

BORIS PILNYAK

AS A

SOVIET WRITER

BORIS PILNYAK AS A SOVIET WRITER

By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

October 1969

MASTER OF ARTS (1969)

(Russian)

McMaster University

Hamilton Ontario

TITLE: Boris Pilnyak as a Soviet Writer

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NUMBER OF PAGES: 108

SCOPE AND CONTENTS: A brief analysis of the works of Boris Pilnyak and the author's role in Soviet literature.

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PREFACE

A study of the place of Boris Pilnyak in Soviet Literature faces several practical difficulties; biographical data are scanty, critical material is very scarce, and some of his works are unavailable or difficult to obtain. Until greater latitude is allowed to Soviet scholars and until the author's works are more readily available, non-Soviet scholarship can only render preliminary judgments upon Pilnyak and his works. There is always the possibility that a substantial amount of "desk-drawer literature" by the author will be published at a later date.

The scope of this study is general, the basis of more detailed investigations in the future; Pilnyak is viewed in the context of the 1920's and 1930's, the period in which he wrote the great majority of his novels and stories. Pilnyak is not only an interesting author, but also worthy of attention as a central figure in the struggle for power between various literary groups or camps.

The first part of this thesis deals with Pilnyak the author -- his concern with the Revolution, his themes, and his characters. The second half of the thesis deals with Pilnyak the literary politician -- his role in the Union of Writers and his difficulties with the Soviet literary and political establishments.

I hope to attain two goals as a result of this study: 1) to shed some light upon Boris Pilnyak as an author and personality; 2) to delineate the fratricidal struggle in the literary arena of the late twenties through the case of Boris Pilnyak.

I have used the transliteration of the name "Pilnyak" which is most common in English; the correct form is "Pil'njak."

All quotes from Pilnyak's works are in Russian, with the exception of those quotation which are available only in English.

I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Louis J. Shein, Chairman of the Department of Russian, McMaster University, and to Dr. C. J. G. Turner, for their advice and assistance.

I also wish to thank McMaster University for granting financial assistance in the form of a Graduate Teaching Fellowship.

INTRODUCTION

For many students of Russian literature Boris Pilnyak is an author of the early Soviet period whose works are occasionally read, but more often passed by with a cursory mention. At one point in his turbulent career Pilnyak was considered the most outstanding prose writer in the Soviet Union; the fatal combination of passing time, changing tastes, and an official silence on the part of Soviet literary critics has served to relegate Pilnyak to a minor niche in the history of Russian Literature. Gleb Struve points out that due to "great handicaps such as the deliberate suppression of facts and the equally deliberate creation of myths," important Soviet writers of the Twenties are only names to later Soviet readers, if even that.¹

Boris Andreyevich Vogau (Pilnyak) was born on September 29, 1894, in Mozhaisk, a small town not far from Moscow. His parents were from Saratov, where the family later returned when Boris began his formal education. Pilnyak's father, a descendent of the Volga German colonists, and his mother, who came from a Russian merchant family, were involved in the narodnichestvo movement of the late nineteenth century; their influence can be easily discovered in the works and world-view of

¹Gleb Struve, Soviet Russian Literature: 1917-1950, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), p. xi.

their son, who saw wisdom and strength in the common folk (narod) and their primitive way of life rather than in government and industrialization.

Pilnyak's early boyhood was spent in many ancient Russian towns: Mozhaisk, Bogorodsk, and Kolomna are three historic locations where the elder Vogau's occupation of veterinary surgeon led the family. Boris found himself surrounded by relics of Old Russian history; ancient history, together with the study of languages, retained life-long interest for Pilnyak.

In 1913 Pilnyak graduated from the Nizhni Novgorod Academy of Modern Languages, and in 1915, his first story was published. Information concerning Pilnyak during the First World War, Revolution, and Civil War is very scarce; he apparently travelled widely within Russia and took part in expeditions in search of food during the famine.

In 1922 Pilnyak's first major work, Naked Year, was published; his reputation soared and Pilnyak became the leading prose writer in the Soviet Union. His appeal declined in the later Twenties and his political fortunes also suffered an eclipse. His political problems and recantations will be discussed in the body of the thesis.

Very little is known of Pilnyak's life in the Thirties; he presided over a literary circle which met in his apartment once a week until his arrest in 1938 as a Trotskyite and Japanese spy. He was executed, but the date remains unknown. His works have never been republished in the Soviet Union.

Pilnyak receives a mention in the Literary Encyclopedia of 1934 (vol. 8), but any mention of his works is deleted from the Large Soviet Encyclopedia of 1940 or its supplement of 1958. Other Soviet criticism will be discussed in the thesis itself.

CHAPTER ONE
RUSSIA VERSUS THE WEST

Boris Pilnyak published novels and stories from 1915 to 1937. Despite the length of that period and the upheavals which took place in the Soviet Union during that era -- war, revolution, famine, industrialization -- Pilnyak followed one line of thought throughout the great majority of his works. It is difficult, if not impossible, to give a precise definition or picture of this thread of thought; the thread, however, can be arbitrarily divided for purposes of discussion and study.

The first aspect is the opposition, familiar to all students of Russian Literature, between city and country, which in turn represents urban, Western influence conflicting with genuine, rural Russia. The second aspect of the theme is an offshoot of the first opposition: instinct pitted against intellect. The processes of a bountiful yet sometimes cruel nature, associated with rural Russia, conflict with human efforts to conquer nature and emotion; the trend towards systematization and planned existence is usually associated with urban Russia, which is more open to Western influence. The third aspect of the theme is what Leon Trotsky labelled Pilnyak's "retrogressional realism": the opposition of ancient primitive Russia to modern civilized life.² The sum of these

²Leon Trotsky, Literature and Revolution (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), p. 76ff.

components forms an undefinable unity which can be described as a struggle between forms of planned existence and the blind forces of nature which were allowed full sway before the advent of civilization.

The opposition of the city, especially St. Petersburg, to the country has been a recurring theme in Russian Literature. The city in a predominantly agrarian nation appears strange and hostile to all except confirmed urban dwellers; life in the city seems hectic and unnatural. In such a situation the city becomes isolated not only from the country but from the nation as a whole; urban life becomes artificial. St. Petersburg became such a city, and Russian writers have portrayed its residents as spiritless bureaucrats, rich but rootless dandies, and the oppressed poor who cannot escape. The first "superfluous man", Evgeny Onegin, is a product of the city who is divorced from the roots of Russian tradition ; when he retires to his country estate and meets Tatyana, the artificiality and aimlessness of his life in the city become apparent.

In his story, The Overcoat, Nikolai Gogol paints a terrifying picture of St. Petersburg: gray, cold, windy, impersonal, almost foreign. The price for the city's grandeur is continually paid by the dehumanized workers of the bureaucracy; public achievement is bought and maintained by immense private sacrifice.

In Poor Folk, a story similar to The Overcoat, Feodor Dostoevsky portrayed the trials of Makar Devushkin, an honest but poor man in Saint

Petersburg. Like the "underground man," Makar is divorced from reality just as Saint Petersburg -- dark, sooty, smelly -- is divorced from the Russian soil. The inhumanity of the city drives him to conscious self-humiliation, the complete loss of self-esteem as a human being.

In Notes from the Underground Dostoevsky also employs the capital as a befitting unnatural setting for his irrational hero.

Leo Tolstoy's War and Peace is in part a polemic against Saint Petersburg. St. Petersburg society consists of many Kuragin families -- vain, avaricious, and unhappy; the artificial social life of the capital is opposed by the natural life of the country estate, just as abortion is opposed by the natural processes of birth, life, and death. As Prince Andrei gravitates from the country to the city, he becomes progressively disillusioned and unhappy, while Pierre gravitates from the city to the harmony of the country. Andrei initiated his life's quest by leaving Bald Hills, his father's estate, and finds death; Pierre terminates his quest at Bald Hills and finds life.

The opposition of city to country runs much deeper than mere rural antipathy to, or fear of, urban existence; the issue is inextricably connected with the larger question, apparent in literature, philosophy and theology, of Russia's relationship to the West. "The Mongol Yoke" had effectively segregated Russia from the remainder of Christendom; when the Tsars finally became independent, Western Europe had entered upon the Renaissance period and about to launch the

Reformation.³ The Latin West was now as alien to the Muscovites as the Mongolian East, and the fall of Orthodox Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 left the Russians in a solitary position. The insular defensive mechanism of "The Third Rome" was called upon to create and maintain a national identity for the Russian people, and the Tsars consolidated their autocratic power at the expense of intellectual and economic development. Eastern Moscow rather than Western Kiev had become the center of Russian life.⁴

Peter the Great initiated a revolution designed to terminate the centuries of isolation and stagnation, a revolution so thorough and so brutal that Peter has been considered a prototype of the Bolshevik.⁵ Peter's reforms are often thought to consist mainly in the introduction of Western technology to the Russian backwoods; his most radical and enduring "reform," however, was to change the entire concept of government from the personal relationship between "the Little Father" and the Orthodox Christian people to the concept of the state as an independent entity, the institutional bureaucracy satirized by Gogol and Dostoevsky.⁶

³Hans Kohn, The Modern Russian Mind (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), p. 4.

⁴Ibid., p. 5.

⁵Nicolas Berdyaev, The Origin of Russian Communism (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1960), p. 13. When Berdyaev compares Peter's revolution to Lenin's, he prefers the latter.

⁶Marc Raeff, Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1966), p. 35.

While this new outlook became political fact, it was not able to displace the old view among the peasants and sections of the intelligentsia; one hundred years after Peter's reign the institutions of government were still considered to be a foreign importation which had succeeded in deceiving the Tsar and in causing a split (raskol) into two Russias, official and popular.

The image of dual Russia is not simply a conception of the state and people as two different Russias. It also comprises an evaluative attitude, or rather a range of such attitudes. Their common denominator is the apprehension of the autocratic state power as an alien power in the Russian land.⁷

The Slavophiles never ceased to denounce Peter the Great and his reforms; in their view Peter denied the religious foundations of the ancient Russian nation (communes, paternalism, Patriarchal church government) and introduced insidious Western ecclesiastical reforms and social conventions. The debate between Slavophiles and Westernizers continued through the nineteenth century. Many people held an intermediate view, such as Alexander Pushkin, who was certainly no Slavophile, but recognized the dangers of wholesale and thoughtless imitation of the West. Evgeny Onegin's indiscriminate predilection for Western books, clothes, and foods is both symptom and cause of his rootlessness and unhappiness.⁸

⁷Robert Tucker, The Soviet Political Mind (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 70.

⁸Alexander Pushkin, Evgeny Onegin (Moskva: Academia, 1933), Chapter one, Stanzas II, IV - VIII, XVI, et. al.

Dostoevsky also entertained ambiguous feelings towards Europe; he viewed the West as a "precious graveyard," a sad relic of a great Christendom.⁹ The industrial revolution, capitalism, and political revolutions of the West caused many Russians to distrust Western influences in their country; as these phenomena slowly became part of Russian life, this distrust caused some to re-define their national identity in terms of Russia's relationship with the East.

The "Scythian" movement in literary and philosophical circles was an expression of Russia's links with the East as well as with the West. A group of intellectuals, led by Ivanov-Razumnik, the historian, were descendants of the Slavophiles in that they considered Western influence in Russia to be an undermining of Russia's own cultural traditions. They also felt that the autocracy, especially its structure after Peter the Great, was alien to the Russian people; for this reason the Scythians tended to support the 1917 Revolution, believing that Bolshevism would rid Russia of the alien bureaucracy and autocracy.¹⁰

Among the literary figures influenced by the Scythians was Alexander Blok. He composed a poem immediately following the Revolution which captured the Scythian mood; it emphasizes Russia's differences from the West with an outburst of Slavophil messianism, but combined with a plea for peace and cooperation.

⁹F. M. Dostoevsky, Bratya Karamazovy, in Sobranie Sochinenii, edited by L. P. Grossman et. al., IX (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoye Izdatelstvo Khudozhestvennoy Literatury, 1956), p. 289.

¹⁰Sir John Maynard, Russia in Flux (New York: Collier Books, 1962) pp. 279-281.

Мильоны -- вас. Нас --- тьмы, и тьмы, и тьмы.
 Попробуйте, сразитесь с нами!
 Да, скифы -- мы! Да, азиаты -- мы,
 С раскосыми и жадными очами!

В последний раз - опомнись, старый мир!
 На братский пир труда и мира,
 В последний раз - на светлый братский пир
 Сзывает варварская лира!¹¹

By 1918 the lines were drawn; country/ Russia/ Asia were competing against city/ West/ Europe for philosophical and literary hegemony.

Boris Pilnyak, in common with all educated people, was compelled to take a stand on the revolutionary changes of 1917; neutrality was impossible. Pilnyak's parents were narodniki, and apparently their opinions influenced their son; Pilnyak declared for the innate wisdom of the Russian masses, the peasantry, and village life rather than the urban proletariat, cities, and western influence. He shared the Slavophil belief that the cities, centers of Western philosophy and German bureaucracy, were dens of iniquity; he also shared the Scythian hope that the Revolution would eradicate the cities altogether and restore Russia's ancient customs. Pilnyak's Naked Year, the novel which brought him into the literary limelight, contains many passages which seem

¹¹Alexander Blok, Skifi, in Sobranie Sochinenii, II (Moskva-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoye Izdatelstvo Khudozhestvennoy Literatury, 1960), p. 360. Another poem of Blok's, Dvenadsat', also reflects the Scythian point of view; the Revolution is viewed as a purification.

to reflect a sympathy for the country rather than the city; Donat, a warmly and humanly portrayed Old Believer who combines an anarchistic, evangelism Christianity with thievery, states that Petersburg is a fungus.¹²

The most detailed condemnation of cities, however, comes from the retired Archbishop Sylvester, who has lost his faith in Orthodoxy and reverted to the pagan faith of his ancestors.

Из города народный проселочный Бунт принес - смерть...
 Все до одного в городе сиужили, чтобы
 Обслуживать самих себя, и все до одного в городе писали
 Бумаги,
 Чтобы запутаться в них -- бумагах, в бумажках, карточках,
 Картах, платаках...по городу шатались голод, сифилис, и
 смерть. По проспектам обезумевшие метались автомобили,
 томясь в предсмертной муке...Красная кровавая жизнь
 ушла из города, как и не была здесь, положим, пришла
 белая бумажная жизнь --- смерть. Город умирал, без
 рождения,. А за городом, на окраинах, разгоралось
 новое холодное багряное возрождение.¹³

The preference of Pilnyak's characters for the country rather than the city is intimately connected with their abhorrence of Western influence in Russia, an influence which is predominant in the artificial atmosphere of the city. The most amusing example of disdain for Western Europe is the attempted arrest of Andrei Volkovich by Jan Laitis, the Lithuanian Communist in charge of the Cheka detachment in Ordynin.

¹²Boris Pilnyak, Goly God, (Letchworth:Bradda Books Ltd., 1966), p. 132.

¹³Ibid., pp. 158-160.

Pilnyak seems to delight in the deception of the foreign Communist by the Russian anarchist, so much so that the reader might wonder how this episode escaped the scathing criticism which dogged Pilnyak's literary career.

У ворот стоял товарищ Лайтис с нарядом солдат.
Отпер калитку Андрей Волкович.

Товарищ Лайтис спросил:

-- Где здесь есть квартера овицера-дворянина-зду-
дента Волковиса?

Андрей Волкович безразлично ответил:

-- Обойдите дом, там по лестнице, во второй этаж.
Сказав, позевнул, постоял у калитки лениво и лениво
пошел в дом, к парадному входу. Товарищ Дайтис пошел
к заднему ходу. Лестница привела к заколоченной двери.

-- Не здесь.

-- Двери ломайте!

-- Видал!? -- сказал Сергей Сергеевич саркастически
и захохотал, держась за живот.

