his novels *Radetzky March, Job,* and *Flight without End.*

Italo Svevo (Italian novelist)—Svevo's ironic portrayals of the moral life of the bourgeoisie, which characteristically demonstrate the influence of the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud, earned him a reputation as the father of the modern Italian novel.

Mark Twain (American novelist)—Considered the father of modern American literature, Twain combined moral and social satire, adventure, and frontier humor to create such perenially popular books as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court.*

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Contents

Mikhail (Petrovich) Artsybashev

1878-1927

(Also transliterated as Artsuibashev, Artzibashef, Artzibasheff, Artzibashev, Artzybashef, and Artzybashev) Russian novelist, dramatist, short story writer, and essayist.

Artsybashev is chiefly remembered as the author of *Sanin (Sanine),* an immensely popular novel of its time that detailed the sensual exploits of an unapologetic egoist. Extremely rebellious and nihilistic in spirit, Artsybashev was preoccupied with sex and death and with the stultification of the free expression of individual will by social conventions. In all of his works, society crumbles as its members succumb to despair and suicide; only Sanine, through his unabashed individualism and sensuality, avoids the spiritual malaise suffered by Artsybashev's other characters. However, in his later works, Artsybashev even doubts the viability of his own creed of anarchism as a response to the human condition and ultimately concedes the utter futility of being.

The only son of small landowners, Artsybashev was born in the Kharkov region of southern Russia. He was extremely unhappy in school, the brutal discipline of which he later described in his first short story, "Pasha Tumanov." He demonstrated an early aptitude for painting, and his father, a retired army officer who wanted his son to pursue a military career, reluctantly allowed him to study art. While attending art school, Artsybashev began writing, at first experimenting primarily with poetry. In 1898 he provoked a bitter feud with his father by marrying a woman of a slightly lower social class, and thereafter his father refused to support him financially. When Artsybashev left a year later to study at the Imperial Academy of fine arts, he earned money by drawing cartoons and writing articles for local newspapers. During the unsuccessful Revolution of 1905, which Artsybashev supported, he wrote several short stories that recorded some of the bloodiest and most dramatic events of the uprising. In 1907, the publication of *Sanine* brought Artsybashev immediate fame and inspired numerous imitations as well as *Sanine* cults which many young people organized in order to give expression to their defiance of tradition and restraint. Translated into every major European language, the novel was widely censored for its promotion of unrestrained sexuality and rebellion against authority. His next novel, *U posledney cherty (Breaking Point),* was similarly rebellious in tone, and after its publication in 1912 Artsybashev was imprisoned for several months as an enemy of the czarist government, an experience that further confirmed his nihilistic and anarchistic beliefs. At this time, Artsybashev began writing dramas as well as fiction and soon began to publish *Svoboda,* a weekly magazine which became a vehicle for his opinions. The paper was suppressed after the outbreak of World War I, but was revived after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. Because of his anarchistic beliefs, Artsybashev soon became estranged from the Bolsheviks and was persecuted by them: *Svoboda* was again suppressed, he was imprisoned several times, and his books were placed on the "forbidden list." In 1923, Artsybashev left Russia for Poland, where he published bitter invectives against the Bolsheviks. He died of tuberculosis in Warsaw in 1927.

Sanine, Artsybashev's most widely read work, was a succès de scandale that glorified the defiant egoism of its eponymous protagonist. Rejecting the authority of society to limit his behavior, Sanine believes that only through self-willed activity, and not socially induced passivity, can life be lived to the fullest. Nicholas Luker wrote that "Sanin embodies Artsybashev's advocacy of the natural life free of moral and social constraints," and that the dominance that Sanine exerts over all of the other characters attests to the efficacy of his worldview. Sanine regards those who are constrained by society as vulgar and stupid, and the numerous suicides at the end of the novel as evidence that their social order is crumbling. While the novel was widely denounced as pornographic, some critics defended the artistic merit and philosophical sophistication of the work, and many have viewed Sanine as a literary descendant of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's *Übermensch* ("superman") because of his unapologetic self-assertion. However, Artsybashev disavowed this comparison and instead pointed to the influence of Max Stirner, a nineteenth-century philosopher who argued that the suppression of human will by civilization and government subverted the natural expression of life. Early commentary on *Sanine* often discussed the work in relation to contemporary politics: Gilbert Cannan wrote in his preface to the first English translation that the novel "was written in the despair which seized the Intelligentsia of Russia after the last abortive revolution" in 1905. However, Artsybashev contended that the novel was written in 1903, but because of its controversial nature was withheld from publication until 1907; thus, later critics argued that interpreting the novel as a reaction to the failed Revolution of 1905 overestimates the social purpose of the book. Sanine, although openly defiant of all authority, has no interest in revolution nor in joining with others to achieve social change; he looks upon the submission of others to authority only as a sign of their own weakness.

