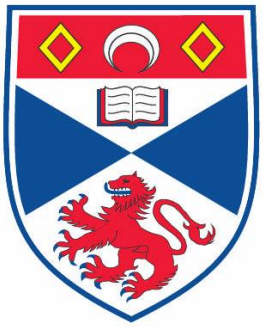
Tortured Words:
The first Soviet Writers Congress, Moscow 1934
Socialist Realism and Soviet Reality in Stalin's Russia 1934-1939

Robert Alexander Boyle



This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Ph.D
at the
University of St Andrews

30th of September 2013

Abstract

Both the academic and the fiction element of the thesis concerns events in the Soviet Union and elsewhere in Europe in the 1930s. The first element informs the second. The academic portion is based on the first Soviet Writers Congress of 1934, the only such gathering allowed by Stalin in his lifetime and an event following which many of its delegates were murdered. Primary research sources include the stenographic verbatim record of the Congress itself and an addendum consisting of biographical material published by the Writers Union of the USSR in 1990 as Russian Communism tottered towards its end. This part of the thesis examines aspects of Soviet reality against the background of the Purges, and includes consideration of the writer's world, the significance of the Red Army to literary life, the position of foreigners and the doctrine of Socialist Realism, officially sanctified at the Congress. Other sources include memoir, histories of the period and material from the Thirties Soviet press.

The fiction element comprises an excerpt from a novel, *The Eastern Bow*, which takes its title from Auden's poem *A Summer Night*. It is a story of espionage set in Moscow, Paris and London from 1937 to 1939. The plot involves the writing of a book in Russia by an unknown writer of genius who tells the truth about Stalin, the Purges and what the Revolution has become – a perversion of its earlier ideals. The secret police, the NKVD, hunt for the book, its author and all connected with it. This sub-plot combines with another centred in London and Paris in which a Soviet spy within MI6 is also being sought by elements within British intelligence. The two strands combine in France at the climax of the novel.

THE EASTERN BOW

SYNOPSIS

The Eastern Bow (TEB) begins on a winter night in 1937 in a Moscow flat and ends on a café terrace at the bottom of the Rue de Faubourg du Temple, Paris XI, on the 23rd of August 1939, the day the Nazi-Soviet pact was announced. It is intended as a historical espionage story whose themes are class, betrayal, vulnerability and friendship and is the first book of a projected trilogy about Communism and Europe. The second is *Only a Spy*, set in Leningrad, Berlin and Paris during the war years, followed by *The Shadow Pleasers*, a novel of Eastern Europe in the early Fifties. TEB characters feature in later books. Their world is tortuous and uncertain. Many Soviet intelligence figures were executed on Stalin's whim in the 30s and later and this fact is central to all three books. Willi Muntzenberg for example, the real-life genius of Soviet propaganda, first glimpsed in *The Eastern Bow* on a Montparnasse terrace, was strangled in a French wood - probably by his NKVD travelling companion - at the Fall of France, when his and Stalin's views differed. Similarly, his assistant Otto Katz, who gave his life to world-wide espionage on behalf of the Revolution but who was also partial to an aperitif at La Rotonde, returned to his native Czechoslovakia in triumph after the war as an important functionary in the new Communist government. He was hanged after a last Stalinist show trial, as a capitalist spy, in Prague in 1952.

The structure of TEB, though complicated, may be separated into three strands: events in Russia and Eastern Europe dealt with through **Andrei Edouardovich Miller,** a Russian student; a London sub-plot in which a British mole, (or 'sapper' in TEB parlance, an engineer soldier who excavates a mineshaft) is hunted within MI6 by **William Flanders**, a low ranking intelligence officer**,** and a French coincidence which links the two (through a fugitive Soviet spy master whose code name is **Archimedes**).

The main strand of the story takes place in a profoundly evil time in Russia's history, the Purges of the 1930s, and concerns the writing of a book by a character called **Fyodor.** Writers and Poets have always been considered by the Russian population to be the 'Other Russia', tellers of truth and guardians of such free thought as was able to survive in an authoritarian society. In TEB, twenty years after the Revolution, thoughtful Russians in favour of its original ideals are devastated to find that these have been twisted and destroyed and the nation is in the hands of a paranoiac whose solution to any potential dissent is mass murder. Executions are running at ten thousand persons a week with deaths in the camps doubling that number, also weekly. In this time of betrayal and planned killing an unknown writer of genius, pre-empting Pasternak by thirty years, is writing the truth about the Revolution, its corruption and the subsequent horror wreaked upon the nation. But Fyodor is not just a historian; the book's universality takes in everything Russian: music, landscape, childrens' tales and Tolstoy, Chaliapin and execution cellars, cathedral bells and firing squads. Gogol and Pushkin mingle with Rodchenko and Ivan the Terrible; Stalin appears repeatedly as a mentally- ill murderous puppeteer.

Socialist Realism does not allow such books to be written far less published and the penalty for so doing is death. The author is a secretive, often child-like forty year old, who drinks. He looks like

Shostakovich, with forelock and small round glasses. Originally from Odessa, he is alone in life, his brother, sister and parents having disappeared, as so many Russians did, in the Civil War. He writes in fear and despondency and is unable to cope with everyday reality, save on a page, but there his prose is immediately beautiful to any Russian reader, subtle and striking, his ideas forged of elegant steel. The NKVD have captured a single chapter and its masterful grasp of truth frightens Stalin into incandescent rages. The book and its writer must be found and so the NKVD and the Writers Union (itself a Stalinist tool of great harm in the 1930s) are harnessed to the task.

Against the background of the book being written there are two main characters at opposite ends of Europe: William Flanders, a low- level intelligence gatherer based in London and Paris, where he has a watching brief on Russian emigrés, and Andrei Miller, a Moscow law student whose father is a Red Army officer. His deceased mother was from French stock. Amid the slaughter of much of the Red Army's officer corps Miller's father is taking the first chapter of the book to Leningrad and safety when he is captured and Andrei is thereafter on his own. A subsidiary character, whose code name is Archimedes, a soviet spy master on the run who like many others Stalin is attempting to liquidate, will eventually link the British and Russian strands.

The Russian end of the plot centres around Andrei's involvement with an enigmatic figure named **Mendel** who was a friend of his father and who assists Andrei to avoid the NKVD who are hunting him all over Moscow. He desires Andrei to look after Fyodor and when the book is ready, to take it to the West, to the British, with whom he has an unspecified connection. He is something of a miracle man, in reality a senior officer of Red Army Intelligence (GRU) a body in competition with the hated NKVD. The NKVD are executing GRU men daily. His hallmark is the ability, even in a deep Russian winter, to obtain lemons for tea. In 30s Moscow this is extraordinary and marks him as a character of power. Mendel's lemons are a recurring theme in the novel. Andrei and Fyodor have many adventures in Moscow, including meeting young Americans who have immigrated to Russia but who want very much to return home. The two's friendship, and Fyodor's arrest, is central to the theme of loss in *The Eastern Bow.* Andrei initially cannot find the book, which is complete, but eventually does so through a facially disfigured attendant of the famous Sandunovsky bath house, a character as disdained by Soviet society as he might be elsewhere.

Mendel contrives to hide Andrei but eventually he ends up in a Soviet prison under an assumed name, where, with hundreds of foreign communists of no further use to Stalin, he is to be shot. He escapes, (though the others do not - all are murdered) through the actions of the mysterious Mendel (again lemons) and is smuggled into Poland where the NKVD track him to Krakov. He becomes involved with the Jewish community there (Mendel has contacts) who help him and he narrowly avoids death. His link to Mendel is cut (no more lemons therefore) and he learns Mendel has been betrayed and captured. He finds safety with a high-level prostitute who gets him out of Poland to Paris. In Paris he has an address to which to take the book (an operative named **Wolfie Light**, a former St Petersburg Jew and impecunious lover of Paris who operates the Parisian end of Flanders' network) and is about to try to make contact when he meets a lovely girl. She drugs him. When he wakes up he has been robbed of everything except the transcript. He hides it just before he is arrested for vagrancy and is imprisoned. In prison he is badly beaten and emerges tired, lonely and almost finished. Starving in Paris and sleeping under the bridges he contemplates suicide.

Interspersed with the Russian chapters a parallel story is developing in London where Flanders is enlisted by a **Colonel Blake,** the operative arm of a secret Cabinet committee known as 'The Committee' to take on the equally secret job of finding a mole (sapper or tunnel man in TEB parlance, a digger of mines) in MI6. Flanders is an outsider who walks with a limp and is from the lower classes. He speaks Russian because of a timber firm apprenticeship in St Petersburg before the Great War. Commissioned in the trenches, he is in his forties and has inherited a large ramshackle house (from a former commanding officer) in Surrey where he lives alone. He has

served as an intelligence officer in the British Intervention in North Russia, the Irish troubles and in India in the early thirties. Often lonely and isolated he is picked by Blake to investigate MI6 because he is not from an Oxbridge background or the establishment. His agent in Paris, Wolfie Light, has over the years and against the rules of espionage, become a friend. In the Russian Civil War Flanders saved Light's life. In the secret enquiry into the tunnel man Flanders is paired with Philip **Maitland,** a young Oxford graduate and MI6 officer who, against his will, has been ordered to befriend Flanders by the deputy head of MI6, **Chalcott,** who is against the enquiry and a snob. At a picnic at Maitland's house, Flanders meets his family, a retired Colonel of the Indian Army and his wife, and Maitland's sister **Julie**. Despite himself, he falls in love. She is in her thirties, a sensitive person, as lonely as Flanders, whose fine features are ruined by a large wine stain birth mark covering half her face. Their courtship is Edwardian, gentle and beautiful.

In order to give atmospheric factual information (lightly, in an unobtrusive way) to the reader about the world of 30s espionage and, for example, the internal conflicts of the Soviet Secret Services, a character called **Pushy (for Pushkin) Forbes** acts as standing oracle to the British intelligence world. He is owlish, bibulous, Oxbridge, highly intelligent, and homosexual, his social circle including E.M. Forster (who lives near the Maitlands in Weybridge) and a group who at that time all associated in a house by the Thames in Hammersmith. Flanders saves him from an indecency charge and rescues him from Hammersmith Police station.

Chalcott, outwardly charming, a product of Eton and Christ Church, is determined to derail the enquiry into MI6 and pressures Maitland to find something with which to sink Flanders. Maitland, probably in the wrong line of work, feels demeaned by this but his sense of duty forces him on. The MI6 enquiry finally reveals a sapper, an Oxford man known to Maitland and Chalcott, and the traitor commits suicide.

In a sub-plot, Light becomes suspected by Blake of being a Soviet double agent. Flanders refuses to believe this and tests of Light’s loyalty prove the Paris agent innocent. This issue, however, lingers in the mind of the reader and arises again. Flanders proposes to Julie and is accepted. Her family is delighted.

*

In France the sole coincidence in the book takes place. Andrei is at his life's end. He is ragged from sleeping rough and has lost much weight. He debates suicide on the Pont Neuf but decides on one last walk through the Sixth Arrondisement to the Luxembourg Gardens. In the Rue Tournon, outside the cafe of the same name, he sees Fyodor, wearing a hat and coat and reading the paper.

He shouts and crosses the street to find the man standing with his hand in his pocket, obviously holding a gun. It is Archimedes, on the run from the NKVD. He is Fyodor's brother. He also looks ill, and in fact has cancer. He doesn't shoot Andrei but talks to him and the whole story is revealed. Andrei tells him of Mendel, the man who can produce lemons in winter. Archimedes is determines to have the book published and he looks after Andrei thereafter, taking him to an isolated farm in the Aveyron in South West France. From there he gets a message to British Intelligence. The offer is that Archimedes will reveal Oxbridge spies within the British establishment (it is the time of the Cambridge Five) in return for the book being published. Blake has also heard of the book, from sources not revealed, yet, to the reader.

A team is sent from London to France. It is the hot summer of 1939 and Europe is caught in the run

up to war. Flanders and Maitland go as representatives of Blake and Chalcott respectively and Blake also allows Light to attend. In a hilltop farmhouse at night Archimedes, a living corpse, and Andrei, sit round a table with the three others. An envelope with names in it is produced and undertakings as to publication given by Flanders on behalf of HMG. As Flanders lifts the envelope Philip Maitland takes out a gun. Then, at what it is hoped is the high point of the chapter, he tells *Light* to search them all. Maitland and Light are Soviet agents, a team. Light cannot look Flanders in the eye. It is made clear to Flanders that he, and the two Russians, are to be murdered. The old Russian speaks of his time in the Revolution and curses Maitland, who loses his nerve and shoots him. Andrei tips over the oil lamp and in the dark manages to club Maitland. Flanders, now armed, calls for silence in the dark and Andrei finds a candle. Light has his hands in the air. Flanders repeatedly smashes his face with the pistol.

Maitland and Flanders speak, the former with his hands tied behind his back. Maitland cites the plight of the Jarrow marchers and unheeding high teas at Balliol, the corruption of British society, Munich, the way forward for mankind. He admits framing the MI6 suicide and arranging his murder. He also admits Flanders and the Russians were to be killed. He speaks in jargon. Light will answer no questions, including how long he has been a Soviet double.

When Maitland admits that the introduction to Julie was part of his Soviet handler's instructions Flanders suffers a hammer blow. Flanders thinks of what a trial and the resultant disgrace would mean to the Maitland family. Andrei reminds him the NKVD are looking for them as they stand talking. Flanders orders Maitland's hands undone, then shoots him through the heart.

*

Flanders leaves Light to be interrogated in France at a safe house near Bordeaux. Andrei stays there also and Flanders returns to London with the manuscript. He learns a team has been sent out from London with 'The Committee's' authorisation to interrogate and execute Light. Blake's earlier assessment of Light is vindicated. The list contains three names from Oxford, none from Cambridge. [This should allow usage of the Cambridge spies in the two sequels.] Flanders has to go to see the Maitland family, who have been told their son has been killed on active service. He has been awarded a medal. The family know something is wrong. Flanders meets closed shutters. He and Julie speak in the garden where the picnic was held. He cannot find words and in her face can see only Philip's. She, wise beyond her years, is willing to go on but he cannot. She hands back the ring and kisses him goodbye.

Flanders has lost all. Chalcott and MI6 want him ousted for incompetence. HMG, courting Stalin as war approaches, reneges on the promise to publish the book. Blake defends Flanders who goes to see him in his flat in the Temple to see what the future holds. As Flanders walks along the Thames from Temple tube he runs everything over again in his mind. He is early for his meeting with Blake and outside the Temple church he sits on a bench and a Damascene revelation comes to him. It, and the scene with Blake, is not at all, hopefully, that which the reader has expected.

The final scene takes place in Paris. Andrei sits at a terrace outside the Grand Café du Capitale des Balkans at the bottom of the Rue de Faubourg du Temple, a working class quarter of Paris containing many foreigners. It is the 23rd of August 1939 and the early evening crowd has just learned of the Nazi-Soviet pact. Uproar. Men are tearing up their Party cards, long-time symbols of a labourer's dignity. A table goes over. There is shouting; fighting breaks out. A man stands crying in the street. Andrei is transfixed. When he looks back to his table a steaming cup of coffee has appeared without being ordered, and with it a lemon on a saucer, round and yellow in the evening sun.

* * *

1. Candidate's declarations:

I, Robert Alexander Boyle, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in October 2009 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D in September 2010]; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2009 and 2013.

Date …… signature of candidate ……

2. Supervisor's declaration:

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Ph.D in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

Date …… signature of supervisor ……

3. Permission for electronic publication: (*to be signed by both candidate and supervisor*)

In submitting this thesis to the University of St Andrews I understand that I am giving permission for it to be made available for use in accordance with the regulations of the University Library for the time being in force, subject to any copyright vested in the work not being affected thereby. I also understand that the title and the abstract will be published, and that a copy of the work may be made and supplied to any bona fide library or research worker, that my thesis will be electronically accessible for personal or research use unless exempt by award of an embargo as requested below, and that the library has the right to migrate my thesis into new electronic forms as required to ensure continued access to the thesis. I have obtained any third-party copyright permissions that may be required in order to allow such access and migration, or have requested the appropriate embargo below.

The following is an agreed request by candidate and supervisor regarding the electronic publication of this thesis:

(ii) Access to all of printed copy but embargo of all of electronic publication of thesis for a period of 5 years on the following grounds:

publication would be commercially damaging to the researcher, or to the supervisor, or the University;
publication would preclude future publication;

By letter of the 2nd of October 2013 from the Pro-Provost the above request was granted by the University and thus an embargo for five years is placed on the electronic copy of this thesis.

Date …… signature of candidate …… signature of supervisor ……

UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

REGISTRY – STUDENT OFFICE

EXAMINATION FOR THE DEGREE OF Ph.D, D.Lang, Eng.D or M.D
(by research thesis)

1. Special Circumstances Form

(*to be completed by the candidate*)

Name of Candidate: Robert Alexander Boyle

ID Number: 080014589

Department / School: School of English

Are there Special Circumstances? NO

Student's Signature: Robert Boyle

Date: 30th of September 2013

N.B. The form should state any special circumstances that have affected the progress of the thesis or its final presentation e.g. ill health, bereavement or other temporary incapacity, and which should be brought to the attention of the examining committee and the Faculty Officer before the thesis is examined. Failure to report any special circumstances without good reason may affect any subsequent appeal. This form must be submitted with the thesis. It is expected that the form will normally be blank.

2. Details of Special Circumstances:-

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to thank my supervisors Professor John Burnside and Professor Susan Sellers for their help and encouragement. In addition I am grateful to Ms. Jennifer Griffiths of the Bodleian Library and to the staff of the Taylor Slavonic Library, Oxford. Finally, but not least, my special thanks to Ms Sandra Wallace, Post-Graduate Secretary of the School of English, without whom…

This thesis is dedicated to three people

For Carolyn
kak vsegda

For Fyodor
silver-haired and of that time
who first led me over white winter fields
past Pilnyak's gate to Pasternak's house
and of whom I ought to have asked more questions

and for
Tamara Litsinskaya
27 years old and a student
born in Moscow
arrested on the 8th of February 1937
sentenced to death on the 25th of August 1937
Murdered the same day
Patronymic unknown
Address unknown
Charge unknown
Grave unknown

One day Lara went out and did not come back. She must have been arrested in the street, as so often happened in those days, and she died or vanished somewhere, forgotten as a nameless number on a list which later was mislaid, in one of the innumerable mixed or womens' concentration camps in the north.

Doctor Zhivago

CONTENTS

Note on Sources and Translation

This thesis contains material drawn from sources in both Russian and English. All are listed in the Bibliography. They are also marked in the text by footnotes and endnotes. Because the references are extensive it has been decided to present those sources largely, though not exclusively, through endnotes. This structure has been chosen with the aim of combining detail within a readable narrative illustrating aspects of the writer's life in Soviet Russia. It is a method used, for example, in such books as *Natasha's Dance, A Cultural History of Russia* by Orlando Figes, and as it provides both rigorous notation of sources and ease of reading it has been adopted in this thesis. Where a footnote refers to a specific source an abbreviated citation is given on the relevant page, the full citation appearing in the Bibliography.

Original material in Russian consists of extracts from two main documentary sources and from articles in the Soviet press of the 1930s together with a small number of references from the late Soviet period. The two central Russian publications (titles translated) are: *The Stenographic Record of the 1st All Union Congress of Soviet Writers 1934*, published in that year (and following its repression by Stalin reprinted only in 1990) and *The Supplement to the Stenographic Record of the 1st All Union Congress of Soviet Writers 1934*. The title and appearance of the latter publication is misleading in that it appears to be part of the original Congress Record but in fact consists almost entirely of later biographical material taken from the records of the Soviet Writers Union and published in Moscow in 1990 as the Soviet regime faltered and died.

The main Congress document is thus a verbatim record of the Congress itself, six hundred pages of close type covering two weeks of speeches, formal addresses and presentations from delegations such as the Moscow garrison and the Pioneer youth movement. As well as being a contemporary record of the words uttered at the Congress it supplies, through appendices, sociological data showing the sex, age, social origin and Party affiliation of the delegates themselves. This material was invaluable in rounding out the picture of who the Soviet writer was in the first main decade of iron literary conformity.

The Congress supplement gives such information concerning the lives and fates of some delegates as appears to have been available in 1990 within the Writers Union records. There are gaps and omissions in the records, a fact emphasised in the publication itself. Such gaps did not augur well for the persons concerned. Many disappeared leaving no trace. By cross-referencing writers' names from the main Congress Record with the available biographical data of sixty years later it is possible however to present a picture, a fragmentary picture, of their lives and deaths.

Other Russian material is cited in the endnotes.

Concerning transliteration, since the thesis is concerned more with history than phonetics the method adopted is that used by Katerina Clark in her book *The Soviet Novel* as being the most suitable for non-specialist readers. See pxv of her text for details. Exceptions have been made for certain widely recognised spellings. The name 'Beltov' for example has been written thus and not 'Byeltoff' a variant more phonetically correct but perhaps jarring to a reader of English.

The thesis concentrates on the history of events and circumstances shaping the lives of Soviet writers, and not the literary content of their works. Descriptions and analysis of those works where relevant are therefore taken from recognised authorities on Russian and Soviet literature such as Professor Gleb Struve and Katerina Clark.

Strictly speaking the Soviet Union, embodying its fifteen constituent republics of which Russia was one, should be described thus or referred to as the USSR. In common usage however the country was often spoken and written of, both at home and abroad, as 'Soviet Russia' or simply 'Russia' and all four descriptions are used interchangeably in the thesis.

Finally, the text contains material taken from the pages of the Soviet press of the Thirties, including *Pravda* and *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (the Literary Gazette), the journal of the Writers Union. These newspaper sources came from the American State Department microfiche records held at the main Bodleian Library and the Taylor Slavonic Library, Oxford.

Save where indicated, the translations from the Congress Stenographic Record, the biographical information from the Writers Union files and the Soviet press, are mine, as are any errors which may be contained therein.

1st Congress of Soviet Writers
The Hall of Columns, House of the Unions, Moscow
17th of August 1934

CHAPTER I

Introduction
and
Historical Background

Hail Caesar. We who are about to die salute you

Suetonius

MOSCOW 1934

The Congress delegates do not realise that many of them are shortly to be murdered. In the times soon to come they will share their allotted end with a vast army of others. Killings will take place in execution cellars, lonely clearings or slave labour camps extending across Soviet Russia and since this land covers one sixth of the earth's land surface the deaths will number in the millions. Sentences will be ordered and carried out by the state whose praises the writers sing and by the leader whose name they daily glorify. As much part of the five year plan as wheat production or steel the murders will be developed into a nationwide factory process. At full capacity its machinery will kill an average of thirty thousand persons a week. [1]

*

Introduction

By any reckoning the Russian century was hard. The opening lines of *The White Guard* by Mikhail Bulgakov, though referring to the aftermath of the October Revolution and the Civil War with its evocation of mingled hope, promise and blood letting, might also provide a leitmotif for all the troubles that followed. It serves especially for that period which has come to be known as the Purges, an epoch in which the purported ideals of a new just society lived side by side with planned but casual death.

> "Great and terrible was the year of Our Lord 1918, of the Revolution the second. Its summer abundant with warmth and sun, its winter with snow, highest in heaven stood two stars: the shepherds' star, eventide Venus; and Mars – quivering, red." [2]

Of Bulgakov's two heavenly bodies Mars would be in the ascendant. A man or woman born at the beginning of the century would by the end of a normal life span have survived much. The list is long; the land suffered three revolutions, a vicious civil war, dismemberment by Germany, defeat by Poland, widespread poverty, famine, institutionalised mass murder as an instrument of state control, and war, destruction and death on a scarcely believable scale. The Russian century will also create a word for institutionalised repression with which it will ever be identified. A simple acronym for the anodyne-sounding State Administration of Camps (*G*osudarstvenny *U*pravlenye *Lag*erov) will come to refer to the largest organised system of slave labour in history.

This thesis is concerned with certain aspects of reality during a short period of the Soviet epoch in which a new literary genre, Socialist Realism, (described by Katerina Clark in *The Soviet Novel, History as Ritual*, as in truth a literary *system*[3]), came into being. It had two obvious effects: the first was that published literature in the USSR atrophied for seventy years; the second that Soviet society was deprived of the sort of truth that only fiction can tell. As Joseph Brodsky observed in his introduction to A *Tomb for Boris Davidovich* by Danilo Kish, a fictional indictment of the

catastrophic realities of communism in the thirties: - 'By having written this book, Danilo Kish simply suggests that literature is the only available tool for the cognition of phenomena whose size otherwise numbs your senses and eludes human grasp'. [4]

It is a commonplace that where a country's literature cannot serve as witness, its history becomes black farce and its truths slaves to euphemism. What is extraordinary in the Soviet case however is both the length of time this state of falsity lasted and the extent to which it held sway. The Congress and related events dealt with in this thesis took place in the 1930s but their collective shadow was long. In the summer of 1934, for example, Kim Philby was sitting nervously on a Regents Park bench with his first Soviet controller as the Congress delegates prepared to assemble in Moscow. Four decades later he felt able in a speech to a receptive KGB audience to consider the black fate of millions thus: 'Now we all know that in the 30s some good people, including members of our own organisation, fell victim to cases of unfortunate disregard of socialist legality...'[5]

Similarly, even so modern a Western writer as Christopher Hitchens seemingly at one time also felt able to wish away the mass horror of collectivisation in the 30s: 'there wasn't a *famine*...There may have been the occasional *shortages...*'.[6] Vasily Grossman, with rather more experience of Soviet reality, was unequivocal: the regime's policy ordained 'that the peasants of the Ukraine, the Don and the Kuban be put to death by starvation, put to death along with their little children'.[7] At least three and half million people died.in the Ukraine alone.[8] Socialist Realism was silent as to these, and other, awful events.

Although suppression of the truth and prudent or wilful blindness were attitudes applicable to all aspects of the creative arts and to Soviet life generally the present thesis is primarily concerned with the writers of the 1934 Congress (the only one allowed by Stalin in his lifetime) and the world in which they lived. It will touch on Soviet Socialist Realism as a literary theory consecrated as state orthodoxy at the Congress in order to illustrate the constraints under which they worked but its principal aim is to convey something of Soviet daily reality in the 1930s, something of the world outside the Congress hall.

The 'Tortured Words' in the thesis title refer to those which characterised those tormented times- words falsely uttered, swallowed, hidden, wishful, destroyed, extracted or still-born - whether

found in the Congress record, Pravda[i] headlines, or interrogation notes of half a century ago, revealed as Communism fell.

When considering Soviet literature of the period generally there are a number of larger issues which arise but which do not fall to be considered in this thesis. Amongst these are questions of the possible validity of Socialist Realism itself as a practical didactic system for a country struggling to raise literacy levels and, also, in a specifically Soviet context the extent to which people needed Combray, or their political masters feared Leopold Bloom.

Those questions, and others related to Socialist Realism, though of great interest, cannot be properly examined within the scope of this thesis. Instead it will focus on what the American critic of the Fifties Leonard Trilling called in another context the 'the dark and bloody crossroads where literature and politics meet',[9] a particularly crowded Soviet intersection. Consonant with themes within the novel *The Eastern Bow*, part of which forms the creative writing element of this thesis, four aspects of Thirties Soviet life are considered; the world inhabited by the writers themselves (and through them the nation as a whole), the special position of the Red Army at the Congress and in Soviet society; the relationship of foreigners and fellow travellers to the Soviet Union, particularly Americans[ii]; and finally the process by which an individual delegate to the Congress, one of the most famous Soviet writers of his time, Boris Pilnyak, became enmeshed in tortured words of his own and others' making. These words destroyed him. His fate stands for many.

Because the speeches of the main historical figures at the Congress-Gorky, Bukharin, Radek and Zhdanov - are readily accessible in English[iii] the emphasis in this thesis will be on less well-known figures whose words are only available, so far as I am aware, in Russian.

With the Purges as a constant background the thesis will examine aspects of Soviet reality as the delegates themselves would have found it on stepping outside the Congress hall. To attempt a picture, if only in part, of Moscow and Soviet life within the thesis parameters must necessarily be an impressionistic endeavour but through examination of diverse images of the time an idea of life as it was actually experienced by the writers during the 1930s emerges. In order to bring life to

[i] There were two main Soviet newspapers, *Pravda*, and the separate Communist Party organ *Izvestia*. 'Pravda' means 'Truth' and 'Izvestia' means 'News.' In a quicksilver phrase facilitated by Russian grammar Russians would often murmur, privately, 'There's no News in the Truth and certainly no Truth in the News'.

[ii] The position of the Americans, because of the extent of both their emigration and disappearance, is particularly interesting and comparatively little known. This aspect, as with the others cited above, features in *The Eastern Bow.*

[iii] See H.G. Scott, *Problems of Soviet Literature*.The three last named were senior Bolshevik politicians.

such a picture in the context of the creative writing degree and the novel which forms its other half, after consultation with my supervisors a style of presentation has been adopted which combines a rigorous approach to research, through the use of both primary and secondary sources, with a less formal evocation of a literary and physical landscape long since gone. The facts themselves are of great importance but it may be equally important, without straining metaphor, to picture a writer stepping out of the Congress hall between speeches and looking left and right, noting at either extremity of vision the Kremlin and the Lubyanka[i] and his position almost exactly half-way between the two.

The reason for the adoption of this approach is to convey the *strangeness* of the period. So many of its details are personal, its ironies and contradictions intimate and telling. The statistics render the reader numb after a while, their horrific significance diminishing with accumulation, and it is only through the personal that the full reality of what happened becomes even partially comprehensible. Even if Stalin, that 'pockmarked Caligula' as Pasternak famously called him[ii] did not say those words often attributed - that the death of one person is a tragedy, a million a statistic[iii]- there is a doleful sense, faced with the Holocaust and other evils of the 20th century, in which the phrase itself is not without a certain melancholy truth.