-- Молодец! А?! Сам отпер и -- пожалуйста в задний
проход! А?! Хо-хо! Ищи в поле ветра. Хо-хо!..¹⁴

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While Pilnyak deals harshly with the West and the city, particularly St. Petersburg, he occasionally portrays them in a friendly light; such is the favorable picture of Great Britain in "The Cheshire Cheese."¹⁵ The man whom Pilnyak held to be primarily responsible for the westernization of Russia, however, Peter the Great, receives uniformly harsh treatment from the author.

Pilnyak's intense dislike of Peter the Great was not unique; the majority of the Emperor's subjects were convinced that he was the anti-

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 66, 68.

¹⁵ Pilnyak, "The Cheshire Cheese", in The Tale of the Unextinguishable Moon and Other Stories, (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1967, pp. 121-136.

Christ.¹⁶ The Slavophiles interpreted Peter's reforms as "the betrayal of the original national basis of Russian life, a violation and interruption of its organic development."¹⁷

Pilnyak is a part of this tradition; to him Peter is the chief villain of Russian history. Entire short stories are dedicated to exposing Peter as the man responsible for the influx of Western methodology and philosophy; in most of his larger works he sprinkles references to Peter's prostitution of Russian traditions. In Naked Year Gleb Ordynin, as icon-painter and scion of a noble family, states this negative attitude after a condemnation of Western Europe for its capitalism and mechanization at the expense of spiritual culture.

Европейская культура --- путь в тупик. Русская государственность два последних века, от Петра, хотела принять эту культуру. Россия томила в удушьи, сплошь гоголевская.

... -- была русская народная живопись, архитектура, музыка, сказания об Иулиании Лазаревской. Пришел Петр, -- и невероятной глубиной стал Ломоносов, с одою о стекле, и исчезло подлинное народное творчество...¹⁸

Peter, then, has paralyzed the organic growth of Russia by introducing his reforms; he is regarded as a sort of foreign conqueror,

¹⁶Sir Bernard Pares, A History of Russia (New York: Vintage, 1965), p. 225.

¹⁷Berdyaev, op. cit., p. 12.

¹⁸Goly God, op. cit., p. 101.

eradicating the local culture just as later Tsars used the Russification policy in an attempt to eliminate native cultures.

In the story, His Majesty Kneeb Piter Komondor, Peter is portrayed as a half-crazy, semi-literate alcoholic who causes families to be separated, men and women to violate their consciences, and friends to spy upon one another. A song is quoted:

А и Петра, что шелканище,
С князей брал по сту рублей,
С бояр по пятидесяти.
С крестьян по пяти рублей.
У кого денег нет --
У того дитя возьмет.
У кого дитя нет --
У того жену возьмет!
У кого жены нет--
Того самого с головой возьмет!...¹⁹

Another aspect of the country/ Russia/ Asia versus city/ West/ Europe opposition in Pilnyak's works is his attitude towards the newly-formed Communist government and its representatives. Pilnyak's interpretation of the Revolution will be treated below; at this point it is only necessary to note that he viewed the Revolution as a grass-roots movement of the people to rid themselves of alien Western influences and return to the wise customs of their ancestors. In this respect Pilnyak

¹⁹ Pilnyak, "Yevo Velichestvo Kneeb Piter Komondor", in Nikola-na-Posadyakh (Moskva - Peterburg: "Krug", 1923), p. 21.

followed the Scythian interpretation of the 1917 Revolution, shared by Sergei Esenin and Alexander Blok.²⁰

The truly Russian people -- workers, peasants, and enlisted military men -- were revolting against centuries of Western domination through the bureaucracy, landowners, and officers in an attempt to regain control over their own destiny, a destiny separate from both East and West.

Pilnyak portrays an error which apparently cropped up during the early days of the Revolution; the peasants distinguished between Bolsheviks and Communists, the former being considered bona-fide Russians, while the latter were regarded as representatives of an alien power. The basis of such a distinction may be that the average Red Armyman with whom the peasant came into contact was an ordinary fellow like himself: simple, uneducated, and conscious only of a new freedom. The Communist, on the other hand, a dedicated Marxist, was usually an educated person, often with a Jewish, Baltic, or German surname, who represented organization and commands from a distant location, just as alien as the Petersburg-oriented Tsarist functionary before him.

In the above-mentioned incident between Andrei Volkovich and Comrade Jan Laitis, the foreign Communist, despite the fact that he represents the Revolution with which Pilnyak basically sympathizes, is portrayed as a fool; Laitis appears in an even more unfavorable light

²⁰ Struve, op.cit., pp. 9, 20-22.

with Olly Kuntz in the convent chapel.²¹ What is initially portrayed as a semi-mystical mating in the sanctuary in order to conceive a new Messiah is actually a clumsy debauch which will terminate in an abortion.²²

The most explicit elaboration of the Bolshevik/ Communist opposition occurs in Naked Year. Nikon Borisich says:

...говору, ребят везу в Красную армию, буржуев бить, се-таки. Я, говорю -- мы за большевиков стоим, за советы, а вы, должно, камунесты?... Пошла чесать... се-таки обидно...

-- Камуне-есты! -- и с энергическим жестом (блещущими в лучине глазами): -- Мы за большевиков! за советы! чтобы по-нашему, по-росейски.²³

For Pilnyak the Bolshevik represented the elemental, rural, native Russian aspect of the Revolution, while the Communist represented the urban, proletarian and Marxist ingredient of the same event. It is clear from Pilnyak's works that he eagerly supported the first aspect of the Revolution, while he viewed the second as merely a continuation -- even an intensification -- of harmful Western influences. Klavdiya,

²¹Goly God, op.cit., pp. 150-160. This scene is a variation on the experienced, callous girl and inexperienced, ardent boy theme.

²²The abortion image occurs often in Pilnyak's works; as the termination of the life-process it is a sign of decadence.

²³Goly God, op. cit., pp. 223-224.

pregnant with an illegitimate child, expresses a view of the Bolshevik Revolution quite different from the Communist Revolution, which occurs often in Pilynak's works.

-- Я очень физиологична, -- сказала она.
 -- Я люблю есть, люблю мыться, люблю, когда Шарик, наша собака, лижет мне руки и ноги. Мне приятно царапать до крови мои колени... А жизнь -- она большая, она кругом, я не разбираюсь в ней, я не разбираюсь в революции, -- но я верю им, и жизни, и солнышку, и революции, и я спокойна.²⁴

The opposition between Bolshevism and Communism -- or more correctly, between revolutionary romanticism and the New Economic Policy -- is portrayed in Naked Year; Kitai-Gorod, the center of capitalist enterprise in pre-revolutionary Moscow and thus, a center of Western influence, competes for ascendancy with the revolutionary, semi-Asiatic blizzard.

Днем в Москве, в Китай-Городе, жонглировал котелок, во фраке и с портфелем -- и ночью его сменял: Китай, Небесная империя, что лежит за Великой Каменной стеной, без котелка, с пуговицами глаз. -- Так что же, -- ужели Китай теперь сменит себя на котелок во фраке и с портфелем?! -- не третий ли идет на смену, тот, что --

-- Может энергично фуждировать!

²⁴Pilnyak, Krasnoye Derevo (Berlin: Petropolis, 1929), p. 60.

Метель, Март. -- Ах, какая метель, когда
 ветер ест снег! Шооя, шо-оя, шооооя!...
 Гвиуу, гваау, гааау...гвиууу, гвиуууу...
 Гу-ву-зз! Гу-ву-зз!... Гла-вбум!... Гла-вбумм!...
 Шооя, гвиуу, гаауу! Гла-вбумм!!Гу-вуз!!Ах,
 какая метель! Как метельно!... Как -- хо-ро-шо!...²⁵

In Mahogany Pilnyak concedes defeat on behalf of Bolshevism;
 with Ivan Ozhogov and his community exiled to the kilns, once again
 native Russia has been subdued by the West, this time through "NEPmen."
 When Mahogany was enlarged to The Volga Flows into the Caspian Sea,
 the defeat was completed; not only were "NEPmen" victorious, but the
 urban proletarian civilization gained complete control over rural,
 Bolshevik Russia.

²⁵Goly God, op.cit., p. 206.

CHAPTER TWO

INSTINCT VERSUS INTELLECT

Pilnyak's views concerning the 1917 Revolution, the Civil War and Communism serve as a convenient bridge between two chapters. On the one hand he interpreted the Revolution as a liberation of Russia from urban Western influence after centuries of subservience, while on the other hand he also viewed the Revolution as a liberating factor on a more basic plane, the level of pure instinct. In this regard Pilnyak parted company from the Slavophiles who were also anti-Western; while they desired a return to a primitive Christian Russia, Pilnyak looked even further back to a pagan, anarchic Russia, before the Varangians came to rule over them and before Christianity was imported from Constantinople.

Pilnyak's most common metaphor for the Revolution is the blizzard. A blizzard is unplanned, uncontrollable, and usually causes tremendous hardship for those unfortunate enough to be caught in it. At the same time it has a purgative function in the realm of nature; it scatters and kills the old in order to make way for the new, and it also covers urban ugliness with a white blanket.

Pilnyak views the Revolution in much the same way; he sees it as a spontaneous outburst of the people, unplanned, uncontrollable, the

cause of incredible hardships, but also a purgative event, dispersing the marks of Western influence and spurring the sedentary and sleeping masses to action. In many of his stories and novels the blizzard occurs either as a sign of change or as scenic backdrop behind revolutionary action. The most obvious application of the metaphor is Chapter Seven of Naked Year; the entire chapter consists of only three words which are related as the terms of an equation: "Россия. Революция. Метель."²⁶

In the short story, Snowstorm, Pilnyak writes:

МИЛЫЙ, МИЛЫЙ ТОВАРИЩ БОРИСЪ!
МИЛЫЙ, МИЛЫЙ ТОВАРИЩ КЛЕНА!
КАКЪ ХОРОШО! СВОБОДА, МЕТЕЛЬ.
КАКЪ ХОРОШО!²⁷

The snowstorm represents the unleashing of natural forces and the overthrow of unnatural contrivances which curtail human behavior, the struggle of the blind forces of instinct against any form of planned existence. Even when the image is not as explicit as in Naked Year or Snowstorm, the significance of the snowstorm is clear. In "Death" Pilnyak portrays an aged landowner who lives his last days during an Indian summer and then dies; the death of this man, which represents the demise of the old order, is immediately followed by a snowstorm, "an earthly joy."²⁸

²⁶ Ibid., p. 211.

²⁷ Pilnyak, "Metel", in Epopeia (Moskva: issue 1, 1922), p. 120.

²⁸ Pilnyak, "Death", in Tales of the Wilderness (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1925), p. 194.

The signs of vibrant winter, attempting to break through the hold of languid summer, finally triumph, just as the various illnesses which plague the landowner finally overwhelm his body's resistance to inevitable death. Pilnyak is portraying his own belief in the invincibility of nature and the natural rhythms of life as well as the inevitability of the Revolution.

ii

Pilnyak's second metaphor for the events of 1917-1920 is "wormwood" (Полынь), a natural force primarily sexual in connotation, which is likened to the plant of the same name. The Revolution, which was a spontaneous outburst, was preceded by an accumulation of energy by the Russian people as a result of centuries of inaction; when this energy was released, the entire land was convulsed and the foundations for a new way of life were laid. Pilnyak used the human acts of sexual intercourse and birth to act as an analogy to the equally natural process of the Revolution; the act of intercourse is the Revolution, the release of energy and the convulsion of the Russian people, and the birth is the issue of that act, the new social order of Bolshevism.

In the short story, Wormwood, which was later incorporated into Naked Year, Pilnyak draws a parallel between the expression of revolutionary fervor and sexual desire; both emotions, natural and therefore

approved by the author, culminate in a tremendous release of energy and birth.²⁹ Pilnyak considers nature and its processes to be the greatest marvel imaginable; each man, as part of nature, finds fulfillment in his works insofar as he is obedient to the rhythms of life. Within this context, then, the sexual imagery is in good taste; it is man's most personal and most valuable contribution to creation.

In Wormwood Natalya the anarchist and Baudek the archaeologist, in the preliminary processes of becoming sexually involved with each other, discuss the Revolution, while the author connects their sexual desire and the Revolution with the approaching storm; all three phenomena are natural, good, and signify the birth of something new. The Revolution, the storm, and the desire of Natalya and Baudek share in the quality of wormwood; the fact that it grows wild in the countryside signifies that it is a natural, living force. Baudek says:

-- Россия. Революция. Да. Пахнет полынью --
живой и мертвою водою? -- Да!... Посмотрите кругом --
в России сейчас сказка. Рахнет полынью -- потому что
сказка. И у нас, вот у нас двоих, -- тоже сказка,
ваши руки пахнут полынью!

Наталья сидела склонившись, упали косы, --
опять почувствовала остро, что революция для нее связана с
радостью, радостью буйной, с той, где скорбь идет рядом,
полынная скорбь.³⁰

²⁹Pilnyak, "Wormwood", in The Tale of the Unextinguished Moon and other Stories, op. cit., pp 61-72. Goly God contains a number of short stories which had been previously published. The Russian quotes of "Wormwood" are taken from the text of Goly God, since the Russian text of the story was unavailable.

³⁰"Wormwood", in op.cit., pp. 67-68. Goly God, op.cit., pp. 130.

After a short interlude, Natalya and Baudek hear the peasants speaking of the Revolution which they regard as the second coming of Stenka Razin. The Revolution is portrayed as both good and bad, joyful and painful; Natalya feels these emotions within herself.

..осязала каждым уголком своего тела огромную радость, радостную муку, сладкую боль; понимала, что горькая горечь полыни --- сладость прекрасна, необыкновенная, безмерная радость. Каждое касание Баудека, еще неровное, обжигало живую водой.

Эту ночь нельзя было спать.

Гроза пришла с ливнем, с громами и молниями. Эта гроза застала Наталью и Баудека за веретием, за развалинами башни персидской царевны, Наталья пила полынную --- ту ведьмовскую скорбь, что оставила на Увеке царевна персидская.³¹

The pain attached to loss of virginity is balanced by the joy of love, conception, and birth; the sufferings of the Revolution are balanced by the advent of the just social order.

While the blizzard and wormwood represent the revolutionary struggle itself, the result of the Revolution is represented by the image of childbirth.³² Just as loss of virginity implies both pain and joy, so childbirth represents the same combination. Archbishop Sylvester tells

³¹"Wormwood", in op.cit., p. 71. Goly God, in op.cit., p. 138.

³²The relatively calm period of gestation does not enter into Pilnyak's analogy. The revolutionary struggle is violent from beginning to end; there can be no intermediate phase of pregnancy.

Gleb, "Все кровью родится, все в крови, в красной. И флаг Красный!"³³

Basic social change must also be bought in blood.

If the Olly Kuntz -- Jan Laitis incident is recalled, the connection between birth and revolution becomes more clear. Comrade Jan Laitis and Olly Kuntz must conceive a child at midnight in the convent chapel, behind the iconostasis; the child will be a "Savior" who in twenty years time will reveal himself as the Messiah.³⁴ The comedy of errors with which Pilnyak surrounds this incident demonstrates his disdain for the proposal in general and for the foreign Communist in particular. The reader knows what Laitis does not know, that Olly is not a virgin, but the most promiscuous woman in town who has regular abortions. Pilnyak employs this incident to portray his belief that foreign Communists have nothing to offer to Russia; the abortion is indicative of the Western failure to bear fruit in every regard, and the subsequent arrest of Olly and Laitis is Pilnyak's condemnation of their contribution to the Revolution.

The relationship between Arkhip Arkhipov and Natalya Ordynina is presented as an alternative to the Laitis - Kuntz mating; Arkhip, an honest Russian peasant, and Natalya, the doctor-daughter of a noble family, are Bolsheviks.³⁵ In a scene which is reminiscent of

³³Goly God, op.cit., p. 104.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 70-71.

³⁵Ibid., p. 108. Natalya Ordynina should not be confused with Natalya the anarchist.