While *Sanine* is in part an apology for the uncompromising pursuit of pleasure, *Breaking Point* emphasizes the bankruptcy of sensuality as a way of life. Sanine is never bored by his pursuit of pleasure; Dchenev, the central character in *Breaking Point,* becomes satiated and no longer interested in self-assertion. James Huneker, who described *Breaking Point* as "the most poignant and intolerable book I ever read," called Artsybashev "a prophet of pessimism." Death and suffering pervade the novel, a fact which has led many critics to compare it to the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky. However, whereas Dostoevsky saw suffering as a vehicle for redemption, Artsybashev recognized only the universality and inescapability of suffering. He concluded that the only response to endless and meaningless suffering is suicide, reflecting a pure intellectual nihilism that is the major theme of the novel. Artsybashev's dramas, like his novels, deal explicitly with sex and relations between men and women. They focus on what the author saw as the inevitable unhappiness of marriage, an institution that inhibits the natural desires of its participants. In his plays, Artsybashev continued to express the "anarchical individualism" that is the hallmark of his fiction.

Early critical reaction to Artsybashev's works concentrated on his frank treatment of sexuality and unabashed sensuality. Many critics dismissed *Sanine* as prurient; D. S. Mirsky, who called it "the Bible of every schoolboy and schoolgirl in Russia," maintained that it "contributed to [the] moral deterioration of Russian society, especially of provincial schoolgirls." Other critics, however, lauded Artsybashev for his daring frankness and found literary value in his works, praising their philosophical depth and artistic candor. Later critics, accustomed to what seemed at the time sensational excesses, have recognized the value in Artsybashev's articulation of the moral, social, and intellectual turmoil of his age.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Sanin (novel) 1907
[*Sanine*, 1915]
U posledney cherty (novel) 1912
[*Breaking Point*, 1915]
Revnost (drama) 1913
[*Jealousy*, 1923]
Vragi (drama) 1913
[*Enemies*, 1927]
Zakon dikarya (drama) 1913
[*The Law of the Savage*, 1923]
The Millionaire (short stories) 1915
Voyna (drama) 1915
[*War*, 1915]
Tales of the Revolution (short stories) 1917
**Dikie* (novel) 1923
[*The Savage*, 1924]
Zapisky pisatelya (essays) 1925

*This work was written during 1917 and 1918.

WILLIAM LYON PHELPS (essay date 1911)

[An American critic and educator, Phelps was for over forty years a lecturer on English literature at Yale. His early study The Beginning of the English Romantic Movement *(1893) is still considered an important work and his* Essays on Russian Novelists *(1911) was one of the first influential studies in English of the Russian Realists. From 1922 until his death in 1943 he wrote a regular column for* Scribner's Magazine *and a nationally syndicated newspaper column. During this period, his criticism became less scholarly and more journalistic. In the following excerpt, he discusses the major themes of* Sanine.*]*

Not the greatest, but the most sensational, novel published in Russia during the last five years is ***Sanin,*** by Artsybashev. It is not sensational in the incidents, though two men commit suicide, and two girls are ruined; it is sensational in its ideas. To make a sensation in contemporary Russian literature is an achievement, where pathology is now rampant. But Artsybashev accomplished it, and his novel made a tremendous noise, the echoes of which quickly were heard all over curious and eclectic Germany, and have even stirred Paris. Since the failure of the Revolution, there has been a marked revolt in Russia against three great ideas that have at different times dominated Russian literature: the quiet pessimism of Turgenev, the Christian non-resistance religion of Tolstoi, and the familiar Russian type of will-less philosophy. Even before the Revolution Gorki had expressed the spirit of revolt; but his position, extreme as it appears to an Anglo-Saxon, has been left far behind by Artsybashev, who, with the genuine Russian love of the *reductio ad absurdum,* has reached the farthest limits of moral anarchy in the creation of his hero Sanin.