All epochs of course have their oddities, their unique happenings, but this particular time and place seems to contain so many as to belong on another, almost incomprehensible, planet which at the same time still retains characteristics of a Europe we recognise and understand. Therein lies its singularity.

*

[i] The headquarters of the various incarnations of the Soviet secret police is a large, much altered, 19th century building, in pre-revolutionary times the head office of an insurance company. In the 1930s it consisted of the main building, the infamous inner prison constructed in the courtyard and a number of local annexes connected to it by tunnels. It is situated adjacent to the largest childrens' toy shop in Russia.

[ii] Levi, Peter. *Boris Pasternak.* p 214

[iii] No definitive primary source can be found for the attribution.

Historical Background to the Congress

The general history of Auden's 'low dishonest decade' [10] is well known and does not require repetition here but it may be useful to summarise briefly the peculiarly Russian and Soviet events which make up the contextual landscape informing fiction in the Soviet era.

By 1934 the Soviet Union had entered into a period of comparative calm. The two revolutions of February and October 1917, the forlorn intervention by Britain, France and America in the Civil War on behalf of the White forces, and the violent Civil War itself had been followed by forced collectivisation of the peasantry, widespread devastation of the land, famine, and a massive drive to industrialisation which demanded huge sacrifices from the Soviet people. Behind these brief words lie the deaths of some twenty million of them.[11] After the first Five-Year Plan however, that is after 1933, an approximate sense of normality had returned to the country and though hardship and poverty were still obvious, things had improved to the extent that bread came off the ration in 1934.[12] Soviet power was well established and had already begun to create the mythology of the Revolution and the Civil War which would sustain its vision of itself in the years to come, fact immediately falling victim to propaganda. The events of the Great October Revolution for example, (or simply 'October' as Soviet Russians referred to it), though subsequently of great significance for the world, were in themselves less than stirring. The succeeding years would see heroic efforts by Soviet cinema and literature to portray October in tumultuous scenarios but the reality was otherwise. Soviets used to say, only half in jest, that casualties amongst Eisenstein's 5,000 army extras enthusiastically storming the Winter Palace for the cameras were greater than the true meek

surrender and actual quiet entry up the stairs.[i] The shots signalling revolution fired by the cruiser Aurora moored on the Neva across from the Palace were blanks. Even the theatres stayed open.[13]

This manner of thinking, the requirement to portray events as Bolshevik orthodoxy would have them rather than the actuality, became in itself a Soviet reality. Every Soviet citizen was bent to its needs; in the grip of Socialist Realism the writers were no exception.

In politics Stalin had virtually won against all, former friends and otherwise, who stood in his way and said as much at the 17th Party Congress (in Communist terminology 'The Congress of Victors') in early 1934.[14] The Writers Congress followed a few months later in similar self-congratulatory style. On the 1st of December that year, however, all was changed by the assassination of Sergei Kirov[ii] Stalin used the ensuing chaos to begin immediate executions and to usher in the show trials and the Purges which reached their apogee in late 1937, a terrible year in the Russian psyche. For that reason, in her memoirs of the Purges and the camps, *Into the Whirlwind,* Evgenia Ginsberg wrote that 'The year 1937 really began on the 1st of December 1934'. [15] The writers of August 1934 therefore, as if in thick fog, were standing on the edge of a pit they could not see.

Consideration of the period requires mention of Trotsky. He features strongly in the Soviet Thirties. Following his forced exile in January 1929 (he demanded the arresting soldiers carry him bodily down the stairs lest history paint him acquiescent)[16] and his eventual residence abroad, he became the regime's most noted enemy, composing his 'Bulletin of Opposition'[17] with mordant accuracy. Trotsky's position is central to the Soviet Thirties and became a recurrent preoccupation of the Stalinist regime. As *soi-disant* keeper of the flame he founded the Fourth International as rival to Stalin's Third and this heresy was used to portray him as the enemy beyond the country's borders, a foul traitor bent on destruction of the Revolution. As will be seen in the chapters following it was a notable characteristic of the times that charges of sabotage, treason and murder often had 'Trotskyite' attached to them as though the gravity of the charge could be increased by hyphenation as a lesser French growth is optimistically linked to one more grand. The writers became ensnared by the Trotskyite label, a feature of most denunciations or charges which affected both them and others. A vivid poster of the period,[18] part of the propaganda assault against those whom Stalin

[i] The side staircase used by the Bolsheviks lacked cinematic verve so the main Jordan stairs were used for *October*. Red Army extras fired off live ammunition inside the building, shattering expensive antique china and wounding five of their number. The caretaker, while sweeping up, told Eisenstein that his people caused far less damage the first time they took the palace. See Figes, Orlando. *Natasha's Dance.* p 460.

[ii] Kirov was the extremely popular Party leader of Leningrad and a possible rival to Stalin. The latter's involvement in his murder is strongly suspected by many historians. See for example Conquest, The Great Terror, p 38 et seq.

sought to destroy, covers almost all the dangerous ground in one picture- a massive red proletarian forearm is strangling a ferocious snake above the words: 'TO THE WIPING OUT OF SPIES AND DIVERSIONISTS, AND OF THE TROTSKYITE – BUKHARINITE AGENTS OF FASCISM!' The eyes of the reptile are Nazi swastikas[i].

By the time the main Purges end in 1938 Stalin had vanquished all opposition at home and abroad and he was ready to reach an accommodation with Hitler in the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939. The Russian end of Auden's decade closes with Von Ribbentrop's entourage arriving at the old Moscow airport. A guard of honour presents arms with much flying of swastikas (borrowed hurriedly from the sets of Mosfilm (the Moscow Film studio complex where they had of late been used in the making of anti-fascist epics) and in honour of the visitors the Red Army band played the unfamiliar notes of the German national anthem, and the Internationale; the music for the Horst Wessel could not be found but was soon added to the People's Army of Workers' and Peasants' repertoire. It disappeared in June 1941 when Hitler invaded.[19]

* * *

[i] The image has longevity. In 2013 it could be purchased at a bookseller's booth at the corner of the Pont Neuf and the Quai Conti.

CHAPTER II

Socialist Realism at the Congress – Stalin Demands

An artist must above all portray life truthfully.

J.V. Stalin 1932

Of the hundreds of delegates gathering in the Hall of Columns that August fortnight it may perhaps be open to doubt as to whether any two of them would agree on a precise definition of the term 'Socialist Realism'. In fact no single definition was attempted by any speaker. As Katerina Clark pointed out in her seminal book '*The Soviet Novel. History as Ritual*',[20] since the declaration in 1932 at the formation of the Writers Union that Socialist Realism was 'the sole method appropriate for Soviet Literature' Soviet scholars themselves argued about what the term meant, with no real answer being agreed upon.[21] She cites for example 'Byzantine' debates concerning the relative proportions of 'realism' and 'romanticism' the proper Soviet literary recipe should contain and views these collectively as 'academic hair-splitting', [22] unhelpful for the consideration of what Socialist Realism actually is and what it meant to those writing and reading it. Instead, she defines the concept as 'essentially a name applied to Soviet culture's literary system rather than to a way of writing that is particularly 'socialist' or 'realist.' That system, following a 'master plot', acts as a repository of national myth and as a 'parable for the working out of Marxism-Leninism in history'[23] through exemplars handed down, as if in benediction, at the beginning of every literary congress which has taken place in the Soviet Union. These form the Socialist Realist canon. Examples of some titles convey their themes: *Cement; Virgin Soil upturned; How the Steel was tempered;* and *The Young Guard*.[i]

For the purposes of this thesis, save in so far as is necessary to explore the reality of some aspects of the lives of those affected by Socialist Realism, an analysis of the concept itself or the books forming the canon is not made. It may be useful however to examine briefly Clark's concept of the types of soviet novel and the virtually universal structure of what she calls the 'master plot[24] in order to illustrate the constraints binding any writer who wished to have anything published. These constraints constituted the reality, the invisible boundaries, of the Soviet writer's creative world.

Clark divides the types of most Soviet (and virtually all Stalinist) novels into several categories: the 'production' novel (i.e. the increase of some commodity or endeavour); the historical novel; a novel about a worthy inventor or intellectual; a novel concerning war or revolution; a novel about spies or criminals and a novel about the West. The master plot, where the setting is in Russia, typically requires a 'positive hero', usually from a modest background, who finds himself in an unfamiliar new closed environment (a factory for example, or a dam, or a section of the front) or who makes a return to a place formerly known. He has to fulfil a task of some sort within that environment.

[i] By Fyodor Gladkov, Mikhail Sholokov, Nikolai Ostrovsky and Alexander Fadeyev respectively

This might include the 5 year plan not being properly carried out or a danger arising which imperils its completion. The template also requires that problems develop in the course of that fulfilment which appear to prevent the successful completion of the task. These might include both deficiencies in the quality of persons he finds on his arrival (backsliders, inefficient bureaucratic persons in authority lacking sufficient purpose or efficiency, truculent nay-sayers etc.) and practical difficulties such as climate or lack of materials. In overcoming these problems the positive hero seeks advice from a local source (the 'People' and its collective wisdom) as well as help from higher authority. In the course of these soundings a plan is formed through which the hero develops his own increased socialist consciousness and inspires the local people, and any salvageable bureaucrats, to complete the task. A climax may be engineered which threatens the completion. This is usually followed by a successful resolution of events and some sort of celebration or marking of the event which underscores the ideology at the centre of the work.[25]

Within the master plot, given the wide nature of possible scenarios available in a rapidly industrialising country, any number of variants of its component parts were possible and might even include peripheral events such as an emotional estrangement which interferes with achievement. The central framework, however, was inviolable and long lasting. Zhdanov, Stalin's cultural spokesman and acolyte, whose address at the 1934 Congress clearly set out the Party's viewpoint (see below) was still emphasising after the war that this framework, referred to by Clark as the 'purity of the formula' must be followed without deviation.[26]

The obligatory structural requirements of any work of fiction were so clearly defined and embedded in the soviet literary conscience that throughout the life of the Communism system it was being applied to all situations, even down to short stories or vignettes of Soviet rural life. In *Stovemakers*, a short story from the 50s by Alexander Tvardovsky, a much celebrated author -and young delegate to the Congress in 1934 - the raw material of an installation of a small village stove in the depths of the country is carved and fashioned to fit the model.[27] The story concerns a young member of the intelligentsia (a teacher) recently arrived in the countryside and the useless stove in his new quarters. Intellect alone is unequal to the situation; bricks must be found, clay puddled and flues planned. It is only after seeking help from a bluff army major undaunted by any task and an elderly master of stove making (a clear man of the people) that warm serenity reigns. The tone, as with most Soviet morality tales, is always serious, the only unintended comedy for any Soviet reader arising at the injured refusal of the old tradesman to take even a drop of vodka before the job was completed. A party celebrating the building achievement ends the story. In a small way it illustrates

the manner in which the genre, or the system, of Socialist Realism was intended to enter the consciousness of everyday people as an inspirational blueprint for their lives. It acted as a digestible narrative which in turn formed a building block of successful problem resolution cemented into place in the edifice of the Communist state. Its main enemies were the countless ironies of Soviet reality and an equal number of softly spoken Russian 'anekdotes'. These were short stories in oral form largely following Zhdanov's hallowed structure, the subtleties and cumulative effect of which both teller and recipient expected and relished. They all ended with a variation on the soviet glass-making factory narrative - a magnificent industrial palace covering miles of the Kazakh desert erected at extraordinary cost and in the teeth of every conceivable problem thrown up by man or nature, which closed after a month due to a sand shortage.

Whatever literary development any Congress delegate thought might be desirable, Soviet reality meant that only the regime and its leader would decide its parameters. Stalin did not address the Congress, preferring strings to speech, but Andrei Zhdanov spoke with his voice.

At the opening session, on the evening of the 17th of August, Gorky opened the Congress with a few remarks and introduced the session chairman, Ivan Mikityenko, who in turn introduced Zhdanov. Mikityenko was a senior writer and Party activist from the Ukraine.[i] His words would carry in the hall - "From the Central Committee of the All-union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and from the Council of Peoples' Commissars of the USSR I present Comrade Zhdanov." - and they received 'loud applause'.[28] Zhdanov took the podium to deliver the first address to the Congress. The order of precedence is not without significance; whatever the field, whether literature or cabbage production west of the Urals, the Party's message came first.

Zhdanov, Stalin's messenger and cultural gauleiter, controlled cultural matters in the Soviet Union on his master's behalf until 1948, when he died of alcoholism. That period of dark repression, of imprisonment and worse, is known in Russia as the Zhdanovshina, or the Zhdanov-time.

The rows of delegates listened to Zhdanov as he set the Congress tone. He first of all, as with almost all speakers throughout the Congress, praised Stalin.[ii] For reasons of space when considering other speakers similar empty tributes will not be repeated but they represent a constant

[i] Later shot. See p 27 below

[ii] It appears that in the context of the Congress, mention of Gorky was allowed to exceed that of Stalin. The former's name appears 253 times, the dictator's 167. Josef Vissarionovich still outshines Lenin (151), Pushkin (82), William Shakespeare (62) and Noel Coward (1). See the Congress Supplement pp 142,163,159,170 and 334 respectively.

theme throughout the Congress Record and embody another Soviet reality of the time, that called by Russians the Cult of Personality. Zhdanov's tortured words (though of course he may not have considered them as such) include:

> '...under the leadership of the Communist Party, under the guiding genius of our great leader and teacher, Comrade Stalin, the socialist system has finally and irrevocably triumphed in our country'.
>
> '...At the Seventeenth Congress of our Party, Comrade Stalin gave a masterful, unsurpassed analysis of our victories...'
>
> '...Comrade Stalin gave an exhaustive analysis....'
>
> 'Comrade Stalin laid bare the very roots of our difficulties and shortcomings...'
>
> '... [with] the untiring support and help of Comrade Stalin a whole army of Soviet writers has rallied around the Soviet power and the Party...' [29]

He moved on to emphasise the interconnectedness of politics and literature in the Soviet Union, citing the dangerous European political situation, tolling the bell for the end of Western literature and stating, bluntly if turgidly, the regime's requirements for the practitioners of Socialist Realism: they should hold themselves in readiness, as 'engineers of the soul'[i], to 'remould the mentality of their readers':

> 'The present state of bourgeois literature is such that it is no longer able to create great works of art. The decadence and disintegration of bourgeois literature, resulting from the collapse and decay of the capitalist system, represent a characteristic trait, a characteristic peculiarity of the state of bourgeois culture and bourgeois literature at the present time'.[30]

[i] Stalin apparently coined this phrase, much taken up later by Soviet letters, at a literary meeting in Gorky's Moscow mansion. See Frank Westerman, *Engineers of the Soul*, p 33.

His address then descended to the particular, the fundamental requirements of Socialist Realism as the state saw them. In a few important passages he revealed these demands in the answers to his own question:

> 'Comrade Stalin has called our writers engineers of human souls. What does that mean? What duties does the title confer upon you'?
>
> 'In the first place, it means knowing life so as to be able to depict it truthfully in works of art, not to depict it in a dead, scholastic way, not simply as "objective reality" but to depict reality in its revolutionary development'. [my underlining]
>
> 'In addition to this, the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic portrayal should be combined with the ideological remoulding and education of the toiling people in the spirit of socialism. This method in belles lettres and literary criticism is what we call the method of socialist realism'.[31]
>
> '...Comrades, the proletariat, just as in other provinces of material and spiritual culture, is the sole heir of all that is best in the treasury of world literature...'[32]
>
> '...untiring work directed towards improving their ideological equipment in the spirit of socialism represents an indispensable condition without which Soviet writers cannot remould the mentality of their readers...'[33]
>
> [Socialist Realism embodies] … 'the most matter- of -fact everyday reality, and the most heroic of prospects'.[34]
>
> 'We require a high mastery of artistic production, and in this connection it is impossible to overrate the help that Maxim Gorky is rendering the Party and the proletariat in the struggle for quality in literature, for the culture of

language'.[35]

The key to the Soviet literary situation as it was to develop in the Thirties and beyond lies in Zhdanov's dismissal of 'objective reality'. 'Reality in its revolutionary development' was what was being demanded and the 'Engineers of the Soul' knew that those code-words meant a portrayal of life not as it is, but as it should be. In turn that meant what the *state* says it should be. As the delegates applaud deliriously they may have little idea of just what that is going to mean.

***

CHAPTER III

The Congress and
the Soviet Writer's World

Poetry is respected only in this country - people are killed for it.
There's no place where more people are killed for it.

Osip Mandelshtam[36]

Nobles' Club or Society of the Well Born. Bolshaya Dimitrovka. (Good balls, concerts and fetes.) *Baedeker's Russia.* 1914[37]

At the bottom of Great Dimitrovka street in the centre of Moscow, appropriately, as subsequent events showed, half - way between the Kremlin towers and the Lubyanka, sits a demure building in the Russian neo-classical style. Its three stories, usually painted a light pastel, are austere, its façade relieved only by a portico and four large Corinthian columns. In date, intended function and style it is similar to the Assembly Rooms of Jane Austen's Bath or those of the Edinburgh of Walter Scott. Pushkin, Turgenev, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky all knew it well.

In its time as the Club of the Nobility (in Russian literally the 'Society of the Well-born'), under tiers of bright candles the aristocracy of old Moscow whirled in endless mazurkas on its parquet while outside the city lay under thirty degrees of frost. Anna Karenina would have no difficulty today in recognising its tall windows and polished floor. Should she look beyond the curtains at the lines of Mercedes cars and and bright shopping bags bearing addresses on 5th Avenue or the Rue St Honoré she might recognise in the new Russia's deep thirst for excess something of the old.

Now, the streets of central Moscow throb with money. Concrete, steel and plate glass preen on old lanes; there are casinos, nightclubs, lights. In a squat mausoleum of red Labradorite the leader of the Great October Revolution lies sightless within a few yards of a huge underground shopping centre, an obvious American victory hidden under cobbles. Where Lenin's speeches sought to inspire tired women in shawls and threadbare illiterate men with visions of a universal happiness for humankind, advertising hoardings now proffer a different joy. Their promises may be less lofty but offer more immediate contentment, funds permitting, from Sony or Marlboro, Rolex or Chanel.

It was different in 1934. Before moving to consider certain aspects of the Soviet Writers' world at that time, mention should be made of one of the important facets of that world which of which space does not allow more than the briefest of mentions - the Writers Union. Founded in 1932 to oversee all aspects of literary production it had a central role in the lives of its members. This single body, through its power, and its policy of *Knut i Pryanik*, (Whip and Gingerbread, the Soviet equivalent of carrot and stick) controlled publication, pay, accommodation, travel, dachas, holidays, food, access to special shops, education and almost every aspect of the writing life for over half a century. It even decided who could be called a writer. Space does not allow analysis of its role but a full and very useful examination of the organisation in the round is to be found in *The*

Soviet Writers Union by John and Carol Garrard, New York:The Free Press, MacMillan, 1990.

This chapter will examine the delegates themselves, something of the increasingly surreal world a writer would see outside the Congress hall and something of the fate of those who for two weeks in August 1934 gathered within. As the Congress Record is verbatim and in the present tense, that tense will continue in use in appropriate parts of the thesis.

By 1934 the old Nobles' Club has become the House of Unions[i] with the new name in large letters on the pediment. Fleeting clips of surviving newsreel footage shows the façade adorned with banners welcoming the writer delegates. Huge crowds of people filling the square outside are waiting for the arrival of Maxim Gorky. Moscow summers are hot; long days of deadening humidity are only broken by fierce downpours, and when Gorky steps out of the official car into strong sunlight there are puddles behind him on the paving stones. One of the most popular men in Soviet Russia he acknowledges solemnly the cheers of the crowd. His tall gaunt body and long drooping moustaches, now grey, make him the most recognisable figure, save one, in the country. With a stern glance at the camera he passes inside.[38]

Away from the noise of the street the Congress is to take place in what was often called 'the most beautiful room in Moscow'.[39] A vast hall painted entirely in white, its huge Corinthian columns rise up two storeys in grand simplicity. At the far end a podium for the speakers stands several feet above the long rows of chairs and tables set up for the delegates. Without stretching matters too far the podium itself might be said to convey at a glance some idea of the future direction of Soviet artistic thought. The excited experimentation and angular modernity of the new revolutionary art and architecture of only ten years before, the 'Arkhitekronics' of Malevich and Rodchenko's constructionism,[40] are gone. A photograph of the dais shows a swagged satin backdrop and imperial quantities of brass-potted ferns.[41] The avant garde has departed and the future, which in time will replicate much of the past, is to be proclaimed as if from the foyer of an Eastbourne hotel.

*

A delegate arriving at the House of Unions and pausing with his back to the portico (97% of all

[i] The trades unions existed but not in the Western sense. They were another branch of government.

delegates were male, see below p 41) would see a changing city. Just beside him a new metro station is being built. The first line will open later that year. Looking immediately left over the heads of the crowd filling the square he will see the facade of the Bolshoi ('large' in Russian) and the side of the Maly ('small') theatres skirting a smaller square. The buildings, as with most of Moscow, look tired and in need of painting[i]. Beyond the theatres an avenue runs slightly uphill to a four-square heavy building about six hundred yards away, which sits facing the city. Depending on his origin he may not know this large edifice but it is the Lubyanka. Muscovites avoid referring to it, or even walking past. On the other side of the avenue the mosaics of the Art Moderne Metropole Hotel face the Bolshoi and behind it a run of the old city walls screens a long street filled with churches and monasteries. Their cupolas peep over the walls, any remaining gilt shining in the hot August sun. At the end of this street, hidden from view, is the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court which will be in time will become a place where, daily, long runs of death sentences[ii] will be passed.

Directly across the square two large ornate red brick buildings in the style usually referred to without a negative connotation as 'pseudo-Russian' contain the offices of the old city council and the rooms of the Historical Museum. Between them is the space where the old Chapel of the Iberian Virgin used to stand before its demolition a few years before. Then the Kremlin battlements, the broad expanse of Red Square and the long permanent queue, to view Lenin in his tomb. To the right a stretch of Kremlin wall draws the eye to the end of a long square where a low classical building, the former Imperial Riding School, sits in ochre yellow. The colour is the Maria Therese yellow or Kaiser gelb, sporadically brightening this often drab city and seen from Vienna to the Urals. To the immediate right of the delegate a new modern building is rising; it is the central office of the Five Year Plan. Everywhere crowds pass and re-pass over the streets; trams clang by, filled to bursting.

The old city of Moscow, with its village air of low buildings, malodorous back lanes and small cupolaed churches in tired streets is changing, not only physically.[iii] The delegate does not realise it yet but soon Moscow is about to become the city of *The Master and Margarita*,[iv] surreal and darkly

[i] See the diaries of the British Consul, Reader Bullard, *Inside Stalin's Russia pp 1-37* for a contemporary description of the city.

[ii] 35,000 in 2 years. Execution cells existed at the court. See David Satter, *It Was a Long Time Ago and It Didn't Happen Anyway*, p 5

[iii] For a picture of the changing city in the 1930s see Kathleen Berton, *Moscow, An Architectural History.*

[iv] Bulgakov was writing the novel in the Thirties, exactly the period of the Congress and subsequent Terror. It circulated in the Soviet Union in illegal samizdat (literally 'self publishing') form in the early sixties and openly in 1973. See Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita.*

quixotic, and the country of which it is the capital is about to descend into a time of great evil. For the moment however, there is a sort of busy calm. Moscow is still just recognisable as of old and ironies thrown up by change still abound. The Soviet re-naming of streets, for example, is not yet complete and the names of months, weeks and days, unlike those of an earlier revolution, have also not changed. It is still possible for two convinced Communists standing at the Saviour's Gate to the Kremlin, in agreeing a meeting the following Sunday nearby, to speak without a second thought of gathering at Saint Basil's on Resurrection Day.

*

The setting of those times is singular enough in itself - the largest country in the world where all borders are sealed and all means of communication and survival are controlled by the state. None may voice disquiet with impunity and the value of an individual life is assessed only in proportion to its value to the collective.

Below, before consideration of the Congress itself is considered, a number of random aspects of Thirties Soviet reality are juxtaposed, deliberately with little detail or explanation save in the end notes and minimal footnotes, so as to show in brief something of the whirling and surreal nature of the Soviet Writer's world as it developed throughout that decade.

The starvation in the Ukraine and Southern Russia of more than five million persons, 'one vast Belsen', [42] was not mentioned by a single delegate. Maxim Gorky the world famous literary figure central to the Congress, whose former humanist views were legendary, calls people stigmatised as kulaks (slightly better-off farmers or those opposed to collectivisation) 'half-animals'.[43] State murder through execution and other repressions is so widespread that a national census reveals a shortfall of several millions of people. The census is cancelled as never having taken place, the documents pulped. The civil servants in charge of the census are shot.[44]

The first Soviet Constitution, known as the Stalin Constitution, guaranteeing an independent judiciary, due legal process and freedom of speech, conscience and assembly is announced with some fanfare to Soviet Russia and the world.[45] Its two principal authors, Bukharin and Radek, prominent delegates to the Congress, are arrested subsequently, forced in show trials to confess to imaginary crimes and then disposed of.[46] The Constitution cites as immutable the freedoms and rights given to national minorities formerly marginalised by Tsarist autocracy while the entire thirty

five members of the government of the Mongolian Peoples Republic, one of the fifteen constituent republics of the USSR, are invited as comrades to Moscow, then shot[47]. Elsewhere, Soviet film studios and theatres turn out great numbers of comedies, romances, adventure stories and musicals[48] at the same time as more than twenty five thousand forced labourers are worked to death building a canal from the White sea too shallow to carry most sea-going ships.[49] The state seeks to immortalise the waterway by a collective book created by a brigade of soviet authors praising the venture; writers apparently so excited at the prospect that their fingers were 'shaking from astonishment'.[50] In the Gorky park of Culture and Rest teenage baseball teams of American emigrants *to* Soviet Russia flail at pitches on summer evenings and shout encouragement in the vowels of Brooklyn and Kansas. Many of the baseball players will end in the Gulag or in unmarked graves.[51] As the press announces a 'beisbol' league being set up in Moscow, Pravda similarly announces that the death penalty is now applicable to twelve year olds.[52]

Shortly before the Congress begins a famous poet, Osip Mandelshtam, is arrested[i] in central Moscow for writing a poem, *A poem on Stalin, (November 1933),*[53] describing him in graphically unflattering terms. It sums up an era:

> We live, deaf to the land beneath us
> Ten steps away no one hears our speeches
>
> All we hear is the Kremlin mountaineer
> The murderer and peasant slayer
>
> His fingers are as fat as grubs
> And the words, final as lead weights, fall from his lips,
>
> His cockroach whiskers leer
> And his boots gleam
>
> Around him a rabble of thin-necked leaders-
> fawning half-men for him to play with.
>
> They whinny, purr or whine
> As he prates and points a finger,
>
> One by one forging his laws, to be flung
> Like horseshoes at the head, the eye or the groin

[i] Information on events of the period can be confusing. Peter Levy in *Boris Pasternak* cites the arrest as having taken place in the poet's lodgings in Furmanov St in Leningrad.(see p 183) whereas his wife's memoirs specify their room in Nashchokinsky Lane, Moscow. Emma Gerstein's *Memoirs*, p64 confirms this as does Anna Benn and Rosamund Bartlett's *Literary Russia*, p 79. Bulgakov also lived in this building which was not far from the Congress Hall.

And every killing is a treat
For the broad-chested Ossete

In the Lubyanka the poet admits this openly and recites the poem to his interrogators. In reply to a question, he replies that he wrote it because he hated fascism.[54] Against all odds he is ordered by Stalin not shot or imprisoned but merely exiled to a provincial town. His health gone, he is soon to attempt suicide. Under guard leaving Moscow the dazed poet mumbles 'It's a miracle' to the train compartment window.[55] As delegates gather, Stalin's astute decision allows him to appear as the wise dispenser of mercy. Despite his fame and generally acknowledged brilliance the poet's name is mentioned at the Congress once only in passing as a member of a former literary grouping, now considered irrelevant.[56] All other delegates remain silent; not a word is said publicly of his arrest for a dozen lines of verse. After his period of exile is served he receives an unexpected gift of a two-month rest home holiday from the Writers Union. It is bestowed so he may be arrested the more easily and he is taken one day, before dawn.[57] He disappears this time for good. In the camps he becomes an emaciated skeleton driven to madness, and finally finds exhausted death. In a frozen Gulag transit camp on the far side of the world, in deep winter, whilst his rags are deloused, one of the greatest poets of the European twentieth century falls and dies half-naked on a sulphurous plank floor. A numbered wooden tag is attached to his foot and he is thrown into a communal pit.[58]

Another writer of renown, Isaac Babel, popular for his unsparing vignettes of the Civil war, and of a famously European and liberal cast of mind, stands at the Congress and declares wryly that his new genre is one of silence.[59] He receives surprised laughter and applause for his daring, still just possible at this time. He is a protégé of Gorky. Most of the delegates may not be aware that he also socialises regularly with secret policemen, some of the monstrous 'half – men' of the above poem for whom the clichéd term 'blood-soaked' is, however apposite, by infinite multiples inadequate.[60] When asked why he frequents these households - 'did he want to touch death?' - he replies 'No. I just like to have a sniff to see what it smells like'.[61] The writer, for all his silence, is given money, privileges, special city lodgings and a country house in a unique writers' colony in which to create. This takes place in a land where most people think themselves fortunate to possess a few shoddy square feet of space in a communal flat. His links to the upper ranks of the Soviet elite and his equally important contacts and fame in Western Europe preserve him for a while but when these attributes become less relevant to Stalin and dangerous in a new political climate he, like many another less celebrated, is arrested, forced to confess to imagined charges, and shot.[62] His Lubyanka photograph shows him bruised and stunned, his vital glasses gone.[63] He will have stayed

alive a little longer than most of those condemned in the frenzied killing period of the main Purges, but he cannot escape his name on a list, as chance has it the same execution list as the man whose company he formerly sought, the erstwhile head of the secret police.[64] Standing on the Congress podium, an urbane and civilised European figure, he does not realise how short his life is to be.