Chernyshevsky's What to Do, Arkhip and Natalya discuss the practical advantages of their marriage; although neither loves the other, they perceive the value of breeding a robust peasant with an intelligent noblewoman, the best of the old order.³⁶ Pilnyak leaves no doubt that this union will produce healthy and intelligent children, and that Natalya and Arkhip's union is far superior to the union of Jan Laitis and Olly Kuntz.

One cannot help but feel, however, that Pilnyak is choosing the lesser of two evils; throughout his literary career he exhibited delight in the natural processes of life, and his matings are always passionate and animal-like. The Arkhip/Natalya marriage is so devoid of emotion that the reader is compelled to come to the conclusion that this union is endorsed only because Pilnyak views the rationalistic, impersonal approach to marriage of the Communists to be superior to the fruitless union of Jan Laitis and Olly Kuntz. If such an interpretation of Pilnyak's endorsement is accurate, then Pilnyak's attitude toward the Revolution and Communism becomes clear; they must be endorsed not because they are inherently good or beneficial, but because they are the only present alternative to decay and death, symbolized by the abortions of Olly Kuntz and the Ordynin girls and by the syphilis of the Ordynin males. The only marriage which is superior to that of Arkhip

³⁶Ibid., pp. 208-210.

and Natalya is the elopement of Mark and Irina; the reader knows, however, that the free life of the Old Believers and anarchists is doomed to extinction at the hands of the Bolsheviki.

iii

Pilnyak's use of the natural processes of life to portray the events of 1917-1920 demonstrate his preference for the instinctive rather than the intellectual; a Marxist or any other systematic explanation of the Revolution was completely alien to Pilnyak. In his early stories he was enthralled by the animal life of pure instinct, especially as illustrated in wolves; as the reader's familiarity with Pilnyak grows, it becomes apparent that he attributes the animal's lack of artificiality to a lack of intellect, that aspect of man which is the source of his sufferings and unhappiness. In two of his short stories Pilnyak portrays the natural life of two birds (Over the Ravine) and the natural life of two pre-historic humans (A Year of Their Lives); their lives are quite similar in their simplicity and natural happiness, quite unlike the turbulent and unhappy life of most of the civilized people in Pilnyak's stories and novels.³⁷ The young man in A Year Of Their Lives, Demid, leads a completely instinctive life with a bear as his closest male companion; his intellect seems to be superfluous equipment.

³⁷"Over the Ravine", in Tales of the Wilderness, op.cit., pp. 69-84. "God Ikh Zhizni", in Rasplesnutoe Vremya (Moskva-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoye Izdatelstvo, 1927), pp. 86-97.

In Snow Wind the brutal aspect of animal life comes to the fore; the wolves, whose free lives Pilnyak generally admires, turn upon the leader of the pack who has deserted them to avenge the killing of his mate.³⁸ The saving grace of Snow Wind is that the wolves expect and accept the violence which they inflict upon each other; only animals with intellects question the life-processes and consequently make themselves unhappy.

The questioning and opposing of the rhythms of life are the bases of human suffering for Pilnyak. In this regard he echoes Leo Tolstoy's thesis in War and Peace; Kutuzov is victorious because he does not attempt to impose his will upon events, but awaits their unfolding with patience. Napoleon, on the other hand, is defeated because he believes that his intelligence and actions are responsible for the creation of history and victory upon the battlefields.

Natasha Rostova reaches her height of achievement with maternity, while Princess Elena reaches the depths with her abortion. Natasha is also the opposite of Prince Andrei; while Natasha exhibits vitality and the joy of living, Prince Andrei, who is a rationalist par excellence, is an example of fruitless intellect, isolated from vibrant life.³⁹ Those persons who lend themselves to the processes of nature receive Tolstoy's benediction, while those who obstruct nature or attempt to influence events

³⁸"Snow Wind", in Tales of the Wilderness, op.cit., pp. 121-134.

³⁹Ralph Matlaw, Tolstoy (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1967), p. 3.

are roundly condemned and doomed to failure.⁴⁰

Pilnyak shares Tolstoy's attitudes in this regard; from Naked Year through the short stories and The Volga Flows into the Caspian Sea to his final long story, The Birth of a Man, instinct is artistically acquitted while intellectual approaches are clearly in disfavor. Intellect -- any systematic approach -- is occasionally victorious over nature; in The Volga Flows into the Caspian Sea, for example, the river is reversed when the dam is constructed, and in Naked Year, the organization of the Communists is victorious over the anarchists. Even on these occasions, however, the author's sympathies seem to be with the natural approach; the old Kolomna rather than the stupendous feat of dam-construction attracts Pilnyak, and the liberty and warmth of the anarchists are carefully portrayed while the inevitably victorious Bolsheviks are cold caricatures of Chernyshevsky's rationalistic heroes.

iv

What is the basis of Pilnyak's preference for the instinctive rather than the intellectual? Pilnyak was influenced by Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher who flourished circa 500 B.C. Heraclitus is chiefly remembered by his statement that "everything flows and nothing abides."⁴¹

⁴⁰Tolstoy evolved from this early position to a later belief in the efficiency of personal initiative; cf. The Kingdom of God is within You.

⁴¹Philip Wheelwright (ed), The Presocratics (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1966), p. 70. Pilnyak is reputed to have carried a copy of Heraclitus's fragments on his person (p. XII, The Tale of the Unextinguished Moon, op. cit.,) A study of Heraclitus's fragments revealed surprising similarities between the Greek philosopher and the Soviet author.

The theory of universal flux precludes the possibility of absolutes and principles which are necessary for the initiation of intellectual activity; everything changes so quickly that the intellect cannot make a conclusive judgment before the premises change. The only reality of which a person can be certain is what he sees, feels, or hears; the intellect is deceived if it attempts to interpret and order reality. A Heraclitean theory of knowledge, therefore, is virtually impossible; man cannot actually perceive reality through his intellect.

We should let ourselves be guided by what is common to all. Yet, although the Logos is common to all, most men live as if each of them had a private intelligence of his own.⁴²

The key to knowledge, then, is not intellectual activity, but a fusion of the individual personality into the common principle of life; withdrawal from the common processes of nature is a manifestation of intellectual pride, the vice which is the source of all evil for Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Pilnyak. Pilnyak felt that a trust in human instinct rather than reliance upon intellect serves man's best interests.

Heraclitus states that "man is not rational; there is intelligence only in what encompasses him".⁴³ Pilnyak believes that each man's

⁴²Ibid., p. 69.

⁴³Ibid., p. 74.

instinct will lead him to a share in that common intelligence which is found in nature, while the intellect, paradoxically, tends to limit man's real understanding of life.⁴⁴

Instinct opposed to intellect can also be expressed as chaos and nature versus logic and civilization; everything is in motion and incapable of definition. The Revolution, for example, is incomprehensible and inexplicable because it is a spontaneous and chaotic uprising of the people which is eradicating civilization and initiating a return to a more natural way of life. Marxist explanations of the Revolution are merely another manifestation of intellectual pride and are doomed to be mistaken.

Another aspect of Heraclitean influence upon Pilnyak is the role of fire in Mahogany. Heraclitus considered fire to be the basic element of all things: "there is exchange of all things for fire and of fire for all things, as there is of wares for gold and of gold for wares."⁴⁵ Aristotle mentions that "Heraclitus says that all things at some time become fire" and that "fire is the first principle."⁴⁶ Cicero states that Heraclitus taught that fire was that from which the mind of living beings is derived.⁴⁷

⁴⁴Tolstoy views the intellect as the source of pride which is the most common limitation upon man's ability to perceive reality.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 71.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 80. Aristotle, Physica, 205a 3, Metaphysica, 984a 7.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 89. Cicero, De Natura Deorum, III, 35-36.

Fire, the first principle, changes into other elements and, in the process, becomes corrupted; this process of corruption -- from fire to air, water, and earth -- is called the "downward way."⁴⁸ In Mahogany the names of the "war communists," the okhlomons, are all derived from words connected with fire -- Ozhogov, Pozharov, and Ogniov.⁴⁹ Pilnyak implies that these men, certainly out of tune with the prevailing New Economic Policy, are pure Communists, and that the Soviet authorities have betrayed the Revolution for which these men had fought. Just as fire is the purest element in nature, so the okhlomons are the purest element of post-Revolutionary Russian society.⁵⁰ Ivan Ozhogov says:

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 12.

⁴⁹Okhlomon is employed by Pilnyak to designate a member of the community of perpetually inebriated Communists who live in the Kiln; they represent the idealists of 1917-1921 (War Communism) who are unable to cope with the drab reality of NEP Communism (1921-1928) which they regard as a betrayal of the Revolution. The word may be derived from two Greek words, Okhlos and Monos (mob and alone respectively); the meaning, then, could be outcast, exile, etc. cf. Pilnyak, Mother Earth and Other Stories (New York-Washington: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1968), p. 76, footnote. Another point of interest is the Okhlomons names, derived from fire; they use these names in place of their surnames, a step which is similar to religious profession and formal dedication to a new life. Ivan Ozhogov is the fool for Christ's sake and the okhlomons are the monks of the Soviet Union, models of perfection in the world.

⁵⁰In the initial part of the story Pilnyak calls Ivan Ozhogov, the chairman of the Okhlomon community, the hero of Mahogany. cf. Pilnyak, Krasnoye Derevo, op.cit., p. 17.

Настоящие коммунисты во всем городе -- только мы, и вот нам осталось место только в подземельи. Я был здесь первым коммунистом, и я останусь им, пока я жив. Наши идеи не погибнут.

Далше иван Карпович бредил -- он опять рассказывал о своей коммуне, о ее равенстве и братстве, -- он утверждал, что коммунизм, есть первым делом любовь, напряженное внимание человека к человеку, дружество, содружество, соработа, -- коммунизм есть отказ от вещей и для коммунизма истинного первым делом должны быть любовь, уважение к человеку и -- люди.⁵¹

Yakov Karpovich Skudrin, Ivan's NEPman-brother, attests to the fact that the okhlomons are the most honest people in town, even if they are idiots; Pilnyak tells of Ozhogov's fervent speeches which brought tears to the eyes of the okhlomon's audience.⁵² Despite obvious flaws in their characters, the alcoholic okhlomons are favorably compared to NEPmen, especially the Bezdetovs, whose surname implies Pilnyak's condemnation. The okhlomons are similar to the "Fools for Christ" (yurodivyie) of an earlier period; although not many people imitate (that) that particular brand of asceticism, the okhlomons and "Fools for Christ" cause those who have diluted or perverted their original faith to experience a twinge of conscience.

When Mahogany was incorporated into The Volga Flows into the Caspian Sea, the okhlomons and their Heraclitean surnames remained in the

⁵¹Ibid., p. 36, 62.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 48, 62-63.

new novel; Pilnyak must have hoped that the Soviet literary and political authorities would not recognize the provocative surnames of the "war Communists."

Heraclitus displayed an attitude towards nature which Pilnyak portrayed in his animal stories; the forces of nature are an amoral force, indifferent to human concepts of right and wrong, justice and injustice. Human judgments of morality concerning the events of nature are dependent only upon how these processes affect the individual, for good or for ill; the processes themselves are neutral, unrelentingly regular, and the culmination of an endless series of conflicts and tensions.

The basic conflict is between life and death; new life is realized only through death. In the short story, Snow Wind, Pilnyak shows the struggle for life between wolves; a young wolf leads the fight to depose the old wolf who is leader of the pack.

The old wolf, fresh from his kill, slowly descended the valley where his pack had gathered. At the sight of his grey gaunt form they rushed forward to meet him... the young wolf, with a savage squeal, dared to throw himself upon the leader in a sudden fierce attack...the young wolf, like the old one before him, now became leader and too a mate; she was the daughter of the old leader, and she went into the cave to breed.⁵³

⁵³"Snow Wind," in Tales of the Wilderness, op.cit., pp. 132-134.

That last sentence is also the last line of the story. Pilnyak does not conclude the story with a moral judgment or expression of horror at the cruelty of fate; what has happened is natural and is accepted as such by the wolves. The author is merely reporting the tensions from which life is created; in the same way the Revolution is creating new life, and moral judgments and expression of horror are out of place. All one can do is trust in the forces of natural development, an attitude which will earn Pilnyak much negative criticism from Marxist readers.⁵⁴

⁵⁴Pilnyak's style is outside of the scope of this work, but it should be mentioned as another demonstration of Pilnyak's attraction toward the instinctive rather than the intellectual; his style itself is anti-intellectual. Pilnyak was a practitioner of dynamic, ornamental prose which was opposed to the use of a conventional plot with its emphasis on intellect and idea. As a stylistic appendix to this study, cf. The Serapion Brothers by Hongar Oulanoff (Hague: Mouton & Co., 1966), Prof. Oulanoff studies the connection between Pilnyak's attraction to instinct and the anti-intellectual style of his plotless prose; he also testifies to Pilnyak's influence upon the literary scene of the early 1920's. Also cf. Robert Maguire, Red Virgin Soil (Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 118-119.

CHAPTER THREE

RETROGRESSIONAL REALISM

i

This study of Pilnyak's central theme began with the author's specific preference for semi-Asiatic Russia rather than the West, which in turn was followed by his general preference for instinct and nature rather than intellect and civilization. Pilnyak further defined his preferences by his commentary on Russian history.

Pilnyak condemned Peter the Great for introducing Western technology and bureaucracy into Russia; even before the advent of the Emperor, however, Pilnyak discovered other influences which served to corrupt purely Russian practices. In Naked Year Donat the Old Believer is close to the soil and the processes of nature; the Old Believer rather than the Orthodox has kept more of the old ways of Russian life. The basis of the raskol was the introduction of new religious practices by Patriarch Nikon; these practices were viewed by the Old Believers as heretical Greek imports and not native to the Russian people and their Church.⁵⁵

⁵⁵Pares, op.cit., pp. 163-167.

In Naked Year Pilnyak, through Archbishop Sylvester, reveals that he regards the Old Believers as an aberration also: Christianity in general, a foreign import, is a fraud perpetrated upon the Russian people by Greek connivers.

Вместо пасхи девушек на урочищах
умыкали, на пригорках в дубравах Егорию,
скотьему богу, молились. А православное
христианство вместе с царями пришло, с Чужой
властью, и народ от него -- В
сектантство, в знахари, куда хочешь, как
на дон, на яик -- от власти.

Ну-ка, сыщи, чтобы в сказках про православие
было? Лешай, ведомы, водяные, никак не
господь Саваоф.⁵⁶

Christianity and monotheism are fiction; whenever the people have had a choice or been able to move to the hinterlands, the old pagan beliefs survived. Pilnyak was not looking back to the Seventeenth or Sixteenth centuries, as some critics assert, but to the Ninth century; Varangian princes and Greek churchmen are just as responsible for the negative alien aspects of pre-revolutionary Russia as Peter the Great and Nicholas II. The connection between the Revolution and pagan religion, a symbol of natural tribal life of pre-988 Russia, is portrayed in the conversation between Archbishop Sylvester and Gleb Ordynin.

⁵⁶Goly God, op.cit., p. 103.

Слышишь, как революция воет -- как ведьма
 в метель! слушай: -- гвииуу, гвииуу! шооя,
 шооя... гаау. И леший барабанит: -- гла
 -- вбум! гла-вбуум. А ведьмы задом --
 передом подмахивают: -- кварт -- хоз!
 Кварт -- хоз! ... леший ярится: -- нач - эвак!
 нач-эвак! Хму! А ветер, а сосны, а снег: --
 шоя, шооя... шооя...шооя... хмууу... и ветер:
 -- гвииууу... слышишь?⁵⁷

The combination of Soviet jargon and folklore, joined with the blizzard of the Revolution, emphasize Pilnyak's belief that the Revolution signals a return to nature and an abandonment of Western civilization. For Pilnyak the Revolution means the erasure of Russian history from c988 to 1917, one thousand years of negative foreign influence.

ii

Another manifestation of Pilnyak's preference for antiquity is his attitude towards industry in general and the dam at Kolomna in particular; many of his stories and novels, especially Machines and Wolves and The Volga Flows into the Caspian Sea, are thinly-disguised condemnations of the industrial revolution and factory life. Pilnyak was not alone in this regard; Alexander Blok and Anton Chekhov both portrayed

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 104-105.

the seamier sides of factory life in Russia, along with Maxim Gorky and Alexander Kuprin. Pilnyak, however, did not merely expose managerial excesses or portray the evil side-effects of industrial life; he opposed the very idea of industry. Pilnyak was oriented towards rural agrarian life, hunting, and fishing; he felt completely alien to the factories and to the stultifying monotony of work from which the laborer gained so little.