In an admirable article in the *Westminster Gazette,* for 14 May 1910, by the accomplished scholar and critic, Mr. R. C. Long, called "The Literature of Self-assertion," we obtain a strong smell of the hell-broth now boiling in Russian literature. . . .

> Russia always had her literature of adventure, and Russian novels of manners and of psychology became known to Westerners merely because they were the best, and by no means because they were the only books that appeared. The popular taste was formerly met with naïve and outrageous "lubotchniya"-books. The new craze for "Nat Pinkerton and Sherlock Holmes" stories is something quite different. It foreshadows a complete change in the psychosis of the Russian reader, the decay of the literature of passivity, and the rise of a new literature of action and physical revolt. The literature of passivity reached its height with the *(sic)* Chekhov. The best representative of the transition from Chekhov to the new literature of self-assertion is Maxim Gorki's friend, Leonid Andreev. . . .
>
> These have got clear away from the humble, ineffectual individual, "crushed by life." Full of learned philosophies from Max Stirner and Nietzsche, they preach, in Stirner's words, "the absolute independence of the individual, master of himself, and of all things." "The death of Everyday-ism," the "resurrection of myth," "orgiasm," "mystical Anarchism," and "universalist individualism" are some of the shibboleths of these new writers, who are mostly very young, very clever, and profoundly convinced that they are even cleverer than they are.
>
> Anarchism, posing as self-assertion, is the note in most recent Russian literature, as, indeed, it is in Russian life.

The most powerful among this school of writers, and the only one who can perhaps be called a man of genius, is Michael Artsybashev. He came honestly by his hot, impulsive temperament, being, like Gogol, a man of the South. (pp. 248-50)

Sanin appeared at the psychological moment, late in the year 1907. The Revolution was a failure, and it being impossible to fight the government or to obtain political liberty, people in Russia of all classes were ready for a revolt against moral law, the religion of self-denial, and all the conventions established by society, education, and the church. At this moment of general desperation and smouldering rage, appeared a work written with great power and great art, deifying the natural instincts of man, incarnating the spirit of liberty in a hero who despises all so-called morality as absurd tyranny. It was a bold attempt to marshal the animal instincts of humanity, terrifically strong as they are even in the best citizens, against every moral and prudential restraint. The effect of the book will probably not last very long,—already it has been called an ephemeral sensation,—but it was immediate and tremendous. It was especially powerful among university students and high school boys and girls—the "Sanin-morals" of undergraduates were alluded to in a speech in the Duma.

But although the book was published at the psychological moment, it was written with no reference to any post-revolution spirit. For Artsybashev composed his novel in 1903, when he was twenty-four years old. He tried in vain to induce publishers

to print it, and fortunately for him, was obliged to wait until 1907, when the time happened to be exactly ripe.

The novel has been allowed to circulate in Russia, because it shows absolutely no sympathy with the Revolution or with the spirit of political liberty. Men who waste their time in the discussion of political rights or in the endeavour to obtain them are ridiculed by Sanin. The *summum bonum* ["supreme good"] is personal, individual happiness, the complete gratification of desire. Thus, those who are working for the enfranchisement of the Russian people, for relief from the bureaucracy, and for more political independence, not only have no sympathy with the book—they hate it, because it treats their efforts with contempt. Some of them have gone so far as to express the belief that the author is in a conspiracy with the government to bring ridicule on their cause, and to defeat their ever living hopes of better days. However this may be, ***Sanin*** is not in the least a politically revolutionary book, and critics of that school see no real talent or literary power in its pages.

But, sinister and damnable as its tendency is, the novel is written with extraordinary skill, and Artsybashev is a man to be reckoned with. The style has that simplicity and directness so characteristic of Russian realism, and the characters are by no means sign-posts of various opinions; they are living and breathing human beings. I am sorry that such a book as ***Sanin*** has ever been written; but it cannot be black-balled from the republic of letters.

It is possible that it is a florescence not merely of the author's genius, but of his sickness. The glorification of Sanin's bodily strength, of Karsavina's female voluptuousness, and the loud call to physical joy which rings through the work may be an emanation of tuberculosis as well as that of healthy mental conviction. Shut out from active happiness, Artsybashev may have taken this method of vicarious delight.