Probably the most read author in Russia, Boris Pilnyak, another delegate to Congress[i] and a leading member of the Soviet Writers Union and the Congress Praesidium,[65] remains completely silent. Despite his acknowledged status, as literary mores veer and change his position has from time to time been subject to lacerating attacks in the state journals, and in the press. He cannot but be worried. In silence safety may lie, he hopes, and in any event he confesses privately to trusted friends, that the gathering itself is a contrived affair of mediocrity in which he desires no part. In private he also discloses his true and unfavourable views of the Soviet state. These words, betrayed, will return in the form of an ever-tightening net. Outwardly however, he has abandoned earlier independence and will continue to wrench and twist himself to every newly required nuance of official literary policy, turning out books to order and excoriating those he wrote before his publicly- voiced red Epiphany. His tortured words are many. They weigh on him. Like other literary figures he frequents gatherings of senior secret policemen and in drink learns details of how executions are carried out, then returns to his family, with what thoughts are not recorded. He finds a protector in the head of the NKVD himself, a man who knows no limit of evil. With time's passing the writer's contorted writings bring him advantage. All the privileges of a successful and approved writer are accorded him - he receives money, the gift of foreign travel (even Hollywood), the rare luxury of a private car, good accommodation in Moscow - and a large dacha where his next door neighbour is another famous writer, Boris Pasternak. They share a garden gate which 'was never closed'.[66] From that garden his neighbour sees him lead away at dusk one Autumn day. He is taken to the Lubyanka, put in a cell and interrogated, and in due course murdered after a trial lasting fifteen minutes.

The delegates increasingly will be becoming aware that the system, if such it may be called, also contains a measure of unpredictability. Evgeny Zamyatin, a widely read and respected author has risked the publication abroad, four years before, of a dystopic novel about totalitarianism. *We*, his tale of 'Onestate' ruled over by the 'Benefactor' , with unmistakeable echoes of Soviet life, is now widely considered one of the 20th century's most important books and was subsequently of great

[i] See Chapter VI of this thesis for a more detailed examination of his position.

interest to George Orwell when preparing to write1984.[67] The writer is pilloried and threatened in all quarters of the Soviet press but after a brave direct appeal to Stalin is allowed, extraordinarily, to leave Russia. He dies in Paris in the middle of the Purges, a 'loyal emigre', sad and bitter, having written little else.[i] Mikhail Bulgakov, another writer now acknowledged as being of world stature, makes a similar request after being unable to publish for years. He is refused. Stalin, after a personal telephone conversation with him, orders that a ban on publication be continued but that he be given suitable employment at the famous Moscow Arts Theatre and be protected from arrest. Stalin likes one of his works from which the quotation at the beginning of this chapter is taken. Formerly banned it is now dramatised for the stage at that theatre. It becomes the dictator's favourite; he sees it fifteen times.[68] If the writer is saved by a caprice, however, the theatre and its director are not. It is closed and the director,Vsevolod Meyerhold, an artist of European repute, is arrested and makes a written appeal from his cell (with the unbroken arm) to Stalin via Molotov. It goes unanswered. Perhaps he does not realise that the fact that his arrest warrant is signed by the head of the NKVD in blue pencil means he is destined for execution. He is tortured most evilly, as his Lubyanka photograph shows; this includes bones being broken and the interrogator urinating in his mouth.[69] He is then shot. While he is in the Lubyanka his wife is murdered in their flat by persons unknown, her body suffering 17 stab wounds, a murder widely regarded as a general warning.[70] This sordid event mingles with another aspect of Soviet reality, the corruption and omnipotence of those in authority; the elderly maid who was beaten unconscious in the attack is sent to the Gulag and the Meyerhold apartment is then divided between the chauffeur and the assistant of Lavrenti Beria, then head of the NKVD.[71]

Though Literature seems to be the most dangerous category of the arts in which to work music is also subject to the same repressions. Soviet Russia's premier composer Dimitri Shostakovich is summoned to a police station on a Friday and told to confess to espionage and implicate others. Unsurprisingly he is dumbfounded. His NKVD interrogator gives him a stark warning that he has the weekend to come up with the confession, then releases him. On his terrified return to the Police station on Monday morning the composer is told that his former interrogator has been himself arrested and he is therefore free to go.[ii]

---

[i] No definitive authority can be cited for the following assertion which nevertheless demands to be made: Zamyatin must surely have been the only 1930s Russian dystopic novelist of international stature who was also a shipbuilding correspondent for the Glasgow Herald. See the Glasgow Herald Trade Review issues 31/12/32 p 66; 29/12/34 p 45 and Glasgow Herald 30/6/34 p 4. Cited in Zamyatin,*The Biography of a Heretic* p 90

[ii] Dimitri Shostakovich. See Elisabeth Wilson, *Shostakovich, A Life Remembered*, p 148

Caprice also plays its parts in other walks of life; in industry a black American cotton specialist engineer emigrant working in a plant in a Soviet Central Asian city shows extraordinary courage when he learns of an NKVD arrest team who have come for him when he was absent. He goes immediately to NKVD headquarters and demands to know what is going on. An officer assures him he won't be troubled again and that it had been purely a question of a quota, now filled.[72]

The American ambassador Joseph Davies, appointed by Roosevelt, fosters a rosy view of the reality of life in the USSR while American citizens, disillusioned emigrants to Soviet Russia who wish to return to the United States, are arrested on the pavements outside the embassy.[73] The readers of the New York Times are assured by its Moscow correspondent, Walter Duranty, throughout the Purges and the great show trials that all is well in the USSR under Stalin and any statement to the contrary is either uninformed or malicious propaganda. The correspondent, an English ex-public schoolboy from Bedfordshire with one leg, celebrated in journalistic circles, is awarded a Pulitzer prize. He lives a good life in an excellent flat on a major street south of the Kremlin beyond the Moscow river. Whilst his columns are appearing in the New York Times sealed vans containing condemned prisoners cross and re-cross the city nightly from police station to prison, from the Lubyanka holding cells to dark and obscure places on the outskirts of the city. When records are opened half a century later one such mass grave eleven miles from Red Square contain tens of thousands of bodies.[74] An NKVD senior administrator of the time, who later changed his name, confessed in 1990:

> 'In the fall of 1936 all of the execution chambers in Moscow were working at full capacity. Yet there were more and more people to shoot. It became difficult to remove the bodies of those who had been executed without being noticed by people in the area. There began to be bad rumours and the executioners, meanwhile, were pushed to the limit. What went on! What went on! There was no time to wash away the blood in the basements. There were brains on the walls....But people kept coming and coming and it seemed like the shooting would never end. I did not know where to send the corpses, everything was filled...everything.'[75]

The mixture of ideology and banality which reflects the 1930s in Stalin's Russia is seen in the main press organ of the regime. The contemporary pages of Pravda, where the most utilised verbs seem to be 'unmask' and 'shoot', are violent and loud with denunciations and warnings of spies, saboteurs

and traitors in every corner of Soviet society while at the same time recording adjacent facts of daily life as if the two were merely aspects of the same normality. Below black headlines shrieking for men to be 'shot like mad dogs' echoing the words of the Prosecutor Vishinsky at the show trials[76] appear notices for *La Traviata* at the Bolshoi Theatre. A few columns down, a new book by Stalin on the insufficiency of party workers' effort towards "the liquidation of Trotskyites and other double-dealers" appears without irony beside an illustrated advertisement for a new Soviet brand of instant soup cube.[77]

In every part of the country, from Minsk to the Sea of Japan, mass graves will be dug.[78] These graves are filled by the people who disappear daily from trains, places of work, and quiet rooms in sad communal flats. No word of this is heard in the Hall of Columns nor afterwards in the works of the writers. Socialist Realism does not recognise, in Zhdanov's words, this particular aspect of 'objective reality.' The writers grow to realise that failure to conform means at best a crushing repression harming the non- obedient and those closest to them; at worst it means death. Deliberate flouting of the rules is however not the only category which invites disaster; a slavish devotion to Party ordinances or as Pasternak wrote, simply being on an unlucky list 'which later was mislaid'[79] can also easily bring oblivion. In one central Moscow side street a few hundred paces long and five hundred yards from the Lubyanka, Potapovsky Lane, thirty five residents were arrested and murdered and over a hundred others were sent to the camps.[80] Though some paths *seem* safer than others no one knows for certain which will lead to survival. That is the reality of the world inhabited by every Soviet writer in Thirties Russia.

*

THE CONGRESS OPENS

His initial brief words of welcome complete Gorky hands over the proceedings to Ivan Mitinyenko, a leading Ukrainian writer, party member and functionary of both the Ukrainian and the All-Soviet Union of Writers. He, together with Nikolai Tikhonov, a well known Leningrad writer, (who is later to publicly demand the death penalty for the accused in a show trial in this very building while the trial was in session)[81] carry out the swift election of the Praesidium of the Congress. This was a

body whose exact function were never made clear but whose members, judging by the rapid and unopposed election, embody another aspect of Soviet reality – the pre-determined vote.[82] Robert Conquest cites a telling episode in the Comintern[i] where in 1927 two Italian delegates failed to understand the system. They declined to vote for condemnation of a Trotsky article on the grounds they had not read it. Despite being pressured to do so, they refused to give in. Stalin, the tactician, withdrew the motion but it appears that this was the last such serious incident of principle.[83]

Gorky's two colleagues on the podium embody from the outset the uncertain and hazardous world of Soviet literary reality. Tikhonov, from working class stock, was a favourite of Stalin and was often photographed with him. His Socialist Realist works earned him two Stalin prizes and he was awarded the Lenin Laureate prize in 1970. As well as being one of the foremost powers of the Union of Writers for 30 years he served as a member of the Supreme Soviet[84] This body, like all other Soviets (the word comes from the Russian 'to advise') was in principle an executive unit in the governmental structure. In practice a duplicate Party structure at all levels made the decisions. Despite these badges of the establishment both the contemporary (1934) and later (1990) records show Tikhonov not to have been a Party member.[85]

Mitinyenko, on the other hand, was of a similarly impeccable proletarian background but the model of a dedicated communist writer. He made his career ever upwards within Party and literary administrative posts and in the mid-thirties was an international Soviet delegate to anti-fascist Congresses abroad in 1935 and 1937 as well as being elected to international bodies (under Soviet control) formed in opposition to fascism. A dependable Stalinist he was chosen to speak at the Congress in which the Stalin Constitution was formally adopted. The conclusion to his speech, met by 'frenzied enthusiasm', was couched in the turgid phrases typical of the period: 'Long live the Stalin Constitution! Long live our great leader, the great Stalin! Glory to Stalin! (All delegates stand, thunderous applause, cried [sic] of 'Hurrah!' Hurrah for Comrade Stalin! Hurrah for our great leader the great Stalin! Greetings to the Great Comrade Stalin!'[86] His tortured words did not save him, neither did his participation with Tikhonov and others in a Writers Union letter published in it's own journal on the 15th of June 1937 following the judicial murder of senior army officers. It praised the both NKVD and the Stalin Constitution stating 'We demand the firing squad for spies!'[87] Mitinyenko was arrested and shot later that year.[88]

*

[i] The Communist International, a body devoted to the spreading of Communism outside the USSR.

THE DELEGATES

As Gorky, Mitinyeko and Tikhonov complete the opening formalities and look out over the hall prior to the first address given by Andrei Zhdanov they see a large body of writers, about 650 in total, (including 40 foreign guests) filling all available space. They are of so many disparate origins that their journeys to Moscow might have begun from a rail halt at the edge of a baking desert a thousand miles away or the terrace of Lipp. While at the Congress the delegates are asked to complete a questionnaire which recorded facts about them as individuals. The statistics compiled from these facts form several separate appendices to the original 1934 record. From these additional annexes (a proviso specifically states that minor variations in the figures derive from non-attendance or non-completion of some forms) a picture may be formed as to the origins, occupations and political affiliations of the delegates.

The delegates are overwhelmingly men (96.3%), whose average age is just under 36. [89] Party membership, categories of literary activity and social origins are dealt with in three separate sections. As to the first, 60.4% are members of the Party either as full members (49.1%), candidate or probational members (3.7%), or members of the Komsomol - or Young Communist League - (7.6%). The remainder, about two fifths of the total at 39.6%, are declared to be 'Non-Party'[90] although as evidenced by writers such as Tikhonov this did not at all imply any lack of support for Party policy, quite the reverse.

The list of delegates shows 52 separate nationalities.[91] It appears from the figures that about a third of them (183 or 32.9%) were engaged in prose, 107(19.2%) in poetry and 36(6.4%) in both. 106 delegates (19%) list themselves as being involved in mixed or general work with smaller numbers giving their primary employment as dramatists, journalists or, ever present, critics. There are 71 critics listed,just over 12% of the total.[92] In addition to areas of work, a specific tabulation is made of dates of publication. This divides the delegates into groups whose work was initially published pre-1917 (139), from 1918-1926 (257), from 1927-1931(151) and from 1932 onwards (8).[93] From this it can be seen that the hall would contain a majority of younger writers, two thirds of them products of the Soviet regime and published under its auspices. It may be that writers of such comparative youth, exemplified by Tvardovsky, still writing of Socialist Realist village stove repair in the 1950s, himself taken up and nurtured by the system, felt a sense of debt to the Soviet regime.

This in turn, allied to fear, might be a factor explaining another aspect of the writers' world - the fact that while its members were being arrested over a number of years and either executed or sent to the camps their Union and its members remained silent.

In keeping with the Party's teachings social origin was paramount. The importance of this attitude is reflected by the table of percentages of persons coming from various social origins which follows on immediately after the section on political affiliation. Workers form just over a quarter of the delegates at 27.3%, peasants (Khristyanin or 'Christians', the old Russian word that would never change even under Soviet rule) make up 42.6% and the rest come from diverse backgrounds. These are 'the working intelligentsia' (12.9%), office workers (5.5%), handicraft tradesmen (3.8%). The less happy categories of social origin then follow: nobility (2.4%), urban lower middle class (2.4%), clergy (1.7%) and the mercantile class (1.4%).[94] The percentages speak for themselves as a reflection of another reality in Soviet Russia – the relative value of social origins in the eyes of the regime[i]. There are many recorded instances of membership of such categories resulting in a person's inability to enter further education or obtain employment or even basic accommodation.[95] Quite apart from these restrictions it may be imagined how precarious was the life of a person from the wrong social origin (the phrase used in Russian was 'former people') when the press repeatedly printed hysterical diatribes against 'class enemies' who were presented as omnipresent hidden cancers in the body politic and whose 'unmasking' was demanded of all loyal Soviet citizens.[96]

Children of an affected person also suffered. In the face of these perpetual disabilities many would move to a new area and start again with a newly created background (often by taking factory or other manual work to provide a tangible basis for a new beginning for self and family), taking a risk in the administrative chaos in the years after the Revolution that the lie would remain undetected. This process became widespread with the introduction of the internal passport system in 1932 and the purge of 'class enemies' which accompanied it as part of the second five year plan.[97] In turn this lead to a situation of unease and distrust in Soviet society. In the words of Orlando Figes: 'Throughout the 1930s the Party leadership encouraged the popular belief that colleagues, neighbours, even friends and relatives, might not be what they appeared to be - a belief that did much to poison personal relationships and fuel the mass terror of 1937 – 38'. [98] Elena Bonner, wife of Andrei Sakharov the dissident Soviet physicist later recalled how, at the arrest of her father, her

[i] It also reflects the marginalisation and repression of the old Russian Intelligentsia. For an examination of the fate of those who were deported from Russia see Lesley Chamberlain,*The Philosophy Steamer.*

younger brother had said 'Look at what those enemies of the people are like. Some of them even pretend to be fathers'.[99]

In the press, notices in which people, often children, renounced their parents and family appeared widely. Persons who wished to take part in the new Soviet world had to be seen to sever all connections with members of the class enemy such as kulaks and the former clergy.[100] A typical example is given in Orlando Figes' book The *Whisperers*:

> 'I, Nikolai Ivanov, renounce my father, an ex-priest, because for many years he deceived the people by telling them that God exists, and that is the reason I am severing all my relations with him'.[101]

One of the delegates to the Congress, Alexander Tvardovsky, a young writer and future famous Soviet poet from the Smolensk region whose Socialist Realist short story *The Stovemakers* (thesis p 24) has already been mentioned, found his own experiences in this area of Soviet reality to be particularly lacerating. He came from a large family judged to be kulaks - in Russian, 'fists', or better off peasants - because of his father's trade as a village blacksmith but had joined the Young Communist league as a fourteen year old. He became an activist and his disagreements with his family led to him to leave for the city of Smolensk in 1927 where he joined the Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP)[i] and began to make a career in print. His family began to disintegrate under the punishing measures being taken then against people labelled class enemies, especially those decreed to be 'kulaks'. His father and two brothers, unable to pay the heavy tax bill imposed on them and fearing arrest, ran away to find work in the Urals. His younger brother was denied entry to school as the son of a kulak. When the family was finally re-united in their village a year later all, save Alexander, were deported to the Urals. At the Pedagogical Institute where Tvardovsky was studying, he spoke as an activist at meetings in favour of the campaign against 'kulakdom' as the press called it, but was troubled at his family's fate. He sought advice from his local Party Secretary but was told' in life there are moments when one had to choose between one's family and the Revolution'. After this he was treated as someone unreliable and attacked at literary meetings as the son of a kulak. He was saved from expulsion only by the spirited intervention of a prominent local writer, (who was himself later arrested.)[102]

In response to letters from his family who were in a poor situation but wished to stay in touch he

[i] The Association of Proletarian Writers, a powerful hard line Bolshevik group absorbed into the Writers Union in 1932.

finally wrote to exhort them to be patient and to work, but severing all ties. When his father and brother journeyed to Smolensk to see him later that year they found him at the local House of the Soviets (an administrative centre) where he had an editorial position. He was shocked and said he could only help by paying for them to return where they came from. His father went to borrow money from a friend but on his return, Alexander having notified the Police, was arrested.[103]

Tvardovsky's guilt followed him. His own tortured words can be found in an unpublished (and in the Soviet Union unpublishable) poem, *Brothers*, of 1933:

> What are you, brother?
> How are you, brother?
> Where are you, brother?
> On what Belomorkanal?[i]

Time did not diminish the disquiet. In the brief 'thaw' of 1962, as editor of Novy Mir (New World), one of the most prestigious 'thick journals' in which emerging Soviet literature was often serialised, Tvardovsky was both courageous and instrumental in putting into print Solzhenitsyn's *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich.* This book, unique in Soviet literature, was the first to expose the camps. In the words of a writer of the time it 'let the genie out of the bottle, and however hard they tried later, they couldn't put it back in'.[104] Thirty years later Tvardovsky's tortured questions had returned with some sort of answer.

Quite aside from people concealing their social origin to survive, and the renunciation of relatives, another aspect of Soviet reality became more pronounced as the thirties wore on - informers. This phenomenon received a curious affirmation at the Congress through mention of a cult surrounding a Soviet teenager who had denounced his father, who was executed, and then had himself been murdered. His name was Pavlik Morozov or Little Paulie Frost. This facet of Soviet life was one of the most singular of a strange epoch, the boy's name being shorthand for a system of denunciation lasting more than fifty years until the end of Communism in 1991.

In 1989 Vitaly Shentalinsky, a courageous journalist and writer, campaigned under Glasnost for

[i] The Belomorkanal or White Sea Canal was a forced labour project in which many thousands perished digging an almost useless canal by hand through hundreds of miles of granite. The poem is cited by Figes, *The Whisperers,* p 134

access to the KGB files relating to the lost writers of the Thirties. Against considerable opposition he eventually persuaded the Secret Police to discuss giving him access to the whole files, not merely the summaries proffered. They refused to grant such access, asking:

> '...What do you need the informers for?...'
>
> 'Why are you so worried about them? [he said] It all happened half a century ago. It's already history. You want censorship and half-truths, again?'
>
> 'Now now, why talk in those terms?... But we shall not surrender Pavlik Morozov my dear Vitaly Alexandrovich'.[105]

The Pavlik Morozov cult made its presence felt on the Congress in two ways with both the appearance of a young Pioneer delegation as well as Gorky's validation of denunciation by attempting to raise money for a permanent Moscow monument to the boy. Pavlik Morozov was a fourteen year old who denounced his father as a counter-revolutionary kulak[i] in a small village in the Urals in 1931. His father, a person locally of good reputation and veteran of the Red Army in the Civil War, was shot, Pavlik being the main witness at his trial. Afterwards Pavlik co-operated with the local 'organs' of power and with his brother began a series of denunciations of those they wished to accuse of withholding grain or speaking out against the forced collective farm system. The results caused great harm and ill-feeling which resulted in the murder of the two brothers. Whomever was the actual killer (and the theories advanced subsequently implicated various persons from his cousin to the local secret police anxious for fame) the case soon became politicised and an enduring part of Soviet mythology. [ii]Widespread press coverage was given to the case. In the end a show trial with pre-ordained findings of guilt led to the execution of five members of his family, including his grandparents.[106]

The cult of his 'martyrdom' came to embody the state's requirement that loyalty to it 'was a higher virtue than family love and other personal ties'. [107] This legitimisation of informers disseminated through the Pioneer youth movement implanted 'in millions of minds' that 'snitching on ones friends

[i] As mentioned in connection with Tvardovsky's family a label attached by the regime to any farmer who owned more than subsistence goods or who appeared lacking in revolutionary fervour. During the great forced collectivisation of agriculture anyone so labelled was liable to forced labour, deportation to the wastes of Siberia to die, or shot.

[ii] For a full discussion of the case see Catriona Kelly, *Comrade Pavlik, The Rise and Fall of a Soviet Boy Hero.*

and relatives was not shameful but public-spirited. It was indeed expected of the Soviet citizen'. [108] To demur brought grave risk. Figes notes: "At the height of the Pavlik Morozov cult, the 1930s, the true Pioneer was almost expected to prove his worthiness by denouncing his own relatives. One provincial journal warned that Pioneers who failed to inform on their families should be treated with suspicion and, if found to be lacking vigilance, should be denounced themselves."[109]

Against this background the writers watch a large delegation of Pioneers enter the Congress hall to martial music on the 21st of August. The verbatim record reads as follows:

> 'At the sound of a loud fanfare and orchestra the Pioneer delegation marches into the hall in step. They are met with stormy applause from the whole hall. The Pioneer choir greets the writers:
>
> With the guidance of books, and the Red Army words,
> To the Writers of this unprecedented time,
> From healthy Pioneers in harmony
> From scholars and children
> From the October kids with sunny round faces
> Theirs from the age of nine too
> From the vigilant kids of the capital
> The Very Warmest Welcome to You![110]

The pioneers continue in the same vein for some time. In addition to requesting stories about 'patrols at dawn' and the 'biographies of the Bolshevik leaders' they make a demand (the Russian used is specific - 'want' rather than 'would like'): 'We want to read about the Pavlik Hero'.[111]

The pioneers leave the auditorium to more 'stormy applause'. At the end of the Congress Gorky makes a plea for funds for the erection of a permanent memorial by the Union of Writers in honour of the 'Hero-Pioneer Pavlik Morozov, killed by his relations when he discovered their wrecking activities and chose to assert the interest of the toiling people over blood ties'.[112] He ends by invoking the Congress ritual: 'Long live the Party of Lenin- leader of the Proletariat, and Long live the leader of the Party, Josef Stalin!' [113]Gorky, the world famous humanist of former years, then foremost man of Soviet letters, has come a long way, his tortured words reflecting another reality of the 1930s Soviet writers' world - literature's approval of the informer within.

*

One of the most troubling aspects of Soviet reality which affected all of society but which was particularly relevant to writers is the absence of any public mention of the *actuality* of what was going on. Pravda announced trials, specific executions and demands for retribution (and the Writers Union passed resolutions in favour of same) but nowhere in the Press or contemporary writing appears reference to the nightly disappearances on a huge scale or the millions of deaths by forced labour.[114] Any unpleasant or revealing fact is simply ignored. A striking example of this aspect of life is seen in the descriptions of the House of Unions itself in later publications. The building was central to the Russian century but it's history was omitted from books purportedly of record. A few examples show the extent of the silence: Stalin's funeral took place there as did Gorky's; the state's literary system was proclaimed at the Congress and the three infamous show trials of 1936, 1937 and 1938 were heard within its walls in all their terrible detail. These important events were largely air-brushed from subsequent Soviet history; dangerous strings were clipped in case they unravelled.

In the main Soviet Encyclopaedia of Moscow published in 1977, an important book in general circulation, none of the above facts are mentioned in the section dealing with the House of Unions. The encyclopaedia, for example, records 'leading members' of Bolshevik power who spoke there but does not mention their names or the fact that they were tried in the same building and shot after grim and farcical show trials.[115] The fate of other 'leading members' of Lenin's first Soviet government, 13 in number, is also not given - three died of natural causes and the other ten were executed or died in the Gulag.[116] Similarly the 'triumphant gatherings' of the Comintern (see p 72 below) which took place in the building are mentioned in a short single phrase without any acknowledgement that the Comintern was annihilated. Per Conquest: 'In general, a clean sweep was made of the organisation and they were exterminated in their thousands, not only foreign Communists but Soviet citizens working with them who were 'blamed for collusion in the penetration of the enemy into the constituent parties'.[117]

In exactly the same way, the fates of the repressed delegates at the Congress went long unmentioned, especially by their brethren. Though the surviving writers must have looked around at any gathering to see who had disappeared, or noticed that a fellow writer's dacha suddenly had new residents, nothing whatever could be said publicly without inviting disaster on self, family and friends. The silence was simply part of daily life.

*

THE FATES OF THE WRITERS

True numbers, of deaths or anything else, were notoriously difficult to obtain in the closed world of Soviet officialdom but since the coming of Glasnost and the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, with the sporadic if incomplete release of some files, the position has become a little clearer. By way of illustration it is now known that of the two thousand delegates who in 1934 attended the 17th Party Congress, the 'Congress of Victors' (just before that of the writers), 70% of them perished in the Purges.[118] Before dealing with the position specifically of writers it is necessary to mention the repression numbers (those executed or sent to the Gulag) for the country as a whole. These vary but Russian figures released in the last twenty years have tended to confirm, and even exceed, those cited by Robert Conquest, the pre-eminent historian of the Purges. They are a melancholy backdrop to the Soviet writer's world:

1937 -1938

Arrests	about 7-8 million
Executed	about 1 million
Died in camps	about 2 million
In prison, late 1938	about 1 million
In camps, late 1938	about 8 million[119]

Of the last named figure he concludes that 'from much Soviet and other testimony that not more than 10% of those in camp survived'. He gives the total number of repressions - from Russian sources - as some 40 million (up to 1957) and sets the deaths of the Stalin era, including the horrors of collectivisation and famine, at 20 million people. These *exclude* a similar figure for the casualties of the war.[120]

Concerning the writers, Conquest noted in his history of the Terror (which originally appeared in 1968 prior to general confirmation of his conclusions during Glasnost) '...the heaviest toll amongst them all [the intelligentsia] seems to have been among the writers. They were threatened from two directions. A theory of correct aesthetic *method* was imposed on them, and at the same time the *content* of their works was subject to intense scrutiny. It emerged in the 1950s that of the approximately 700 writers who met at the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934

only 50 survived to see the second in 1954.[i] A recent estimate is that 90 percent of the Writers' Union membership was repressed. After the XXth Party Congress in 1956 [the 'secret speech' in which Krushchev recounted *some* of the crimes of the Stalinist period, excluding those in which he was, excluding those in which he was a participant[ii]- [my italics,] it was confidentially admitted that 'there were more than 600 writers who were guilty of no crime, and whom the Union [of Writers] obediently left to their fate in the prisons and camps'.[121]

Alexander Solzhenitzn, writing of this betrayal in an open letter addressed to the IVth Congress of Soviet Writers in 1967 stated that in reality "the list is still longer."[122]

He was proved correct. More recent research, making use of recently available files and comparatively more freedom to assess them, has shown that earlier estimates were low. A number of researchers in Russia such as Eduard Beltov and Vitaly Shentalinsky have devoted years to investigations in this field. Shentalinsky's courageous and extraordinary work will be considered further in the chapter dealing with Boris Pilnyak but in terms of numbers alone Conquest quotes Beltov's researches as showing "nearly 1,300" writers being verified as dead during the purges (including post 1938 repressions).[123] As is the case with the population at large it is not possible, because of the disappearance or withholding of records, to establish the exact fates of all writers. In an enquiry in Minsk instigated by an MP of the Byelorussian Supreme Soviet at the highest level into a comparatively small group of several dozen named writers from that country who had been arrested and who had disappeared during the 30s, the response received was that 'law enforcement agencies' had 'no information *whatever'* out 18 of them, roughly half of the total (my italics).[124] But for their names on a bit of paper or long kept by memory, they might never have existed.

In the final period of Glastnost just prior to the demise of the Soviet Union, in 1988, the tide had been turning, in some quarters, in favour of that memory. The Union of Writers was forced to examine its own records. In its journal, Literaturnaya Gazyeta (Literary Gazette) -an organ that had itself been used repeatedly in the 1930s to hound writers and herald their doom (see below) – it was admitted that after investigations 'about 150 litterateurs, including some 75 members of the Union of Soviet Writers could not be traced at all'. In total, it was admitted, 'some 2,000 literary figures

[i] Ilya Ehrenburg, a delegate to both, compared the two lists. Kemp-Welch pp 226-7. He also recalled the disappearance of 'writer after writer'. Conquest *The Great Terror* p259.

[ii] For example his orchestration and leading of a 'spontaneous' mass demonstration of two hundred thousand factory workers in Red Square in February 1937 which bayed collectively for death sentences for accused persons in the House of Unions show trials. See *The Foresaken* by Tim Tzouliades p 115.

were repressed, of whom about 1,500 met their deaths in prison or camp'.[125]

*

In order to illustrate the uncertainty and unpredictable nature of the writer's world two days have been taken at random from the Congress record and the fate of the relevant speakers traced. Extracts from the record illustrate the turgid emptiness which characterises much of the Congress speeches.

