

Title: Vassily Aksyonov's History Lessons
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To comprehend the logic of 20th century Russian history Vassily Aksyonov has consistently attempted to unveil the mechanisms which gave birth to and supported the Soviet regime. As a 'shestidesiatnik' he was naturally drawn to the phenomenon of totalitarianism and looked for one person to blame it on. In the 1960s, in synch with the prevailing attitude Aksyonov shifted from idealizing Lenin and condemning Stalin (*Steel Bird*, 1965) to disillusionment with the concept of ideological brotherhood (*Surplussed Barrelware*, 1967).

In the 1970s the writer, having lost all hope to reconcile with the past and the present, examined the Revolution and the cult of personality (*The Burn 1969-1975*, *The Island of Crimea 1977-1979*) in an attempt to understand their origin. The magnitude of the phenomena forced Aksyonov to weigh the responsibility of the people and the intelligentsia for both. His verdict, to quote Ellendea Proffer, was that the elite 'created the monster and was then devoured by it' (Proffer).

Aksyonov, who had already begun to doubt one man's role in history, started investigating factors which could help one man to interfere with the course of events (*The Island of Crimea*, *The Moscow Saga 1992*). He concluded that Stalin was supported in his actions by a greater power. In *The New Sweet Style* the writer provided the name for it – divine wisdom. For Aksyonov, whose outlook on history has been influenced by Berdyaev and Nietzsche, all events appeared historically and theologically determined in accordance with people's deeds. Both retribution and reward proved to be inevitable, leaving memory as the only means to avoid the past in the future (*The Burn*, *The Island of Crimea*).

Bibliography

Proffer, Ellendea. "The Prague Winter: Two Novels by Aksyonov", in *The Third Wave: Russian Literature in Emigration*, Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1984, p. 133.