The bitterness of his own enforced resignation of active happiness and the terror inspired by his own disease are incarnated in a decidedly interesting character, Semionov, who, although still able to walk about when we first see him, is dying of consumption. He has none of the hopefulness and cheerfulness so often symptomatic of that malady; he is peevish, irritable, and at times enraged by contact with his healthy friends. After a frightful attack of coughing, he says:

> I often think that soon I shall be lying in complete darkness. You understand, with my nose fallen in and my limbs decayed. And above me, where you are on the earth, everything will go on, exactly as it does now, while I still am permitted to see it. You will be living then, you will look at this very moon, you will breathe, you will pass over my grave; perhaps you will stop there a moment and despatch some necessity. And I shall lie and become rotten.

His death at the hospital in the night, with his friends looking on, is powerfully and minutely described. The fat, stupid priest goes through the last ceremonies, and is dully amazed at the contempt he receives from Sanin.

Sanin's beautiful sister Lyda is ruined by a worthless but entirely conventional officer. Her remorse on finding that she is with child is perfectly natural, but is ridiculed by her brother, who saves her from suicide. He is not in the least ashamed of her conduct, and tells her she has no reason for loss of pride; indeed, he does not think of blaming the officer. He is ready to commit incest with his sister, whose physical charm appeals to him; but she is not sufficiently emancipated for that, so he advises her to get married with a friend who loves her, before the child is born. This is finally satisfactorily arranged. Later, Sanin, not because he disapproves of the libertine officer's affair with his sister, but because he regards the officer as a blockhead, treats him with scant courtesy; and the officer, hidebound by convention, sees no way out but a challenge to a duel. The scene when the two brother officers bring the formal challenge to Sanin is the only scene in the novel marked by genuine humour, and is also the only scene where we are in complete sympathy with the hero. One of the delegates has all the stiff courtesy and ridiculous formality which he regards as entirely consistent with his errand; the other is a big, blundering fellow, who has previously announced himself as a disciple of Tolstoi. To Sanin's philosophy of life, duelling is as absurd as religion, morality, or any other stupid conventionality; and his cold, ruthless logic makes short work of the polite phrases of the two ambassadors. Both are amazed at his positive refusal to fight, and hardly know which way to turn; the disciple of Tolstoi splutters with rage because Sanin shows up his inconsistency with his creed; both try to treat him like an outcast, but make very little progress. Sanin informs them that he will not fight a duel, because he does not wish to take the officer's life, and because he does not care to risk his own; but that if the officer attempts any physical attack upon him in the street, he will thrash him on the spot. Enraged and bewildered by Sanin's unconventional method of dealing with the difficulty, the discomfited emissaries withdraw. Later, the challenger meets Sanin in the street, and goaded to frenzy by his calm and contemptuous stare, strikes him with a whip; he immediately receives in the face a terrible blow from his adversary's fist, delivered with all his colossal strength. A friend carries him to his lodgings, and there he commits suicide. From the conventional point of view, this was the only course left to him.

In direct contrast to most Russian novels, the man here is endowed with limitless power of will, and the women characterised by weakness. The four women in the story, Sanin's sister Lyda, the pretty school-teacher Karsavina, Jurii's sister, engaged to a young scientist, who during the engagement cordially invites her brother to accompany him to a house of ill-fame, and the mother of Sanin, are all thoroughly conventional, and are meant to be. They are living under what Sanin regards as the tyranny of social convention. He treats his mother's shocked amazement with brutal scorn; he ridicules Lyda's shame at being *enceinte* ["pregnant"]; he seduces Karsavina, at the very time when she is in love with Jurii, and reasons with cold patience against her subsequent remorse. It is clear that Artsybashev believes that for some time to come women will not accept the gospel of uncompromising egoism.