TWO DAYS OF THE CONGRESS. 20-21st of AUGUST 1934

Over the whole fortnight, with some time off, there were twenty six sessions normally split between morning and evening. Taking two of those days (and four sessions) at random, the sheer uncertainty of whether a writer would die or survive becomes clear. On the morning of the 20th of August the fourth session lists three speakers: Malachy Toroshelidze speaks of Georgian literature, a Comrade Sukhanov leads a delegation of Soviet inventors and Drastamat Simonyan, deals with Armenian literature. [126]A short verbatim extract from the middle of Toroshelidze's long speech illustrates the first delegate's approach, one typical of many speakers at the Congress:

'The decision of the Central Committee of the All-Soviet Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of the 23rd of April 1932 [i] **"**On the re-construction of the work of literary-artistic organisations" provided a mighty impulse towards new heightened levels of creativity in Georgian literature.
Under the leadership of the Party organisations of Georgia and Transcaucasia, and in the process of struggle to fulfil the decisions of the Central Committee we were able to smash cliques as well as overcome the leftist traditions of Bulgarisation[ii] and administrative practices of literary organisations. Those mistaken individuals who made up the Georgian Association of Writers [i.e. the former national literary grouping, now banned] were exposed and unmasked in their anti-Leninist platforms relating to creative methodology and to literary policies'.[127]

Toroshelidze's speech ends with further exhortations to 'struggle for literature in our great epoch

[i] This edict created the Union of Writers and laid down the basis for future literary development.
[ii] A definition cannot be found. It is presumed to be perjorative.

which is building socialism' all thanks to the 'exceptional daily help which has been shown to the literary front of the Central Committee by our Leninist party and by the wise, beloved leader of all the workers of the world, the mighty Stalin'.[128]
There is 'prolonged' applause.

His tortured words did not save him. Even his being appointed Rector of Tibilisi University and writing a hagiography of Stalin published under the name of Stalin's last head of the secret police- another Georgian, Beria- availed him nothing. He was denounced in Literaturnaya Gazeta on the 26th of March 1937 and "exposed as a despicable renegade, counter-revolutionary and enemy of the people". His fate was death.[129]

The second speaker, Sukhanov, gives a short address on behalf of '52,000 inventors and rationalization improvers (persons tasked with improving productivity) imploring the delegates to 'supply creative charges for the furthering of our work as inventors and rationalisers, not only in the field of industrialisation of our country but in the invention of a new literature which will in its turn help inventors and rationalisers....Long live Socialist Literature – the leader in the great ideas of Communism! Long live our glorious Leninist party and its leader and teacher –Comrade Stalin!'[130]

There are two Sukhanovs listed in the index as being delegates at the Congress but it is not clear whether this man was a writer or solely an inventor. In any event no biographical information is available at all from the Union of Writers 1990 records, an absence indicating an unhappy end for any delegate named Sukhanov. Given the countless persons from industry who were shot during the Purges on false charges of sabotage or 'wrecking' it may be that the speaker's chances of survival were not high in any event..

The third speaker, Simonyan, delivers an address on Armenian literature past and present. There are two references to Stalin in his speech but he does not end the address with the customary tribute. He was arrested in 1937 and shot.[131]

The 5th session of the Congress began the same evening. Of the six speakers two definitely survived. There is no information available on two others (which, again, bodes ill), and two were definitely shot. Mahmed Alekberli was executed in 1937[132] and Oraz Tachnazarov was arrested in that year also but sent to the camps where he died.[133]

The next session began the following morning, the 21st. There were 13 speakers. Of that total one died in the 1940 war against Finland, seven survived or died of natural causes, and four were shot including Ivan Mikityenko who assisted Gorky in the opening ceremonies on the first day. [134]

On the evening of the 21st there were four Soviet delegate speakers; all lived, including Ilya Ehrenburg, friend of Malraux and Stalin's cultural ambassador in Paris in the inter-war years.[135]

The 8th session began the following morning, the 22nd. Eight of the speakers lived through the Purges and three did not. Axel Bakunts, a Party member from Armenia, was shot in 1937:[136] and Afzal Tagirov, an old Bolshevik from 1913 and member of the Central Committee of the Party in Bashkiria was also shot in the same year.[137] The third delegate, Ali Nazim from Azerbaijan, Party member from1930 and 'an active Marxist literary critic' was denounced in the Writers Union journal, the Literary Gazette of the 10th of July 1937. With a number of others he was declared to be ' an agent of German-Japanese fascism, a Trotskyite, an inciter and a nationalist-deviationist.'[138] He was shot that year.[139]

The world of the Soviet writer was not an enviable one. The Congress extracts show that such a world consisted of turgid prose, meaningless formulaic repetition, slavish adulation of Stalin and the regime, and death, if not of self then of those nearby. What it felt like to live in fear amongst informers, to utter false words as true, to call for the deaths of innocent people then return home safe for that day at least, is not often recorded. The Congress Record does not reflect these realities and Socialist Realism did not write them down.

***

CHAPTER IV

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RED ARMY TO THE CONGRESS AND THE ATTACK ON THE OFFICER CORPS

Ils sauront bientôt que nos balles
sont pour nos propres généraux

The Internationale[140]

At the Congress the later mass executions and destruction of the Red Army Officer Corps could not yet be seen, the bullets 'for our nice clean generals' who were the heroes of that army,[141] unimaginable. Following the appearance of the Pioneers and their choir on the evening of the 21st of August the Congress heard from Ilya Ehrenburg followed by the arrival, to great fanfare, of the Moscow garrison delegation. It represented the Red Army and the armed forces as a whole. The army was particularly important to the country's view of itself because of its role as chief defender

of the Revolution during the foreign intervention and the Civil War when White forces and their allies had to be cleared from both Northern and Southern Russia and from Siberia . The army had, even in its first decade and a half of existence, become a central platform of revolutionary mythology and its exploits had become famous in books and on the screen. Less rosily, Babel had chronicled its activities in his realistic stories of the Civil War collectively entitled Red Cavalry.[i] That mythology also included the actions of the sailors who mutinied in both 1905 and 1917 in the Baltic and Black Sea fleets, especially the men who pace forever the monochrome quarter-deck of the Battleship Potemkin. Sailors also formed a large component of the forces who fought for the Bolshevik cause on land, especially the Kronstadt [ii] naval base garrison which consolidated Communist rule in Petrograd. They were treated in Soviet history as the heroic shock troops of the Revolution. Under Revolution Square a few steps away from the House of Unions the vast marble arches of the Metro ceiling are supported by life-size bronze figures from that conflict, the favourite for many Muscovites being the brawny sailor holding a Mauser pistol, long worn shiny by childrens' passing hands.[142]

In practical terms the regime had some difficulties in dealing with the history of both the sailors and the Red Army. The main problems were with the Kronstadt naval garrison's uprising against Bolshevik power in 1921 and Trotsky's successful creation and leadership of the Red Army (laurels which Stalin fain would wear) whose exploits won the Civil War. At Kronstadt the same sailors who delivered the Revolution to Lenin, its own ' most favoured sons',[143] and, according to Trotsky the 'pride and glory of the Russian Revolution',[144] revolted against Bolshevik rule. They demanded free elections, (for those occupying the left of the political spectrum; not monarchists or rightists), freedom of speech, removal of Communist ration privileges and a right for peasants to work the land unmolested.[145] The uprising was suppressed with much loss of life, those who failed to escape over the frozen ice to Finland being shot. The Kronstadt rebellion was dealt with in Soviet mythology (in a manner similar to that of the Hitler-Stalin pact in 1939) largely by ignoring it.

A greater difficulty for Stalin's regime lay in the fact that the achievements of the Red Army, indeed its creation as a fighting force, were largely due to the leadership of Leon Trotsky,[146] someone who was by the 1930s the dictator's main enemy and - if the term is not inappropriate - an exiled Anti-Christ from the chapel of Bolshevik Orthodoxy. He, like others, was airbrushed

[i] These unsentimental harsh tales earned the undying enmity of Stalin's crony and cavalry general, Budyonny, former Red Cavalry Commander, and, later, an enthusiastic participant in the judicial murder of the General Staff.
[ii] The main naval fortress protecting the Baltic approaches to Petrograd.

literally and figuratively[i] from Revolutionary history and his person replaced by adulation of the Red Army itself. Stalin, whose minimal and less than competent role in any fighting was transformed into a vast false edifice of military omnipotence by the publication of books and articles by Marshal Voroshilov and others. The dictator was presented as a military genius and Trotsky's role erased.[147]

The Civil War and the Red Army's central role in the Revolution became one of the mainstays of the Soviet Arts. Leon Feuchtwanger, an influential German anti-fascist writer and Fellow Traveller, visited the USSR in 1937 and wrote a book, *Moscow 1937*, largely an attempt to rebut the heretical doubts of *A la Rétour de l'URSS* by Andre Gide published in 1936. Gide's own elevated Fellow Traveller status was lost in an instant[ii]. Feuchtwanger was astounded at the extent of war planning - 'In the Soviet Union...everyone reckons with the imminent war as with a hundred per cent certainty'[148] – and the amazingly high status of the army itself. Describing the vaunted closeness 'between the army and the people' he cites its role as educator of the people through libraries, theatres, cinemas and literary journals and the intertwined connections between writers and the military – 'I know of no other country where high literary talent is so frequently combined with military abilities'.[149]

Though Feuchtwanger is openly partial to the Soviet position the book was written to persuade and reassure Western readers (its covers are in the nostalgically strident orange of the Left Book Club, 1/-3d) at a time of Hitler's increasingly higher pitched speeches and the war in Spain. Soviet foreign policy was to participate in a broad coalition of the Left whenever possible, the most visible signs of which was support for the Popular Front government of Leon Blum in France from 1936 onwards. Designed to further this policy the book makes an attempt at projecting a certain sort of balance. A particularly interesting example of this is his mention of Trotsky: 'A writer, Leo Trotsky, was one of the organisers of the Red Army, and today writers play an important part in it'.[150] Trotsky's seminal part in the creation of the Red Army was well known in the West and therefore complete omission of his name in this regard would have undermined the author's desire for his book's acceptance as something approaching an objective report. Only a foreigner with a larger mission on behalf of the USSR, and embodying concomitant political advantages visible to Stalin, could have mentioned Trotsky without obloquy in this way and lived.

---

[i] For an examination of this particularly Soviet form of photographic and artistic erasure see David King, *The Commissar Vanishes.*

[ii] See Thesis Chapter V, Foreigners.

The intimate connection between Soviet literature, indeed all the arts, and the military exploits of the Red Army forms one of the strongest aspects of the Soviet writer's reality at this period. It was a popular genre, as politically safe as it was ubiquitous. As Feuchtwanger stated; 'I have already mentioned the war plays and films which dominate the repertoires, and of the great range of literature commemorating the heroism of those who fought in the Civil War or the Intervention... *One could hardly have seen at the front in the four years of the Great War as much slaughter, battle, and conflict as appeared on the stage and screen during the ten weeks of my visit to Moscow'.*'[151] (My italics)

*

Against this background of a strong link between the military and the Arts the appearance of the Red Army at the Congress seems inevitable. Following the speech of Ehrenburg on the evening of the 21st all in the auditorium hear the thud of the drums and the high sound of trumpets. Every head cannot but have turned. The Congress Record shows as follows:

> 'CHAIRMAN. Comrades, the Congress receives the delegation from the soldiers of the Moscow Garrison.(Applause)'.
>
> (*Fanfares, March music, the entry of the Red Army soldiers; applause. "Hurrahs."*)
>
> 'ILYICHEV. [a member of the delegation] From the men of the Red Army, Trainee Commanders, Commanders and Political Commissars of the Moscow Garrison to the First All-Union Congress of Writers...'
>
> '-All Red Army men together: - "*Our fiery Red Army Greetings!*"'
>
> 'ILYICHEV. 'Dear Comrades, the men of the Red Army are not only men who master difficult military technology, they are not only men who study military affairs, they are rounded people who aspire as much as possible to take from that which strengthens mankind and from that culture from which humanity gains'.

The speaker goes on to name writers, like Furmanov (who wrote the Civil War epic *Chapaev*) and Alexei Tolstoy[i], who he declares have touched the hearts of the Red Army by their books on the Revolution and the civil war. He then moves on to the nation's official number one writer.

[i] A distant relation of Leo Tolstoy who returned to Russia after a period abroad in emigration. He was known as 'The Count' and survived the Purges.

'Comrades, you think maybe in naming these other writers I have forgotten one great name? No, Comrades: the soldiers of the Worker Peasant Red Army will never forget Alexei Maximovich Gorky. (loud applause)'.

'Dear Alexei Maximovich! When we came here the soldiers of the Moscow Garrison fervently desired us to tell you the following: The soldiers of the Worker Peasant Red Army love you, value you and understand all you have written. The soldiers love you because you are the first soldier of proletarian culture, you are the first to come to give us the basis on which to create the road to a new, light-filled life. With great pride, with great love we say to you, dear Alexei Maximovich, that your initiatives in this creative-historical civil war have a high value to us. We love you. We really want to say to you that you are our native, beloved and great proletarian writer. (loud applause)...'

'We are not only delighted with you, we love and read you with great attention. Moreover we want to invite you to consider our requests, and we think you will agree with them'.

'Our country, our socialist society, our Red Army would like very much that more books and better books be written about them. We wait for books to be written about the Red Army, about its soldiers and most importantly the ordinary soldier from the ranks in his everyday life. There have been many and good books about the heroes, the great heroes, tempered in the fire of the Civil War but you yourself know how few the books are where the ordinary soldier figures; his daily life, his training. We wait and we think that you will fulfil our task. We hope you'll show the life of those who guard the nation, which literature up till now has done little about. (applause)...'

'...Show how the national culture is increasing, show how the soldiers of the Worker Peasant Red Army are increasing and strengthening. Show how we are striving to master difficult technology, that when the call comes we'll move to defend the borders (applause)'.

'Comrades, we are soldiers and you, you are soldiers. When the time comes, when the Party, when the working class, when the government give the word that it's time to defend the country, we will move as one to defend her borders. (applause) If carrion crows caw at our borders and white guard tanks appear [i] we'll take things in hand and our vehicles will head for the battle in very quick time'.

'We all, soldiers of the Worker Peasant Red Army, know that when the time comes we, all who labour, all the freemen of our 170 million people, will come together in the defence of our country'.

[i] In Soviet terms 'white' was associated with counter-revolutionary, usually right wing or fascist, forces. This reference appears to include Germany in that generality, it being the Soviet Union's principal concern at the time.

'Long live the Communist Party!'

'Long live the Leninist Central Committee!'

'Long live the Worker Peasant Red Army and its beloved People's Commissar Klim Voroshilov!'

'Long live Socialist Culture and the great beloved proletarian writer A. M. Gorky!'

'Long live our Motherland!
Long live our country!
Long live the great Stalin!'

(Loud applause. Cries of "Hurrah". The soldiers leave the hall, scattering flowers and singing songs.)[152]

*

As the soldiers march from the hall, the delegate Vishnyevsky, who later became infamous as a literary bureaucrat, informer and scheming servant of the regime,[153] proposes that an address be given welcoming Marshal Kliment Voroshilov, the Peoples Commissar for Defence. Voroshilov, a brave soldier but incompetent general[i], was no bibliophile but that did not prevent him being adopted at the beginning of the Congress as a member of its Praesidium. Vishnevsky reads out the address:

'THE WELCOME TO PEOPLES COMMISSAR FOR DEFENCE K.E. VOROSHILOV'

'Dear Kliment Efremovich

The first All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, consisting of 500 representatives from the different nationalities within Soviet literature, born in the flame of the October Revolution, tempered in the Civil War and

[i] He was a constant companion to Stalin, who preserved him. After almost allowing the defeat of the Red Army by the tiny Finnish forces in the Winter war of 1940, however, he was sidelined for the rest of the war.

strengthened in the decisive battles of the two socialist five year plans come to you, iron peoples' commissar of defence, heroic leader of the Red Army, defender of mankind's peace and the development of all humanity with all its cares, to give greetings from the bottom of our hearts.

Our address to you and to the Red Army has special significance. The Red Army is both family and school for the majority of us. The Red Army formed our youth and guided us on the wide path of life. The names and numbers of the partisan columns and the regular divisions are for us both dear and unforgettable.

Linking the blood of the Red Army and our own consciously chosen fates we have given our works, written down while the battle was still hot. In these books we have shown to the proletariat of the Union [the USSR] and to the international proletariat, the soldiers, commanders and commissars of Piter [the informal name of St Petersburg and Petrograd], the Far East, Siberia, the Ukraine, the Caucasus, the Urals and Central Asia. Their names and characters will ever remain in literature.

The majority of us here are no longer in the ranks of the army but, with the renewed appearance of an aggressor we charge ourselves with the aim of delivering new, stirring books and within them raising the voice of new and still better aims, the bearers of which are the proletariat.

The writers of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics state that the country and the army will receive as a weapon new types of writing. Writers are showing the new modern Soviet army, the modesty, simplicity and heroism of its soldiers, its high pure morals and its high ideals and strength- a strength with which nothing can be compared.

We are aiming to give you books dealing with likely adversaries, revealing the quality of their forces, their intentions against humanity and the preparations taking place in the rear of the capitalist armies intending to do battle against our proletarian forces.

The writers of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics promise you this: if it becomes necessary to defend this great Motherland against attack, then at the first call of the Party and the government we writers will again be in the army's ranks. Again will live, from first to last, the noble fighting traditions of the Red Army. Remember one: “Beat the enemy till he's senseless.” We are young as before, our stern commander, and ready to fight to the end.

Up with our war cry- “Long live our Red Army, our love and our pride.” (applause)'.[154]

There followed a short address from the Sailor's section of the Civil Defence and Veterans Association Osoviakhin. They asked for more stories of maritime life.[155] The head of that association, a powerful body in Soviet life, was later executed in the Purges.

*

At the time of the Congress the army's special position as national saviour and guardian outside the political arena meant that it had avoided most of the political infighting in the late twenties and early thirties when Stalin was consolidating his power within the Politburo. Up until the early summer of 1937 arrests and show trials had mainly concerned civilians stigmatised as wreckers, saboteurs and Trotskyites, or senior Bolshevik figures, politicians like Radek, Zinoviev and Bukharin, potential challengers Stalin's eyes to his one- man rule. It was therefore a thunderbolt in the eyes of the entire Soviet populace, accustomed to constant and long standing adulation of the Red Army as embodied in the speeches cited above, to read in Pravda on the 11th of June 1937, that eight of its most senior officers, all decorated heroes of the Civil War, were to be tried for treason that very day. The press announcement of the 11th of June stated that the indictment of the USSR Procurator accused the officers of 'violating their military oaths, of treason against the Motherland, of treason against the peoples of the USSR, and of treason against the RKKA[i]'.[156]

The article cites an indictment, without any particulars as to specific offences, stating that they had participated in 'anti-government associations with leading military circles of a foreign state, [later named as Germany- unlikely; three of the generals were Jewish] which conducts an unfriendly policy towards the USSR...' It accused them of betraying secrets and carrying out acts of sabotage to 'weaken the powers of the Red Army' as well as attempting to ensure its defeat in the event of an attack on the Soviet Union. It was also stated that the soldiers had sought to re-establish the 'power of landlords and capitalists in the USSR'.[157] A subsequent report on the 15th, under Voroshilov's name includes, for good measure, and perhaps inevitably, an allegation of association with Trotsky and the preparation of assassination plots against 'the leaders of the Party and the Government'.[158]

Pravda also stated that all of the accused had admitted their complete guilt and that the trial would be held in a closed session of the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court.[159]

[i] Rabochnaya Krestyanskaya Krasnaya Armya- The Worker Peasant Red Army.

There are differing views as to whether there was any basis whatever for questioning the loyalty of the senior officer corps of the Red Army. Alexander Orlov, a senior NKVD functionary, spy[i] and defector to America to avoid his own execution, stated in his memoirs[160] that that the generals had spoken of ridding the country of Stalin. Other commentators such as Conquest are of the view that no evidence at all exists for this theory.[161] None was ever produced publicly. All commentators seem at least to be agreed that the military was the only power with the ability to threaten Stalin's hegemony in thirties Russia and that possibility, to a paranoid personality such as he, was sufficient excuse for any barbarity.

Because of a lack of documentation little concrete information as to the proceedings themselves is available but whatever their nature Pravda's large black headlines above an article on the 12th of June left no doubt, if any existed, as to the outcome:[162]

> **FOR ESPIONAGE AND BETRAYAL OF THE MOTHERLAND – SHOOT THEM!**
>
> 'The Supreme Court has delivered well-founded verdicts against the eight persons listed below, all spies caught red-handed. A special sitting of the Supreme Court of the USSR has found [the eight officers are named without military titles] to be in breach of their military oaths, to have betrayed the Worker-Peasant Army and to have betrayed the Motherland. It was ordered that all be deprived of their military ranks, the defendant Tukhachevsky that of Marshal of the Soviet Union,[a special appointment] and that all be sentenced to the highest measure of criminal punishment – shooting'.[ii]

Recent Russian scholarship generally acknowledges the officers to have been the best of the Red Army General Staff and in an essay on the trial two informed commentators, Vitaly Rappaport and Yuri Alexeev, list them together with ranks. The names are Marshal Tukhachevsky, Deputy Peoples Commissar of Defence, and Chief of Combat Preparedness of the Red Army, Commander Yakir, Commander of the Kiev Military District, Army Commander Uborevich, Commander of the

[i] His one-time cover was that of an American refrigerator salesman in an office off Regent Street.

[ii] The word 'rasstrel' used in Pravda implies a military shooting by firing squad. In fact multiple exhumations have shown that the usual method of execution was a single bullet to the head from behind or, even more terribly, with two. See Satter, p 59

Byelorussian Military District, Corps Commander Eideman, Head of the civil defence organisation Osoaviakhin, Army Commander Kork, head of the main Military Academy, [the Frunze Academy], Corps Commander Putna, lately the Military Attaché in London, Corps Commander Feldman, Head of the Political Administration of the Red Army and Corps Commander Primakov, Deputy Commander of the Leningrad Military District. In addition, Yan Gamarnik, Head of the Political Adminstration of the Red Army and First Deputy Commissar of Defence, described as being involved with those named above, was stated as having committed suicide.[163]

The 'trial' took place in the main court building of the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court in Nikolsky Street, an ancient thoroughfare off Red Square, which in 1932 had been re-named the Street of the 25th of October. It is located a few hundred yards from both the Lubyanka and the House of Unions. Before the Revolution the Nikolsky had been famous for its religious buildings and a famous restaurant, the Slavyanksky Bazaar, was a favourite dining place of, amongst others, Tchaikovsky, Stanislavsky and Chekhov.[164] The Collegium had its own execution cellars, fully employed, almost next door. The juxtaposition of such evil with the Russia of Swan Lake and the Cherry Orchard of only a generation before emphasises the estrangement and dislocation of the Soviet 30s.

There were seven judges, all senior military officers, of the rank if not of the same calibre as the accused, and one chairman, V.V. Ulrikh, President of the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court. He was experienced and had had charge of show trials in 1936 and 1937 under the tutelage of Vishinsky, Stalin's principal prosecutor, the most famous face of the Purges and a man whom Robert Conquest, who had opportunities of meeting him later in life, characterised as 'physically and spiritually a creature who gave life to the image of a "rat in human form"'.[165] Vishinsky controlled the military proceedings from behind the scenes. Of the seven military judges who pronounced the death sentences on that day five apparently showed through their silence a lack of participatory enthusiasm which angered Stalin. Within months they themselves were shot in turn.[166]

As mentioned earlier, because of that other aspect of reality typical of the times – secrecy in all state matters – there is no completely reliable account of the proceedings. In later years however, some small glimpses emerged. Khruschev, in his famous 'Secret Speech' to the Party of 1956 stated that witnesses subsequently describe Yakir's execution. At the moment of being shot he died shouting 'Long live the Party! Long live Stalin!' Stalin, when this was reported, cursed him.[167]

The main attack on the army began almost immediately. Four days later another senior officer was shot 'on a charge only of Trotskyite ideas' and this event signalled the purge of the army and fleet.[168] Within nine days of the trial just under a thousand officers were arrested including 21 Corps Commanders and 37 Commanders of Divisions. At the Army's Moscow headquarters twenty younger generals were executed. In the military academies staff and students were 'rounded up in droves'.[169] In his history of the Soviet -German conflict, *Barbarossa*, Alan Clark lists a short summary of the military executions over the succeeding two years of the Purges. 'Only Budyenny and Voroshilov [long standing creatures of Stalin] remained among the Marshals. Out of eighty members of the 1934 Military Soviet only five were left in September 1938. All eleven Deputy Commissars for Defence were eliminated. Every commander of a military district (including replacements of the first casualties) had been executed by the summer of 1938. Thirteen out of fifteen army commanders, fifty-seven out of eighty-five corps commanders, 110 out of 195 Divisional Commander, 220 out of 406 Brigade Commanders, were executed. But the greatest numerical loss was borne in the Soviet officer corps from the rank of Colonel downward and extending to company commander.'[170] Thousands of officers from the Red Army, Fleet and Air force simply disappeared from their units never to be seen again[i].

Where officers were not murdered, tens of thousands of them were dismissed from the army and thus were rendered liable to civilian arrest by the NKVD with all the consequences that vulnerability entails. Aside from the terrible human cost to all those repressed and to their families (sometimes executed, often sent to the camps) [ii]the effect on Soviet society was not felt fully until the German invasion of Russia in June 1941. So few experienced officers were left to deal with the calamity of invasion that within a few months the Wermacht arrived in the Moscow suburbs leaving in their wake two and a half million Soviet soldiers dead or dying.[171]

*

The murderous process of dismembering the Red Army Officer Corps went on untroubled by comment; no sequel by Feuchtwanger appeared in the Left Book Club's list for 1938. The euphoric tributes, mutual congratulations and professed camaraderie between writer and soldier which had filled the Hall of Columns - '...we are soldiers, and you, you are soldiers...' - was followed by a chill silence. Of the daily slaughter in the Red Army, the writers wrote not a syllable.

[i] For a full discussion of the numbers and extent of the military purges see Conquest, *The Great Terror*, Chapter 7
[ii] For an analysis of specific murders of family members of executed officers see Conquest, p 204

CHAPTER V

Foreigners

'It is also, it is in great part, the stupidity and dishonesty of the attacks against the USSR that today make us defend her with a certain obstinacy. They, the fault-finders, will begin to approve her just when we shall cease to do so; for they will approve her compromises and concessions, which will make the others say: “You see!” but by which she will wander from the end she originally pursued. May our eyes, while continuing to focus on that end, not be led, thereby, to turn away from the USSR'.

Andre Gide, 1935
Pre Soviet visit[172]

'...the smallest protest, the least criticism, is liable to the severest penalties, and in fact is immediately stifled. And I doubt whether in any other country in the world, even Hitler's Germany, thought be less free, more bowed down, more fearful (terrorized), more vassalized'.

Andre Gide, 1936
Post Soviet visit[173]

'27 Nov. Went with Walton to hear the trial of the eight 'wreckers' and 'organisers of intervention'. It is being held in an enormous building which was formerly the Nobles' Club or meeting-place. The great hall packed with people'...'A considerable crowed outside, for the feelings of the people have been cleverly worked on. There were at least eight searchlights in the hall'.

'2 Dec. The 'wreckers' trial drags on. No one can make out the truth, though no-one accepts it at face value. It is a revolting show if they intend to execute the accused- the searchlights, the loudspeakers, the judges and the Public Prosecutor smoking cigarettes, the two judges taken from the workshop bench to sit on the judicial, the propaganda...'.

'6 Dec. Sentence on the eight 'wreckers' is to be given tonight. Crowds were lining up to go in as I went home'.

'8 Dec. Sentence was given at 2.30 a.m. Everyone had to stand while a long considered judgment (sic) was read. Five of the eight are to be shot and three got ten years. Walton said that when the sentence was read out the audience clapped as at a play – many standing on tiptoe and clapping with their hands above their heads so that it might be seen that they were doing their bit. A revolting sight.'

Reader Bullard
British Consul Moscow 1930[174]

'He is a man of the Left,' said Teitelbaum. 'What would he think, I wonder, of this German-Soviet Friendship Treaty?'
Everyone looked at Guy to see what he, another man of the Left, thought of it. He merely said: 'I imagine Russia has a plan. She knows what she is doing'.

Guy Pringle,
The Balkan Trilogy[175]

Now Papa my fate is sealed. I have left you, lost my country, lost my freedom, lost all the delights of life...there remains only to lose in addition my head, which may happen not being able to live through it all. Today is a day which brought me much unpleasantness. I refused to work in the mine.

George Sviridoff, 17
American Citizen
Vorkhuta Camp, Soviet Arctic
17th July 1937[176]

Indeed everywhere in that great city of Moscow there was an atmosphere of harmony and contentment, even of happiness.

Leon Feuchtwanger
Fellow Traveller
Moscow 1937[177]

We talked anxiously and it grew dark. The park gates were closed and we walked together through the streets. 'Is there no chance at all of getting away? Must we wait and let ourselves be slaughtered like sheep?' How could we have suffered everything all those years without criticism? What came out of Moscow was accepted as gospel, and we suppressed all our doubts. We wanted to believe. The alternative was grim. But now we had to pay for our credulity.

That was the last time I saw Kurella. The next time I went to the rendezvous I waited vainly for two hours. He didn't come. Afterwards I learnt that he had been arrested on his way to the railway station.