Some of the most biting anti-industrial sarcasm came from the pen of Boris Pilnyak. In the short story Wolves, Pilnyak substitutes details of the new gray ugliness of the industrial environment for the usual lyrical description of nature; he also criticises the tendency of the Soviet Union of the 1920's to divinize the machine and to sanctify its anonymous operator.

Вокруг завода, по большаку, разметался заводский поселок, домики, как скворешники, за палисадами, в черной копоти, в буре от копоти снеге.

А там, за заводской стеной, за завкомом, -- дым, копоть, огонь, -- шум, лязг, визг и скрип железа, -- полумрак, электричество вместо солнца. -- машина, допуски, калибры, вагранка, мартены, -- ты оторван от солнца, от полей, от цветов, от ржаных утех и песен ржаных, ты не пойдешь направо или влево, потому что весь завод, как аякс и как гидравлический пресс, одна машина, где человек -- лишь допуск, -- машина в масле, как потен человек, -- завод очень сорен, в кучах угля, железа, железного лома, стальных опилок, формовочной земли, -- там, за заводской стеной, -- человек, инженер -- его никто не видит -- поворачивает рычаг: сквозь крышу идет

сюда кометой пыли луч солнца --- и он случаен и
ненужен здесь.

Что такое --- машина? И кто такой
пролетарий? --- У машины, как у бога, нет крови.
В Ассирии, в Вавилоне, в Египте --- были божьи дворы,
у них были служки. Но тогда на заводском дворе ---
пролетарий --- служка машины, как инженер --- поп.

Россия правилась метелью и кровью.
Пришли новые монахи, принесли новую веру --- веру
машины --- пролетарий.⁵⁸

There are other sections in the same story which echo these sentiments; they show that Pilnyak is not only in the tradition of anti-industrial fiction, but also comes close to the Orwellian nightmare which is also portrayed by Pilnyak's contemporary, Evgeny Zamyatin, in We. Pilnyak reacted not only to the ugliness of the factory milieu, but also to the dangers of a new civilization in which greater importance is attached to the machine than to the man who operates it; while the man is mere priest, the machine is God.

While Pilnyak is alienated by the drabness and dehumanization of industry, he is also nostalgic about the Russia which is being replaced by the new industrial complex. In The Volga Flows into the

⁵⁸Pilnyak, "Volki", in Krasnaya Nov' (issue 13, 1923), pp. 134, 138, 139, 140.

Caspian Sea the dam at the historic site of Kolomna, a grandiose project of the first Five Year Plan, is contrasted to the age-old customs of the people in the local villages. When the dam is completed many of these simple peasants will have to vacate the lands which their ancestors have worked for centuries; the offence against nature, however, is primarily emphasized by the fact that the dam will cause the river to flow backwards. Despite the author's obvious sympathy with the life of the villages and their historical significance, the waters inundate the area; the new order, natural or not, is victorious. "Water encircled the tower of Marina Mniszek the tower of legends."⁵⁹

As another clue to Pilnyak's sympathies, the okhlomon Ivan Ozhogov, symbol of pure Communism, dies as the flood engulfs the cellar of the brick factory. "So died Ivan Ozhogov, a good man of the good times Nineteen-Seventeen to Nineteen-Twenty One."⁶⁰

Ivan was incorporated into the novel from Mahogany after official criticism of the short story; Pilnyak was expected to redeem himself by writing a novel depicting the achievements of the Five Year Plan. The redemption, however, fell short of expectations; while Mahogany was, among other things, a condemnation of NEP Communism as a perversion of the Revolution, The Volga Flows into the Caspian Sea is a condemnation

⁵⁹ Pilnyak, The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea (London: Peter Davies, 1932) p. 320.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 322.

of industrialization but also an admission of its inevitability. Ivan Ozhogov's death symbolizes the death of all that was good in the Revolution; the successful reversing of the river and its subsequent inundation of Ivan's cellar signifies the victory of civilization over nature, and also the victory of the Communists over the Bolsheviks.

Pilnyak's attachment to the past, and the inner conflict for which this attachment was responsible, is apparent in Naked Year and The Volga Flows into the Caspian Sea as well as in his stories; he realized that the disappearance of the past is inevitable, but he was also well aware of the ugly, impersonal aspects of the new mechanized society.⁶¹ In Naked Year, for example, the aristocratic Ordynin family clearly contains within itself the seeds of decay, symbolized by hereditary syphilis and abortions; despite the drabness and inhumanity of industrialization and Communism, the new social order will inherit the future because nothing else is present to combat it.

iv

In conclusion, Pilnyak's theme, which as been divided into three sections, is the tension between unfettered freedom and any form of systematized existence. His sympathies are clearly with freedom, which is represented by Russia and her peasants who adhere closely to the

⁶¹ Pilnyak's personal failure to solve this conflict may have partly responsible for his attraction to alcohol. cf. Ilya Ehrenburg, Memoirs: 1921-1941 (World Publishing Co., 1964), pp. 24-28. Edward J. Brown, Russian Literature since the Revolution (New York: Collier, 1963), p. 114.

processes of nature; he ridicules and condemns the rationalistic West, represented in Russia by the nobility and certain sectors of the intelligentsia. As an artistic aid to his central thesis, Pilnyak employed pre-historic Russia as his example of a free, natural society.

This central theme occurs in Pilnyak's works from 1915 to 1937, his last major story, The Birth of a Man, concerns a dedicated Soviet public prosecutor who gives birth to an illegitimate child; maternal instincts and human emotions, which she thought were experienced only by the bourgeoisie, gain control of her personality.⁶²

The Soviet view of Pilnyak's theme will be presented in a separate chapter; even at this point, however, it should be obvious that Pilnyak's defense of instinct and freedom against any form of planned existence runs counter to the belief in human conquest of nature and to the gradual growth of totalitarianism in the Soviet Union during the Twenties and Thirties.

⁶²"Rozhdeniye Cheloveka", in Novy Mir (issue 1, 1935), pp. 111-126.

CHAPTER FOUR

PILNYAK'S CHARACTERS

As a prelude to a study of Pilnyak's characters, a mention should be made of the author's use of characterization in general. The connection between Pilnyak's characters and themes is similar to the bond between Dostoevsky's characters and themes. Konstantin Mochulsky states that "in the world of Dostoevsky the idea always portrays the spiritual center of the personality. The personality is always idea-bearing."⁶⁴

In Dostoevsky's novels, characters are embodiments of ideas. In Podrostok, for example, Versilov represents German idealism and socialism, Arkady Dolgoruky represents the Rothschild idea (happiness and self-confidence are by-products of independent wealth), Makar Dolgoruky represents the religious idea (the liberating influence of belief in Christ and the Orthodox Church), and Prince Sergei represents the stagnant nobility, divorced from the life of the Russian people (narod). All of Dostoevsky's major novels can be dissected in a similar way; the author's ability to put flesh and blood on these ideas varies from character to character.

⁶⁴Konstantin Mochulsky, Dostoevsky (Paris: YMCA Press, 1947). p. 405.

Another aspect of Dostoevsky's characterization is the moral complexity of his characters; each personality is a human being with good and bad points, doubts and anxieties. Even Svidrigailov, the symbol of Raskolnikov's attraction to evil, presents a good side of his personality in Crime and Punishment. Although Dostoevsky resisted the temptation to portray his characters as entirely good or evil, they usually lack flesh and blood. They adequately represent ideas, but it is difficult for the reader to visualize these characters as physical human beings.

Tolstoy's characterization was superior to Dostoevsky's. Although a few persons seem a bit ethereal (Platon Karataev, for example), most of his characters are quite humanly and convincingly portrayed through lavish and recurrent physical detail. Although Natasha Rostova represents the principle of natural life, she is much more than the embodiment of an idea; she is alive and vibrant, a warm and complete human being. Unlike Dostoevsky, whose characters tend to be morally complex and otherwise somewhat vague, Tolstoy's characters are morally simple and otherwise very detailed. Although a myriad of descriptive human detail is given to Tolstoy's characters, they are either good or bad, approved or disapproved by the author; there is no middle ground for Tolstoy. Napoleon is ridiculed and condemned as an egocentric, effeminate fool, and Kutuzov is praised as a gruff, patriarchal wise man; historians of the period, however, do not describe these personalities in such black and white terms.

Pilnyak's characters, like Dostoevsky's, stand for ideas. Also like Dostoevsky's characters they are occasionally credible, but more often insufficiently human or mere caricatures. Pilnyak's characterizations resemble Tolstoy's in that the author's benedictions and condemnations are quite obvious to the reader. Pilnyak blatantly illustrates his preferences through ridicule and caricature of characters whom he dislikes.

While Tolstoy's approved characters either triumph or find happiness, Pilnyak's favorite characters, those who are spared ridicule and are presented favorably, are doomed either to extinction or to painful conformity.⁶⁵

In general Pilnyak's characters are not individual personalities. Occasional warm, human portraits are drawn of certain individuals, such as Gavrilov in The Tale of the Unextinguished Moon, but these are the exceptions. The characters of whom Pilnyak seems to disapprove are almost always portrayed as syphilitics, abortionists, or inhumanly rigid; the characters of whom the author approves are healthy, fertile, and personable. In none, or very few, of these cases are the characters treated as individuals inviting further study or emotional involvement on the part of the reader. Identification with a hero or individual, which is possible with many literary characters, is very difficult, if not impossible, in Pilnyak's stories and novels.

⁶⁵Pilnyak himself suffered both painful conformity and execution.

Characterization does not seem to be a matter of importance to Pilnyak. As soon as each character has conveyed the idea of which he is an illustration, he is removed, and another character, or set of characters, occupies the center of the stage. In Naked Year, Mahogany, and The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea, characters are briefly introduced, re-appear in unordered sequences in confusing relationships with each other, and then disappear; because Pilnyak does not depend upon conventional plot in his stories and novels, the reader has no idea as to whether a certain character will re-appear or not before the conclusion of the work, or whether that character is important or not.

Pilnyak avoided the use of a central character in most of his works for the same reason that he shunned the use of the conventional plot; in order to construct a plot or to portray a convincing character, the author must devote many pages to details which limit the pace and scope of the work. In Naked Year the plot is the Revolution itself. The loose collage of scenes, some of which are loosely united through the presence of the same persons, conveys the sense of uncontrollable chaos of Russian life which Pilnyak thought the Revolution represented. If the author had chosen to employ a central character (or a plot, for that matter), the scope of the novel would be severely limited insofar as one person is necessarily limited.

The second reason for Pilnyak's avoidance of central characters is the author's belief, similar to Tolstoy's thesis in War and Peace, that there is no central character in great historical movements such as the Revolution and the War of 1812. The Revolution is an uprising of the Russian people who are seeking to return to their national roots, and so, there are neither heroic deeds nor heroic individuals. If one wishes to catch the flavor of the Revolution, he must plunge into its chaos and feel the Revolution rather than view it through the eyes of one or two personalities. The Revolution and advent of Bolshevism are irrational and elemental movements, and any orderly presentation or sequential treatment of these events would run counter to Pilnyak's understanding of their significance. For this reason Pilnyak portrays the Revolution as a whole; the chaos of Naked Year is the chaos of the Revolution. In his later works, such as Mahogany, the situation is limited, but Pilnyak still shuns the use of a central character. An overall picture of the personalities of NEP Communism -- NEPmen, War Communists, peasants, disenfranchised noblemen, and Trotskyites -- is presented rather than a single portrait. This method of characterization not only permitted the author a wide scope, but also gives the impression that the author was unable to find the "positive hero" in the Soviet scene.

ii

The characters whom Pilnyak dislikes are simply those who embody ideas of which he disapproves. In the preceding chapters concerning Pilnyak's themes, one idea in particular emerges as the main recipient of Pilnyak's scorn, namely, that man is superior to, and should organize, the processes of nature. Persons who advance this idea are either ridiculed, condemned to embarrassing failure, or revise their opinions. Thus Jan Laitis is a fool in Naked Year, Nekulyev in Mother Earth is doomed to failure, and Antonova in The Birth of a Man belatedly recognizes the role of instinct and emotion in her life. When this type of person is successful, he or she is portrayed in such a way that the author's sympathies cannot possibly be interpreted as being in their favor. In Naked Year Arkhip Arkhipov and Natalya Ordynina, the Bolsheviks who represent the future of Russia, are inhumanly rigid robots, and in The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea, the engineers, who have successfully reversed the flow of the river, as well as the female workers, are living in a state of moral chaos which destroys their relationships with their wives and fellow-workers.

On the other hand, anyone who recognizes the primacy of nature and instinct appears to receive the author's approval. In Naked Year Pilnyak portrays a scene which is reminiscent of Levin's mowing scene

in Anna Karenina, as the members of the anarchist commune work the soil and become part of the agrarian cycle of planting and harvest. The author's enthusiastic description of Andrei as he works in the field indicates Pilnyak's fondness for both the character and the type of natural life which Andrei and the scene represent.

У анархистов Андрей поднимался с зарей, -- летней, безмерно ясной, и -- с бочкой на паре в дышлах мчал на реку за водой; ... Солнце поднималось красное и медленное, одежда мокла медвяной росой, из займищ уходили последние ключья тумана. В двенадцать шабашили до тпех, мужчины поднимали пар, собирались к обеду, бронзовые от солнца, раньше Андрей не работал мышцами, -- сладко пыли плечи, поясница и бедра, голова была легкой, мысли -- ясны и тихи. И июнь с фарфоровыми жасминами, с хрустальными его восходами, прошел уже.⁶⁶

In his works Pilnyak followed the Heraclitean (and Hegelian) principle that conflicts produce new forms of reality. The author presents themes and characters as opposing pairs and portrays the consequent tensions. In his animal stories Pilnyak illustrates this principle with wolves and birds; the young kill or otherwise depose the old in order to make way for the new, and aggressive males struggle for females of their species.

⁶⁶Goly God, op.cit., pp. 122-123.

Jan Laitis and Andrei Volkovich are presented as opposites at the beginning of Naked Year. Jan, the foreign Communist, is at the opposite pole from Andrei, the Russian anarchist. Jan is arrested by the Bolsheviks, and Andrei is forced to become a fugitive as the anarchist commune is destroyed. A sort of synthesis results -- as Jan and Andrei fade out, Arkhip Arkhipov, the Russian Bolshevik, is presented as the model of the new Soviet citizen, a Communist with a Pugachev beard.

iii

Both Heraclitus and Hegel viewed the conflicts produced by nature's processes as a necessity for progress; Heraclitus views the process as the survival of the fittest, and Hegel's dialectic calls for the fusion of elements of two clashing opposites. If the reader expects to discover progress as a result of the tensions and conflicts in Pilnyak's works, he will be disappointed. In his animal stories progress is evident, but when the author deals with human beings, it seems as though a regression is taking place. Arkhip Arkhipov, the Bolshevik who is conceded the future of Russia, is a caricature of a humanbeing in comparison with Andrei Volkovich and Mark, the son of Donat the sectarian. The reader receives the

impression from these characterizations that Pilnyak regarded Bolshevism as an inhuman ideology which is attractive only to machine-like men in leather jackets whose only human value seems to be efficiency -- "to function energetically." In none of his works is there portrayed a personable Communist, a fact which was duly pointed out by Soviet critics. The examples of Jan Laitis and Arkhip Arkhipov have been mentioned above; in Naked Year Pilnyak described the Bolsheviks in a paragraph which has often been quoted as the typical caricature of the Communists by the Fellow Travellers in the early Twenties.