The most interesting character in the book, apart from the hero, is Jurii, who might easily have been a protagonist in one of Turgenev's tragedies. He is the typical Russian, the highly educated young man with a diseased will. He is characterised by that indecision which has been the bane of so many Russians. All through the book he seeks in vain for some philosophy of life, some guiding principle. He has abandoned faith in religion, his former enthusiasm for political freedom has cooled, but he simply cannot live without some leading Idea. He is an acute sufferer from that mental sickness diagnosed by nearly all writers of Russia. He envies and at the same time despises Sanin for his cheerful energy. Finally, unable to escape from the perplexities of his own thinking, he commits suicide. His friends stand about his grave at the funeral, and one of them foolishly asks Sanin to make some appropriate remarks. Sanin, who always says exactly what he thinks, and abhors all

forms of hypocrisy, delivers the following funeral oration—heartily endorsed by the reader—in one sentence: "The world has now one blockhead the less." The horror-stricken consternation of his friends fills Sanin with such scorn that he leaves the town, and we last see him in an open field in the country, giving a glad shout of recognition to the dawn.

The motto that Artsybashev has placed at the beginning of the novel is taken from Ecclesiastes vii. 29: "God hath made man upright: but they have sought out many inventions." This same text was used by Kipling as the title of one of his books, but used naturally in a quite different way. The Devil has here cited Scripture for his purpose. The hero of the novel is an absolutely sincere, frank, and courageous *Advocatus Diaboli*. He is invariably calm and collected; he never loses his temper in an argument; he questions the most fundamental beliefs and principles with remorseless logic. Two of his friends are arguing about Christianity; "at least," says one, "you will not deny that its influence has been good." "I don't deny that," says the other. Then Sanin remarks quietly, "But I deny it!" and he adds, with a calmness provoking to the two disputants, "Christianity has played an abominable rôle in history, and the name of Jesus Christ will for some time yet oppress humanity like a curse."

Sanin insists that it is not necessary to have any theory of life, or to be guided by any principle; that God may exist or He may not; He does not at any rate bother about us. The real rational life of man should be exactly like a bird. He should be controlled wholly by the desire of the moment. The bird wishes to alight on a branch, and so he alights; then he wishes to fly, so he flies. That is rational, declares Sanin; that is the way men and women should live, without principles, without plans, and without regrets. Drunkenness and adultery are nothing to be ashamed of, nor in any sense to be called degrading. Nothing that gives pleasure can ever be degrading. The love of strong drink and the lust for woman are not sins; in fact, there is no such thing as sin. These passions are manly and natural, and what is natural cannot be wrong. There is in Sanin's doctrine something of Nietzsche and more of Rousseau.

Sanin himself is not at all a contemptible character. He is not argumentative except when dragged into an argument; he does not attempt to convert others to his views. He has the inner light which we more often associate with Christian faith. In the midst of his troubled and self-tortured comrades, Sanin stands like a pillar, calm, unshakable. He has found absolute peace, absolute harmony with life. He thinks, talks, and acts exactly as he chooses, without any regard whatever to the convenience or happiness of any one else. There is something refreshing about this perfectly healthy, clear-eyed, quiet, composed, resolute man—whose way of life is utterly unaffected by public opinion, who simply does not care a straw for anything or anybody but himself. Thus he recognises his natural foe in Christianity, in the person of Jesus Christ, and in His Russian interpreter, Leo Tolstoi. For if Christianity teaches anything, it teaches that man must live contrary to his natural instincts. The endeavour of all so-called "new religions" is rootless, because it is an attempt to adapt Christianity to modern human convenience. Much better is Sanin's way: he sees clearly that no adaptation is possible, and logically fights Christianity as the implacable enemy of the natural man. (pp. 251-60)

William Lyon Phelps, "Artsybashev," in his Essays on Russian Novelists, *The Macmillan Company, 1911, pp. 248-61.*

JAMES HUNEKER (essay date 1915)

[Huneker was an American musician and critic. As a critic, he concentrated on discovering the best of European music and literature and introducing them to the American public. Huneker was an early advocate of impressionism in literary criticism and, as such, his writings in this genre were characteristically subjective and marked by his often contagious enthusiasms, love for the voluptuous and eloquent prose style. Huneker's critical ideas strongly influenced many young writers of the twenties. In the following excerpt, he surveys Artsybashev's works, focusing on Sanine *and* Breaking Point.]

