

Solomea Pavlychko. Trans. Myrna Kostash. New York: St. Martin's Press in assoc. with the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1992. viii, 177 pp. Photographs. \$35.00, hard bound.

Letters from Kiev—62 in all—were written by Solomea Pavlychko, a specialist on American and English literature and the daughter of a prominent member of the Ukrainian parliament, to Bohdan Krawchenko of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies between 12 May 1990 and 25 March 1991. They chronicle the confused events of those months; more than that, they portray the anxieties of an intellectual caught in a turbulent time in a city where "no one wants to live." In her initial letter Pavlychko describes herself as "a serf, as in the times of Shevchenko," and her sense of powerlessness does not abate. Her fellow Kievans, she tells us, are apathetic and sullen: "the brutalization, demoralization and moral apathy of people are unbelievable."

She is fully aware, of course, of the profound accomplishments of the times. "Political prisoners have become members of parliament," she acknowledges in her summary letter for 1990. Occasionally she amuses us with insights into the popular psychology of her city. "On the whole, God-seeking, mysticism, astrology, palmistry and various sorts of magic are incredibly popular among us," she writes on 6 July 1990. Itinerant fortune-tellers cure paralytics before sold-out stadium crowds. "Everybody believes in ESP and different kinds of shamanism." But where else, she asks darkly, "are people supposed to get treated when there isn't even an aspirin in the shops?"

Pavlychko does not attempt to provide a detailed political chronology: the fast pace of change, in fact, frustrates her efforts to keep up with political events. But there are constants that bind her thoughts, above all hatred of the Soviet system and a fear of a coup d'état. Some victories have been won: "That feeling of being provincial and second-rate," the constant desire to publish in Moscow, "to write as they do in Moscow, to be praised by the Moscow critics. . . . has vanished from our psychology. Although the writing life has become very difficult, and there's nowhere to publish. . . . it is a free, unfettered and sane life as never before."

The reader can only guess at Pavlychko's reactions to the dramatic events of August 1991 and the subsequent plunge into independence. Perhaps additional letters will be published? As it stands, this collection is nevertheless compelling and teachers of contemporary history and politics should take note. As a whole, the letters convey a deep pessimism and it is the sea of popular apathy that bothers the writer most. The heady days of the October 1990 student strike transformed her city but Pavlychko believes this victory to be "only temporary." And always there is the nightmarish backdrop of Chernobyl and the fear of radiation. Amid the swirl of change, it is Chernobyl that surfaces again and again as "the apocalypse of our lives." "Once you start thinking, there's no more sense in living. At any rate, not in making any plans for the future. The worst thing is that Chernobyl didn't teach us anything and the system which engendered it is still alive and people who defended it are still defending it. It terrifies me to think about what kind of world I live in."

In her concluding letter, Pavlychko acknowledges that "where there is movement of some sort, there is some kind of hope." Yet she seems afraid to be hopeful and this above all is what her letters convey.

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The Reconstruction of Poland, 1914-23. Ed. Paul Latawski. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992. xiii, 217 pp. Appendix. Index. Map. \$65.00, hard bound.

"Round up the usual suspects." The organizers of the conference held in 1988 at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, on which this book is based, did a splendid job of assembling a group of specialists well known to us from their other works on this subject. Even if history never repeats itself, this