...собирались наверху люди в кожаных куртках, большевики. Эти вот, в кожаных куртках каждый в статью, кожаный красавец, каждый крепок, и кудри кольцом под фуражкой на затылок, у каждого крепко обтянуты скулы, складки у губ, движения у каждого утюжны. Из русской рыхлой, корявой народности -- отбор. В кожаный курткой -- не подмочишь....Архип Архипов днем сидел в исполкоме. бумаги писал, потом мотался по городу и заводу -- по конференциям, по собраниям, по митингам. Бумаги писал, брови сдвигая (и была борода чуть-чуть всклокочена), перо держал топором.

Кожаные куртки.

Большевики. Большевики? -- Да. Так. --
Вот, что такое большевики! 67

In Mahogany no regular member of the Communist Party is portrayed, with the exception of Akim Skudrin who is about to be expelled for Trotskyism. From the opening section of the story, the reader learns that the local leadership of the Party is corrupt.

В кино же однажды уполномоченный внуторга. не-то Сац, не-то Кац, в совершенно трезвом состоянии, толкнул случайно по неловкости жену председателя исполкома, -- та молвила ему, полна презрения: -- «Я -- Куварзина», -- уполномоченный Сац, будучи не осведомлен в силе сей фамилии, извинился удивленно, -- и был впоследствии за свое удивление похерен из уезда. Начальство в городе жило скученно, остерегаясь. в природной подозрительности, прочего населения, заменяло общественность склочками и преизбирало каждый год само себя с одного уездного пуководящего поста на другой в зависимости от группировок склочающих личностей по принципу тришкина кафтана. По тому же принципу тришкина кафтана комбинировалось и хозяйство.⁶⁸

In the latter part of the story Ivan Ozhogov converses with his nephew, Akim, about the expulsion of the idealists from the Party.

--Выгнали? --- спросил радостно.
 --Откуда? -- переспросил Аким.
 --Из партии, -- сказал Иван Карпович.

⁶⁸ Krasnoye Derevo, op.cit., pp. 16-17.

-- Нет.

-- Нет? не выгнали? -- переспросил Иван и в голосе его возникла печаль, -- но кончил он бодро: -- ну, не сейчас, так потом выгонят, всех денинцев и троцкистов выгонят! -

Далше Иван Карпович бредил -- в бреду рассказывал о своей коммуне, о том, как был первым председателем исполкома, какие были те годы и как они погибли, прозные годы, как потом прогнали его из революции. ⁶⁹

In Ivan Moskva the reader encounters a sincere, but colorless Communist, the first for whom sympathy might be shown. He is defeated in his efforts to help create a new society, however, by natural forces over which he has no control. Ivan's hereditary syphilis gradually deprives him of his mental faculties and he enters a world of fantasy with a mummy which has been brought to Moscow by a Russian professor of history. Ivan stands out in relation to the local peasants with whom he is living; he attempts to persuade them of the advantages of technology and the superiority of the Communist regime to the tribal life of the peasants. His efforts are portrayed in opposition to his occasional lapses into insanity, which tend to belie his claims of innate Bolshevik superiority. His hereditary syphilis and insanity suggest that his rabid belief in technology and organizational efficiency does not take into account perennial human irrationalities and the limitations of human history which always seem to subtract from even the best of plans.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 61-62.

In Mother Earth Nekulyev, a Communist, is sent to a back-woods area to compel the peasants to stop stealing the diminishing timber supply of the state-owned forests along the Volga. The peasants regard the local forests as their own, while the Communist attempts to convince them of the priority of national needs over their local, comparatively selfish necessities. Nekulyev fails; not only do the peasants disregard his appeal to aid the central government and continue to steal the timber, but the hapless Communist barely escapes with his life. Nekulyev is not a malicious character, but he is an alien imposition upon the simple life of the local peasantry, merely the representative of another avaricious absentee landlord. The analogy between the Soviet government on the one side, and the Tsarist government and/or private landowners on the other is left unsaid by the author, but the reader might wonder if the local peasants, supposedly the beneficiaries of a Workers' and Peasants' Republic, could discern between the Whites and the Reds, both of whom exploit the local inhabitants in Mother Earth.

In The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea a different group of Communists is presented: Sadykov, Poletika, and Laszlo are engineers who are entrusted with the task of constructing a dam on the Moscow River. When the dam is completed, the river will be reversed, the historic and ancient town of Kolomna will be inundated, and a hydro-

electric plant will be established. Each of these three Communist engineers seems to be a good man: Sadykov is reminiscent of Arkhip Arkhipov in Naked Year in that he is seemingly devoid of emotion but sincere; Poletika is a believer in the idealistic aspects of Communism (similar to Ivan Ozhogov), but drawn to Russia's pre-revolutionary heritage; Laszlo is a very human Communist whose career and domestic life are destroyed by his adherence to the new moral code.

The connecting link between these three men is not only their Communism, but their entanglement in each other's marital affairs. Poletika's wife had fled with Laszlo, and Poletika accepted the situation in accord with Communist morality (derived from Chernyshevsky's What to Do?) which dictates calm rational acceptance of new sexual or marital attachments rather than an emotional refusal to recognise the change of affection. Despite Poletika's noble attempt to arrange his life in accord with these ideas, he has retained his love for his wife and is portrayed in the novel as a lonely, pathetic figure for whom ideology is not a replacement for human love.

Almost twenty years after the original incident Laszlo becomes infatuated with Maria, Sadykov's wife, when Sadykov, Poletika, and Laszlo are assigned to the Five Year Plan project at Kolomstroi. Sadykov becomes aware of Maria's love for Laszlo and he insists that the two live together. Sadykov, who had never told his wife that he

loved her, feels that his action is in accord with the new morality which encourages lovers to live together in happiness while their former mates go their own way. Laszlo's allegiance to this viewpoint compels him to desert his wife (Poletika's ex-wife) and join Maria, but he soon realizes that his attraction to Maria was purely physical and passing. He regrets the desertion of his first wife, a fact which Maria realizes and which leads her to commit suicide. The female construction workers are incensed at Maria's suicide, which they interpret as another manifestation of male exploitation of helpless female, and they go on strike; the breakdown of the family unit has been responsible for the halt in construction.⁷⁰

This particular problem, of course, is settled and construction continues; at the end of the novel Poletika and his wife are reunited and Laszlo's career comes to a halt, as he is considered a stumbling-block to the successful completion of the dam. The scene of reunion between Poletika and his wife seems to receive more emphasis and care on the part of the author than the completion of the project. The individuals and their relationships to each other are portrayed as being more important and more interesting than the fate of the Five Year Plan.

⁷⁰ In fairness to the Communist Party, it should be noted that the Party itself had reversed its position on sexual morality long before the publication of Pilnyak's novel. Party officials realized the necessity for the maintenance of the family unit.

The Communists portrayed in The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea are quite different from those portrayed in earlier works. The "leather jackets", hard, efficient young men of a single purpose, are replaced by tired, middle-aged men whose rational commitment to Communism had not foreseen the consequences of a morality which attempts to eliminate man's instinct. The reader receives the impression from the unhappiness of the Communists that it would have been preferable for the men to struggle for the preservation of their families rather than meekly accept the situation; the latter alternative is unnatural for any animal, human or not. The old Bolshevik Poletika has suffered greatly because of this morality. He also suffers because of the construction of the dam, as his attraction to Russia's past competes with his conviction that the dam represents for Poletika Communism in toto; why does it have to root out the past in such a brutal fashion? At the conclusion of the novel Poletika makes an agonizing Act of Faith in Communism because it is the only possible way for Russia to go forward at this particular period of history.⁷¹

⁷¹ In conjunction with Poletika's act of faith, Pilnyak wrote much the same thing in an autobiographical piece, quoted in Struve, op.cit., p. 215. Pilnyak believes that the Communists are the historic destiny of Russia for the moment.

iv

In contrast to the drab and unfavorable portraits of Communists Pilnyak draws comparatively vivid pictures of personalities who are obviously not in concert with Soviet policy of the 1920's. These people are often openly hostile to the regime, such as Ivan Ozhogov in Mahogany, or they believe in ideals which cannot possibly be reconciled with any interpretation of Communism, such as anarchism.

Ivan Ozhogov, who has been mentioned above a number of times, is the traditional "fool for Christ's sake," who calls sinners to perform penance and to recall their original, undiluted commitment to their faith, in this case, Communism. Ivan is portrayed as a thoroughly likable person; despite his faults of perpetual drunkenness and occasional rudeness, he is honest and idealistic, "a fool of Soviet Russia for Justice's sake," in the midst of petty thieves without any ideals at all.⁷² Soviet critics were quick to notice that the only honest person in the story is driven to alcoholism and insanity by the local Communist bureaucrats. The reaction of these critics, and Pilnyak's subsequent difficulties, will be recounted in a later chapter.

A second character in Mahogany is not as developed as Ivan Ozhogov, but he stands apart from the corruption of his native town

⁷²Krasnoye Derevo, op.cit., p. 62.

where he has returned for a visit. Akim Skudrin, Ivan's nephew, is a Trotskyite who is "flesh of Ivan Ozhogov's flesh..." and weeps for Communism lost.⁷³ It is rare for a literary character to be labelled a Trotskyite; in the politically charged atmosphere of the late Twenties Pilnyak's portrayal of Akim assumed importance as a clue to Pilnyak's opinions concerning the factional strife within the Communist Party.

Akim almost seems like a Communist Christ-figure; he is associated with the wooden Christ crowned with thorns, his mother is solemn when she meets him, "as at Communion," and as he leaves his birthplace for the last time, the reader receives the impression that his crucifixion as a Trotskyite is imminent. "The Trotskyite Akim was late for the train, just as he was late for the train of time."⁷⁴

Akim is also almost alone in his refusal to condemn his aunt, Kapitolina, for her two illegitimate births; he echoes thoughts which Pilnyak as narrator had written a few pages before Akim's thoughts were presented. He recognizes that Kapitolina's two illegitimate children and their grandchildren have provided a rich and full life for the old woman, while Rimma, her sister, who condemned Kapitolina for promiscuity and maintained her sterile virginity, is a

⁷³Ibid., pp. 63-64.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 69.

lonely figure who finds a modicum of happiness by belatedly immersing herself into Kapitolina's family life. The processes of nature, whether legitimized by human convention or not, are more fruitful than solitary virtue. Akim views the Revolution as the termination of these false human conventions and as a declaration of belief in the fruitful processes of nature, thoughts presented by characters in other works of Pilnyak.

Pilnyak's characterization of Akim also became a source of trouble for the author. Akim the Trotskyite is portrayed as a morally good man who is sincerely interested in the well-being of people, while the Communists of the local Party leadership are bent on their own financial and political gain at the expense of the townsfolk.

Akim and Ivan Ozhogov are unique in Pilnyak's works in that they represent political factions and are still portrayed with some feeling and care by the author. The other characters who are warmly and humanly portrayed are either apolitical or anti-political. In Naked Year, for example, while the Bolsheviks are flat, colorless caricatures of human beings, Andrei Volkovich, Donat, Mark, and the members of the anarchist commune are illustrated as vibrant human components of a universal natural process of life. Only these characters experience joy and delight in the world about them; the Communists are as dour as they are drab. Irina describes her life

with Mark, farming, bathing in the river, long rides by horse over the vast plains, and then she exclaims, "how many beautiful and happy days are ahead of me!"⁷⁵ Arkhip and Natalya, on the other hand, are more prosaic: "coziness, children, and work...work."⁷⁶

The character of Donat the sectarian is worthy of mention because he best exemplifies ideas which are evident not only in Naked Year but in the early animal stories also. Donat is a Christian who practices the works of mercy. He leaves food on the table and an unlocked door for weary travellers, but he is also a horse-thief who believes in the survival of the fittest. He carefully follows ritual prescriptions such as abstinence from tea, but, with a clear conscience, steals horses and murders trespassers, just as wolves and eagles instinctively steal provisions and protect their domain, be it lair or nest.

Irina, who deserts the anarchist commune and joins Donat's family as his daughter-in-law, expresses the same idea. Andrei says:

«-- Поделитесь со мною маками, товарищ
Ирина, -- пожалуйста!

«Я обыкновенно отвечаю так:

⁷⁵Goly God, op.cit., p. 146.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 210.

«-- Разве мужчины просят? -- мужчины берут!
 Берут свободно и вольно, как разбойники и анархисты!
 Надо уметь задушить человека и бить женщину. Разве
 же вы еще верите в какой-то гуманизм и справедливость?
 -- к чорту все! пусть вымрут все; кто не умеет
 бороться! Останутся одни сильные и свободные!..

«-- Это сказал Дарвин, -- говорит тихо Андрей.⁷⁷

Irina and Donat are happy. Donat states that his people have contentedly followed their customs since the time of Catherine the Great, when they left the cities and settled in the hinterland. Happy people are rarities in Pilnyak's works, and the reader's tendency is to sympathize or identify with their way of life and ideas. Donat and Irina, however, illustrate the ugly aspect of what seemed to appeal to Pilnyak -- the struggle for survival. Pilnyak records many such struggles, especially on the animal level; destruction and chaos are beautiful because they give birth to new possibilities. On the human level, the process is not so beautiful; it leads to wholesale destruction, murder, and theft, all of which are justified by the principle that "might makes right." How much Pilnyak himself subscribed to this theory is difficult, if not impossible, to say. It is ominous, though, that some of his most attractively portrayed characters are the mouthpieces of such sentiments.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 142.

Trotsky singled out Donat as the main enemy of the Revolution, for if Donat's fierce individualism, unchecked in the novel, is allowed to be victorious, the Revolution will collapse and the classless society will remain a dream.⁷⁸

The final class of characters which seemed to interest the author was the nobility. In Naked Year and A Thousand Years these portraits are friendly. The nobles are not characterized as heartless exploiters or decadent hedonists, but as human beings who have the misfortune of belonging to the wrong social group at this particular period of history. In this regard Pilnyak was preceded by Ivan Bunin and Anton Chekhov who drew sympathetic, but objective portraits of the last days of the Russian aristocracy. In Chekhov's Cherry Orchard the landowners lose their estate through inaction rather than seizure by peasants or expropriation by the government; in Pilnyak's Naked Year the Ordynin family has to contend with the Bolsheviks, but their hereditary syphilis and their inability to find a niche in the new Soviet society (with the exception of Natalya) suggests that they contain the seeds of decay within themselves.

Boris Ordynin, the eldest son, becomes the de facto head of the family when his father, who has undergone a religious conversion after a life of dissipation, becomes a hermit in his own room. As the

⁷⁸Trotsky, op.cit., pp. 85-86.

reader learns more of the family and its disintegration, he receives the impression that the elder Ordynin's religious fanaticism is a result of insanity produced by the advanced stages of syphilis. This disease has been passed on to all of the Ordynins with the exception of Natalya the Bolshevik, whose physical health coincides with the fact that she has forsaken the aristocracy. When Boris learns of his disease, he is horror-stricken as he realizes that he is incurably ill and will eventually lose his mind. Boris commits suicide and the relationship of the nobility to the Bolsheviks becomes apparent as "the triumphant playing of the 'International' resounds through the entire house" as the shot rings through the ancestral home of the Ordynins.⁷⁹ Bolshevism is putting an end to a thousand years of history connected with the nobility.

v

Some of Pilnyak's characters receive more vivid treatment than others, and those who are convincingly portrayed usually are representatives of anti-Soviet sentiments. Communists are caricatures, nobles are sympathetically portrayed, and anarchists and Trotskyites are favorably compared to Party officials. Whatever Pilnyak's opinions were, non-Communist characters received more detailed treat-

⁷⁹Goly God, op.cit., p. 112.

ment from the author, while characters who would receive official approval from Soviet authorities tend to leave unfavorable impressions upon the reader. The close association between characters and themes in Pilnyak's works laid the author open to the charge that his artistic inability, or lack of desire, to portray a sympathetic and personable Communist reflected his lack of sympathy for the Revolution and the Communist Party. The next part of this study will examine these accusations and Pilnyak's attempts to become an approved Soviet writer.