Little more than a decade has passed since the appearance of a young man named Michael Artzibashef who, without any preliminary blaring of trumpets, has taken the centre of the stage and still holds it. He is as Slavic as Dostoievsky, more pessimistic than Tolstoy, though not the supreme artist that was Turgenev. Of Gogol's overhwelming humour he has not a trace; instead, a corroding irony which eats into the very vitals of faith in all things human. Gorky, despite his "bitter" nickname, is an incorrigible optimist compared with Artzibashef. One sports with Nietzsche, the other not only swears by Max Stirner, but some of his characters are Stirnerism incarnate. His chosen field in society is the portrayal of the middle-class and proletarian. (pp. 34-5)

His first successful tale was **"Ivan Lande."** It brought him recognition. This was in 1904. But the year before he had finished ***Sanine,*** his masterpiece, though it did not see publication till 1908. This was three years after the revolution of 1905, so that those critics were astray who spoke of the book as a naturally pessimistic reaction from the fruitless uprising. Pessimism was born in the bones of the author and he needed no external stimulus to provoke such a realistic study as ***Sanine.*** Whether he is happier, healthier, whether he has married and raised a family, we know not. Personal as his stories are said to be, their art renders them objective.

The world over ***Sanine*** has been translated. It is a significant book, and incorporates the aspirations of many young men and women in the Russian Empire. It was not printed at first because of the censorship, and in Germany it had to battle for its life.

It is not only written from the standpoint of a professed immoralist, but the Russian censor declared it pernicious because of its "defamation of youth," its suicidal doctrine, its depressing atmosphere. The sex element, too, has aroused indignant protests from the clergy, from the press, from society itself.

In reply to his critics Artzibashef has denied libelling the younger generation. ***"Sanine,"*** he says, "is the apology for individualism: the hero of the novel is a type. In its pure form this type is still new and rare, but its spirit is in every frank, bold, and strong representative of the new Russia." And then he adds his own protest against the imitators of ***Sanine,*** who "flooded the literary world with pornographic writings." Now, whatever else it may be, ***Sanine*** is not pornographic, though I shall not pretend to say that its influence has been harmless. We should not forget *Werther* and the trail of sentimental suicides that followed its publication. But ***Sanine*** is fashioned of sterner stuff than Goethe's romance, and if it be "dangerous," then all the better.

Test all things, and remember that living itself is a dangerous affair. Never has the world needed precepts of daring, courage, individualism more than in this age of cowardly self-seeking,

and the sleek promises of altruism and its soulless well-being. ***Sanine*** is a call to arms for individualists. And recall the Russian saying: Self-conceit is the salt of life.

That Artzibashef denies the influence of Nietzsche while admitting his indebtedness to Nietzsche's forerunner, Max Stirner, need not particularly concern us. There are evidences scattered throughout the pages of ***Sanine*** that prove a close study of Nietzsche and his idealistic superman. Artist as is Artzibashef, he has densely spun into the fabric of his work the ideas that control his characters, and whether these ideas are called moral or immoral does not matter. The chief thing is whether they are propulsive forces in the destiny of his puppets.

That he paints directly from life is evident: he tells us that in him is the débris of a painter compelled by poverty to relinquish his ambitions because he had not money enough to buy paper, pencil, colour. Such a realistic brush has seldom been wielded as the brush of Artzibashef. I may make one exception, that of J.-K. Huysmans. The Frenchman is the greater artist, the greater master of his material, and, as Havelock Ellis puts it, the master of "the intensest vision of the modern world"; but Huysmans lacks the all-embracing sympathy, the tremulous pity, the love of suffering mankind that distinguishes the young Russian novelist, a love that is blended with an appalling distrust, nay, hatred of life. Both men prefer the sordid, disagreeable, even the vilest aspects of life.

The general ideas of Artzibashef are few and profound. The leading motive of his symphony is as old as Ecclesiastes: "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be." It is not original, this theme, and it is as eternal as mediocrity; but it has been orchestrated anew by Artzibashef, who, like his fellow countrymen, Tschaikovsky and Moussorgsky, contrives to reveal to us, if no hidden angles of the truth, at least its illusion in terms of terror, anguish, and deadly nausea produced by mere existence. With such poisoned roots Artzibashef's tree of life must soon be blasted. His intellectual indifferentism to all that constitutes the solace and bravery of our daily experience is almost pathological. The aura of sadism hovers about some of his men. After reading Artzibashef you wonder that the question, "Is life worth living?" will ever be answered in the affirmative among these humans, who, as old Homer says, hasten hellward from their birth.

