

Karel Fallada's novel "The Iron Doctor", which had recently been issued in a Russian translation, has passed through a difficult, veritably dramatic experience. It appeared in Berlin in 1936, and surprised the reader by having a "raggy" ending, something unusual for Fallada. The principal characters in the novel, Kurtz and Hans Dorschel became members of the Nazi party, which proved to be, for them, a solution for all their problems and a way out of all their difficulties. The unscrupel, disorganized nature of such an ending to the novel was obvious. Besides that, it is common knowledge that Fallada, who continued to live in Germany under the Nazis, tried to have nothing to do with them. Already at that time, many people suspected that pressure had been brought to bear on the author. At a later date I.R. Dember, having stated that "The Iron Doctor" was a book "of which we, Germans, are entitled to be proud", added a reservation "if we disregard the artistically manufactured ending, which had been imposed on him "from above" at the time". The details of this happening became known only at a later date, out of autobiographical notes written by Fallada in the autumn of 1944 in the Stralitz Hospital for Alcoholics, where he had been interned on the orders of the State prosecuting organs. This institution was a hospital only in name. Actually, to be assigned to it was a form of imprisonment.

To give this complicated issue document the merit it deserves, it is necessary to have an idea of the conditions in which it was written. Making his notes under constant observation of the staff of the hospital, Fallada could have little hope that the notes he made, written, crisscrossed and recrossed, to disguise them and to economize on paper, would ever become available to the reader. On September 25, 1944, Fallada writes:

"I know that I am sad. It is not only my own life that I am gazing under threat. The longer I write, the more I recognize that I am putting under threat the lives of many people that I mention. At the moment, I have not the faintest idea as to how I can evade the censor, how I can get my notes out of this place. Is this just a question of flightiness, or am I being driven by a force which I am incapable of withstanding?"

Then, among other things, the history of "The Iron Doctor" is set out in the notes of October 1-3, 1944. It is impossible to have any doubts about the truthfulness of this recitation.

Fallada recalls how, in 1937, the Teltin Cinema company asked him to prepare a script for the popular cinema star Heil Jannings. It was suggested that the iron story of a Berlin caddy, who in 1908 drove his cab from Berlin to Paris and back, should be taken as a basis. After some hesitation, Fallada agreed to this project, but he stated that he could not write up a script.

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Translator's Note. The Soviet writer cannot fail to recognize the easy parallels between his own situation and the one described here, notably the pressure to inject propaganda into his work or the prospect of seeing the accused, membership and enforced alterations; the moral agency of economics; the possibility of repression - perhaps in a "medical" institution.

It was agreed that he should write a novel, which would then be converted into a script by the studio.

Three months later (Fallada working non-stop on usual) the novel was finished. The fate of the film then depended on what the Propaganda Minister Goebbels would have to say about it.

Fallada writes:- "It so it seemed that everything was perfectly simple. The Minister should be invited to read the novel. But the experienced cinema brains shook their heads when they heard what a complicated suggestion. There was no point in asking the Minister to read the novel. There were too many things in it that it would be better for the Minister not to see. Also there was a lot left out. So several writers were tasked with the job, who were described by F (all) J (surname) as "head choppers". These writers produced an up novel, compressed it, cut down and trimmed the characters. All this cheap ballistics was alleged to be necessary in order to meet the 'specifications of the cinema', which suppose ideas different from those of the theatre, the novel, life itself, the whole world in general. I am giving all this detail in order to let the reader see how under F (all) rule, any creative work was hampered and made practically impossible".

Fallada goes on:- "Thank heaven, I was not mixed up in all this. My feeble protests were laughed off as the complaints of a child knowing nothing about life. Like everybody else, I waited anxiously to hear what Dr. F (Goebbels) would have to say about the script."

A bit later on, the director of the studio informed the author about the main requirements of Goebbels. "The film should not end with the trip to Paris. Only one end to the film was possible, obviously - the seizure of power" (by the Hitlerites - H.H.) "Some of the characters should be brought to the moment of the seizure of power, above all old Hahnemann, the Iron Master, who, in the years after the trip to Paris would be converted into an artist F (all)."

"Whilst he was speaking, I sat frozen. This was something I had not expected. Had I foreseen it, I would never have accepted this order. What I wanted to do was to write a part for F (all) J (surname). Propaganda work on behalf of the party was something which was very, very foreign to me."

But here, Fallada expressed himself somewhat differently. He reminded the director that in the Nazis he had always been an "undesirable writer", that for his novel "Anyone who has been 'tested prison ability", which appeared in 1934, he had already incurred a complete ban. If such a writer started to parody Nazis, they might resent it, and the whole film would come under threat. The director and Goebbels, who was present, recognized the justice of the objection, but their reaction was different from what Fallada had hoped.

"F (Goebbels) promised at once to arrange for me to be received by the Minister. Incidentally, Dr. F (Goebbels) had expressed a wish to meet me, and to hear my objections personally. I shattered and refused. To survive Goebbels and be regarded as an undesirable writer was honorable. But to come under the rays of Goebbels' approval appeared to me to be asking for the fate of Insaar".

The money which the author received from Goebbels "was short and sweet, consisting of no debts or misunderstandings. If F (Goebbels) still does not know what his attitude towards the party is, the party knows very clearly what its attitude to F (Fallada) is".

"I just like dramatic gestures. To kill oneself before the throes of the tyrant, being so good to nobody and doing harm to my children, is not for me. After considering for three minutes, I accepted the second order. The month during which I wrote this tall piece is bookmarked in black ink as my calendar".

What a tremendous degree of carelessness to himself is contained in this admission about the three minutes. Just three minutes needed for complete surrender! What a huge lack of logic in the decision of the author, who shuddered away from any approval by Goebbels, but regarded resistance to pressure as being merely a "dramatic gesture." Even after this clash, he did not forgo the possibility of leaving Germany, but he did not take advantage of it, although he was very near to doing so. He was too absorbed with an unhealthy conviction that he would never be able to live or write outside of Germany. Six years later, he summed up the sad total in the Stralitz hospital.

The film about the Iron Gustav was never shot. "Wilmshart/Blaschke" announced that no genuinely German film could appear under the name of F[allada]. He is regarded as the representative of Bolshevist culture, and his removal is highly desirable."

The novel which had appeared in the sensitive case under savage persecution and was withdrawn from sale.

"Once again, like it was after 'poison shilly' the storm troopers and SS men marched through the streets, demanding that my books should be removed, not only from the shelves but altogether. I was made bankrupt."

To his honor be it said that Fallada discovered in himself the courage and determination to become master of himself once more. His creative road reached its peak with the novel "Each dies alone" (1947) in which the idea of the need to fight and to resist, learnt through his sufferings by the author, manifests itself with impressive force.