Margarete Buber-Neumann
German Communist
Party Member
Moscow 1937[178]

Foreigners worried Stalin. Never as *controllable* as Russians, they seemed to him to be both necessary evils and potential carriers of political disease, whether as engineer specialists starting up a factory or Fellow Traveller journalists, vital for successful pursuit of the propaganda war in the West. Their disparate origins and attitudes, their forbidden but lingering habits of independent thought, meant that at any moment Stalin's greatest hate and fear, a differing opinion, could manifest itself. Even within Communism, if outside the Party his ideas were continually mocked and derided from abroad; Trotsky's deft barbs in the Bulletin of the Opposition continued throughout the 1930s.

The theme of foreigners and their relationship to the Soviet Union and its politics in the thirties is a large one. It includes visiting drawing room socialists like George Bernard Shaw who returned from Russia to English lanes and tea as well as convinced Communists who found in the Promised Land a grave. It also includes diplomats, spies, Comintern workers, writers from St Germain and Popular Front politicians, Russians like Isaac Babel with contacts in the West, returning Commissars from the war in Spain and young men who in Glasgow or Cambridge boarded a train for Barcelona not to return. Many were politically committed but there were also others who in the economic doldrums of the thirties were drawn into the political maelstrom of that era through hardship at home; after the October Revolution those who saw a decent working future in the newly created Soviet Union travelled there from all over Europe and North America. Disillusionment and worse was to be their lot. In a troubled decade all of the above categories of persons whirled in a confusing haze of ideals and ideology, their ends various and usually, if within Stalin's control, bad.

*

Stalin needed to mobilise and maintain support for the Soviet Union amongst the intellectuals of the Western democracies and the populations they influenced, especially with the increased danger from Nazi Germany as the thirties wore on. The Congress year, 1934, also saw the release of Triumph of the Will[179] which Stalin must surely have viewed in the private Kremlin cinema; its message of Teutonic mass ardour will not have been lost on him. Leaving aside the military implications, the sequence in the film in which fifty two thousand immaculately uniformed agricultural workers shoulder polished spades as one must have prompted an uneasy comparison with the wrecked shambles of Soviet agriculture following collectivisation. In order to harness widespread anti-Nazi feelings as pro-Soviet, he needed writers, actors, film makers, theatre people and journalists to adopt, or at least not obstruct, Soviet policies. If not actually members of the Party

these people of the creative industries became part of a group whose name has entered English as the Fellow Travellers. The term, 'Pahputchiki' in Russian, ('Put' is a path; a paputchik is one who follows it) appeared in the 1920s, could have positive or negative connotations depending on the user and featured prominently and disparagingly in the writings of Trotsky. In Soviet terms It came to mean all those, foreign and domestic, who broadly accepted the Soviet regime and its aims, but who had not joined the Party.[180] A number of them addressed the Congress during that August fortnight from the ranks of the 40 foreign guests. The most important speech was that of Andre Malraux, who, with typical grandiosity, states that whereas Soviet writers are able to write for the Proletariat, 'we revolutionary writers of the West' only had the opportunity to "work against the bourgeoisie"[181] among whose comfortable ranks Malraux evidently did not count himself.[i] He does however, almost alone amid the formulaic speeches, make a plea for individuality. 'If writers are really engineers of the soul [in Stalin's phrase] it's necessary not to forget that the most important function of an engineer is that of invention. Art is not subordinate - art is conquest'.[182] While a famous and protected foreigner might be able to utter these views in the Hall of Columns, Soviet reality demanded total conformity. As evidenced by the destruction of Boris Pilnyak considered in the Chapter VI a Soviet writer voicing the same views would be courting death.

This incompatibility between Soviet reality and the need for the artist to speak individually and freely was vividly illustrated by the writings of one of the most important Thirties Fellow Traellers, Andre Gide. His status in Soviet Russia was high because of his position in pre-war letters in France and his pronouncements (if not always sufficiently and sternly Bolshevik for Moscow's taste) in favour of the "unprecented"[183] Communist experiment.[ii] Though not a delegate he sent his greetings to the Congress and despite his absence he is mentioned in the speeches nineteen times.[184] His hopeful travelling however did not survive Soviet reality. In 1936 he made a visit to the Soviet Union and on his return to France wrote one of the Thirties' most famous books, Retour de l'URSS.[185] In it, whilst still clinging to the *ideals* of the Revolution which had caused him to write in 1932 that 'I have declared as loud and clear as I could my sympathy (and the word is weak) for the USSR and for all it represents in our eyes, in our hearts, despite all the imperfections that are still held up to us',[186] he concluded that those ideals had changed, a great deal for the worse, because of the "man at its head".[187] Despite leavening the book with positive observations on charming

[i] He later became one of De Gaulle's most devoted tribunes.

[ii] See Andre Gide, Journals 1889-1949 pp 539,541,549,553,564,593.

Russians he had met and splendid childrens' schools he had been shown his overall conclusions were damning: art and life was miserable and submission and conformism was everywhere. 'Every morning' he declared, 'the Pravda teaches them [the Soviet population] just what they should know and think and believe. And he who strays from the path had better look out!'[188] He noted also that any dissenting voices are condemned as 'Trotskyists' so that 'one begins to wonder if Lenin himself were to return to earth today...?'[189]

In Soviet terms this was heresy, especially that last sentiment. The book was a severe shock to Stalin just as he was trying to engineer the construction of the Popular Front in France through mobilisation of the broad left. Gide was never forgiven; immediately a campaign was begun to vilify him in all Soviet controlled publications and organisations, at home and abroad.[190]

There were many such organisations. Another aspect of the relationship between foreigners and Soviet Russia was the use of front organisations in the West to influence public opinion in order to further Soviet foreign policy.[i] These activities were normally centred in Berlin until the advent of Hitler to power in 1933, thereafter in Paris. Bodies with odd names, such as the World Committee for the Relief of the Victims of German Fascism cropped up after the Congress, or were already in existence at the time. From modest premises (the above 'committee' was run out of a flat in the Rue Mondétour by les Halles) Soviet policy, trumpeted or whispered as occasion and readership required, moved into the wider world more easily than would serial diktats emerging from behind the Kremlin walls.[ii] Space does not allow consideration of the two men most concerned in the Soviet propaganda battle in Western Europe, Willi Muntzenberg and Otto Katz, but their ends are significant in that they typify the fate of those foreigners who were destroyed by the regime in whose service they spent their lives.[iii] Muntzenberg, a giant of propaganda, broke with Moscow as a result of the Purges and at the Fall of France was found strangled in a wood, probably by his Soviet companion. Katz, returning as a hero to a newly Communist Czechoslovakia after the war was hanged in Prague as a capitalist spy in the Stalinist Slansky show trial of 1952.

---

[i] For a full examination of this area see Stephen Koch, *Stalin, Willi Muntzenberg and the Seduction of the Intellectuals.*

[ii] Another of the cover institutions, the 'Institute for the Study of Fascism' was run out of flat at 25, Rue Buffon near the Jardin des Plantes in the Fifth Arrondisement of Paris. Alone among the myriad Soviet vehicles of propaganda it had the distinction of providing unpaid employment and one meal daily, a 'thick,purée-like German soup of lentils, peas or potatoes, occasionally with delicious bits of sausage swimming in it' to the destitute Arthur Koestler, later the author of *Darkness at Noon*, one of the most important works against totalitarianism of the 20th century. A rare Stalinist nutritional mistake. See Arthur Koestler, *Invisible Writing* p 298.

[iii] See Sean McMeekin, *The Red Millionaire* and Jonathan Miles, *The Nine Lives of Otto Katz* respectively.

The ideological basis for the suspicion and destruction of those who had come from abroad to build Socialism was set out by Stalin in a speech to the Central Committee of the Party in March 1937. The implications for any person with a link, however tenuous, to abroad, were clear:

> 'It has been proved as definitely as twice two are four, that the bourgeois states send to each other spies, wreckers, diversionists and sometimes also assassins...The question arises why should bourgeois states be milder and more neighbourly towards the Soviet Socialist state … Would it not be more true, from the point of view of Marxism, to assume that to the rear of the Soviet Union the bourgeois states should send twice and three times as many wreckers, spies, diversionists and murderers'?[191]

These could only come from the foreigners living in the Soviet Union. The bright sentiments of an international Socialist brotherhood voiced repeatedly at the 1934 Congress dimmed quickly to a dark world, confused and murky, where those strangers who had come to the USSR to help build Socialism heard Stalin pronounce their fate:

> '...We shall have to extirpate those persons, grind them down without stopping, without flagging, for they are the enemies of the working class, they are traitors to our homeland!'[192]

And so 'those persons' were extirpated and ground down. Stalin's orders did not of course only apply to those born abroad. His paranoia devoured Russians as well in their millions but in the great mass of people covering the Soviet Union foreigners and those connected to them were especially vulnerable as their obvious distinctness made it impossible to hide. In a very few cases individuals were able to use foreign contacts in order to survive. Victor Serge, one of the great voices of the Revolution and a declared member of the Trotskyite Opposition exiled to Siberia in the early Thirties, was fortunate enough to have vocal and influential connections in the West at a time whom Stalin needed to placate. His case was pleaded at the 1935 Paris Writers Congress attended by amongst others, Babel, Pasternak, E.M. Forster and Virginia Woolf. The Communists present tried repeatedly to prevent a hearing but were unsuccessful due to the efforts of persons not cowed by Stalin's writ. These friends were able to render his execution politically troublesome and so he was deported rather than shot.[193] His luck was rare and his resultant memoirs one of the few books by an eye-witness of the corroded aftermath of the Revolution.[194]

The general position was quite otherwise. As Anne Appelbaum notes in her study of the Soviet prison and camp system, *Gulag*, "'foreigners' were always considered suspect'. Such people included 'citizens of other countries, people who might have contacts abroad, or people who might have some link, imaginary or real, to a foreign country. No matter what they did they were always candidates for arrest....'[195] She cites the memoirs of a black emigrant, Robert Robinson, who moved to Moscow in 1930. He wrote that 'Every single black I knew in the early 1930s who became a Soviet citizen disappeared from Moscow within seven years'.[196]

*

Another category involved Russians who had foreign contacts. The interrogation records of Isaac Babel, revealed at the end of the Communist era, show how a Soviet citizen with precious links abroad found they had become manacles. He had many such links with France. Under prolonged interrogation he was forced to implicate both Russians and foreigners such as Andre Malraux, a fellow delegate to the 1934 Congress and a long standing friend of Soviet Russia, as spies and enemies of the Soviet Union.[197] At his 'trial' he bravely renounced all such falsities 'prompted by my own faint-hearted behaviour during the cross-examination'[198] but inevitably it availed him nothing. He was shot at 1.30 a.m. on the 27th of January 1940 and his cremated remains thrown into a common pit in the grounds of the Don Monastery in central Moscow.[199] As an illustration of the inter-connection between Soviet literary matters and politics, the timing of his arrest (on the 16th of May 1939) and its aftermath may be significant in that they took place during the summer of secret negotiations behind the Nazi-Soviet friendship Pact signed on the 23rd of August 1939. As a result France, Malraux and the remnants of the Popular Front were no longer of any significance to Stalin. Babel realised this. He confessed himself lost to a fellow prisoner who, in a similar NKVD fairy tale, had become a spy but of the German-Japanese variety: ' When the German-Soviet alliance was concluded, Babel downheartedly remarked that he was now quite certain to be shot and congratulated me on having probably avoided a similar fate'. [200]

*

As well as recognising that certain friends abroad were no longer necessary Stalin also decided that

the same principle applied at home. Within the USSR itself the organisation charged with the successful spread of international Revolution was, as the thirties progressed, already slipping from its previous position as the world vanguard of the Bolshevik dream.[201] The Comintern had begun to lose influence in the Kremlin from the mid-twenties when Stalin began to formulate his policy of 'Socialism in one Country' following the failed attempted revolts in Germany, Hungary and Austria. This policy of course was contrary to Marxist and Leninist theory which envisaged the success of Socialism only in international terms and under conditions of constant revolution in the developed European countries, especially Germany. To this view Trotsky still held; it became one of the major fault lines of theory and policy between his camp and Stalin's.

The Comintern, by its very nature, involved foreigners, foreigners whom Stalin did not trust. His solution was to label them all as potential spies and traitors. In February 1937 he told Georgi Dimitrov [i] the Bulgarian Communist running the Comintern, and acolyte of Stalin, that 'all of you there in the Comintern are working in the hands of the enemy'.[202] As a result the Comintern was virtually annihilated. Margarete Buber-Neumann's memoirs, *Under Two Dictators,* recalls vividly the arrest of her husband in the Hotel Lux, a Moscow Comintern hostel, who was a senior German Communist and Comintern functionary. This followed the NKVD decree in mid-February 1937 ordering the arrest of thousands of German Communists in Russia as Trotskyites and counter-revolutionaries.[203] He was executed later in the year and her arrest, as with many other foreign Communists, soon followed. Against the odds she survived the Soviet camps only to be handed over to the Gestapo as part of a secret protocol of the Nazi-Soviet pact whereby nationals of each country held by the other were exchanged. These persons, pushed across the railway bridge at Brest-Litovsk, included those who were both Communist and Jewish and who had come to Russia to build Socialism, their fate a particularly sordid betrayal.[204]

Among the many nationalities who fell victim within the Comintern the Germans and the Poles seem to have fared the worst as being the two most important Communist parties whose members were in Russia because of the illegality of the Party in their respective nations. All twelve members of the Polish Central Committee were shot together with many others.[205] Conquest cites sources showing ten thousand Poles shot in Moscow at the time of the 1938 Bukharin show trial alone among which number will be both Comintern and non-Comintern persons.[206] Within the German

[i] A defendant in the trial following the famous Reichstag fire trial of 1933. He was acquitted after a massive propaganda campaign by Willi Muntzenberg.

Communist Party (KPD) whose members had escaped to sanctuary in Moscow after 1933, Stalin killed more of its leading Communists than Hitler; 41 out of 68 members of its Central Committee dying by shooting or in the Gulag.[207] In the literary world Soviet Russia was home to many German writers of Socialist sympathies. Their end[i] was the same as those who worked for the Comintern. They must have thought with bitterness on the book written by one of the most famous of their number, Leon Feuchtwanger, whose *1937 Moscow* painted the Soviet Union in fine bright colours whilst many of his compatriots were being taken from that city's streets and murdered. He himself lived abroad.

*

Another, and less well documented, component of foreigners in the Soviet Union at the time of the Congress was the considerable number of people working in industry as part of the first and second five year plans. Amongst them, there was a large body of emigrants, almost forgotten now, who came from across the Atlantic. Had any of the delegates to the Congress taken some time away from the endless speeches and strolled south- west through the hot streets to the Stalin stadium opposite the Gorky Park of Culture and Rest they would have seen an enthusiastic Soviet crowd cheering on a 'beisbol' game whose participants whistled and stamped, shouting in the adenoidal tones of New York or the long vowels of the mid-West.[208] The game had been played informally in Moscow since the arrival of the first emigrants to Russia and in early 1932 a city league was set up in Gorky Park itself. In the summer of that year the Soviet Supreme Council of Physical culture announced the decision to adopt baseball as a 'national sport'.[209] The August 1934 match was between two rival teams, the Moscow Foreign Workers team captained by Arnold Preedin, a cheerful young man from Boston, and the Karelian Americans, a side based in Petrozavodsk, a town 400 kilometres north of Leningrad on the heavily wooded Finnish border. The latter side was drawn from American lumberjacks and ski-makers and their captain was Albert 'Red' Lonn from Detroit. In front of a happy crowd, shouting 'we want baseball' (meaning a formal inter-city league) the Karelians won 14-9. Arnold Preedin, who Tim Tzouliadis in his book '*The Forsaken*' describes as appearing in photographs curly haired and "usually pictured grinning" conceded gracefully, later thanking the

[i] See David Pike, *German Writers in Soviet Exile 1933-1945 f*or a full examination of the plight of German writers trapped in Soviet Russia.

'genuine fourteen carat rabid fans' for turning out in support. It is not difficult to hear the American voice or to imagine his rueful smiling acknowledgement that Albert Lonn's team deserved to be crowned 'the USSR champions of 1934' together with his promise to give them 'the sweetest trimming they ever got in their lives in 1935'.[210] These words sound incongruous in Thirties Moscow, their innocence a prelude to much sadness for the Americans in Soviet Russia. As yet, none of that was known; a photograph of two American baseball teams of the time, showing a mixed group from the Moscow Foreigners team and their opponents from the Gorky Automobile Factory, show tired young men smiling at the lens in home-made uniforms covered in cyrillic lettering. Their happy arms are thrown round one another's shoulders and the grass of Gorky Park is covered with bats and baseball gloves.[211]

Within two summers everything changed. Many of these players and their families and friends who supported them were not to live through the Purges or, if they were lucky enough to survive, were to spend many years in the Gulag. The fates of the two captains of the 1934 game embodied that of the other Americans; Red Lonn from Detroit served fourteen years in the camps, sometimes eating rats to survive, and Arnold Preedin, the cheerful good sportsman from Boston and the Huckleberry Finn figure of Gorky Park, was with his brother Walter arrested and shot. They lie today in a vast communal grave outside Moscow with twenty thousand others. The only reason their names and final places of rest, if the term is applicable, are known is because they form part of an NKVD archive which was released in the autumn of 1991 and shown to Vitaly Shentalinsky a campaigning Russian writer who spearheaded an investigatory commission as Communism fell.[212]

The list, known as Depository Number 7, is a record of executions at one Moscow site at a former army firing range near the village of Butovo, eleven miles west of central Moscow. Up to four hundred people a night were shot there.[213] The lists are bound, page after page of surnames each ticked with a red pencil, into thick directories like telephone books. Depository Number 7 alone has four hundred volumes.[214] 20,675 persons are recorded as having been murdered at this single site between the 8th of August 1937 and the 19th of October 1938.[215]

*

The baseball players of Gorky Park were only part of a greater emigration. The American Depression forced others, desperate to find work, to look eastwards to a country represented by both Soviet propaganda and Western Fellow Travellers as an Eden for the working man.

As early as the mid- twenties an American magazine article summed up a certain view of the new Soviet experiment:

> 'There is much to say about Soviet Russia. It is a new world to explore, Americans know almost nothing about it. But the story filters through, and it rouses heroism. As long as the Red Flag waves over the Kremlin, there is hope in the world. There is something in the air of Soviet Russia that throbbed in the air of Pericles' Athens; the England of Shakespeare; the France of Danton; the America of Walt Whitman...This is the first man learning in agony and joy how to think. Where else is there hope in the world?'[216]

In 1931 a book appeared in American bookshops which described the new world. *New Russia's Primer: The Story of the Five-Year Plan* became one of the highest selling titles in American non-fiction for the preceding ten years and was on the best-seller list for seven months. In simple language it described clean factories like cathedrals lit by huge windows, places where 'Not the lungs of men, but powerful ventilators will suck in and swallow, the dirt, dust, and shavings of the factories...Socialism is no longer a myth, a phantasy of mind...We ourselves are building it...And this better life will not come as a miracle: we ourselves must create it. But to create it we need knowledge: we need strong hands, yes, but we need strong minds too...Here it is....your Five-Year Plan'.[217]

That year an advertisement was placed in American newspapers offering six thousand jobs in Russia for workers with skills. Over a hundred thousand applications were received and ten thousand Americans were hired.[218]

The words and actions of those who decided to go to Soviet Russia, in the light of what happened to them, have a pathos all of their own. A man called Harry Dalhart wrote to the American State Department as the president of the 'Soviet emigration society' of Wichita, Kansas seeking advice about going to Russia in a group. He wrote on behalf of '342 members, all under forty years of age'. They included ninety two 'overseas world war veterans: all native born Americans'.[219] A mechanic from San Francisco wrote to a Moscow paper asking if it would better his chances to change his

name to a Russian one 'with that -ovitch or itsky ending'.[220] From Virginia a group of Shenandoah Valley miners was ready to 'go to Russia with their picks and drills and any other machinery that they have enough to buy'. Other groups sold everything they had. One used the money to buy American machinery for a collective farm near Moscow where they intended to settle and another group, sixteen people from San Francisco, clubbed together all their assets- tools, a Lincoln car, savings- so they could buy tractors for the new 'Portland' commune near Kiev.[221] Their sincerity and courage, ready to cross the world to a place where they could not so much as speak the language, is affecting even at these years distance. Their words embody a willingness, even a determination, to believe. It is impossible not to think on the faces of those men and women on the day when the realities of Soviet life became irrevocably clear, still less when they were forced onto a Gulag transport train or lead out to die alone in a darkened field.

*

Because of the lack of records or their continued retention by Russian authorities it is not possible to trace the fates of all those emigrants from America who had been arriving in Russia in the early 30s. There are some clues however. In his book, *The Forsaken,* Tim Tzouliades cites a number of examples where he was able to gain some clues as to what happened. In one, a commission set up by the American Government after the Second World War recorded the testimony of a survivor of the Gulag who had seen a 'column of prisoners, half-frozen in threadbare clothes, driven forward like cattle by their NKVD guards. Unable to speak Russian, these men could only repeat "American. American" and "eat, eat"'.[i]

Tzouliades was able to find some other answers in individual cases which shed some light on the fate of the Americans. In October 1938 the parents of a young American woman named Mrs Bertha Kylma of Painestale, Michigan wrote to the then Secretary of State Cordell Hull reporting her detention, as well that of many other Americans, and asking for help.

> '….We have definite proof from her – by letter, that she is being held prisoner for no reason at all and that she is being forced to suffer untold misery. She says several hundred other women of American citizenship are also being imprisoned on several islands which are in Lake Ladoga'. [ii]

[i] See Tzouliades p 288. This evidence arose in 1948 and may have related to Americans found in German POW camps by the Red Army and not released.

[ii] Lake Ladoga is situated north-east of the present St Petersburg, formerly Leningrad.

There are other instances of letters being smuggled out of camps and routed to the West presumably by bribery or by courageous Russians with access to the outside world. Two such extraordinary letters from a young New Yorker to his father were passed on by the latter to the State Department, again with the request for help. The writer was George Sviridoff, 'a sixteen or seventeen year old fair-haired boy'[222] who had tried to stowaway on the Kim, a ship going from Soviet Russia to America. Upon discovery he was sentenced to ten years for attempting to leave the Soviet Union illegally. The first letter, dated the 10th of July 1936, two years after the Congress, spoke of his detention in the huge Arctic mining camp of Vorkuta, a place of dread[i], where he writes that 'the material conditions are all right but you know, Papa, in one word, a camp gets you in the end...' He ends the letter with a request for food 'suitable for the North', photographs, 'one sweater with a fastener' and some 'views of New York'. He asks his father to reply immediately as 'Time is precious'.[223]

The second letter is dated a year later on the 17th of July 1937, a time when the Purges were in spate. Its contents indicate that in his earlier letter he wanted to spare his father the truth but could no longer do so. The tone is sombre, the more so when the age of the writer is considered:

> 'Greetings dear Papa,
>
> ….I have had one letter from you during three years and two months[this perhaps indicates at least the approximate date of his arrival in Soviet Russia - the early summer of 1934 - shortly before the Congress opened.] All hope has collapsed... Dear Papa, I did not want to upset you up to now, but it would be even sadder were you not to know my actual situation and whereabouts...
> Now Papa, my fate is sealed. I have left you, lost my country, lost my freedom, lost all the delights of life...there remains only to lose in addition my head, which may happen not being able to live through it all. Today is a day which brought me much unpleasantness. I refused to work in the mine.
>
> Your loving son,
> George Sviridoff'.[224]

[i] 'One of the largest and toughest camps in the entire Gulag system'. Per Appelbaum, *Gulag*, p 94.

There was no further contact from George Sviridoff. His end can only be imagined. A sympathetic State Department official in Russia wrote in June 1938, a year later, a long note in George's file concerning the fate of all Americans deemed by the Soviet state to be Soviet citizens, emphasizing that 'The Soviet Government has the administrative power to arrest and hold incommunicado indefinitely any American citizen in the Soviet Union...' and recognising that 'the situation is such that these people are virtually at the mercy of the Soviet Authorities...' His recommendation was that America should refuse to recognise the purported unilateral naturalisation of Americans without proof of its voluntary nature or, alternatively, should publicise the true state of affairs.[225] The former course might not have achieved very much given the regime's ability through torture to force a prisoner to say or do anything but in any event, there was no publicity and the American Government did nothing. That stance reflected another aspect of reality for foreigners in Stalin's Russia of the 1930s – they were completely alone. Given the contents of George Sviridoff's letter he was probably dead before the State Department note was penned.

Space does not permit further examination here of the fates of other individual Americans or groups of emigrants but their world and its destruction is chronicled in Tzouliades' book, the main source for this chapter. A few examples must serve to outline their plight. The Foreign Workers Club and its baseball team was shut down and the Anglo-American school for emigrants was declared to be a 'spy centre' [226] with all that that meant in Thirties Russia. Foreigners clamouring at their embassies for repatriation were arrested on the streets outside with no diplomatic protests being made.[227] Americans were recruited by the NKVD to inform on other emigrants as the price of their continued relative freedom. Those denounced disappeared.[228] A young man of 24, Alexander Gelver from Oshkosh Wisconsin, went to his Embassy for repatriation then was picked up on the pavement outside; a single laconic entry on his NKVD file records his death on New Year's Day 1938.[229] The lives of those who were not executed but who disappeared into the Gulag are given life in the memoirs of a twenty one year old from Buffalo, New York, Thomas Sgovio, who had come as a teenager to the USSR with his family to escape the Depression. Arrested outside after an Embassy visit he was taken to the Lubyanka and given a piece of paper with '5' written on it. It was his first sentence.[230] When it expired he was simply given another.

Briefly at liberty after eight years his former girlfriend, an American NKVD informer, betrayed him and he was sent back to the camps. Against every imaginable portent he survived the terrible

Kolyma gold fields[i] (by luck he obtained an inside job) and on Stalin's death his sister, writing to the authorities that 'Please remember that of the nineteen years my brother has lived in the Soviet Union sixteen of them have been in prison', finally obtained his release.[231] He eventually managed to get back to America and in memory of all those who had been taken wrote his life story.[232] Under an Arizona sun this child of the Depression would later recall a dark Russian forest and a rare Gulag showing of an American film left over from the war. It was *The Grapes of Wrath.*

***

[i] Even getting there was perilous. One large ship, caught in the Autumn ice of 1933, did not arrive until the following year (the year of the Writers Congress). None of the thousands of prisoners on board survived. On the Kolyma outside work was compulsory until the temperature fell to minus 50 Centigrade. Conquest, p 326. Conquest's research from Soviet and non-Soviet sources indicates that of the 8 million persons in the camps by 1938 the survival rate was no more than 10%. See Conquest, *The Great Terror,* p 485

CHAPTER VI

Boris Pilnyak – The Destruction of a Writer

Mirror mirror on the wall
Who's the fairest of them all?
And the mirror answered

I'd prefer not to speak about politics

Soviet variant

Not every delegate to the Congress spoke. Some were too junior in years or lacked sufficient stature in the literary world to be invited to the podium; others, famous and acclaimed, kept silent for quite different reasons.

Boris Pilnyak, even now little known in the West, was described by Victor Serge, the memoirist of the Revolution, as 'one of the greatest soviet writers,'[233] Gleb Struve in his magisterial history '*Russian Literature under Lenin and Stalin 1917-1953'*, dedicates the volume to Babel, Mandelshtam and Pilnyak.[234] Pilnyak's multiple works were published in ten languages and he was fervently admired by those such as Simone de Beauvoir[235] and Anna Akhmatova, his friend.[236] He was a man who had described the revolution as 'a rebirth of some ancient Slavic quality in the Russian soul and an event of 'cleansing fire'.[237] Those flames would end his life but not before he was ground down and forced to renounce his beliefs. Worst of all he was also made to collaborate on the writing of a book not with another writer but with a man who would head the NKVD during its most awful epoch, Nikolai Yezhov, whose name is one of the most reviled in the history of Russia.

Pilnyak's life, though adorned with the material benefits of a successful Soviet writer, had hidden costs and painful contradictions. In the Russia in which he found himself, the Russia of forced collectivisation and famine, deportations of whole peoples, mass arrests, legalised murder and random death, Pilnyak was obliged to make choices as to how he was going to live. These cannot but have caused him sorrow. His instincts were civilised but like many others he signed petitions calling for the deaths of engineers being tried as 'wreckers' and 'saboteurs' when he knew the charges were false,[238] and though he would have known that a refusal to sign would not have prevented the executions, his tortured words of assent must have festered like a wound. His participation in the regime's realities did not end there. He also, like Babel, sought out the company of influential members of the NKVD as insurance and protection and in so doing learned sordid details of the minutiae of executions from tipsy secret policemen.[239] There is no evidence he was a cruel or evil man; all sources show him, whilst accepting the Revolution as part of Russia's destiny, to be a writer in love with words and memories of an erstwhile land; evening cupolas above still water, boisterous market days by city walls, and wise old men. He was a romantic in an era shorn of gentleness. What it cost him to take wine with executioners is not known.

Pilnyak's tribulations demonstrate how difficult it was for writers during the thirties to navigate the tortuous paths that the Revolution had scattered through the altered topography of both literary and

ordinary life. These paths often enough led to catastrophe but even if they were recognised from afar as dangerous, they were not always avoidable. Conformity did not ensure safety.

