

New Release from Mehring Books -- Major Cultural Event

Art as the Cognition of Life

By Aleksandr Konstantinovich Voronsky

2 September 1998

Art as the Cognition of Life: Selected Writings 1911-1936

Aleksandr Konstantinovich Voronsky

Translated and edited by Frederick S. Choate



Aleksandr Voronsky
at the time of his
arrest in 1929

The publication of this volume of essays by Aleksandr K. Voronsky is a significant cultural event. Voronsky was an outstanding figure of post-revolutionary Soviet intellectual life, editor of the most important literary journal of the 1920s in the USSR and a supporter of Trotsky and the Left Opposition in the struggle against Stalinism. As a defender of the "fellow-traveler" writers and an opponent of the Proletarian Culture movement, Voronsky was one of the authentic representatives of classical Marxism in the field of literary criticism in the twentieth century. His work speaks very directly to the current crisis of artistic perspective.

In the late 1920s Voronsky was expelled from the Communist Party, arrested, sent into exile, only to be rearrested and executed in 1937 during Stalin's terror. The Stalinist bureaucracy removed his books from Soviet libraries and virtually erased him from Soviet history. After his "rehabilitation" in 1957, several collections of his writings were published in the USSR in heavily censored form. All cuts have been restored for his edition.

This anthology, the first to appear in English, contains Voronsky's major literary critical essays, including "Art as the Cognition of Life, and the

Contemporary World" as well as writings on Tolstoy and Freud, newspaper articles, a satire, two letters addressed to his persecutors, and an appendix of six documents crucial to an understanding of the events of the 1920s.

ISBN 0-929087-76-3/ CIP 97-43107 528 pages with glossary, biographical notes, name index, subject index and index of literary works and characters
\$29.95 plus shipping and handling

Translator Frederick S. Choate is a lecturer in Russian Literature in California and has done extensive research on the socialist-based opposition that existed to the Stalinist regime.

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Remarks of Frederick Choate

"To be able to break down the barriers erected by Stalinism and restore Voronsky to his rightful place in Marxist literary thought is an historical event, for many of the problems which Voronsky addressed in his lifetime remain unresolved today"

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Frederick Choate, the translator of Voronsky's Art as the Cognition of Life, related the following history about the events leading up to the publication of the book.

In the early 1970s, while taking a course on Soviet literature, I read Leon Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*. Without doubt, this is one of the most insightful books about socialism and literature written in this century. Fascination with this work led me to

other writings by Trotsky and those who collaborated with him in the struggle of the Left Opposition against the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union.

A book published by Professor Robert Maguire drew my attention to Aleksandr Voronsky, a member of the Left Opposition and editor of *Red Virgin Soil*, the most important literary journal of the 1920s.

It turns out that Voronsky is perhaps the most important Russian Marxist who focused primarily on literary matters. Because he belonged to the Left Opposition, he was not only executed in 1937 during the Stalinist purges, but virtually erased from Soviet history as a so-called "enemy of the people."

I hoped to be able to find out more about Voronsky by going to Moscow for three months in the fall of 1987. From what I learned in 1987, it was clear that extensive research was necessary to develop material on Voronsky's political and theoretical views.

In 1991 I returned to Moscow for one year of research under the auspices of ACTR [the American Council of Teachers of Russian]. This one-year trip turned into a four-year stay, as the Soviet Union underwent unprecedented political change.

While in Russia, I gathered a large amount of new material about Voronsky. Friends and colleagues would often ask me to suggest material from Voronsky that they could read. Apart from his autobiographical book, *Waters of Life and Death*, only two essays have previously been published in English. With the encouragement of Mehring Books I have put together a collection of his most important writings in the present anthology and am currently working on a biography of his life.

To be able to break down the barriers erected by Stalinism and restore Voronsky to his rightful place in Marxist literary thought is an historical event, for many of the problems which Voronsky addressed in his lifetime remain unresolved today. For the first time, the English-speaking reader will now have a body of major works by Voronsky, which will allow one to judge his theoretical contributions to Marxist literary criticism.

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