SOVIET LITERARY CRITICISM OF PILNYAK

CHAPTER V

i

Before a study of Soviet criticism of Pilnyak's works commences, it should be apparent that Pilnyak would merit negative criticism from almost every literary critic in the world; his themes and characters are quite out of tune with the prevailing sentiments of twentieth-century civilization, irrespective of ideology. The fact that Pilnyak was fated to publish his works in the Soviet Union of the 1920's added to the amount and intensity of the criticism which the author received. Not only was he faced with an all-encompassing ideology which denigrated the aspects of Russian tradition which he especially appreciated, but he had the added misfortune of being caught between groups of literary politicians in a vicious struggle for recognition as sole interpreters of official Soviet literary policy.

As a prelude to presentation of specific Soviet criticism of Pilnyak, it is necessary to mention the conflicting starting points of the various groups of literary critics. As each individual critic comments on Pilnyak, he is not only criticizing the author from a Marxist point of view, but also attempting to demonstrate his own

ideological orthodoxy at the expense of the author and other critics. Thus the individual piece of criticism may be not only an objective discussion of the literary merits of the work, but also a defense of current political trends and personal interpretations of those trends. Unless the differences of approach among the critics are made clear from the outset, their comments are less comprehensible. At the same time, as the diverse nature of the various criticisms becomes apparent, Pilnyak's situation becomes more awkward, since no group or individual, no matter what the interpretation of Marxism, could publicly defend Pilnyak and not become suspect himself.

ii

Two fundamentally different views of the role of literature were espoused by Bolsheviks during the 1920's. One view was rooted in the thought of Karl Marx, and the second had as its base the theories of the radical literary and social critics of the nineteenth century. The first attitude towards literature reflects Marx's theory of historical process, namely, that socialism is merely a transitory state of preparation for the Communist ideal of the classless society. The literature of the transitory period will also be temporary, as it also is in a state of preparation for its role as a true artistic representation of Communist

society and will necessarily reflect the shortcomings of the socialist approximation of the final goal. The artist can be granted great latitude so long as he does not attack the goal itself; his portrayal of imperfection may even spur his readers to greater efforts to reach Communism. The foremost exponent of this liberal attitude towards literature was G. V. Plekhanov, the "father of Russian Marxism" and the most prominent pre-revolutionary literary critic among the Marxists.

In 1924 Leon Trotsky, following Plekhanov's views, published a book of critical essays, Literature and Revolution; in the chapter entitled "Communist Policy towards Art" he elaborated his views on freedom of artistic creation within a Marxist-Leninist framework.⁸⁰

Art must make its own way and by its own means....the party leads the proletariat, but not the basic processes of history. There are domains in which the party leads, directly and imperatively. There are domains in which it only cooperates. There are, finally, domains in which it only orientates itself. The domain of art is not one in which the party is called upon to command. It can and must protect and

⁸⁰In order to avoid misunderstanding, a careful definition of the term "freedom" is necessary at this point. When Trotsky treats of freedom of literary creation, he means freedom to arrive at goals predetermined by the theories of Marxism-Leninism in any manner not detrimental to, or derogatory of these goals. His more totalitarian colleagues denied even this minimal freedom to artists; they dictated the exact form to be employed in the achievement of a literature truly reflective of the Socialist society. cf. Trotsky, op. cit., p. 218. Harriet Borland, Soviet Literary Theory and Practice during the First Five Year Plan: 1928-1932 (New York: Kings Crown Press, 1950), p. 10.

help, but it can lead only indirectly....
 It can and must give the additional
 credit of its confidence to various art
 groups which are striving sincerely to
 approach the Revolution and so help an
 artistic formulation of the Revolution...
 The Party... regards literary fellow
 travellers not as the competitors of the
 writers of the working class, but as the
 real or potential helpers of the working⁸¹
 class in the big work of reconstruction.

The second attitude towards literature does not regard artistic creation as a representation of contemporary life (socialism with its imperfections), but rather as a representation of an ideal which will be attained in the future, or an idealized portrait of the present. With this approach freedom of creation is greatly curtailed; human failings on the part of Communists are not permitted to appear in print. This point of view would obviously appeal to government and party authorities who have a vested interest in publicizing the successful and popular aspects of their program while maintaining a strict censorship concerning the remainder of their policy.

All forms of art must in every way help
 raise the mass consciousness and organize
 the mass will, mind, and enthusiasm for
 socialist construction and the great
 social reforms being carried out, and for
 international socialist education.⁸²

⁸¹Trotsky, op.cit., p. 218.

⁸²Borland, op.cit., p. 23. This is Miss Borland's paraphrase of B. Ettinhof. "Art in the Five Year Plan of Cultural Construction," VOKS, II, no. 10-12 (1931), p. 4.

These two approaches to literature, which shall be termed Marxist and Stalinist respectively, fought for supremacy in the literary arena from 1917 to 1930.⁸³ Much of the freedom for literary creation and possibility of publication of that decade is usually attributed to the comparatively chaotic state of Russian social and economic life, a condition which required the total attention and energies of the young Soviet government. While it is difficult to contradict this opinion, a bit of credit must also go to the high-ranking Bolsheviks, such as Bukharin, Lunacharsky, and Trotsky, who resisted the shrill demands of the "proletarian" writers for the regimentation of literature.⁸⁴

The greatest single bone of contention between the two groups was the position of the fellow travelers, of whom Pilnyak was one of the most prominent. The Marxist view gravitated towards a permissive

⁸³The use of the term "Stalinist" requires some clarification. Stalin's approval of certain literary critics and artists seems to be a case of pragmatism rather than a sign of approbation or literary appreciation. These critics and writers were tools for Stalin's total regimentation of Soviet life and were allowed to function insofar as they served that purpose. The fate of many formerly favored literary figures during the purges of the late Thirties demonstrates Stalin's ability to alter his benedictions to fit changing interests. Thus the epithet "Trotskyite" was hurled at people who had long and honorable careers of avid opposition to Trotsky's literary opinions, eg., Leopold Averbakh, who was branded a "Trotskyite wrecker." cf. Brown, op. cit., pp. 216-219.

⁸⁴In May, 1924, the Press Commission of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party maintained that freedom in literature was permitted and necessary. This resolution was later incorporated into the platform of the Thirteenth Conference of the Communist Party in 1925. Nikolai Bukharin, at that time editor of Pravda and a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, upheld the right of "anarchic competition" in literature. Anatol Lunacharsky, Commissar of Education, supported Bukharin's theory of free competition. Borland, op.cit., pp. 13, 16. Max Eastman, Artists in Uniform (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1934) pp. 135-140.

approach; when the social reality improves (as Socialism becomes Communism), the fellow travelers will reflect this change in the evolution of their literary works. Fellow travelers, as well as avowed Communists, should be allowed into the literary arena so long as the social and political realms are not threatened. As Trotsky points out, the fellow travelers can play an important role, for their knowledge of literary technique will enable the evolving literature of the socialist period to be genuine art and not slogans on factory walls.⁸⁵

The Stalinist group wanted to dispense with the services of the fellow travelers; since art is primarily a means of education and social improvement, it should portray the ideal life to be imitated by the masses, the life advocated by the Party authorities. Fellow travelers, who do not appreciate that ideal, cannot be entrusted with the task of public education. Most literary figures who supported the notion of literature as primarily an educational tool were convinced that fellow travelers were counter-revolutionaries who for some reason or other were unable to emigrate. The Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP), under the leadership of Leopold Averbakh, was quite willing to sacrifice art to ideological orthodoxy and called upon the Party to refuse publication to those writers whose politics were suspect.⁸⁶

⁸⁵Trotsky, op.cit., p. 227.

⁸⁶Borland, op. cit., p. 12. From a speech by Averbakh at the Conference of the Literary Department of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party, May 9, 1924.

The various groups which claimed to be ideologically correct not only fought fellow travelers and Communists who advocated freedom of publication for fellow travelers, but also other groups which were willing to eliminate non-Communists from the literary scene. Thus various Communist groups -- The Smithy (Kuznitsa), RAPP, October, On Guard (Na Postu) -- each accused the others of being "anti-proletarian," i.e., anti-Communist. Each group appealed to the Party leadership for its sign of approbation as a means of establishing the groups position as the sole guide to a new literature. This unfortunate tendency on the part of the groups presented a tremendous temptation to political leaders; it was a chance to silence literary deviations from the Party line and also presented an opportunity to demonstrate an apparent omniscience in an area in which political leaders should, perhaps, acknowledge their comparative ignorance. The ultimate result of such a policy would be the strangulation of creative literature.

The struggle was carried on in literary journals and committee meetings. The tone of the charges and counter-charges became so vitriolic and shrill that the Central Committee of the Communist Party felt obliged to call the writers and literary groups together in an attempt to put an end to fratricidal infighting and claims of exclusive orthodoxy. In May of 1924, the Party expressed its belief in freedom of artistic creation. Much of the credit for this position must go to Trotsky who foresaw the

catastrophic results of Party interference with the processes of literary development. The enforced silence of writers who do not seem in complete accordance with the opinions of the Party leadership would effectively block the continuity of literary creation and thus prohibit the evolution of a literature truly reflective of the best interests of the Party. At the same time the opportunity for the Party leadership arbitrarily to proclaim literary theory would lead to arrogance and the cult of the omniscient Party leadership. For these reasons Trotsky waged an unremitting struggle against the regimentation of literature and its complete identification with Party policy; his influence helped considerably to postpone the advent of official intolerance to the literary scene.⁸⁷

The years following the death of Lenin in 1924 were characterized by a fateful struggle for power within the leadership of the Russian Communist Party. Stalin emerged victorious, and Trotsky was expelled from the Party in 1927, deported from the Soviet Union in 1929, and finally assassinated in Mexico in 1940. In order to consolidate power and further weaken Trotsky's influence, the epithet "Trotskyism" was hurled at any and all variations from the Stalin party line during the years 1927-1940. Trotskyism -- i.e., any difference of opinion from Stalin -- was fought at all levels, including literature.

⁸⁷Brown, op. cit., p. 214.

Stalin's attitude toward literary freedom was quite different from the approach advocated by Trotsky. The primary direction of Joseph Stalin's actions as ruler of the Soviet Union was the extension and consolidation of his power over all aspects of Soviet life. His own revolutionary experiences had taught him the value of the printed word, and he spared no effort not only to silence literary opposition, but also to dominate literary production. While Trotsky upheld the internal laws and independent development of literature (within a Marxist framework), Stalin viewed literature as an instrument of party propaganda, whose form and content would be determined by political considerations. While Stalin did not personally take part in the literary warfare of the 1920's, he encouraged opponents of Trotsky's views to struggle for control of the literary arena.

One such opponent was Leopold Averbakh of RAPP, who was the hatchet-man of literature until he fell into disfavor in 1932. Averbakh attacked fellow travellers and fellow Communists who did not share his opinion that "the method of artistic creation is the method of dialectical materialism."⁸⁸ By 1930 Averbakh's loud and persistent campaign to regiment literature was fairly successful; silence, death, or emigration removed many obstacles to achievement of literary unanimity.⁸⁹ Thus art lost is independent

⁸⁸Eastman, op.cit., p. 129.

⁸⁹E. J. Brown, "The Year of Acquiescence" in Literature and Revolution in Soviet Russia, 1917-1962, ed. by Max Hayward & Leopold Labedz (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 44-61.

character and became a tool at the service of a political program. Art was no longer moving along in accordance with its own laws, but was jumping and jerking to fit the current political line. Writers who did not measure up to these standards were cruelly criticized and vilified. Soviet literature embarked upon the path which Trotsky had energetically opposed: strict party control of literature and subjugation of art to propaganda and didacticism. When the literary inquisition was completed by 1930, RAPP was disbanded and Averbakh was shifted to a minor post before his eventual liquidation as a Trotskyite during the purge trials of 1937-1938. Stalin had allowed RAPP to become the apparent voice of the Party in the literary arena in order to eliminate unreliable elements without his personal intervention. Once this intermediate goal was achieved, he asserted his complete domination of the field of artistic creation and eliminated his middlemen, Averbakh and RAPP.

iii

In the midst of the struggle for ascendancy in the field of literature, Boris Pilnyak received criticisms from a wide spectrum of viewpoints, represented in this study by five critics who represent the predominant trends in Soviet literary criticism of the time. Pilnyak, who supported the Revolution but was not a believer in the ideals of Communism, wrote that he supported the Communist Party insofar as it was

a part of Russia's historic destiny.⁹⁰ Pilnyak was fellow traveler, and in the eyes of Marxist ideologues, therefore, his art is transitional. His art "is more or less organically connected with the Revolution, but..is not at the same time the art of the Revolution."⁹¹ As such, Pilnyak could expect to be criticized by those who felt themselves to be custodians of Marxist orthodoxy.

"Probably the most stimulating comments on...Pilnyak come from the pen of Trotsky."⁹² In Literature and Revolution Trotsky devotes a section to the works of Boris Pilnyak. Trotsky's comparatively mild criticism, written in an almost paternal manner, scores Pilnyak's faulty attitude toward the Revolution, based on a reactionary philosophy of history. At the same time Trotsky praises him for his realism and youthful potential to overcome his defects and produce art reflective of the true ideals of the Revolution.

Trotsky praises Pilnyak for a realistic portrayal of the context of revolutionary chaos. Reality is not the transitory chaos, but rather the establishment of a new permanent social order. While some authors see only "lice, bugs, and bagmen," Pilnyak writes about these phenomena as by-products of a birth agony. In Trotsky's view, Pilnyak

⁹⁰Struve, op. cit., p. 215.

⁹¹Trotsky, op. cit., p. 56.

⁹²Brown, Russian Literature since the Revolution, op. cit., p. 294.

is attempting to demonstrate that the Revolution does not consist in the complete chaotic disruption of law and order with its subsequent disorder and physical hardships, but in the construction of a new order with tremendous potential for the improvement of man's lot on this earth.

At the same time Trotsky questions the ability of Pilnyak's artistry to accomplish the goal of a realistic portrayal of the birth agony. Trotsky claims that Pilnyak is artistically ineffective in this regard because he does not intellectually grasp the Revolution.

A master must have within himself an organic, irrefutable axis and the Bolsheviks have displaced the main axis....the invisible axis should be the Revolution itself, around which should turn the whole unsettled, chaotic, and reconstructing life. But in order that the reader should feel this axis, the author himself must have felt it and at the same time must have thought the matter through.⁹³

Trotsky feels that Pilnyak has not thought the matter through, although he may have felt the axis. Although Pilnyak realizes that the bugs, lice, and bagmen are part of a tremendous birth agony, he cannot say what is being born. Agonies, even birth agonies, have to be justified, or "history is a madhouse."⁹⁴

⁹³Trotsky, op. cit., pp. 58, 59.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 91.

Why does Pilnyak not comprehend the Revolution? Trotsky places the blame upon Pilnyak's philosophy of history and he cites Pilnyak's anti-Petrine views as the first piece of evidence of a faulty view of historical development.

Pilnyak's philosophy of history is absolutely retrogressional. This artistic "fellow-traveler" reasons as if the road of the Revolution leads backwards, not forward. Pilnyak accepts the Revolution because it is national, and it is national because it pulls down Peter the Great and resurrects the Seventeenth Century. To him the Revolution is national because he thinks it retrogressional.⁹⁵

Trotsky confronts this view of the Revolution with his own.