*

Boris Andreevich Pilnyak, real surname Wolgau[i] though little remembered now outside Russia, was at the beginning of the 1930s one of the best known and successful writers in the country. He was born in 1894, had reached his early twenties at the coming of the Revolution and at the time of the Writers Congress was in early middle age, widely published, strong and settled in creativity. His work had emerged during the complicated post-revolutionary period in which stubborn traces of the immediate past mingled with new directions. In a time of relative toleration, factions of writers, poets and artists developed in all spheres of artistic life. In his memoirs Ilya Ehrenburg, one of the few writers of that epoch who was able to live abroad and to survive and prosper because of his uses to Stalin, remembered the window of a bookshop where a 'tree of Soviet literature' was displayed. It showed, from left to right, branches tagged with "proletarians", "LEF"[ii] "peasant poets", "left- wing fellow- travellers", "centrist fellow-travellers", "right- wing fellow-travellers", and "neo-bourgeois".[240] Grafted on to that tree might be a number of other terms, organisations and tendencies which complicated the position still further. These included the Futurists, splintering into Cubo-futurists, Ego-Futurists and others RAPP, the Association of Proletarian Writers, a hard line group responsible for many vicious literary attacks before it was disbanded in 1932, and members of the All-Russian Writers Union (disbanded in 1929 and not connected to the later, all-powerful Soviet Writers Union)[iii].Remnants of other, pre-revolutionary, tendencies still lingered though of course without official approval. The lyricism in the work of Alexander Blok and the Symbolists, representing a mystical view of Russia, still entranced some readers of Russian. Amongst the most famous were the Acmeists who embraced 'the classical poetic principles of clarity, concision and the precise expression of emotional experience'.[241] and who were to become one of the most famous and lasting of all the literary sets, its best known voices being Akhmatova and Mandelstam.

It was during the post-revolutionary period that Boris Pilnyak began to be noticed as a writer of

[i] A name coming from the Volga Germans, settlers brought in by Catherine the Great to advance agriculture. Pilnyak was of mixed Russian, German and Tartar descent.
[ii] LEF was a particularly left wing literary grouping in which Mayakovsky and others participated.
[iii] For a full discussion of the varied groupings of the time see Struve, pp 14-38.

short stories and other works. By 1922 he had become the most popular writer in the Soviet Union[242], his shorter earlier works being complemented by the publication in that year of one of the first novels of the Revolution. It was called *Goly God* (The Naked Year), and describes, through characters from all walks of life, from dispossessed aristocrats to Bolshevik 'leathern men in leathern jackets',[i] the struggles of 1918 and 1919 in the immediate aftermath of the Communist victory. Struve describes Pilnyak's first novel as 'fragmentary and disjointed, without a unified plot or a central character' and states flatly that 'To tell the story of the Naked Year is a hopeless task.'[243] For the purposes of this thesis it is not necessary to analyse the novel save to note briefly, in order to illustrate Pilnyak's development, Struve's listing of its various elements. These include a love for pre-Petrine Russia, the rich colloquial language of the villages, 'historico-philisophical digressions' and its 'musical' fragmented structure in which time's exact meaning is lost. Pilnyak's style also favoured the use of symbolic and stylistic devices. These include many references to the Kitay Gorod ('Chinatown)[ii] in Moscow, an old quarter to the immediate east of the Kremlin which he uses to show Russia's 'dual face' to both Occident and Orient. Another technique, playing with time and perception, was the idiosyncratic insertion of identical pages of the book in different and unrelated chapters.[244]

In general terms Struve believes that despite some elements which 'smack of a cheap imitation of Dostoyevsky' and others embodying art which ‘has a second hand flavor, certain ready-made patterns merely cut to post-Revolutionary measure', nonetheless Pilnyak's vision has many valuable elements including his love of language, his humanism and sympathy with oppressed people and above all, his independence and courage which were 'conspicuous amongst his contemporaries’.[245] He quotes Pilnyak as seeing himself having “the artists's 'bitter duty' in being honest with himself and with Russia”.[246]

In 1924 (the year in which Lenin died) Pilnyak contributed to a composite book ‘Writers About Art and About Themselves'. In extracts from his diaries, submitted in place of an article, he stated his creed:

[i] An iconic form of Bolshevik dress, especially popular with the Secret Police. See Figes, *Natasha's dance* p 444

[ii] The accepted modern Russian usage. It's original medieval meaning was 'defended city.' See Berton p 34. 'Kitay' means Chinese, 'gorod' means town or city. Thus Eisenstein's stentorian Alexander Nevsky: 'V Novgorod!'. The English translation - 'To :Newtown!' is less heroic.

'I am not a Communist and therefore do not admit that I have to be a Communist and write as a Communist, while I admit that the Communist power in Russia is determined, not by the will of the Communists, but by the historical destinies of Russia, and, inasmuch as I want to trace those destinies (as best I can and as my conscience and my intellect prompt me), I am with the Communists, that is, inasmuch as the Communists are with Russia I am with them, too... I admit that I am much less interested in the fortunes of the Russian Communist party than in the fate of Russia, the Russian Communist party being for me only a link in the history of Russia.'

'I know that I must be absolutely objective...and I admit that I may be wrong in everything, but I also know that I cannot, nor know not how to, nor ever shall, write otherwise than I do, even if I wanted to do violence to myself...'

'In recent years our state has been setting up incubators for Party literature, providing them with food rations, and nothing came of it, or rather bad things came of it, for when these people touched art they stopped being politicians, without becoming artists...Hence another conclusion: I believe that a writer must care only about his manuscripts, about their being good, and the honesty and validity of his Party-school-social membership card is his own personal business which has nothing to do with literature'.[247]

He was to prove faithful to these beliefs as the twenties wore on but two further novels, in which daring exceeded wisdom, placed Pilnyak in a vulnerable position as the decade closed. The first of these concerned the death, on the operating table not the battlefield, of one of the Revolution's greatest soldiers. The second related to a tale set in an old world Russian town in which he revived and savoured the early romantic ideals of the Revolution.

The first novel, written when a divergence of views was still possible, focussed on an event far away from the Soviet literary world; it was to cast a long shadow on its author. In the mid - Twenties a much celebrated hero of the Civil War, Mikhail Frunze, had been appointed the Deputy People's Commissar for War and though nominally Trotsky's deputy in fact took over control of the Red Army. Frunze, in Conquest's words, 'seems to have sympathised with the Zinoviev-Kamenev group' which later was wiped out by Stalin in the first main show trial in 1936.[248]

Barely a year after his appointment Frunze became ill in the late summer of 1925 and after an operation, rumoured in Moscow to have taken place on the orders of the Central Committee (i.e. a body already being controlled by Stalin)he died on the operating table. As Conquest points out such a rumour, hinting at a possible rival being eliminated, would be entirely understandable in 1936 or

1937, when to be a possible opponent of Stalin was a certain death warrant, but its public currency in the capital as early as 1925 (before Stalin had 'given any precedents') was 'extraordinary'.[249] Such rumour and intrigue might have seemed to Pilnyak a good basis for a story. He wrote it, the novella *Tale of the Unextinguished Moon.* If there was any latent ambiguity about the title, its stark sub-title, *Murder of the Army Commander,* removed it.

Whether the rumours citing Stalin's participation in the death of Frunze were correct or not (and the argument continues still among Russian historians) their public currency clearly had a political dimension. Pilnyak, avowedly non-political, seems to have either ignored or failed to see the implications. Stalin had begun his rise to unfettered power immediately after the death of Lenin. On the 23rd of January 1924, two days after the death of Lenin, Stalin led the Central Committee to the former's convalescent home to collect the body and return it to Moscow to lie in state in the very hall where the 1934 Congress would take place. He directed the funeral arrangements (against Lenin's and his wife's wishes a lavish state funeral was ordered by him) and positioned himself as Lenin's heir immediately. Famously, Lenin's final testament, derogative of Stalin and recommending a secondary role for him, was suppressed by the future dictator. On the 28th, the day after Lenin's funeral, Stalin was formally 'elected' to the Central Committee and two days later installed as a member of the Praesidium of the Party, later called the Politburo. His growing power and increasing status received formal recognition by the re-naming of the city of Tsaritsyn ('Kingsville', very roughly) as Stalingrad.in April 1925.[250] These events were not secrets, quite the reverse. Despite, or perhaps because of, these clear signs of developing power, Pilnyak in 1926 submitted the novella to Novy Mir.[251]

Accounts differ as to the actual publication. The record of the Writers Union[252] states that it was published in *Novy Mir* and re-published in the beginnings of the Glasnost era (1987) in *Banner* a leading magazine. Conquest's view is that it had been about to be printed when the issue was suddenly confiscated. In any event it seems there were many copies in circulation (it was also printed in Bulgaria in 1927) and shortly thereafter, *per* Conquest, 'The editors admitted in the following number that accepting it had been a mistake and printed letters describing it as " a malicious slander on our Party"'.'[253] In the literary hothouse that was Moscow at the time such a disclaimer could only have increased its illicit readership.

Conquest's short summary of the plot highlights the dangerous similarities of Pilnyak's story to the death of Frunze. 'The hero, Gavrilov, is described as a well-known Red Army leader who returns to

Moscow on orders and reads with surprise in the papers that he has come back for an operation. He has had stomach ulcers, but is now fully recovered. He goes to see a man described as the most important of the "three who lead" the Party,[i] who orders him to have the operation. The doctors examine him, and report that an operation is necessary, but afterwards in private conversation say that it is not. The operation is performed and he dies of an overdose of chloroform'. The tone of the story is described as being 'very sinister and gloomy'.[254]

It is difficult to see, with the story's sub-title *Murder of a Red Army Commander* and its details chiming exactly with the circulating rumours, how Stalin, by then the coming man in the Politburo, could fail to place a black mark beside Pilnyak's name. The dictator had a long memory and took revenge against all who failed to see the world as he saw it, even those closest to him. As his daughter Svetlana observed: 'Years of friendship and fighting side by side in a common cause might as well never have been. He could wipe it all out at a stroke – and X would be doomed'.[255] Conquest speculates that given that no sensible person with any political sense at all would have written a story like *The Unextinguished Moon* at that time in Russia - 'it seems likely that Pilnyak was put up to it by some friend more involved in the struggles of the time'.[256] Whatever his reasons, the matter seems to have rested there until Pilnyak's next brush with the regime. This came with the new decade, an attack by RAPP - the association of Proletarian Writers – whose credo stated that 'The one and only task of Soviet Literature is the depiction of the Five-year Plan and the class war.'[257]

By 1929 Pilnyak was head of the Moscow, and pre-eminent, branch of the important All-Russian Union of Writers, an association founded in 1919 by intellectuals as a non-political writers forum.[258] Another famous Soviet writer, Evgeny Zamyatin, was chairman of the branch in Leningrad, as Petrograd had been renamed after the death of Lenin in 1924. This body existed in the company of other groupings of the time, such as the Peasant Writers Union, RAPP and others under the umbrella of the Federation of Soviet Writers Associations. Within this loose group of associations the principal enemy of Pilnyak's organisation was the authoritatian RAPP. The implacable stance of RAPP and the fierce antagonism of its adherents towards Pilnyak and others lacking sufficient Bolshevik purity was to become an especially ominous facet of the Soviet literary scene as the new decade approached.

Pilnyak's next significant book, refused publication by the organs of Soviet censorship, was called

[i] At that time Stalin, Bukharin and Kirov

Mahogany (Krasnoyeh Dyeryevo in Russian), which he published in 1929 in Russian in Berlin, apparently through a firm which had official links with the main Soviet State Publishing house.[259] This of itself was not uncommon in that some Soviet authors published both within and without the Soviet Union at the same time to preserve copyright because the country had not signed any international copyright protection treaties.[260] The Russian emigration, or Russia Abroad as it was known, was widespread. Berlin, until the coming of Hitler when it moved to Paris, was the main, non-Soviet, Russian cultural centre in Europe. Virulently anti-Soviet,, the emigrés commented trenchantly on all matters of Russian politics and culture through journals, publishing houses and newspapers.

It was this circumstance which allowed the literary zealots in RAPP to misrepresent Pilnyak's actions and castigate him as a counter-revolutionary and an individualist whose actions were harmful to the Soviet Union. In a concerted shrill campaign he was pilloried in the Soviet press and literary journals. Headlines from the Literary Gazette and Komsomol Pravda, the Communist Youth Movement's paper, convey the force and virulence of the assault: 'A Hostile Network of Agents in the Ranks of Soviet Writers'; 'Boris Pilnyak, Special Correspondent for the White Guard Supporters'; 'Investigate the Union of Writers'; 'The Lessons of Pilnyakism'.[261]

These attacks were dangerous enough in themselves but they were added to by an especially celebrated figure of the Revolution, Vladimir. Mayakovsky. He had been the self-publicising but successful declamatory voice of Soviet prose and poetry since 1918. Considered a genuine talent by many he was a striking physical and verbal presence in Moscow, involving himself in varied artistic pursuits over a wide area - film, poetry, art, cartoons, journalism and a long successful run of plays on the Soviet stage. His aggressive, strident style, damning of what he saw as the banality of old petty- bourgeois Russia lurking just below the surface of society, caught the iconoclastic mood of early Bolshevism:

> Forward, my country,
>
> move on faster!
>
> Get on with it,
>
> sweep away the antiquated junk!
>
> Stronger, my commune,

strike at the enemy,

Make it die out,

that monster, the old way of life[262]

His merciless attack on Pilnyak, preserved in the latter's Lyubyanka arrest file, follows the tone set by the functionaries of RAPP. This may not be surprising given Mayakovsky's situation in late 1929 and early 1930, when the campaign against Pilnyak reached its height. Mayakovsky's own position was very much under threat. In addition to a failing private life Mayakovsky was suffering from the increasing realisation that his style of confrontational individualism, born of the avant garde, was not consonant with the direction the Soviet arts were taking. His last two plays, *The Bedbug* (scored by Shostakovich) and *The Bathhouse*, both satires on Soviet life, had failed in the theatres and had been condemned in the press as 'failing to portray the Soviet future in heroic[i] terms'.[263] In March 1930 his stock appeared to approach its nadir - a major retrospective exhibition of his artwork in Moscow was avoided by the city's intelligentsia, a visitor recalling his tall gaunt figure pacing alone in the empty rooms.[264]

In the last few months of his life, under attack by extreme RAPP elements himself, and desperate to belong, he penned a vitriolic article entitled 'Our View'. In its mixture of politics, denunciation and danger it exemplifies a particularly crude Soviet reality of the Thirties – an attack on an individual which also threatens others by implication:

> 'I have not read Boris Pilnyak's short novel The Tale of Mahogany (is that the right title?) or, for that matter, other tales by him and many other writers.
>
> To me a finished literary work is like a weapon. Even if that weapon were above the class struggle - such a thing does not exist (though, perhaps, Pilnyak thinks of it like that) – handing it over to the White press strengthens the arsenal of our enemies.
>
> At the present time of darkening storm clouds this is the same as treachery at the front.

[i] Almost exactly the words used by Zhdanov in his speech on Socialist Realism at the 1934 Congress. See Thesis p 26.

> We must give up subject-less literature-mongering.
> We must put an end to the irresponsibility of writers.
> Pilnyak's guilt is shared by many. Who? That is a story by itself.
> For instance, who handed over a third of the Federation [of Soviet Writers Associations] to the Union of Pilnyaks?
>
> Who always defended the Pilnyaks from the tendentiousness of REF?[i]
>
> Who made this writer feel sure of the right of geniuses to extra-territorial class immunity?'[265]

Attacks of this sort in 1930, in the middle of the national struggle to complete the first Five year plan, were not meaningless or innocuous, a type of bookish squabble as might be conducted in the West in the columns of a fashionable review. They had significance both inside and outside literature. As the decade wore on, each assault signalled increasing danger.

What would have been in 1937 a death warrant was, for a short time yet, in 1930, still a warning. In addition, Gorky was a supporter of Pilnyak who had visited him in Italian exile and Stalin was still trying to entice Gorky back to Soviet Russia permanently. Pilnyak was given a chance to recant. He did so, in terms described by Struve as 'abject'.[266] It was the time of trials of 'saboteurs' and 'wreckers' whose alleged acts of industrial vandalism were used by the regime to explain problems with rapid industrialisation and the Five year plan. The trials were forerunners of the later show trials which eliminated the senior Bolshevik leadership and involved ordinary and middle-ranking engineers and managers, working under dire industrial conditions. One such trial was witnessed, with considerable disgust, by the then British Consul Reader Bullard. He recalled the animated and prolonged applause of the audience 'so that it might be seen that they were doing their bit' when the death sentences were announced.[267] In the Radek show trial of early 1937 Pilnyak, with others, signed a resolution stating 'If the enemy does not surrender – he must be annhiliated'.[268] He even wrote an article for Pravda in this vein, described as 'wretched' by his close friend Victor Serge.[269] Although these situations were an inescapable reality of the times (Serge notes writers who knew Pilnyak well taking part in the ritual public denunciations of him organised by RAPP, then coming round to see him to make private apology)[270] they must have added to the self-hatred felt by Pilnyak, whose earlier credo had declared honesty paramount.

[i] Revolutionary Front of Art, an unsuccessful group of brief existence formed by Mayakovsky in 1929 after he abandoned LEF, his earlier body.

As part of his penance Pilnyak had been given the opportunity of redeeming his earlier novel *Mahogany.* It was to be re-written but not simply as a second version of the book. More subtly, and for greater effect in political terms, it was to be subsumed in an entirely new novel which would be a paean to the first Five year plan. It's title was to be *The Volga falls to the Caspian Sea.* There was another condition imposed however, unique perhaps in the literature of any nation; it was to be written as a joint enterprise with a man who was shortly to become Stalin's head executioner of the Purges, Nikolai Ivanovich Yezhov. Though without much formal education Yezhov was popular with Stalin and had some literary connections through his nephew Leonid Averbach[i] the rabid head of RAPP, author and instigator of many Pilnyak denunciations. The interconnection of these persons is an illustration of another reality in the world of Soviet letters, the glutinous mixture of literature itself and the politics of control. It is clear that however much Pilnyak resented Yezhov's involvement with his book his relationship to the up and coming bureaucrat also had the flavour, almost medieval, of protection sought and patronage given in a world where to be without either the supplicant was at great risk. Nadezhda Mandelstam recalls a conversation with Yezhov's wife in a rest home for higher Party people in 1930 (to which she says the Mandelstams were admitted apparently through an administrative error). She was indignant at a comment from Yezhova[ii] implying that it was a given that some sort of protection was as a matter of course sought by every writer; 'Pilnyak comes to see us' Yezhova had said, 'Whom do you go to see?" On speaking about her anger later to her husband Mandelstam tried to calm her responding wearily that 'Everyone goes to see someone. There's no other way. We go to see Nikolai Ivanovich'.[iii271]

Pilnyak needed protection and had much to lose. His support of the regime in print had seen Stalin reward him with material privileges and foreign travel. He took trips to Paris, America and Japan, opportunities almost unheard of in Soviet society. By any standard he led a privileged life but one enmeshed in contradictions.

A pen portrait of Pilnyak and his situation at this time has been preserved in the writings of his friend Victor Serge, old revolutionary, associate of Trotsky, and Marxist critic of Stalin, who escaped Russia and certain death only because of influential friends in the European literary world

[i] His RAPP demagoguery availed him little; Averbach himself was shot in 1937 by his uncle's Secret Police. When Yezhov's usefulness ran out he later found himself on the same execution list as Isaac Babel.

[ii] In Russian a married woman's name is an adaptation of her husband's. Yezhova is 'of Yezhov' in the same way a Anna Karenina is 'of' her husband Karenin.

[iii] Bukharin, himself shot after his 1938 show trial.

and Stalin's desire for political reasons to maintain influence there, especially France.[272] Pilnyak ' was tall,' Serge wrote, ‘an oval head, strong features, a Germanic type, very egotistical and very human' who was' childishly pleased with his fame and his material comforts. Thanks to his trips abroad he dressed in 'English tweed’ and had ' a little car of his own.' [a Ford and an extraordinary luxury for a private individual at this time]. He bitterly resented Yezhov. Pilnyak 'would twist his great mouth.' and complain that 'He has given me a list of fifty passages to change outright....If only I could write freely! What could I not do!' He was also subject to fits of depression, fearing jail, and responded to Serge's protestations that his safety was guaranteed by his fame abroad with dejection- “There isn't a single thinking adult in this country who has not thought that he might be shot”.[273]

The Volga runs to the Caspian Sea, in Struve's words, despite its many efforts (and those of his co-author) 'to put right the ideological fallacies of *Mahogany'* by telling the story 'of the building of a gigantic dam' was not a success.[274] Pilnyak depicted a new town built beside an old Russian settlement and in the portrayal of these, seemed unable to rid himself of equally old romantic habits of idealising what he saw as long standing values of the Russian peasantry. The novel, in which he attempted to 'glorify the Five year plan and remove the bad impression that Mahogany had created in Communist circles' was 'filled with romanticism and heavily flavoured with Dostoyevskian scenes'. It 'misfired completely'.[275]

Other efforts of recantation were required. Pilnyak made them. In 1926 he had been allowed to visit Japan and had written a book called *The Roots of the Japanese Sun* (Korni Yaponskovo solntsa) which was issued in Volume 7 of his Collected Works published by GIZ (Gosudarstvenoyeh Idzatelstvo, the State Publishing House). Struve describes it thus: 'It was a typical mixture of 'the usual Pilnyakian fireworks, of relevant and irrelevant reflections, of interesting observations and half-baked generalisations'.[276] What it was *not* was Soviet, especially in an increasingly xenophobic climate within Russia and Stalin's growing attention towards the rise of Japan on its eastern border. He was allowed to make a second visit in 1932 and in 1934, the year of the Congress, wrote another book, *Rocks and Roots*, (Kamni I Korni) which was a refutation of his earlier work. Struve quotes the formal renunciation from the book:

> "The writer Pilnyak informs his readers that his *Roots* (1926) are no good. The writer Pilnyak of 1932 asks his readers to throw out from their shelves the seventh volume of the GIZ edition of his *Collected Works.* As for the translations of this book, Pilnyak asks that its Japanese translation be destroyed first of all. This must be done out of respect for the author"[277]

*

Pilnyak's abasement and accommodation with the regime meant that in the early part of the 1930s he still retained a significant position in Soviet letters. After a state sponsored visit to America in 1931 (itself a mark of considerable favour)[i] he wrote a book attacking that country, *O-Kay,* to order.[278] When Anna Akhmatova's husband Nikolai Punin and her son Lev were arrested in Leningrad in 1935 it was Pilnyak she asked to accompany her when she sought to deliver a letter to Stalin asking for their release. In her memoirs Emma Gerstein[ii] recalls how Akhmatova and Pilnyak drove up to the Kremlin in his Ford car and handed the letter over to a previously agreed recipient on Stalin's staff. The plea, accompanied by letters directly to Stalin from others like Boris Pasternak and Bulgarkov was successful.[279]

Gerstein recalled her visit to Pilnyak's flat where Akhmatova was staying after the release of her husband and son. There is no description of the interior save for the important fact that it had more than one room, her quietly voiced conversation with Akhmatova taking place in a bedroom while a celebration was audible in a dining room next door. In Soviet terms, during this period when the vast majority of families lived in single and often partitioned rooms in communal flats, Pilnyak's possession of such accommodation is evidence of considerable status. His guests also indicated friends in high places; Akhmatova whispered that one was 'an important Party figure from the regional committee' and one other, unnamed, who apparently had 'three pips' (three lozenge shaped badges worn on each collar to indicate high rank in the NKVD and army). [280]

*

[i] For a description of Pilnyak's visit to Hollywood see *Russians in Hollywood, Hollywood's Russians,* by Harlow Robinson.

[ii] Emma Gerstein, who lived till the age of 99 with all of her considerable faculties intact published a memoir of Russian literary life when all of those involved had already died. She had been close to the Mandelshtams, Akhmatova and her son Lev, imprisoned to control his mother. Her book cause consternation in some quarters as it was not a hagiography but a severely honest and affectionate portrayal. Akhmatova's homosexuality, for example, apparently widely known about in Russian literary circles but not written about, was flatly stated by Gerstein.

In addition to his disavowal of his earlier work Pilnyak inserted a passage into the later book of 1932 which indicated how much his earlier views had, at least for public purposes, changed. The diarist of 1923 in *Writers About Art and About Themselves* had altered considerably. The former individualist whose only concern was whether a manuscript was 'good', someone who disdained state created 'incubators for Party Literature', and a writer who could not 'nor know how to, nor ever shall, write otherwise than how I do, even if I wanted to do violence to myself...' would write a decade later in *Rocks and Roots*, the disavowal of his earlier work:

> 'A writer is like a geologist or a traveller to uninhabited and undiscovered lands. ...Writers must be treated like geologists, for writers can certainly muddle up things no less than the latter. In Soviet literature, too, it is necessary, after re-registering all writers and cutting down their number...to create an Institute of Literature, an Institute of Artistic Prospecting and Equipment, without whose diploma writers could not have the status of a writer and get published, by analogy with the Institutes of Mining Prospecting which equip the geologist for his work. This institute, in qualifying a writer, should demand from him, beside the ability to write and general knowledge, moral good faith which characterizes the writer in his public work and his home life...And if a writer makes a mistake (this also happens to geologists) his mistake will be an accident and a matter for regret rather than abuse. For, given the diploma of the Literary Prospecting Institute and the writer's honesty there will be no doubt about the accidentally vexatious nature of the mistake. And the mistakes will be much fewer, although God alone is never mistaken because He does not exist...while those who make most mistakes are the geologists because they discover things hitherto undiscovered and because they are not tourists who follow beaten paths. Tourist writers, in particular those who travel from Moscow to the Dneprprostroy[i] of Socialism in the mail coaches, dormeuses[ii] and railway carriages of Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Bunin[iii] travel like tourists and will never get anywhere...'[281]

In this poignant extract Pilnyak shows how far he has been subdued by the pressures being piled upon him in a land in which, to repeat his earlier remark to his friend Serge, 'There isn't a single thinking adult in this country, who hasn't thought that he might be shot'. Whilst still trying to preserve some room for manoeuvre for writers, and laying down a foundation for his 'mistakes' to be understood as innocent and not indicative of political unreliability, he clearly accepts state

[i] Large scale dam on the Dnieper river in the Ukraine.
[ii] Old name for railway sleeping compartments.
[iii] Russian emigré writer in Paris awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1933.

control; going further, he advocates it. The date is perhaps significant. In 1932, the year of the book's publication, Stalin ordered all literary organisations swept away and replaced with a single organ, the Union of Soviet Writers. Writers needed to fit in, and Pilnyak was no exception.

Shentalinsky cites quotations contrasting Pilnyak's stance in the 20s with writings from the early 1930s which show his desperate attempts to fit in to the new reality:

'The more gifted a writer is', he had written in the earlier decade, 'the more politically inept he becomes....The writer is only of value when he exists outside the system...I have won the bitter fame of those who kick against the pricks.' By the thirties, he had joined those who praised the Party and courted Stalin's favour - 'He is truly a great man, a man of great determination, of great deeds and words'. In the 20s he had written about the need for compassion and the relationship between state and man thus- 'The courts should not and cannot be as strict as the judgement the individual passes on himself'. Shentalinsky points out that a decade later Pilnyak 'demanded that "enemies of the people" be punished even before sentence had been passed and called upon people to destroy each individual who "infringes our Constitution"'. [282]

*

These later tortured words must have cost his soul much. Their hollowness seems perceptible even at three quarters of a century's remove. So far as the regime is concerned however, Pilnyak's changed public stance allowed him some reward. Gorky had defended Pilnyak in 1929 in print[283] and in 1934 his standing as a Soviet writer, an approved Fellow Traveller, was sufficiently recovered for him to be elected at the Congress to the management board of the Union of Writers itself.[284] In addition he received a special mark of favour - one of the fourteen country houses, or dachas, built for the newly created Writers Colony in the village of Peredelkino, half an hour west of Moscow on the main Moscow to Kiev railway line. It is a beautiful Russian landscape of gentle hills, pine forests and fields open to the sky. Considering the difficult living conditions in the city (where they were also allowed to retain accommodation) the fortunate recipients must have felt themselves anointed. Pilnyak became the next door neighbour of Pasternak - the gate between the two properties was apparently 'never closed'[285] - and settled into a new life there, a daughter being born to him and his wife in the autumn of 1934. As for his private feelings, the public enthusiasm for a system he feared and despised which was forced on Pilnyak by both the regime and his own desire to maintain his position brought him only cynicism and a hollow despondency. Another

writer and Fellow Traveller who spoke with him at the time said afterwards 'I have understood the emptiness of all who declare their loyalty to the Party'.[286]

*

Among the trees and quiet paths of Peredelkino, in a new family life, he began another novel in an uncertain time. Gorky (who had in previous years spoke in his defence) had died in 1936 and on the 17th of May 1937 another attack on Pilynak had appeared in Pravda accusing him of 'counter-revolutionary writing'.[287] His end was drawing closer. It was in front of that garden where the gate to his neighbour 'was never closed', in the late afternoon of the 28th of October 1937, that a car drew up during the birthday celebrations for Pilnyak's three year old daughter.[288] A number of NKVD men in uniform got out. Quite apart from the official car in an empty lane they would have been immediately recognisable to him by his previous acquaintance with other wearers of the distinctive blue caps. After a search, which confiscated two caucasian silver daggers, a typewriter and the first draft of a novel,[i] an officer well known to Pilnyak and his family told him it would be necessary to take him to Moscow to deal with some unexplained matter and that he would be back in two hours. This was not true. As the car taking him to the Lubyanka jolted over the country roads, his house and family growing smaller behind him, he may have known that in his heart. Perhaps he had hopes that his accommodation with the regime, his standing as a famous writer and his relationship with Yezhov would save him. If so, it did not, and he never returned.[289]

*

THE LUBYANKA FILE ON BORIS PILNYAK

Almost nothing was known of the subsequent fate of Boris Pilnyak until the closing months of the Soviet regime. A courageous member of the Writers Union, Vitaly Alexandrovich Shentalinsky, approached the upper reaches of the Union bureaucracy with an unheard of request: openness. He met with obstruction at every turn but in the end prevailed[ii] and the commission he founded was soon inundated with material. He writes about one old man who rode trains from Siberia to

[i] Un-named and never recovered.

[ii] See Shentalinsky pp 5-21 for details of the obstructions he faced from both the KGB and the Writers Union.

