

# Svetlana's Quest for Style

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SVETLANA TELLS HER PERSONAL STORY of Stalin's menage and, since its content is dramatic and her report exclusive, the book is a smash. Her nice, easy prose style and personal celebrity gild the lily.

The content, already widely publicized, is startlingly true to what one would imagine of a household containing a sensitive girl, an idealistic mother 22 years younger than her husband—and Joseph Stalin. Readers prone to psychoanalyze will have a field day; those whose interest is historical and cultural will be saddened.

Upon recovery from prepublication jitters, Soviet critics will discover there are no really damaging revelations, no attacks at all. Khrushchev struck harder blows in 1956. As it happens, Svetlana is in stride with Moscow's largest zag on "de-Stalinization": she makes Beria, the secret policeman, the real villain.

By casting "father" entirely in terms of personal qualities (only his at-home qualities, not his at-work ones), she supports the basic post-Stalin line that it was just one aberrant man, not the continuing system, in the wrong. However psychologically and politically necessary it is to Svetlana and to Russia, this line is an evasion.

Of course there is a basic "anticommunism" in the book, as in Svetlana's whole life. The Soviets beg the reproach for running a society where emigrants are considered political renegades. Their public intolerance of private expression is the policy which, in the abstract, repulses the West and, in the specific, impelled Svetlana to flee. She notes that she failed to become the "educated Marxist" of her father's expectations. Instead, she joined the stream of the "magnificent Russian intelligentsia"—an elite social-intellectual group with much pride in its prerevolutionary roots.

That is the spirit of Svetlana, and of many Russian intellectuals still in Moscow: in-turned, traditional, determinedly "Russian."

"I see you shining, my beloved, chaotic, all-knowing, heartless Russia," says Svetlana. When Stalin advised her to "take care of your (newborn) daughter . . . the state needs people," she felt "terribly uneasy to think that the state already needed by little Katya." She declares of stepbrother Yakov, who died in a German POW camp: "What greater heroism in our day than to be an honest and upright man."

In the old intelligentsia there was a strand of political frustration which ultimately

## Book Review

### 'Twenty Letters to a Friend'

By Svetlana Alliluyeva, translated from the Russian by Priscilla Johnson McMillan (Harper & Row, 256 pp., \$5.95).

opened the group to totalitarian takeover. Svetlana describes her mother as a woman of "revolutionary idealism . . . borne along on a mood of romantic exaltation and youthful enthusiasm for the Revolution." She invites the reading that her parents' marriage consisted of virtue surrendering hopefully and vainly to power. That this uncannily symbolic marriage was ended by the wife's suicide seems, in Svetlana's retrospect, fated.

The suicide may also explain why Svetlana personally stayed at arm's length from her mother's faith in the revolution. She is a Zhivago heroine, a literary person implicitly viewing the revolution as an intrusion, not as an opportunity for personal or social fulfillment.

The surprise of her book is how much she is her father's daughter: Both single-minded in pursuit of self-chosen goals—in his case power, in hers privacy. Both uncompromising as to means—his terror, her defiance expressed by marriages her father opposed, and finally by defection: both accustomed to deference and privilege; both very tough.

Svetlana can refer with casual innocence to favorite relatives in the secret police as though they were merely good civil servants, not cogs in a death machine. Essentially she blames Beria ("a stronger character") for leading her father astray. At one point, amazingly, she attributes to Stalin a dimension of "inner protest against all this insanity."

Svetlana says she hopes to return and be buried in Russia. Until then? The patronage of the Establishment has come quickly and been received easily by this woman to the manor born. Celebrity, wealth, social access are hers. She could join another woman who emerged from the shadow of tragedy in the jet set.

Less likely is her capture by the anti-Communist brigade. More books may and should appear; this one stops at 1953. One senses that her quest is less for a career than for a style, and it will go on, however, wherever, she lives.

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