Essentially the Revolution means the people's final break with the Seventeenth Century, with Holy Russia, with ikons and roaches. It does not mean a return to the pre-Petrine era, but, on the contrary, it means a communion of the entire people with civilization and a reconstruction of the material foundations of civilization in accordance with the interests of the people...the barbarian Peter was more national than the whole bearded and over-decorated past which opposed him...national is that which

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 84.

raises the people to a higher economic and cultural plane.⁹⁶

Trotsky criticizes Pilnyak for his attitude toward Petrograd (now Leningrad). Pilnyak "has no use for Petrograd."⁹⁷ He prefers peripheral provincial and village settings, rather than Petrograd; Bolshevism, however, is almost a Petrograd phenomenon. For Trotsky, Pilnyak's attitude is symbolic of his failure to grasp the central idea of the revolutionary epoch. Petrograd is not to be insulted or downgraded as a symbol of Western influence in Russia; it is, on the contrary, a city of the Revolution, a revolution which would have been impossible in any other location of Russia. The Bolshevik Revolution signals the advent of the benefits of Western technology to the masses and not a return to the romantic notions of Slavophilism.

The city lives and leads. If you give up the city, that is, if you let it be torn to pieces economically by the kulak and artistically by Pilnyak, then there will remain no Revolution, but a violent and bloody process of retrogression. Peasant Russia, deprived of the leadership of the city, not only will never get to socialism, but will not be able to maintain itself for two months, and will become the manure and peat for world imperialism.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 94-5, 96.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 84.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 92.

As a third symptom of Pilnyak's retrogressional philosophy of history, Trotsky cites the author's tendency to portray the Revolution as a massive peasant revolt in the tradition of Pugachev and Stenka Razin. Trotsky apparently feels that this is more of an inclination than an actuality, for he uses the words "if Pilnyak should insist on resolving the Revolution into peasant revolts and peasant life," and "what a pity if the master should decide that the base peasant life is the whole picture."⁹⁹ Although this tendency may remain only a tendency, Trotsky must feel that it is a very real danger that merits criticism. It is a symptom of a more serious heresy -- a view of the Revolution as an elemental Russian movement, likened to a snowstorm. This point is the central area of misunderstanding for a fellow travelers; they all "show the same passive, contemplative, and philistine romantic attitude towards the Revolution as towards a national elemental power unleashed."¹⁰⁰ Trotsky refutes this view of the Revolution as a peasant revolt and blind force of nature.

But these most important traits -- clarity, realism, the physical power of thought, a merciless consistency, a lucidity and solidity of line, which come not from the village, but from industry, from the city, from the last word of its spiritual development -- are the fundamental traits of the October Revolution, and they are entirely foreign to the "fellow travelers," and that

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 86.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 97.

is why they are only "fellow travelers."¹⁰¹

The October Revolution, according to Trotsky, is not only not an unleashed elemental force, but directly opposed to elemental forces in favor of a conscious and rational plan of life.

In summary, Trotsky feels that Pilnyak's faulty attitude toward the Revolution is due to a retrogressional philosophy of history, which is indicated on three levels: 1) a reactionary attitude toward the introduction of Western influence under the aegis of Peter the Great; 2) an instinctive dislike of Petrograd as a symbol of Petrine accomplishment; 3) an inclination to view the Revolution as a national elemental force or massive peasant revolt.

Trotsky concludes his section with a bit of fatherly advice for Pilnyak to grow in his understanding of the Revolution and not to settle down on past laurels. There must be "no venerability. If self-satisfaction and pendency lurk behind his broken voice, then even his big talent will not save him from an inglorious end. Pilnyak is talented, but his difficulties are also great. One needs to wish him success."¹⁰² Trotsky also writes, however, that the solution of the problem of Pilnyak, as with all fellow travelers, "depends on not so much on the personal qualities of this or that 'fellow traveler,' but mainly on the objective

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 104.

¹⁰²Ibid. p. 90.

trend of things during the coming decade."¹⁰³ Trotsky was quite right; under Stalin's control, the objective trend solved the problem by eliminating the fellow travelers as such, including Pilnyak. This solution was quite different from advice to improve one's understanding of the Revolution.

Another Soviet critic who dealt thoughtfully and substantially with Pilnyak was A. K. Voronsky, founder and first editor of Red Virgin Soil (Krasnaya Nov').¹⁰⁴ Voronsky shared Trotsky's liberal attitude toward the fellow travelers: insist on Communist ideology as an ideal, but let the fellow travelers publish and hope to discover progress in their work. The moderate editor, therefore, was willing to publish Pilnyak's works so long as some sign of approval might be given: when he published Naked Year, Voronsky censored Pilnyak's theories of history, revolution, and sex.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁰⁴ Alexander Konstantinovich Voronsky (1884-1943) was a priest's son who was expelled from the Tambov Seminary as a disciplinary problem. He became involved in revolutionary activities and journalism. In 1921, with Lenin's blessing, he founded Krasnaya Nov', the first major literary journal in the Soviet Union. In 1927 he was removed from his post as editor and expelled from the Party as a Trotskyite. He was later readmitted to the Party, but was arrested in 1937. The activities of his last years are unknown, but he certainly spent those years in some sort of confinement.

In a critical article in his journal, Voronsky discussed the significance of Boris Pilnyak with the same mixture of praise and admonition which Trotsky would employ two years later.¹⁰⁵ Voronsky granted that Pilnyak had captured some scenes of the Revolution, but he goes on to say that the author should have made the point that these scenes do not constitute the Revolution. Voronsky also criticized Pilnyak for employment of sexual imagery as an analogy of the Revolution. Voronsky called upon Pilnyak to examine his works up to that point (1922) and to abandon romanticism and primitivism. Voronsky seemed to accept the Bolsheviks of Naked Year as genuine reproductions of the new man, and one is not sure whether he did this as a sign of good will or density. Voronsky's final judgment of Pilnyak was that "Pilnyak had failed to grow, was repeating himself, and would occupy only a modest place in the history of Russian literature as a writer of period pieces."¹⁰⁶ When Mahogany and The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea were published, Voronsky had already been removed from his position as editor, and his thoughts on those works, as well as other later stories, are unavailable.

Another moderate criticism came from Vyacheslav Polonsky, who founded and edited a journal, Press and Revolution (Pechat' i Revoliutsiya),

¹⁰⁵ A. K. Voronsky, "Literaturnye siluety, Bor. Pilnyak," in Krasnaya Nov', no. 4, 1922, pp. 252-269. also cf. Robt. Maguire, Red Virgin Soil (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 101-128.

¹⁰⁶ Maguire, op. cit., p. 125. cf. Voronsky, "Pisatel', kniga, Chitatel'," in Krasnaya Nov', no. 1, 1927, pp. 226-239.

and served as editor of New World.¹⁰⁷ Polonsky wrote a critical article devoted to Pilnyak in 1927, entitled "Chessmen without a King."¹⁰⁸ Polonsky points out that Pilnyak is an heir of Bunin, Chekhov, and Boris Zaitsev as "an artist of the old intelligentsia in the period of its historic catastrophe."¹⁰⁹ He also views Pilnyak as the artist of the chaos of social struggle, the Revolution; these two aspects of Pilnyak's works compete with each other throughout the author's works. In a summation of the previous literary criticism of Pilnyak in the Soviet Union Polonsky divides the critics into two classes which seem to be at opposite poles of the spectrum of Soviet literary and political thought. Some critics consider Pilnyak a writer of the revolutionary epoch, even a revolutionary writer, while others think that "reaction guides his pen."¹¹⁰

Polonsky scores Pilnyak for a lack of moderation, especially the use of repetitions such as the snowstorm image for the Revolution. Polonsky connects the snowstorm imagery with the Scythian movement in literature, which he views as the worst form of Slavophilism. The most important and damaging criticism, however, is the treatment of Communists

¹⁰⁷ Vyacheslav Polonsky (1886-1932) was eventually condemned as a counter-revolutionary and removed from his editorial posts and silenced as a critic. His natural death in 1932 probably saved him from the purges of the later Thirties.

¹⁰⁸ V. Polonsky, "Shakhmaty bez korolya," in Novy Mir, issue 10, 1927, pp. 107-193.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 171.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 172.

in the author's works; Polonsky, unlike Voronsky, realized that Pilnyak employed bloodless caricatures as Communists and that the author's sympathies are torn between his Scythian sentiments and admiration for the Bolsheviks who function energetically.¹¹¹ Polonsky feels that Pilnyak pays only a grudging and belated tribute to the hard-working Bolsheviks, and even then the author's Scythian feelings cannot help but intrude to ridicule the Bolshevik faith in efficiency and industry. Polonsky asserts that Pilnyak would like to believe in the Revolution, but that his "petty bourgeois romanticism" prohibits a profession of total support. Pilnyak is alienated from both the peasantry and the proletariat. He is an "'anarchist,' 'romantic,' a bit of a mystic, a bit of a metaphysician," but not really anything but a rootless member of the petty bourgeois intelligentsia. Polonsky concludes his article by calling upon Pilnyak to cease his ambivalence.

Он не знает еще твердо, с кем он, с
правыми или с левыми? С машинами или
с волками? С «коммунистами» или с
«большевиками?» А жизнь требует: или -
или. Есть, конечно, третий путь: бежать
на Северный полюс, в Китай, на Сандвичевы
острова, в Турцию, на кулички. Но этот
путь --- уводит от борьбы. Когда же люди

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 181. cf. Maguire, op. cit., p. 110. Maguire discusses possible reasons why Voronsky did not criticise Pilnyak's treatment of Bolsheviks.

боролись, улепетывая? В нынешних же условиях отказ от борьбы означает творческую смерть. Только один выход есть для писателя, который хочет быть человеком своего времени: с революцией, за революцию, вместе с рабочим классом.¹¹²

Trotsky, Voronsky, and Polonsky possessed a number of common traits. They were Communists who criticized writers from an ideological point of view as well as from a literary standpoint. All three, however, were willing to let the fellow travelers publish and, more important, were willing to take the time and effort to write thoughtful commentaries. The next group of commentators were not so broadminded; they demanded ideological purity as a prerequisite to publication, and tended to view literature as an educational tool with a social and political message.

Pyotr Kogan published a critical article in New World which was dedicated to Pilnyak, and a section in his book, The Literature of These Years, is also devoted to Pilnyak.¹¹³ Kogan did write thoughtful criticisms of various literary figures, but his sociological and economic opinions intruded to overwhelm the literary aspects of his commentaries.

¹¹²Polonsky, op. cit., p. 193.

¹¹³Pyotr Kogan, "Boris Pilnyak," in Novy Mir, vol. 8 issue 10, 1925, pp. 108-119. also Literatura Etikh Let (Ivanovo-Vosnesensk: Osnova, 1924), pp. 104-106. Kogan (1872-1932) was an old Bolshevik who was well-known in literary circles before the Revolution. Kogan was in the tradition of the nineteenth century radical social and literary critics and was not at all interested in questions of form. Thus the experimentalism of the 1920's received hostile critical comments from Kogan, who opposed freedom of publication for fellow travelers, Kogan became an enemy of Voronsky and opposed the liberal policies of Krasnaya Nov' and its editor.

Kogan criticizes Pilnyak for having seen and understood the Revolution, but being incapable of accepting it because "the roots of his soul are in gray antiquity" which makes comprehension of the present world impossible for Pilnyak. After a critical mention of anti-industrial sentiments in Pilnyak's works, Kogan touches upon a point which Trotsky, Voronsky, and Polonsky did not raise. While these three called upon the author to improve his understanding of the Revolution and to seek new themes, or new methods of treating old themes, Kogan demands that Pilnyak publicly explain his political and social beliefs so that the critic will know "where Pilnyak begins, and where his heroes end."¹¹⁴ Kogan's first critical reaction to a work of literature, then, is to attempt to discover the political persuasion of the author and to correct his possible deviations from an ideological orthodoxy. This approach would be the predecessor of the totalitarian methods employed during the Five Year Plan.

Kogan mentions faults to which other critics had also given their attention: failure to create credible and personable Communists, preference for the past, and a basic misunderstanding of the Revolution. Kogan attacks Voronsky for not dealing more severely with Pilnyak, and while Trotsky praises Pilnyak for a realistic portrayal of scenes of the

¹¹⁴Kogan, Boris Pilnyak, in op. cit., p. 111. Literatura Etikh Let, pp. 104-105.

Revolution, Kogan writes that Pilnyak is not only not the poet of the Revolution, but the "Homer of syphilitics, the troubador of neurotics and alcoholics," the heir of Dostoevsky and Artsybashev.¹¹⁵ Kogan admits that Pilnyak possesses talent, but the critic states that this talent is wasted on portrayals of sex and peasant revolts. The Revolution is derived from Marx, not from Makhno, and the author has failed to point out "the historical consistency and immutability in its contradictions and zigzags."¹¹⁶

Kogan demonstrated a premature enthusiasm at the conclusion of his article in New World. He had just read Pilnyak's short stories dealing with airplane flights and was under the false impression that Pilnyak was reversing his stand against civilization. The author's later publications would prove Kogan's hopes to be misfounded.

Georgii Gorbachev published a criticism of Pilnyak in his book, Contemporary Russian Literature, which served as a textbook for Soviet students of literature.¹¹⁷ Gorbachev, who had opposed the liberal

¹¹⁵Kogan, Literatura Etikh Let, p. 104. During the 1920's Dostoevsky was in disfavor in the Soviet Union. Artsybashev was a symbol of decadence for the Soviet critics.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 106.

¹¹⁷Georgii Gorbachev. Sovremennaya Russkaya Literatura (Moskva-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoye Izdatelstvo Khudozhestvennoy Literatury, 1931), pp. 132-148. Gorbachev's chapter headings are unusual for a work of literary criticism: "Neo-bourgeois Literature," "Petty Bourgeois Literature," "The Left Wing of Petty Bourgeois Literature," "Proletarian Literature."

attitude toward fellow travelers which had been espoused by Trotsky and Voronsky, was a supporter of proletarian critics and writers who saw no place for non-Communist writers in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's book, first published in the late Twenties, repeats the criticisms of earlier critics, but he also presents a more detailed analysis of Pilnyak's political and social philosophy from an official point of view.

Синтез славянофильства и кулачского нео-анархизма, нео-народничества... Первое было протестом полупфеодалного поместья против городского капитализма, второе является борьбой мелкобуржуазной полунатурально хозяйственной деревни с пролетарским городом.¹¹⁸

In accordance with the Marxian analysis of history, then, Pilnyak is two eras behind reality -- he represents feudalism which has to be replaced by capitalism before the proletariat can seize power. In Russia, however, capitalism had not reached a sufficiently significant level of development by 1917, and feudalism, capitalism, and socialism met at the same juncture of history. Gorbachev seems to imply, therefore, that Pilnyak is a defender of feudalism against socialism, which places the author not only in the camp of the reactionaries, but not even on the same level as the capitalists. This type of literary criticism is unique;

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 142.

the brunt of the criticism falls upon the author's political failues rather than artistic shortcomings.

A second example of social and political considerations extending into the literary realm is Gorbachev's comment upon Pilnyak's lack of class consciousness. Gorbachev notes that Pilnyak is able to portray man as opposed to nature, but is apparently unable to show the opposition among various social groups within human society.

...несмотря на все попытки дать классовый анализ положения современной Японии или Китая, Пильняк, в сущности, воспринимает Японию, как единую Японию, Монголию, как единую Монголию, а Китай, как единый Китай.¹¹⁹

This type of literary criticism -- a lack of class consciousness -- lends credibility to the events portrayed in the next chapter.

iii

The Soviet critics have agreed that Pilnyak's understanding of the October Revolution was imperfect from a Marxist point of view. What sets Trotsky, Voronsky, and Polonsky apart from Kogan and Gorbachev is the extent to which a writer must accommodate himself to the ideology

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 148.

of the Communist Party. The first group demanded as a minimum the absence of counterrevolutionary propaganda, and believed that the writer would progress, with proper encouragement, in proportion to the social progress of the body politic. The second group, in the spirit of Belinsky and Chernyshevsky, asked for allegiance to certain ideals as a prerequisite for publication and demanded that the literary work be a favorable presentation of those ideals. The victory of the latter group forms the matter of the last chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

PILNYAK AS A LITERARY POLITICIAN

The preceding chapter presented literary criticisms of Pilnyak's stories and novels which were published in the Soviet Union. Only two of Pilnyak's works had been refused publication by 1929, and these two stories -- The Tale of the Unextinguished Moon and Mahogany -- were the sources of much trouble for the author.