Moscow and unable to afford or obtain lodging in the city spent the night on a railway station bench so he could hand in his prison diaries to the commission in the morning. He refused to trust anything to the postal system. Then he turned around and began the long journey back. 'Take them and print them!' he said, as he handed over the notebooks. 'Now I really believe the time has come...' [290]

In 1989, when the Soviet Union had only two more years of existence, Shentalinsky began his examination of the files. This process took place at the place most feared by Russians. He wrote: 'Each citizen of our vast country knew that the Lyubyanka was watching him. At any moment, it could take charge of his life and then there was no power that could defend him'.[291] The KGB officer with whom he dealt observed on first meeting that Shentalinsky was probably the first writer who had come to the building of his own accord.

Sitting in a room of the Lubyanka he began to follow the file's forms, certificates, press cuttings, records of interrogation, informers' reports and court proceedings which traced out the fates of Babel, Pilnyak, Mandelstam and numbers of others, harrowing accounts that had lain silent for half a century. All the information on Boris Pilnyak from the moment of his arrest at a three year old's birthday party to his murder in an execution cellar was contained in the fading paper.

In Pilnyak's case his own files both at the NKVD and at the Procurator's Office, as well as those on his two wives[i], contained copies of all the attacks that had been made on him in print since the 20s. In addition, actual minutes of meetings held at the Writers Union were also sewn into the file jacket. They show the horrific measures to which Pilnyak was subjected.

One, a year before his arrest, records a meeting of the editorial board of Novy Mir [ii] on the 1st of September 1936 and the words, which cannot be judged less than evil, of Ivan Gronsky the Chief Editor. Pilnyak was recorded as present and had obviously tried to respond to the attacks.

'Ivan Gronsky. (Chief Editor). *"*You have retorted that you are distancing yourself from the enemies in your work. Which works? The Tale of the Unextinguished Moon, perhaps, or the Mahogany?

[i] Olga Shcherbinovskaya and Kira Andronikashvili, both actresses, were arrested after Pilnyak and sent to the camps because of their connection to him.

[ii] The premier Soviet 'thick journal' as they are called, in which new fiction appears.

These works were written on the direct instructions of the Trotskyists. Whether you consciously or unconsciously directed them against the Revolution is another matter....'" [my italics][292] This was a fearsome allegation given the similar charges made in the major show trial of 1936 involving Zinoviev, Kamenev and others. These proceedings had ended just the week before on the 23rd of August and involved the many defendants in accusations of having Trotskyite sympathies. Every defendant had received the death sentence, one crying out in the courtroom at its pronouncement "Long live the cause of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin!" before being led away to execution.[293]

Being accused of the very crimes for which those similarly accused had just been executed must have placed Pilnyak under extraordinary pressure. That burden was to increase during his time in custody. Putting extreme pressure, mental or physical, on arrested persons to implicate others was a characteristic of the investigative techniques used by the NKVD at the time.[294] Unable to stand torture or threats of it often people broke down and gave any names the interrogators wished. A statement would be tidied up and signed and there would be little evidence of what had produced it.

The interrogation statement of a poet, Konstantin Bolshakov,[i] who knew Pilnyak and had been arrested shortly before him, implicated the writer as a counter-revolutionary. He recounted conversations with Pilnyak, his words showing the reality of the times. As Shentalinsky writes, 'Before people were arrested they were driven to the brink of insanity and suicide by the all-pervading fear and suspicion'.[295] This state of torpid horror, in limbo between a tenuous present and fell inevitability, emerges in Bolshakov's words, almost all of which ring true amongst expressions which have the stamp of the NKVD. They are the sentences of a fatalist, a broken man:

> 'Bolshakov: "Pilnyak dragged me back to his dacha. When we were alone together I started talking about the trial of the united Trotskyite-Zinovievite centre. [an expression much used by officialdom and which had featured prominently in the 1936 show trial] Pilnyak said that Trotskyism had nothing to do with it. Anyone could be convicted of Trotskyism now. Anyone who did not think like the leading article of Pravda was already a Trotskyist. "You and I are also Trotskyists", he said. Later he returned to this theme and began to say that all his friends were Trotskyists, not just because they had been in the Opposition but because they refused to conform".'

Bolshakov then spoke about his own fears, the illness that had 'forced me to remain in bed for three months', and thereafter his hiding from people to avoid hearing of the constant rumours and arrests.

[i] He was not a Congress delegate but wrote to it in the customary fulsome and congratulatory terms. See Congress Record p 628. His fate is ominously not recorded by the Writers Union records. Survival seems unlikely.

He spoke of his 'own inevitable death', following which statement he returned to Pilnyak:

> 'The arrests scared people and evoked a muted and furious anger. I thought to myself, infuriated, they are taking away the individual's right to doubt. Pilnyak asserted that they would come and arrest people again, that our arrest was also nearing and did not even conceal the fact that he feared arrest himself and that almost everybody else in Peredelkino was afraid of him. Rumours, each more fantastic than the last, were the only thing that mattered to us and nourished us. I reduced my circle of acquaintances to a minimum. There was some kind of monstrous nightmare in my head. I was afraid to have a drink in case my subconscious might surface when I had become drunk'-
>
> Interrogator: "We have no interest in your emotional state".'[296]

The file records statements from four other writers[i] arrested before Pilnyak, men, as Shentalinsky puts it 'already in the hands of the interrogators'. These statements asserted that he kept anti-Soviet company, had Trotskyite friends, was involved in terrorism and, in 1937 the accusation most deadly of all, that he was a spy.[297] The torture carried out on these men, or the base promises probably made to them in return for false testimony, do not of course form part of the investigation record. It was characteristic of investigations that no actual proof of any alleged act was obtained, merely a matrix of denunciations by men frightened for themselves and their families. Shentalinsky quotes an extract from an NKVD strategy meeting in 1935 addressed by Yakov Agranov, Deputy Peoples Commissar for Internal Affairs:

> 'Our tactic for crushing the enemy was to confront all these scoundrels and set them against each other. It was a difficult task. It was essential to turn them against one another because all these traitors were closely bound together'. [298]

The first record of Pilnyak being interrogated is on the 2nd of November at the Lubyanka, five days after his arrest. His bare details are listed at the top of the form. *Name, date of birth, nationality Volga German, not a Party member, Writer of fiction.* His 'social group' is given, without intended irony, as '*free professional*'.

That very day Pilnyak wrote a typewritten letter to Yezhov, head of the NKVD and the man whose

[i] Of the four writers implicating Pilnyak, two (Aroshev and Bolshakov) are listed as Congress delegates (pp 628, 678, 680 of the Congress record. Of of the other two there is no trace. Aroshev was a veteran of the Revolution and commanded the Moscow garrison thereafter. His Writers Union entry reads: 'Arrested 1937. Shot. Rehabilitated in 1956'. (See Congress Record Supplement p84).

relationship with Pilnyak the latter thought would protect him.[299] Shentalinsky's view is that the very fact he was afforded a typewriter immediately meant that an understanding involving 'co-operation' between Pilnyak and his jailers had already been agreed upon.[300] Judging by the first line of the letter, which sets the tone for the remainder, this may well have been so:

> 'I ask myself whether the NKVD was right to arrest me and answer, they were right...'

The reaction to interrogation varied from person to person. Some prisoners were tortured for months without their surrendering to the false allegations being made to them; others collapsed immediately due to the barbarity of the treatment. Still others, envisaging what lay ahead and hoping to avoid torture, came to an arrangement with the interrogators immediately. Shentalinsky observes that former members of the Secret Police, practiced in every nuance of torture 'often immediately demanded pen and paper when they themselves were arrested and unconditionally confessed to every crime...Sometimes they even wrote out the entire deposition for the investigators, inventing their imaginary dialogue...If I live today then maybe I shall survive to tell the truth tomorrow...'[301]

Pilnyak's decision to co-operate, whether based on promises made to him or fear for his family, appears clear. His letter to Yezhov, which amounts to a script in which the main points have been given to him for elaboration, continues:

> ‘My life and my actions show that I was a counter-revolutionary, an enemy of the existing order and of the existing government. If this arrest will be only a lesson for me, i.e., if I remain alive, I shall consider this a wonderful lesson and make use of it so as to live out the rest of my life honestly....I had dealings with the Trotskyites...I had dealings with all who shared my counter-revolutionary views...[He then cites conversations with like minded persons who held “counter-revolutionary” views] I shall provide detailed testimony about the nature and dates of these conversations during the investigation...Because I do not wish to hide anything I must also mention espionage. Since my first trip to Japan in 1926 I have remained in contact with Professor Yonekawa, an officer on the General Staff and an intelligence agent. Through him I became a Japanese agent and carried out my espionage activities. Moreover, other Japanese came to visit me, and so did foreigners from other countries. I shall describe all of these things in detail during the investigation...[302]

There appears to be no record of a reply from Yezhov, at least in writing. In this year, 1937, he was a busy man; conservative figures arrived at after exhaustive Western and Soviet research show arrests in that year and the year following of seven million persons. Of these, two million died during that period in the Gulag. A total of 8 million people were imprisoned in the camps by 1938. At the time of Pilnyak's letter to Yezhov NKVD executions *alone* (without taking into account the two million being worked to death in the camps over the same period) were running at an average of ten thousand people a week.[303]

In the record of interrogation there is then a delay of a month. The file is silent as to any involvement by Yezhov. It may of course have been the case whereby Pilnyak was encouraged to write the letter to Yezhov in hope of a quick release from a terrible place. Once written however, it was impossible to retract. On the 11th of December another interrogation takes place. In it Pilnyak is led through his early disenchantment with the Revolution and his participation in various literary groups unsympathetic to Soviet power. 'I began to struggle against the Soviet regime during the first years of the Revolution...' He implicates his long-time friend Zamyatin and others. Pilnyak then spoke about Trotsky, who, he said, had joint conversations with Pilnyak, Mayakovsky and Pasternak:

> 'Trotsky talked to us about internationalism in literature and said it made no difference to him where he made a Revolution, in Moscow or in Rome. Trotsky did everything to charm us'.'[304]

Clearly this was a dangerous area for Pasternak, Pilnyak's next door neighbour. Informers' statements on the file implicate both he and Pilnyak further by alleging that ' In 1936 Pilnyak and Pasternak had several secret meetings with Andre Gide, who was visiting the USSR, during which they gave him tendentious information about the Soviet Union. There can be no doubt that Gide used this information in his book[i] against the USSR'.[305]

The interrogators try to make him implicate other writers, especially Pasternak, further but he manages to defend his neighbour obliquely by saying the poet had became antagonistic to him when Pasternak joined the organisational committee of the Writers Union on its creation: 'I made all kinds

[i] *Return from the USSR* published 1936. See Thesis pp 68, 69.

of attacks on him and our relations even became difficult for this reason'.[306]

Concerning his own relationship with the Union and his position as a writer he deals with the issue of why, as a leading Soviet Writer, at the Congress (and elected there to the main board of the Union of Writers) he did not speak. This was, he said 'as a consequence of my then particularly hostile attitude to the policies of the Party and its leadership, I boycotted the Writers Union and did not therefore speak at the Writers' Congress. The Congress struck me as a hypocritical bureaucratic venture and the addresses given by writers there, lying and double-dealing...' These words, which have the mark of authenticity upon them show the ambivalence of Pilnyak's relationship with the Writers Union in that he appears to distance himself from the very organisation which appointed him to a position of standing and gave him a country house in the same year. It may be however that silence was a sensible policy at the Congress given the attacks upon him which were still taking place. In any event it seems likely, given his private conversations with trusted friends like Bolshakov and Serge, that he did in truth hold the whole literary edifice in contempt.

He was questioned closely about Victor Serge (real name Victor Kabalchich) who was at that time in France and thus not directly under Soviet threat. He describes their conversations about the repressions, the Terror and the disaster that was collectivisation. These words are frank and, again, have the stamp of truth: 'We concluded that the political situation was extremely bad....'An unprecedented oppression of the individual by the state could be felt....'...we were living under siege' ... ' This was not socialism since socialism implied an improvement in relations between people whereas we were being encouraged to act like savage beasts...' Pilnyak ended this segment with a declaration which itself alone would be fatal. ‘As a result of our discussions, Serge and I reached the conclusion that we must let the Western public know what was happening in Russia'.[307]

Stalin was particularly sensitive at this time towards foreign opinion. The Popular Front was a central plank in his foreign policy (at least until he began to court Hitler) and he tried to mould Western opinion through what was left of the Comintern, front organisations run by Willi Munzenburg and others in Paris, and writers such as Gide and Panait Istrati, an influential French-Rumanian Fellow Traveller also based there. Gide's 'betrayal' had angered Stalin and Istratii's similar change of heart was to follow. Istrati had come to the Soviet Union as a supporter and had been heralded all over the country as a future Western laureate for Stalin's new land. Pilnyak met him reluctantly, telling him ' You do not look at our country as you should but only through the eyes of official representatives. You accept too many congratulations and express your thanks too often.

You have a false assessment of the situation here and if you write about it then it will be a sugary picture and not the truth...' Istrati apparently responded that he' would like to know the truth.'[308]

Pilnyak and Serge told him what Soviet reality was. Assisted by Serge, the results of his travels and searches for truth appeared in three volumes in Paris. The unflattering contents resulted in Istraati being described in the Soviet Encyclopedia of Literature as a 'most shameless renegade', and his writings as 'crude counter-revolutionary libels'.[309] The interrogator pounces on Pilnyak:

> 'Interrogator: So you were the main source for treacherous information against the Land of the Soviets?
>
> Pilnyak: Yes, I am guilty before the Soviet people for having tried to discredit the Soviet Union in the eyes of the Western Intelligentsia by passing on this treacherous information through Istrati...'[310]

The interrogation record moves on.' We have information that you were preparing to commit a terrorist act. Confess!'[311] After this point Pilnyak in a mixture of truth and fantasy both implicates a number of other people and confesses, amongst other things, to being a Japanese spy, a would be assassin of Yezhov and a party to discussions about murdering Stalin. A particular friend of his, Artyom Vesyoly[i] (who was also a fellow delegate to the 1934 Congress) is specially mentioned by the interrogators. Vesyoly was another old Bolshevik who had taken part in the Revolution and the Civil War. He had been arrested in Peredelkino on the same day as Pilnyak. In the interrogation record the latter relates a conversation just prior to his arrest in which Vesyoly is described as being so angry and distraught at the state of things in the country and in the Bolshevik party that he couldn't speak 'without a bottle of vodka.' and saw a revolver as the only answer:

> [Pilnyak] 'Who would you go after?'
>
> [Vesyoly] 'Who do you think? Stalin, of course'.[312]

These words are a death sentence for everyone implicated. Shentalinsky's investigations reveal that not only was Vesyoly arrested in Peredelkino on the same day as Pilnyak but that his interrogators were the same men. As Pilnyak wrote to Yezhov, so did Vesyoly, evidently with the same result.

[i] Artur Vyesoly was a writer who had also fallen foul of the authorities for his independent stance. He was denounced in the Press in 1929 as assisting 'class enemies'. (See Congress Record Supplement p 21) His Writers Union records show he was shot sometime in 1937. (Ibid)

The first interrogation comes to an end with Pilnyak confirming that he had been a spy, handing over secret information to enemy agents (apparently consisting of material about life in the Soviet Union, literature and literary groupings) as "an agent among certain sections of the intelligentsia".[313]

Four months passed, apparently, before he was interrogated formally again on the 26th of March 1938. There is no record of what he said. The renewed questioning proved to be little more than a re-ordering of the material covered on the first occasion. Shentalinsky states that the record shows a number of names, [unspecified by Shentalinsky] being proposed by the NKVD which were incorporated into Pilnyak's statement as if by rote. Shentalinsky refers to the process as a 'tidying up'.[314] He notices however that there is a major discrepancy within the file. The original statement, handwritten as was the requirement in the case of every prisoner interrogated, is missing. In its place is a typed copy, apparently signed by Pilnyak but with a signature in places so unlike his that it's authenticity is doubtful. It appears at the bottom of each page and only against some, 'but not all', of the answers. Shentalinsky concludes that only a handwriting expert could tell whether the signatures are genuine or were 'written in a very depressed state'.[315]

Whilst Pilnyak waited those long four months much was happening outside the Lubyanka. What is generally considered to be the greatest show trial began, again in the House of the Unions, on the 2nd of March. It involved three original friends of Lenin – old Bolsheviks and members of his Politburo – Bukharin, Rykov and Krestinsky, and a number of others, including Yagoda, former head of the Secret Police before Yezhov. Gorky's secretary (and Secret Police informant) Kriyuchkov was also in the dock, accused with Yagoda of murdering his former master. A number of defendants, including Bukharin, had been in NKVD hands for over a year since their arrest on the 27th of February, 1937. It may be wondered if, when he was marched through the hallways of the House of Unions to the dock, he remembered his address to the Congress on 'Poetry and Poetics' received with loud applause only a few years before. If echo there was it must have been a bitter sound.

Bukharin's 'trial' ended after ten days. On the 12th of March all defendants save three 'junior' accused were sentenced to death. Those three received long prison sentences but were later shot in prison in any event. The machinery of the Party worked the country into a frenzy of hatred against the defendants which was manifest in newspapers, workplace resolutions and in all public fora. The

Prosecutor Vyshinksky's words sum up the venomous fervour of the times:

> '...Shoot these rabid dogs...Down with that vulture Trotsky, from whose mouth a bloody venom drips, putrefying the great ideals of Marxism!...Down with these abject animals...Let's put an end once and for all to these miserable hybrids of foxes and pigs, these stinking corpses! Let's exterminate the mad dogs of capitalism, who want to tear to pieces the flower of our new Soviet nation! Let's push the bestial hatred they bear our leaders back down their throats! [316]

In this atmosphere, the Soviet reality in which all writers and ordinary citizens lived, Pilnyak was lost, his end near. His own 'trial', if such it may be called, came on before Ulrich, the military jurist who had presided over the proceedings in June of the preceeding year in which the Soviet Union's most senior military officers were condemned to death. His name crops up often during the Purges in important cases and perhaps his involvement with Pilnyak's trial indicates its significance to the regime.

The hearing began at 5.45 pm with a reading of the charges: of terrorism, spying for Japan and plotting the murder of Stalin and Yezhov. The charge sheet was signed by Vyshinsky himself. There is of course no written record of any inducements, such as his own life or the well being of his family, which, it might be fair to think, must have been promised him verbally by the interrogators. In any event whatever they had threatened or promised they had prepared him well:

> 'Ulrich: Do you acknowledge your guilt?'
>
> 'Pilnyak: Yes, entirely. I also fully confirm my deposition. During the interrogation I told the whole truth and I have nothing to add.'[317]

He was allowed some final words:

> 'I very much want to work. After being held in prison for so long I have become a different person and look on life with new eyes. I want to live, to work hard, I want to have paper in front of me on which I could write something of use to Soviet people...'

The entire hearing took exactly fifteen minutes, from 5.45 to 6pm. He was sentenced to be shot immediately. A small faded slip of paper in the file records that a Lieutenant Shevelev carried out that sentence the following day.[318]

Subsequent to the trial, as mentioned earlier, Pilnyak's widow and his first wife were sentenced to long periods in the Gulag. It is not clear what happened to his young daughter but if she was not cared for by relatives the normal practice was for children of 'enemies of the people' to be sent into a state orphanage where their past was erased. Pilnyak's books were declared illegal following his arrest, withdrawn from all institutions and destroyed.[319] Any remaining in private hands were dangerous indeed to possess. In Peredelkino another writer moved into Pilnyak's house. The writer was gone, a name in faint and illegible pencil, as if he had never existed.

***

CONCLUSION

In the end the Congress was an irrelevance to Russian Literature. The great names, Akhmatova, Mandelshtam, Tsvetaeva, Bulgakov, Babel, and Pasternak either did not attend or, treating Socialist Realism as an affliction, took refuge in silence. For those who did not survive, the Congress Record stands not as a milestone of Literature but as an unintended war memorial.

There seems little left to say. The stark facts speak clearly and need little interpretation. Running through the lives of the persons considered in this thesis, the writers, the soldiers and the foreigners of the time, there is a common thread of ideals betrayed, of lives perverted. The voices of the Congress fade one after the other. Whatever the achievements of Soviet society in steel production or literacy the 'heroic prospects', to use Zhdanovs's words, became tainted by the overriding aspects of 1930s Soviet reality - enslavement, dishonesty, death - all things that Socialist Realism itself helped to hide. The laudatory enthusiasm of the Congress lies in the same mass graves as many of the speakers. It takes some time to absorb that almost all the Soviet words of the Thirties seem tortured whether they come from the Congress Record, the Press or the interrogation files. All are poisoned by falsity, malice, brutality or forced surrender and in the shadow of Socialist Realism, fiction was without tongue. Literature, as Brodsky suggested, 'the only available tool for the cognition of phenomena whose size otherwise numbs your senses and eludes human grasp' was neutered. It could not rebut, argue or speak truth, its subservience one of the greatest shames of Soviet rule.

Words like 'countless' or 'untold' seem inadequate in the face of mass graves. Thus it is submitted that it may be permissible to see the life and death of Boris Pilnyak as embodying much of that lost Russia, his tortured words representative of a collective undeserved fate. He stands at his window looking at the quiet lane, his daughter's birthday laughter behind him, and sees his own face white in the glass. A car has stopped and blue-capped men step out. He knows them. They stretch their legs in the October dusk.

***

Endnotes

[1] Figures averaged from those executed or who died in camps 1936-37. Total 3 million persons. Conquest, Robert, *The Great Terror.* London: Pimlico, 2008 p 485
[2] Bulgakov, Mikhail, *The White Guard*. London: Fontana, 1979 p7
[3] Clark, Katerina, *The Soviet Novel, History as Ritual.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000 p 9
[4] Kish, Danilo, *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*. Dublin: Dalkey Archive Press, 2001 p xvii
[5] Philby, Kim. *Address to the Chief Directorate of the Committee of State Security (KGB) Moscow 1977.* Cited by his wife, Ruffina Philby in *The Private life of Kim Philby - The Moscow Years*, Ruffina Philby with Hayden Peake and Mikhail Lyubimov. London: St Ermin's Press, 1999 p 250
[6] Amis, Martin. *Koba the Dread.* London: Jonathan Cape, 2002 p 47
[7] Reid, Anna. *Borderlands – A Journey through the History of the Ukraine*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997 p 112
[8] Snyder, Timothy. *Bloodlands.* London: The Bodley Head, 2010 p 53
[9] Trilling, Leonard. *The Liberal Imagination*, New York: Doubleday, 1953 p 10
[10] Auden. W. H. *September 1, 1939*, cited in *W. H. Auden* by Humphrey Carpenter. Oxford: OUP, p 273
[11] Merridale, Catherine. *Night of Stone. Death and Memory in Russia.* London: Granta, 2000, p14
[12] Arch Getty, J. and Naumov O. *The Road to Terror, Stalin and the self-destruction of the Bolsheviks*. Newhaven : Yale University Press, 1999, p 135
[13] Berton Kathleen, *Moscow, An Architectural History*. London: Cassel, Collier and MacMillan, 1977, p 194
[14] Conquest, Robert. *The Great Terror.* p xxvii
[15] Ginsberg, Evgenia. *Into the Whirlwind*. London: Collins Harvill, 1967, p 11
[16] Polonsky, Rachel, *Molotov's Magic Lantern*. London: Faber, 2011, p 60
[17] Trotsky's bulletin was distributed to his followers world-wide.
[18] Appelbaum, Anne. *Gulag, A History.* London: Penguin, 2003, p130-31
[19] Read, Anthony and Fisher, David. *The Deadly Embrace*. London: Michael Joseph, 1988, p 248
[20] Clark, Katerina. *The Soviet Novel, History as Ritual*. See note 3
[21] Ibid p 3
[22] Ibid p 3
[23] Ibid p 9
[24] Ibid p 10
[25] Ibid Appendix A pp 255-260
[26] Ibid p 10
[27] Tvardovsky, Alexander. *Short Stories by Soviet Writers*. Ed R. Dixon. Moscow: Progress Publishers, undated.
[28] Congress Record p 2
[29] Ibid pp 2-5
[30] H.G. Scott. *Problems of Soviet Literature.* London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977 p 19
[31] Ibid p 21
[32] Ibid p 23
[33] Ibid p 23
[34] Ibid p 22
[35] Ibid p 22
[36] Mandelshtam, Nadyezhda. *Hope against Hope*. London: Collins Harvill, 1989 p 159
[37] Baedeker, Karl. *Russia. 1914*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1979 reprint, p 274
[38] Soviet Writers First Congress 1934. Footage file 16 Dec 2010. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJ4i3clp6Es (accessed May 16th 2013)
[39] *Nagel's Moscow and Leningrad.* Geneva: Nagel Publishers, 1958, p 59
[40] Grey, Camilla. *The Russian Experiment in Art.* London: Thames and Hudson, 1986 (Enlarged addition by Marion Burleigh-Motley) pp 167 and 226
[41] Scott, cover photograph
[42] Conquest, Robert. *The Harvest of Sorrow.* London: Hutchinson, 1986, p 3
[43] Maxim Gorky. See Appelbaum p 112
[44] Conquest, Robert. *The Harvest of Sorrow*, pp 299 - 307
[45] Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p 79

[46] Nikolai Bukharin and Karl Radek
[47] Satter, David. *It Was a Long Time Ago and It Didn't Happen Anyway.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012, p 50
[48] Figes, Orlando. *Natasha's Dance. A Cultural History of Russia.* London: Penguin, 2003 p 477
[49] Appelbaum p 84
[50] Ibid p 81
[51] Tzouliades, Tim. *The Forsaken*. London: Little Brown, 2008 p 19
[52] Kelly, Catriona. *Comrade Pavlik*. London: Granta, 2006 p 149
[53] Mandelshtam, Nadyezhda. *Hope against Hope*. pp 5-6. Osip Mandelshtam completed several versions of the poem. his variant is the first version in the possession of the NKVD, or Peoples Committee for Internal Affairs, the secret police. See also Figes, *Natasha's Dance*, p 484.
[54] Shentalinsky, Vitaly. *Arrested Voices.* New York: The Free Press, 1996 p 172
[55] Mandelshtam, Nadyezhda. *Hope against Hope*, p 40
[56] Congress Record, p 416
[57] Shentalinsky, p 189
[58] Ibid p 196
[59] Isaac Babel. Speech. Congress Record p 278
[60] Shentalinsky, p 68
[61] Mandelshtam, Nadyezhda p 321
[62] Shentalinsky, p 70
[63] Ibid, after p 150
[64] Yezhov, head of the NKVD, became surplus to Stalin's requirements in 1938. His name was on the same execution list as Babel's and they were shot within days of one another. See Conquest, *The Great Terror,* p xix.
[65] Boris Pilnyak. Congress Record p 711
[66] Boris Pasternak and Pilnyak had a common garden gate. They were neighbours on the same lane in the village of Peredelkino, half an hour east of Moscow by train. See Shentalinsky p 145
[67] Crick, Bernard. *George Orwell, A Life.* London: Penguin, 1980 pp 448, 450
[68] Shentalinsky p 88
[69] See Conquest, *The Great Terror* pp 306-07 and Shentalinsky, Arrested Voices p 25
[70] Conquest, Ibid p307
[71] Braun, Edward. *Vsevolod Meyerhold, The Final Act.* Essay in *Enemies of the People*, edited by Katherine Bliss. Evanton, Ill: Eaton Northwestern University Press, 2002, p 156
[72] Golden, Oliver (with Yelena Khanga and Susan Jacobi) *Soul to Soul, A Black Russian-American Family 1865-1992.* New York: Norton, 1992 p 90
[73] Tzouliades p 120
[74] Shentalinsky p222 and Satter pp 49-75
[75] Satter, p 57, citing Valentin Gordin, "Kak Sobrat' Ubyiti Narod" (How the killings were done); interview with Alexander Milchakov in Yechernaya Moskva (Moscow Evening, a newspaper) 18th of February 1992
[76] Kemp- Welch Anthony, *Stalin and the Literary Intelligentsia*. London: MacMillan, 1991 p 209
[77] Pravda, 12/6/37
[78] Conquest, *The Great Terror,* p 288
[79] Pasternak, Boris, *Doctor Zhivago*. London: Vintage, 2002, p 449
[80] Shiraev, Valeri. *283 Shaga* (283 steps -the length of the street) Novaya Gazeta (New Journal) Feb 21-27 2008 p 6 quoted in Satter p 4
[81] Kemp-Welsh p 214
[82] Congress Record p 1
[83] Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p 399
[84] Congress Record Supplement 1990 p 70
[85] Congress Record p 691 and Record Supplement 1990 p 70
[86] Kemp-Welch p212
[87] Literaturnaya Gazeta, (The Literary Gazette) 15th of June 1937 article entitled 'No life for Spies'
[88] Congress Record Supplement 1990 p 54
[89] Congress Record Appendix 5 p 697
[90] Ibid
[91] Ibid
[92] Ibid pp 697-708
[93] Ibid p 708
[94] Ibid
[95] Figes, Orlando. *The Whisperers*. London: Penguin, 2007 p 137