The corollary to this leading motive is the absolute futility of action. A paralysis of the will overtakes his characters, the penalty of their torturing introspection. It was Turgenev, in an essay on Hamlet, who declared that the Russian character is composed of Hamlet-like traits. Man is the only animal that cannot live in the present; a Norwegian philosopher, Sören Kierkegaard, has said that he lives forward, thinks backward; he aspires to the future. An idealist, even when close to the gorilla, is doomed to disillusionment. He discounts to-morrow.

Russian youth has not always the courage of its chimera, though it fraternises with the phantasmagoria of its soul. Its Golden Street soon becomes choked with fog. The political and social conditions of the country must stifle individualism, else why should Artzibashef write with such savage intensity? His pen is the pendulum that has swung away from the sentimental brotherhood of man as exemplified in Dostoievsky, and from the religious mania of Tolstoy to the opposite extreme, individual anarchy. Where there is repression there is rebellion. Max Stirner represents the individualism which found its vent in the Prussia of 1848; Nietzsche the reaction from the Prussia of 1870; Artzibashef forestalled the result of the 1905 insurrection in Russia.

His prophetic soul needed no proof; he knew that his people, the students and intellectuals, would be crushed. The desire of the clod for the cloud was extinguished. Happiness is an eternal hoax. Only children believe in life. The last call of the devil's dinner-bell has sounded. In the scenery of the sky there is only mirage. The moonlit air is a ruse of that wily old serpent, nature, to arouse romance in the breast of youth and urge a repetition of the life processes. We graze Schopenhauer, overhear Leopardi, but the Preacher has the mightiest voice. Naturally, the novelist says none of these things outright. The phrases are mine, but he points the moral in a way that is all his own.

What, then, is the remedy for the ills of this life? Is its misery irremediable? Why must mankind go on living if the burden is so great? Even with wealth comes ennui or disease, and no matter how brilliant we may live, we must all die alone. Pascal said this better. In several of his death-bed scenes the dying men of Artzibashef curse their parents, mock at religion, and—here is a novel nuance—abuse their intellectual leaders. Semenow the student, who appears in several of the stories, abuses Marx and Nietzsche. Of what use are these thinkers to a man about to depart from the world? It is the revolt of stark humanity from the illusions of brotherly love, from the chiefest illusion—self.

Artzibashef offers no magic draft of oblivion to his sufferers. With a vivid style that recalls the Tolstoy of *The Death of Ivan Illitch* he shows us old and young wrestling with the destroyer, their souls emptied of all earthly hopes save one. Shall I live? Not God's will be done, not the roseate dream of a future life, only—why must I die? though the poor devil is submerged in the very swamp of life. But life, life, even a horrible hell for eternity, rather than annihilation! In the portrayal of these damned creatures Artzibashef is elemental. He recalls both Dante and Dostoievsky.

He has told us that he owes much to Tolstoy (also to Goethe, Hugo, Dostoievsky, and much to Tchekov), but his characters are usually failures when following the tenets of Tolstoy, the great moralist and expounder of "non-resistance." He simply explodes the torpedo of truth under the ark of socialism. This may be noted in **"Ivan Lande"**—now in the English volume entitled ***The Millionaire***—where we see step by step the decadence of a beautiful soul obsessed by the love of his fellows.

It is in the key of Tolstoy, but the moral is startling. Not thus can you save your soul. Max Stirner is to the fore. Don't turn your other cheek if one has been smitten, but smite the smiter, and heartily. However, naught avails, you must die, and die like a dog, a star, or a flower. Better universal suicide. Success comes only to the unfortunate. And so we swing back to Eduard von Hartmann, who, in his philosophy of the unconscious, counsels the same thing. (A ferocious advocate of pessimism and a disciple of Arthur Schopenhauer, by name Maïnlander, preached world destruction through race suicide.)

But all these pessimists seem well fed and happy when compared to the nihilists of Artzibashef. He portrays every stage of disillusionment with a glacial calmness. Not even annihilation is worth the trouble of a despairing gesture. Cui bono? Revolutionist or royalist—your career is, if you but dare break the conspiracy of silence—a burden or a sorrow. Happiness is only a word. Love a brief sensation. Death a certainty. For such nihilism we must go to the jungles of Asia, where in a

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