Pilnyak's first major clash with Party authorities occurred with The Tale of the Unextinguished Moon, a story which, when considered within the context of events in the Soviet Union, seems to be an incredibly stupid move on the part of the author. M. V. Frunze, Trotsky's successor as the Commander of the Red Army, died under mysterious circumstances during an operation in 1925, and suspicion grew concerning Stalin's role in the unexpected death.¹²⁰ Pilnyak's tale, published in 1926, reproduces the facts of Frunze's death (Gavrilov in the story) with "Number One" of the ruling triumvirate definitely responsible for

¹²⁰M. V. Frunze supported Zinoviev in the intra-party struggles of the Twenties, so Stalin did have reason to be glad of his death.

the Commander's death. It was published in New World, then withdrawn after a few copies had been circulated, and subsequent copies of the issue carried a substitute story. The Tale of the Unextinguished Moon reached only a very few subscribers, therefore, and amazement ran high when the following issue of the journal contained Pilnyak's apology for contributing to false rumors.¹²¹ New World apologized for accepting the article, and the censor who accepted the article for publication was demoted.¹²²

The occasion was even more complicated by Pilnyak's dedication of the story to A. K. Voronsky. Voronsky was already the recipient of abusive criticism from left-wing critics for his permissive attitude toward the fellow travelers, and this story threatened to make his position even more difficult than it was. He hastened to reject the dedication and declared that he considered the story a crude distortion of the facts and malicious slander.¹²³

At this point in Soviet literary history authors were not yet subjected to mass arrest, and, despite the audacity of the theme of The Tale of the Unextinguished Moon, Pilnyak escaped relatively unscathed.

¹²¹Pilnyak, "Pis'mo v redaktsiyu." in Novy Mir, issue 1, 1927, p. 256.

¹²²Marc Slonim, Soviet Russian Literature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 64.

¹²³Voronsky, Letter to Novy Mir, issue 6, 1926, p. 184.

In 1929, the appearance of Pilnyak's short novel, Mahogany, in Berlin caused a sensation. It was not only the foreign publication of Mahogany which precipitated the crisis of 1929, however; a certain amount of ill-feeling was left over from the first crisis, and the fighting within the literary realm was becoming more vicious as the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP) struggled to gain complete control of literary production. Pilnyak had earned RAPP's disfavor because he "had consistently talked and written against the prevalent tendency to write from the viewpoint of an ideology."¹²⁴ Stalin desired to consolidate all literary organizations in order to facilitate governmental control, and he allowed RAPP to make free-wheeling attacks on all other groups in order to annihilate as many dissidents as possible without direct intervention of the government. One of these groups was the Union of Writers, of which Pilnyak was Chairman of the Executive Board and head of the Moscow branch, while Evgeny Zamyatin, another politically unreliable author, was head of the Leningrad branch. There were no solid charges to be laid against the Union, so the attack took the form of a personal vilification of its leaders, Pilnyak and Zamyatin.

¹²⁴Brown, Russian Literature since the Revolution, op. cit., p. 113. RAPP insisted that all writers reflect Party ideals and policies in their works.

The specific charge against Pilnyak was the allegedly illegal publication of Mahogany in Berlin while at the same time it was refused publication in the Soviet Union. The practice of foreign publication was actually widespread in the Soviet Union, which did not subscribe to the International Copyright Law; it was both necessary and permitted to publish in both western Europe and Russia in order to protect the work. Pilnyak submitted the manuscript to publishers in both the Soviet Union and in Berlin. The Moscow firm delayed publication to permit Pilnyak to make some requested revisions, and he was powerless to halt the Berlin publication. RAPP seized the opportunity to inaugurate a vicious campaign to portray Pilnyak as a counter-revolutionary in league with "White Guard" elements.¹²⁵ Although Pilnyak was able to document the facts that the Berlin publisher had printed Mahogany without his approbation, and that the Berlin firm (Petropolis) was an approved foreign outlet for Soviet authors (therefore, not a White Guard front), the smear campaign continued with great ferocity.

At this point some attention should be paid to Mahogany itself in order to understand the public outcry and why it was refused publication in the Soviet Union in the first place. When one considers the situation of 1929 -- the deportation of Trotsky and the rising star

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 113.

of RAPP -- Mahogany almost seems to rival The Tale of the Unextinguished Moon for lack of tact. Not only is the Communist Party illustrated as a collection of inept bunglers and petty embezzlers, but the only honest and morally upright characters in the story are a disillusioned "war Communist" and a Trotskyite, Ivan Ozhogov and Akim Skudrin respectively. The only political point of view is presented by Yakov Karpovich Skudrin, and this theory of the disappearance of the proletariat is a combination of a Trotskyite heresy with Pilnyak's anti-industrial sentiments.

-- А я вам мысль приготовил, кхэ мысль...
Теория Маркса о пролетарьяте скоро должна
быть забыта, потому-что сам пролетарьят
должен исчезнуть, -- вот, какая моя мысль ..
-- а стало-быть. и вся революция ни-к-чему,
ошибка, кхэ, истории. В силу того, да, что
еще два-три поколения и пролетарьят
исчезнет -- в первую очередь в Соединенных
Штатах, в Англии, в Германии. Маркс написал
свою теорию в эпоху расцвета мышечного
труда. Теперь машинный труд заменяет
мышцы. Вот какая моя мысль. Скоро около
машин останутся одни инженеры, а пролетарьят
исчезнет, пролетарьят превратится в одних
инженеров. Вот, кхэ, какая моя мысль. А инженер
--- не пролетарий.¹²⁶

The connection between this passage from Mahogany and passages from Wolves, for example, is the assumption that the machine will

¹²⁶ Pilnyak, Krasnoye Derevo, p. 31.

eventually replace man, for when man's muscles are altogether obsolete, man himself will be obsolete.

An even more dangerous deviation in 1929, however, is contained in this passage, the belief that the dictatorship of the proletariat will soon pass away. The left-wing Communist literary critics argued in favor of a proletarian culture on the basis that each ruling class had its own culture. Trotsky argued that the dictatorship of the proletariat was a temporary situation, and that a sufficient amount of time for the development of a new culture would not elapse before the proletariat would be able to relinquish power and the classless society would come into being with a new classless culture.¹²⁷ The members of the Soviet power structure, who were the dictatorship of the proletariat, were in no hurry to relinquish the reins of power, and they discouraged speculation concerning the duration of proletarian rule. Since Trotsky was the foremost critic of Stalin's tendency to lengthen the period of dictatorship, he was purged, and so, Pilnyak's employment of Trotsky's theory of the disappearance of the proletariat was a politically unfortunate and ill-timed error.

Pilnyak was ousted from his administrative positions in the Union of Writers and then deprived of membership itself as the power of RAPP made itself felt. The press campaign continued as Pilnyak was accused

¹²⁷Trotsky, op. cit., pp. 184-185.

of treason, ingratitude, and sabotage. The beleaguered author was apparently quite shaken by the intensity of the attack, and Max Eastman reports that Pilnyak, unable to defend himself in the mass media, threatened suicide if the vilification did not stop.¹²⁸ In 1930 Pilnyak wrote The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea as a form of reparation for Mahogany's political shortcomings. Victor Serge saw Pilnyak during this period, and reports that the Cultural Section of the Central Committee of the Communist Party assigned Pilnyak a "ghost writer" who would provide ideological direction for the author. "The helpmate's name was Yezhov, and a high career awaited him, followed by a violent death: this was the successor of Yagoda as head of the G.P.U., shot like Yagoda in 1938 or 1939."¹²⁹

After The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea was accepted for publication, Pilnyak wrote other short works which are nothing more than propaganda for the Soviet government. The violent criticism subsided and Pilnyak acknowledged his past mistakes. Pilnyak was the first author to recant publicly and completely to reverse his positions at the behest of the Party; Struve's Soviet Russian Literature contains examples of Pilnyak's eagerness to serve the "social command" of the Party, a position which he had regarded with disdain only a few years before the

¹²⁸Eastman, op.cit., p. 121. Eastman gives a full account of the charges thrown at Pilnyak, especially those appearing in Literaturnaya Gazeta.

¹²⁹Victor Serge, Memoirs of a Revolutionary 1901-1941 (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 269.

publication of Stones and Roots.¹³⁰ Pilnyak continued to publish stories without any further battles with the literary establishment. After his execution in 1938, he was virtually ignored until 1964, when the literary magazine Moscow (Moskva) published excerpts from a novel, "The Salt Storehouse," which was completed just before his arrest. The editorial introduction in Moscow admits that Pilnyak was well-known during the Twenties and early Thirties, and that, although he incorrectly understood the Revolution and the Soviet Union at the beginning of his career, he eventually became a major realistic writer before falling victim to the purges of 1937-1939. Although the re-admission of Pilnyak into the history of Russian literature has taken place, it still appears unlikely that a collection of his works will be issued in the Soviet Union in the near future.

¹³⁰Struve, op.cit., p. 214.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study of Boris Pilnyak was announced in the preface to be twofold: to draw attention to the relatively little-known Pilnyak, and to portray, through Pilnyak's case, the struggle for control of literature in the Soviet Union of the 1920's.

The question of Pilnyak's rehabilitation may serve as a catalyst to summarize the preceding chapters and provide some conclusions concerning the role of Boris Pilnyak in Soviet Russian Literature.¹³¹

The themes which Pilnyak chose to employ in his works are not themes which are generally popular with the reading public. The question of Russia's relationship with the West has always interested educated Russians, but the great majority of them disagreed with Pilnyak's tendency to ally the Russians with the Oriental peoples against the Europeans. Educated people would also dislike his appeal to instinct over intellect and his praise of antiquity at the expense of modern civilization. The average reader of the mechanized and pragmatic Twentieth Century, for example, be he communist or capitalist, would prefer the advantages of the hydroelectric station at Kolomna and would

¹³¹The term "rehabilitation" is employed in the Soviet Union to signify the reintroduction of a literary or political figure into public life. The title of Ilya Ehrenburg's novel, *The Thaw*, lent itself to characterize the period of following Joseph Stalin's death in 1953, a period during which many writers were posthumously published. Many of these authors had been previously condemned for not writing from the viewpoint of "Socialist Realism," but the process of rehabilitation emphasizes the aspects of a writer which are acceptable to the Party and deletes or ignores the less pleasing elements of his works.

not feel any remorse at the inundation of the historic town upon the completion of the project. The tension between nostalgia for the past and modern convenience, a tension which Pilnyak attributes to some of his most attractively portrayed characters, does not even exist for the great majority of people. Despite anxieties concerning automation and pollution, very few people of whatever ideological persuasion feel greatly intimidated by the machine and its ability to perform more and more functions which were formerly in the human domain.

In a sense, then, these unpopular ideas which are circulated in Pilnyak's works are not harmful to the Communist Party or the Soviet establishment, for they are almost universally rejected at this point in history. Pilnyak, therefore, should not be primarily considered an aberration from Socialist Realism, but rather a departure from the consensus of Twentieth century human thought. Why, then, can he not be rehabilitated as an example of eccentricity who later recanted and publicly praised "the social command" theory of literature? The 1964 article in Moscow, mentioned in the body of this study, seemed to be a preliminary for such a rehabilitation which never materialized.

One reason why Pilnyak's major works may never be republished is their connection with historical events. Although Leon Trotsky praised Naked Year for its realistic portrayal of events on the periphery of the Revolution and Civil War, almost all other Communist

critics considered it a distortion of reality. It may well be that as the Revolution and Civil War become more remote and even more romanticized than they are now, accounts such as Pilnyak's will be still less welcome. Pilnyak's essential error -- essential insofar as rehabilitation is concerned -- is that he not only wrote a novel, but also left a record of an important year which conflicts with the official version of the events of that year. Pilnyak's version is unsympathetic to the Bolsheviks, focuses on immorality rather than heroism, and presents attractive nobles and anarchists and unattractive Communists.

Mahogany is the work by which Pilnyak is represented in most Western anthologies of Soviet short stories. This work, never published in the Soviet Union, contains Trotskyite sentiments, but it also portrays the desire of Communist bureaucrats to become the new nobility and the replacement of ascetical ideas by pleasure and power. The disappearance of NEP did not mean the disappearance of class distinction in the Soviet Union, and Mahogany would be an embarrassing reminder of the bureaucratic tendency to amass privileges at the expense of the general public. Mahogany is, therefore, a story which cannot possibly be salvaged, since the entire work is an indictment of Communist society.

A conflict with the official view of events would also seem to militate against the republication of The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea.

As the tremendous program of crash industrialization becomes legendary, accounts which dwell on the seamier sides of life at construction sites will be discouraged even more than they are now. Pilnyak's account of the construction of the dam and hydroelectric station at Kolomna almost disregards the construction itself and concentrates on the moral problems of the engineers. At the conclusion of the novel the reader is not left in admiration of the great engineering feat, but rather in sadness at the death of the disillusioned "wrecker," Ivan Ozhogov, and at the effects of the breakdown of the new moral code upon the lives of Poletika, Sadykov, and Laszlo. The historical is so intricately interwoven with the fictional that it is impossible to salvage either Naked Year or The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea. The very small portions of these novels which coincide with the official versions of the Revolution and industrialization would fill less than a few pages.

One can eliminate almost all of Pilnyak's other works in a similar manner. Mother Earth, for example, is blatantly anti-Communist, The Birth of a Man portrays the unnatural rigidity of Soviet officials, and Ivan Moskva is a mockery of the Communist "positive hero." What remains is a small collection of short stories, especially those dealing with animal life and the basic human experiences of life and death: Tales of the Wilderness, for example, could well be republished without offending Soviet sensibilities. These stories, however, are a mere

fraction of Pilnyak's output, and it would be difficult for Soviet authorities to publish this small amount without raising the question of Pilnyak's other works.

The question of Pilnyak's possible rehabilitation is further complicated by the events of 1927-1930 with regard to the regimentation of literature. Although his subsequent recantations and oft-expressed desire to obey the "social command" eventually diminished Pilnyak's reputation as an independent writer, the fact that he was selected, together with Evgeny Zamyatin, as a target for such a violent campaign of abuse illustrates the degree of danger which he represented to RAPP and other exponents of a carefully censored and didactic literature.

The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea, a novel which attempted to portray the achievements of the first Five Year Plan, indicates Pilnyak's apparent inability to adapt to a doctrinaire theory of literature such as Socialist Realism, and that the fears of Leopold Averbakh and other proletarian critics concerning Pilnyak were justified. Any future rehabilitation of Pilnyak, then, must be tempered by the fact that he never adjusted successfully to the demands of Soviet literature.

Pilnyak's activities as a literary politician, however, are not the prime factor in delaying his rehabilitation; the author's works

themselves are the main obstacle to their republication.¹³² Despite the peculiarity of the ideas presented in Pilnyak's works, they remain potential weapons against the Soviet government which prohibits all criticism of the social order, no matter how petty. Contemporary Soviet literary criticism still demands that authors emphasize only the positive aspects of Soviet life, and Pilnyak's emphases on immorality and philistinism run counter to the tenets which have dominated Soviet literary theory since 1930. It seems very doubtful, therefore, that Pilnyak's works will be republished in the Soviet Union. The silence concerning Pilnyak which followed the article in Moscow will probably be extended for a long time, and his complete rehabilitation cannot occur until the fundamental premises of Soviet literary criticism are altered. This prospect does not seem likely.

¹³² Even such a bitter anti-Communist as Ivan Bunin, who emigrated to France following the Revolution, has been republished in the Soviet Union.

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