A CRITIQUE OF THE POEM FOR ADULTS
by
Adam Wazyk

Translator's Note:

Adam Wazyk was born in 1905. His first volume of lyrics "Semaphore" appeared in 1924. Since then he has published several volumes of poetry, some stories, a novel, and two plays.

During the war he broadcast to Poland from Moscow; later he joined the Polish Army formed in the USSR. After the war he served as a member of the Arts Council of the Polish Ministry of Culture, and in 1953 he was awarded the Polish State Prize for Literature.

In October, 1955 he published in "Nowa Kultura" (then the official journal of the Polish Union of Writers) his "Poem for Adults," a poetic protest against the degradation of socialist ideals and an indictment of the bureaucratic disregard for human values. (Extracts from this poem have been published in the "Manchester Guardian" 29-10-1955). The poem, at first, aroused bitter controversies—but soon all public references to it were suppressed—at least until the 20th Congress of the CPSU. After that the poem, in the words of a Polish critic, "played an important part in the Polish national revival."

The "Critique of the Poem for Adults" was written during November/December, 1955 but was published only after the Polish October revolution' in "Nowa Kultura" of 4-11-1956.

A

YOUNG WOMAN,
an old communist,
holds up her hands and cries:
strip from me the tattered rags of dogma,
give me an ordinary dress.

She woke up all in wounds
like a stigmatist,
the blood of those murdered
in the dungeons of bureaucracy
drips in droplets from her brow.

Our wounds no balm can heal.
J offer you an ordinary dress
and hold out an ordinary catharsis,
Unhappy woman —
she hold up her hands and cries:
slander!

Snake charmers
assembled in the Great Tent,
possessors of passes to special stores,
where pants are sold
embroidered with the dogma of infallibility,
thinkers
hatching your theses
(which the throng of executors will never understand),
dispensers of 70 thousand different forms
for our everyday life —
and for festivals
an abundance of sweets:
inquisitors,
sermonizers,
flagellants,
spartans,
put on your best array!
The Kingdom of God on earth
will come
in two weeks from today.
Then the last banquet will be held:
leviathan in mustard.
Start from the tail,
the fish smells from the head.
Next a wonderful dish:
socialist realism with mushrooms
grilled
on the highest spit of the superstructure.
And mighty toasts will arise:
"We fight for the purity of the rubbish heap"
Free discussion will flow
along the dykes of silence
and then will be served
a triple melba of stone.

Straight from work
runs
a girl in trousers:
—Give me sausage,
I'm rapaciously hungry.
I work during the day,
and make a little more at night.
I'm sixteen already.
Once I accosted a poet.
I asked him the time.
The poet took out his watch.
Oh, fools!
And one like him wrote a poem for grown-ups?.
He hasn't even grown up to my navel.
I went out into the streets,
I went out into the streets,
and carried with me my brief biography:
I'm sixteen already —
The canvas of the Great Tent lifts,
a zealous mannikin
proclaims the resolution:
—The girl is a cheat.
This is no ordinary appetite,
devils rumble in her bowels,
the Lucifer of right deviation,
the Beelzebub of middle-class illusion,
the Belial of intellectual confusion.
The girl is possessed.
She refuses melba of stone.
Exorcize the devil!

They lived by the light of dawn
and sowed the gloomy dark of night.
They lived by an idea
and parted company with men.
They lived by a vision
and deceit is now their daily bread
From mediaeval eyes,
from mediaeval ears,
from mediaeval minds,
from mediaeval means
the party will rid the revolution
and at last will emerge
as the party of Lenin.