[96] Brendon, Piers. *The Dark Valley, A Panorama of the 1930s*,London: Jonathan Cape, 2000, p 208
[97] Figes, The Whisperers, p 98
[98] Ibid p 137
[99] Ibid p 137
[100] Ibid p 130
[101] Ibid p 130
[102] Ibid pp 133-34
[103] Ibid
[104] Vishnyevskaya, Galina. Soviet Writer. Quoted in *The Great Terror* by Conquest p ix.
[105] Shentalinsky p 20
[106] Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers*, p 124
[107] Ibid p 125
[108] Ibid p 125
[109] Ibid p 125
[110] Congress Record pp 178-79
[111] Ibid p 179
[112] Ibid p 681
[113] Ibid
[114] Kemp-Welch p 214
[115] Narochnitsky,A.L. *Encyclopaedia of Moscow,* Moscow: 'Soviet Publishers' 1980 p 245
[116] Levytsky, Borys. *The Stalinist Terror of the Thirties*. Stamford: Hoover Institution Press. 1974 Appendix A
[117] Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p 407
[118] Kemp-Welch p 226
[119] Conquest, *The Great Terror* p 485
[120] Ibid pp 484-489
[121] Ibid p 297
[122] Ibid p 297
[123] Ibid p 297
[124] Kemp-Welch p 225
[125] Literaturnaya Gazeta, 28th of December 1988, Moscow, quoted by Conquest, *The Great Terror* p 297
[126] Congress Record pp 74-111
[127] Ibid p 102
[128] Ibid p 103
[129] Literaturnaya Gazeta, 27th of March 1937 and Congress Supplement Record p 71
[130] Congress Record p 103
[131] Congress Supplement Record p 67
[132] Ibid p 12
[133] Ibid p 69
[134] Congress Record pp 146-169.
[135] Ibid pp 170-187
[136] Congress Record Supplement p 16
[137] Ibid p 69
[138] Literaturnaya Gazeta, 10th of July 1937
[139] Congress Supplement Record p 56
[140] 'Soon our bullets, Will be for our own nice clean generals'. French version quoted by Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p 182
[141] Congress Record p 186
[142] Personal experience
[143] Figes, Orlando. *A People's Tragedy* London Pimlico 1996 p 762
[144] Ibid p 760
[145] Ibid
[146] Rapoport,Vitaly and Alexeev, Yuri. *High Treason, Essays on the History of the Red Army*, Durham: Duke,1985 p 108
[147] Ibid pp 139-146
[148] Feuchtwanger, Leon. *Moscow 1937.* Left Book Club. Victor Gollanz. London 1937 p106
[149] Ibid p 112
[150] Ibid p 112
[151] Ibid p 110
[152] Congress Record pp 186-87

[153] Garrard, pp 40,51
[154] Congress Record p 187
[155] Congress Record pp 185-6
[156] Pravda, 11th of June 1937
[157] Ibid
[158] Conquest, *The Great Terror,* p 183
[159] Pravda, 11th of June 1937
[160] Orlov Alexander. *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes.* London: Jarrolds Publishers, 1954 p 239 et seq
[161] Conquest *The Great Terror,* pp 186-7
[162] Pravda, 12th of June 1937
[163] Rappaport and Alexeev p 8
[164] Ibid pp 5-11
[165] Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p 15
[166] Ibid p 203
[167] Ibid
[168] Ibid p 205
[169] Ibid
[170] Clark, Alan. Barbarossa. London: Cassell, 1965 p 34
[171] Ibid p 145
[172] Gide, Andre. *Journals* 1889-1949. Trans. Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin,1978 p 593
[173] Gide, Andre. *Return from the USSR*. New York: A. Knopf Publishers, 1937 p 42
[174] Bullard, Reader. *Inside Soviet Russia*. Diaries. Oxford: Day Books, 2000 p 19
[175] Manning, Olivia. *The Balkan Trilogy*. London: Arrow Books, 2004 p 104
[176] Tzouliades p 134
[177] Feuchtwanger, p 16
[178] Buber-Neumann, Margarete. *Under Two Dictators.* London: Pimlico, 2008 p 10
[179] Riefenstalhl Reni, *Triumph of the Will. Berlin* 1934. DD Video 2001
[180] Caute, David, *The Fellow Travellers.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973 pp 1-4
[181] Congress Record p 286
[182] Ibid p 287
[183] Gide, *Return from the USSR* p xi
[184] Congress Record p 146
[185] Gide, *Return from the USSR*
[186] Gide, *Journals* p 549
[187] Gide, *Return from the USSR* p xiii
[188] Gide, ibid p 27
[189] Gide, ibid p 49
[190] Koch, Stephen. Stalin, *Willi Muntzenberg and the Seduction of the Intellectuals*. London: Harper Collins, 1994 p 281
[191] Tzouliades P 91
[192] Ibid
[193] Weissman, Susan. *Victor Serge, The Course Is Set On Hope.* London: Verso, 2001, p161
[194] Serge, Victor. *Memoirs of a Revolutionary.* New York: New York Review of Books, 2012
[195] Appelbaum p 129
[196] Ibid
[197] Shentalinsky pp 41
[198] Ibid p 69
[199] Ibid p 70
[200] Ibid p 60
[201] Conquest, *The Great Terror* pp 399-408
[202] Appelbaum p 129
[203] Baber-Neumann, p xii
[204] Ibid p 143 and Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p 402
[205] Ibid p405
[206] Ibid
[207] Appelbaum, p 129
[208] Tzouliades, p 21
[209] Ibid p 16
[210] Ibid p 21

[211] Ibid pp 152-153
[212] Ibid p 104 citing Shentalinsky p 220
[213] Satter, p58
[214] Shentalinsky p 220
[215] Satter, p 66
[216] New Masses, November 1926 quoted by Tzouliades p 1
[217] Tzouliades p 5 citing George S. Counts and Nucia P. Lodge, *New Russia's Primer: The Story of the Five Year Plan*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1931 pp 148-160
[218] Ibid p 6
[219] Ibid p 8
[220] Ibid
[221] Ibid pp 9-10
[222] Ibid p 133
[223] Ibid p 134
[224] Ibid
[225] Ibid p 135
[226] Ibid p 104
[227] Ibid
[228] Ibid p 268
[229] Ibid p 105
[230] Ibid
[231] Ibid p 316
[232] Sgovio's memoirs are entitled *Dear America*. Kenmore: NY. Partners Press, 1979
[233] Serge p 397
[234] Struve, Gleb. *Russian Literature under Lenin and Stalin 1917-1953*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971
[235] Caute p 54
[236] Feinstein, Elaine. *Anna of all the Russias*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005 p 138
[237] Lincoln, Bruce. *Between Heaven and Hell.* London: Viking, 1998 p 412
[238] Kemp-Welch p 214
[239] Serge, p 312
[240] Caute, p 2
[241] Figes, *Natasha's dance* p 435
[242] Clark, p 80
[243] Struve p 41
[244] Ibid p 42
[245] Ibid
[246] Ibid
[247] Ibid pp 227-228
[248] Conquest, *The Great Terror* p 299
[249] Ibid
[250] Cawthorne, Nige. *The Crimes of Stalin.* London: Arcturus Publishing, 2011 pp 102-103
[251] Congress Record Supplement p 61
[252] Ibid
[253] Conquest, T*he Great Terror,* p 299
[254] Ibid
[255] Alliuevna, p 86
[256] Conquest, *The Great Terror* p 299
[257] Borland, H. *Soviet Literary Theory and Practice during the first Five-year plan, 1928-1932,* New York, 1950 quoted by Figes, *Natasha's Dance* p 471
[258] Shentalinsky p 139
[259] Congress Addendum Record p 61 and Struve, p 223
[260] Conquest p300
[261] Shentalinsky p 141
[262] Figes, *Natasha's dance* p 466
[263] Ibid p 470
[264] Ibid p 471
[265] Shentalinsky p 141
[266] Struve, p 226
[267] Bullard, p 19

[268] Kemp-Welch p 214
[269] Serge, p308
[270] Ibid
[271] Mandelshtam, Nadezhda, p 113
[272] Weiss, Susan pp 161-162
[273] Serge, p 312
[274] Struve p 226
[275] Ibid
[276] Ibid
[277] Ibid
[278] Struve p 228. The novel, 'O-Kay' was in Struve's view 'a denunciation of of Capitalist America, one-sided and biased.'
[279] Gerstein, Emma. *Moscow Memoirs*. London: Harvill Press, 2004, pp 187-188. (Originally published as Memoari, (Memoirs) in Russian, Moscow, 1998).
[280] Ibid p 188
[281] Struve, p 227 quoting Pilnyak's *Rocks and Roots*, pp 57-58
[282] Shentalinsky p 142
[283] Congress Record Supplement p 61
[284] Congress Record Appendix VI p 709
[285] Shentalinsky p 142
[286] Ibid
[287] Conquest p 300
[288] Shentalinsky p 145
[289] Ibid
[290] Ibid p 16
[291] Ibid p 19
[292] Shentalinsky p 144
[293] Conquest p 104
[294] Ibid pp 124-127
[295] Shentalinsky p 143
[296] Ibid p 144
[297] Ibid p 145
[298] Ibid p 151
[299] Ibid p 146
[300] Ibid
[301] Ibid p 147
[302] Ibid
[303] Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p 484 et seq.
[304] Shentalinsky p 149
[305] Ibid
[306] Ibid p 151
[307] Ibid p 152
[308] Ibid pp 152,153
[309] Ibid p 153
[310] Ibid
[311] Ibid p 154
[312] Ibid
[313] Ibid p 155
[314] Ibid
[315] Ibid
[316] Cawthorne p 135
[317] Shentalinsky p 156
[318] Ibid p 157
[319] Ibid

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Akhmatova, Anna. *The Complete Poems of Anna Akhmatova.* Edinburgh. Canongate Books Ltd, 2000.
2. Alliluyeva, Svetlana. *20 Letters to a Friend.* Translated by Priscilla Johnson. London: World Books, 1967.
3. Amis, Martin. *Koba the Dread.* London: Jonathan Cape, 2002.
4. Applebaum, Anne. *Gulag, A History.* London: Penguin Books, 2003.
5. Babel, Nathalie. *Isaac Babel: The Lonely Years 1925-1939.* New York: Noonday Press, 1964.
6. Beckett, Francis. *Stalin's British Victims.* Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004.
7. Benn, Anna and Bartlett, Rosamund. *Literary Russia*, London: Papermac, 1997.
8. Berberova, Nina. *Moura, The Dangerous Life of the Baroness Budberg.* Translated by Marian Schwartz, & Richard Sylvester. New York: New York Review Books, 1988.
9. —. *The Italics Are Mine.* London: Chatto & Windus, 1991.
10. Berlin, Isaiah. *Flourishing, Letters 1928-1946.* London: Chatto & Windus, 2004.
11. Berton, Kathleen. *Moscow, An Architectural History.* London: Studio Vista, 1977.
12. Brodsky, Joseph. *Less Than One, Selected Essays.* London: Penguin Books, 1987.
13. Buber-Neumann, Margarete. *Under Two Dictators, Prisoner of Stalin and Hitler.* Translated by Edward Fitzgerald. London: Pimlico, 2008.
14. Bulgakov, Mikhail. Master and Margarita, London: Harvill Panther, 1996.
15. Bullard, John, and Margaret Bullard. *Inside Stalin's Russia, The Diaries of Reader Bullard 1930-1934.* Oxford: Day Books, 2000.
16. Carpenter, Humphrey. W.H. Auden, Oxford: OUP, 1992
17. Caute, David. *The Fellow-Travellers.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson Limited, 1973.
18. Cawthorne, Nigel. *The Crimes of Stalin, The Murderous Career of the Red Tsar.* London: Arcturus Publishing Ltd, 2011.
19. Chamberlain, Lesley. *The Philosophy Steamer, Lenin and the Exile of the Intelligentsia.* London: Atlantic Books, 2007.
20. Clark, Katerina. *The Soviet Novel, History as Ritual.* 3rd. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000.
21. Clark, Alan. Barbarossa, London: Cassell, 2005.
22. Conquest, Robert. *The Great Terror, A Reassessment.* London: Pimlico, 2008.
23. E.H.Carr. *Twilight of the Comintern, 1930-1935.* New York: Pantheon Books, 1982.
24. Ehrenburgh, Ilya. *Truce: 1921-33.* Translated by Tatania Shebunina. Vols. 3 of Men, Years-Life. London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1963.
25. Fang, David. *Gorky's Tolstoy and Other Reminiscences.* Edited by David Fang. Translated by David Fang. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008.
26. Feinstein, Elaine. *Anna of all the Russias, The life of Anna Akhmatova.* London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005.
27. Figes, Orlando. *A People's Tragedy, The Russian Revolution 1891-1924.* London: Pimlico, 1997.
28. —. *A People's Tragedy, The Russian Revolution 1891-1924.* London: Pimlico, 1996.

29. —. *Natasha's Dance, A Cultural History of Russia.* London: Penguin Books, 2003.
30. —. *The Whisperers, Private Life in Stalin's Russia.* London: Penguin Books, 2008.
31. Freidin, Gregory. *The Enigma of Isaac Babel, Biography, History, Context.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009.
32. Garrard, John, and Garrard, Carol. *Inside the Soviet Writers' Union.* New York: The Free Press, 1990.
33. Gerstein, Emma. *Moscow Memoirs.* London: The Harvill Press, 1998.
34. Getty, J. Arch, and Oleg V. Naumov. *The Road to Terror, Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999.
35. Getty, J.Arch, and Roberta T. Manning. *Stalinist Terror, New Perspectives.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
36. Gide, André. *Journals 1889-1949.* Edited by Justin O'Brien. Translated by Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin Books, 1978.
37. —. *Return from the USSR.* Translated by Dorothy Bussy. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1937.
38. Ginzburg, Eugenia. *Into the Whirlwind.* Translated by Paul Stevenson and Manya Harari. London: Collins Harvill, 1989.
39. Gladkov, Alexander. *Meetings With Pasternak.* Translated by Max Hayward. London: Collins and Harvill Press, 1977.
40. Hingley, Ronald. *The Russian Secret Police.* London: Hutchinson & Co, 1970.
41. Hitchens, Christopher. *Unacknowledged Legislation, Writers in the Public Sphere.* London: Verso, 2002.
42. Ignatieff, Michael. *Isaiah Berlin A Life.* London: Chatto & Windus, 1998.
43. Kelly, Catriona. *Comrade Pavlik, The Rise and Fall of a Soviet Boy Hero.* London: Granta Books, 2006.
44. Kemp-Welsh, Anthony. *Stalin and the Literary Intelligentsia: 1928-39.* London: Macmillan Ltd, 1991.
45. King, David. *The Commissar Vanishes, The Falsification of Photographs and Art in Stalin's Russia.* New York: Owl Books, 1997.
46. Kish, Danilo. *A Tomb for Boris Davidovitch.* Dublin: Dalkey Archive Press, 2001.
47. Koch, Stephen. Stalin, Willi Muntzenberg and the Seduction of the Intellectuals, London: Harper Collins, 1995.
48. Koestler, Arthur. *Darkness at Noon.* Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1980.
49. —. *The Invisible Writing, The Second Volume of an Autobiography 1932-40.* London: Vintage, 1969.
50. Levi, Peter. Boris Pasternak. London:MacMillan, 1991
51. Levitsky,Boris. The Soviet Terror in the Thirties. Stamford:Hoover Institution Press, 1974
52. Lincoln, W. Bruce. *Between Heaven and Hell, The Story of a Thousand Years of Artistic Life in Russia.* London: Viking, 1998.
53. Mandelstam, Nadezhda. *Hope Abandoned.* Translated by Max Hayward. London: Collins Harvill, 1989.
54. —. *Hope Against Hope.* London: Collins Harvill, 1989.
55. —. *Hope Against Hope.* London: Penguin Books, 1983.
56. Manning, Olivia. *The Balkan Trilogy.* London: Arrow Books, 2004
57. McMeekin, Sean. *The Red Millionaire, A Political Biography of Willi Münzenberg, Moscow's Secret Propoganda Tsar in the West.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003.
58. Medvedev, Roy. *All Stalin's Men.* Translated by Harold Shukman. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983.
59. Merridale, Catherine. *Night of Stone, Death and Memory in Russia.* London: Granta Books, 2000.
60. Milne, Lesley. *Mikhail Bulgakov, A Critical Biography* . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

61. Montefiore, Simon Sebag. *Stalin, The Court of the Red Tsar.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988.
62. Orlov, Alexander. *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes.* London: Jarrolds Publishers Ltd, 1954.
63. Pasternak, Boris. *Doctor Zhivago*.London: Vintage,2002.
64. Patenaude, Bertrand M. *Stalin's Nemesis, The Exile and Murder of Leon Trotsky.* London: Faber and Faber, 2009.
65. Piers, Brendan. *The Dark Valley, A Panorama of the 1930s*. London: Jonathan Cape,2000.
66. Pike, David. *German Writers in Soviet Exile 1933-1945.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982.
67. Pirozhkova, Antonina. *Vospominaniye o Babele.(Memoirs of Babel)* Moscow: Knizhnaya Palata Publishers, 1989.
68. Polonsky, Rachel. *Molotov's Magic Lantern, Uncovering Russia's Secret History.* London: Faber and Faber, 2010.
69. Pringle, Peter. *The Murder of Nikolai Vavilov.* London: JR Books, 2009.
70. Rapoport, Vitaly, and Yuri Alexeev. *High Treason, Essays on the History of the Red Army, 1918-1938.* Edited by Vladimir G. Treml. Translated by Bruce Adams. Durham: Duke University Press, 1985.
71. Rayfield, Donald. *Stalin and His Hangmen, The Tyrant and Those Who Killed For Him.* New York: Randon House , 2004.
72. Read, Anthony, and David Fisher. *The Deadly Embrace, Hitler, Stalin and the Nazi-Soviet Pact 1939-1941*. London: Michael Joseph, 1988.
73. Reid, Anna. *Borderland, A Journey Through the History of the Ukraine.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997.
74. Riefenstahl, Leni. Triumph of the Will. Berlin 1934, DD Video
75. Robinson, Harlow. *Russians in Hollywood, Hollywood's Russians, Biography of an Image.* Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2007.
76. Rubenstein, Joshua. *Tangled Loyalties, The Life and Times of Ilya Ehrenburg.* London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1996.
77. Satter, David. *It Was a Long Time Ago, and It Never Happened Anyway, Russia and the Communist Past.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012.
78. Scammell, Michael. *Koestler, The Indispensable Intellectual.* London: Faber and Faber, 2009.
79. Scott, H.G. Problems of Soviet Literature, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977.
80. Shane, Alex. Evgeni Zamyatin, *The Biography of a Heretic.* Berkeley. University of California Press, 1968
81. Shentalinsky, Vitaly. *Arrested Voices, Resurrecting the Disappeared Writes of the Soviet Regime.* New York: The Free Press, 1996.
82. Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. *The Gulag Archipelago.* London: Book Club Associates, 1974.
83. - “ -, *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2000.
84. *Soviet Writers First Congress 1934.* Footage File. 16 December 2010. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJ4i3cIp6Es (accessed May 16, 2013).
85. Struve, Gleb. *Russian Literature under Lenin and Stalin 1917-1953.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971.
86. Taylor, S.J. *Stalin's Apologist, Walter Duranty The New York Times's Man in Moscow.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
87. Troyat, Henri. *Chekov.* London: Macmillan, 1987.
88. Tvardovsky, Alexander, Kontantin Paustovsky, Andrei Merkulov, Sergei Antonov, and Ilf and Petrov. *Рассказы советских писателей.* Parallel Text. Edited by R. Dixon. Moscow: Progress Publishers, Undated.
89. Tzouliadis, Tim. *The Forsaken, From the Great Depression to the Gulags: Hope and Betrayal in Stalin's Russia.* London: Little, Brown, 2008.

90. Weissman, Susan. *Victor Serge, The Course is Set on Hope.* London: Verso, 2001.
91. Zamyatin, Evgeny, We, *London*: Penguin Classics, 1993.
92. Wilmers, Mary-Kay. *The Eitingons, A Twentieth-Century Story.* London: Faber and Faber, 2009.
93. Нарочницкий, А. Л. *Москва, Энциклопедия.* Москва: Советская Энциклопедия, 1980 (Narochnitsky, A. L. Encyclopaedia of Moscow, Moscow, 'Soviet' Publishers, 1980).
94. Поляков, Ю. А. *Москва, Иллюстрированная История. Том 2.* Москва: Мыслъ, 1986 (Poliakov, Y.A., Moscow, The Illusrated History Volume 2. Moscow, Idea Publisher, 1986)).
95. Самойлова, М. И. *Первый Всесоюзный Съезд Светских Писателей 1934 г. Стенографический Отчет. Репринтое воспроизведение издания 1934 года.* Москва: Советский Писатель, 1989 (Samoilova, M. I. The First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers 1934. Stenographic Record. Reprint of the 1934 original. Moscow. Soviet Writer Publishers. 1989).
96. Самойлова, М.И. *Первый Всесоюзный Съезд Светских Писателей 1934 г. Стенографический Отчет. Приложения.* Москва: Советский Писатель, 1990 (Samoilova, M. I. The First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers 1934. Stenographic Record. Supplement. Moscow. Soviet Writer Publishers. 1989).

PRESS: Pravda, Moscow.
Literaturnaya Gazeta, Moscow.

THE EASTERN BOW

And, gentle, do not care to know,
Where Poland draws her eastern bow,
What violence is done,
Nor ask what doubtful act allows
Our freedom in this English house,
Our picnics in the sun.

W. H. Auden

A Summer Night

CHAPTER I

Oprichniki

Off Kropotkin Street, Moscow, 15th of December 1937

They came for him at midnight. Early. Arrests usually happened in the small hours. On the stairs leading to the landing he heard the slap of shoes mixed with the rasp of nailed boots on stone. A banging on the door. The hinges creaking as they always did. Behind the cavity wall Andrei, dozing but not sleeping, sat bolt upright.

"It's not locked, Comrade" he heard a voice say. Andrei recognised it - Kruchkov, the caretaker. He sounded incredulous.

"Evidently", a deep voice said. The same voice said "Go ahead Nikolai Salmanovich, but I think our pigeon has flown."

The light came on. One after another they entered the room. Andrei's view was through a peep hole behind a small ventilation grille. Between the lines of the grid he saw three men. Two were in civilian clothes, one in uniform. From his sitting position inside the wall cavity Andrei could see the bodies but not the faces. A pair of long leather coats; the other wore a uniform greatcoat. Andrei could see a revolver in his hand. All their feet were wet with snow.

"I think we can lose the howitzer." The same bass voice, tired. The officer put the pistol in his holster. Andrei heard the leather creak when it slid home.

The man with the deep voice spoke again. His tone was contemptuous. “Get in here. You said he was at home.”

A shuffling of feet. Part of Kruchkov's stomach came into the left hand side of the grid. “He was, Comrade Colonel,” he said, sniffing. He always sniffed between sentences. Andrei heard the fear in his voice. “I could swear to it. I saw him this evening. How he could have got past me I...I really cannot say. Perhaps at seven, when I was asked to come to the Police Station. There are two other exits to the block but I locked them myself. My wife kept a watch when I was away.” Kruchkov’s voice was high and strained. He sniffed again, quickly and rapidly at first, then tailed away. “I assure you, comrade Colonel, she kept a watch...”

“Really.” Two flat syllables.

There was silence in the room. Only Kruchkov’s nasal passages could be heard. The officer half turned.
“Comrade Colonel, will we do a search now?”

“A quick one. There won’t be anything here. I’m sure of that. His personal things are gone. Look at the empty drawers. Whatever was here is gone. It's him I want. For the moment, relax.”

Andrei heard the scrape of a match. The tang of sulphur and makhorka filled the room. Andrei's nose twitched. Someone liked old fashioned peasant tobacco. A wet Fedora was placed on the table, then another.

“I said relax.”

A blue officer's cap was placed beside the other two. Andrei recognised it, the special blue of the NKVD. Though he expected it, it jolted him.

“Nikolai Salmanovich, you take the bed spaces. Comrade Major, you look at the desk. I'll do the bookshelves.”

“What exactly is to be looked for?” said the officer.

A long drag on a cigarette. “Anything.”

“Yes, Comrade.”

“Sheets of paper. Manuscript. Addresses. Writing. Things like that. Anything of use will have gone with him but you never know.”

In his hiding place Andrei silently covered the peep hole with a piece of painted wood prepared for that purpose. He secured it and sat, hands on knees, on the edge of the camp bed. Only he could hear the slamming of his heart. He could feel his fingers trembling, butterflies in the pitch black. He felt sick.

“Let's get on with it,” the deep voice said. Andrei closed his eyes.

The search took fifteen minutes; mattresses prodded, drawers opened, books examined. He could hear someone taking books at random from the shelf. Pages ruffled with a thumb.

“How old is he?” a new voice said, not the deep one or the officer's. A high voice with a sharp edge.

“Twenty. Born in the year of the Revolution,” the officer said. Someone snorted. “What’s he a student of?” The officer again.

“ Law,” the deep voice answered. The high voice laughed, then stopped. Then the officer's voice again. A lot closer.

“French and German,” he said, “foreign rubbish.” Andrei heard new fingers plucking at the bookshelves. His body drew back in the dark. “Shall I take these as evidence? They must be counter-revolutionary.”

“Certainly. Take them,” the edgy voice replied, coming closer. “What are the bastards doing with anti-soviet materials such as these? And they have nothing from our leader. They are guilty swine. Nothing but swine. French and German shit.” He spat the last words out. A silence followed. Andrei could hear again the controlled ruffle of pages.

“Which books are the most counter-revolutionary would you say?” said the bass voice, as if asking about the weather.

Silence.

“I don’t exactly know, Comrade Colonel.” The high voice.

“Come. I'd value your opinion. Read the titles.”

Another silence.

“I don’t read French.”

“Ah. No matter. The German ones then.”

'Soviet power has no need of foreign -'

“So if, for example, this one here said 'The Collected Works of Lenin' let’s say, for the French workers, or this one for the Berlin proletariat, what would your reaction be?”

In the silence Andrei could hear the slow tapping of a finger on the bookcase. It cut through him. He winced and bit his lip. No one spoke.

“You, Comrade Major?”

“I don’t either, Com-.”

The deep voice sounded bored. “Yes. Leave the books. Nikolai Salmanovich, fill in the forms. You,” he said in a different voice, “ sign them.”

“Of course, Comrade Colonel,” Kruchkov said. “I’d be hap…”

“Sign them. When we have left get this door padlocked right away. Retain the key. Do not, if your life has any value to you, enter this room. Comrade Major, how many men have you outside the main entrance?”

“We only brought two.”

“We'll need more. From the caretaker's lodge telephone the Factory. I want every man they have. Now. The entire night shift and if that's not enough get men in from home. Comrade Yezhov's authority. Clear?”

“Clear.”

“We're going. Seal the door. Bring your fellow downstairs up here, break the seal then put him inside. Seal it again behind him. He's to touch nothing but stay put, very quietly, until relieved. No-one to have access to the room save myself and Comrade Nishikov. Anyone comes in, breaks the seal, your man is to arrest him. No shooting. Understood?”

“Understood.” the Major said.

“Comrade Colonel, I have no padlock. But I can get one in the morning.” Kruchkov’s voice had almost disappeared.

“Get one tonight.”

“Yes Comrade.” Kruchkov sniffed again.

“We’ll speak again. About tonight. Nikolai Salmanovich, the seals.’

“I have them.” Andrei heard a rustle of paper. “What about the neighbours? If he hasn't got away earlier might one of them be sheltering him?”

The flare of another match. Again the stink of burning makhorka. Again the deep voice, weary.

“That indeed is what I hope for. And we'll see if anyone is tempted to break the seals. But that is probably expecting too much, Nikolai Salmanovich. Listen.” Absolute silence.

“I can hear nothing.”

“My point. A black maria arrives in the courtyard. Men ascend the stairs, bang on the door and

search a flat. Lights. Noise. At arse-freezing midnight. And what can you hear? Not a sound. Can't you feel them breathing? Sitting up, staring at the wall, their little suitcases already packed. Waiting. For us to pick someone up. Someone else of course, not them. Then they will expect us to go. So we'll go. And they'll relax. Until we do a door-to-door and give them a little shock. Every single flat. So seal the door absolutely as normal and I would like very much to see if anyone breaks that seal in the next ten minutes. If you are so anxious please do wait for the guard."

No. Of course. I see what you are doing."

"What additional action do you propose?" The bass voice sounded silky.

"It's not my responsibility -"

"No. It's mine. But of course I value your opinion. Would you say that anyone in these two hundred communal flats here may be giving him shelter?"

"I think not, Comrade Colonel."

"I think not also. They know what would happen. But we do not take chances. Even though he has slid out while this excuse for a caretaker was supposedly keeping watch. We are going to leave now as if we have found nothing. We are going to clump down those stares and gather at the caretaker's lodge. Then when we have enough men we'll be back. Like a dose of salts. Questions?"

There was complete silence in the room. Andrei felt his heart battering against his chest.

"Good. Let's go. I'm getting irritable. I'm also thirsty. And we still have work at the factory. How many were pulled in yesterday?"

"Twelve." The officer's voice.

"Plus the scribblers and that idiot from the Ministry. Much to do. Pull the door closed. He's gone. The question is where to."

"We'll find out. When we sweat the bastards. That I look forward to." The high voice.

Miller heard their steps fading down the stairs. He stretched his arms and fingers straight out to the side. His shoulders and legs were locked and his right leg would not stop trembling. Nausea rose to the back of his throat. Despite the cold, his clothes were wet with sweat. Had they gone or were they waiting at the bottom of the stairwell? If so he was probably done for. Kruchkov would be scurrying to make up for his earlier error and would be back as soon as he could with the padlock. Guards would be up to enter the room in a few moments. Andrei's mind felt slow; mummified. He couldn't feel his feet. He tried to concentrate but couldn't. A cold sour fear rose in his stomach. In the paralysing dark he heard his father's words. Prepare, then get out. *Get out.*

His fingers moved blindly over his rucksack, checking the fastenings. In a rolled up sock in one pocket he felt the outline of his father's watch and held it quietly for a few seconds. Rising off the camp bed he eased back the panel giving access into the storage cupboard on the other landing and jammed his old fur hat on. He stepped out quickly, holding his rucksack and boots. Replacing the panel he covered it carefully with the pile of old tins, broken heating pipes and sacking, the normal contents of the cupboard. Shrugging on the rucksack he descended the staircase in stockinged feet, his boots tied round his neck. The cold from the stone seeped up his legs. It was pitch dark. He moved down quietly and steadily, feeling each step. Fourth floor, third, second. On the last flight he heard the guard begin to climb the other stairwell, a tired plodding scrape.

At the bottom of the staircase he was sitting on the steps tying up his laces when a door opened slowly and a weak light spread over the walls. A voice coughed. Andrei's face froze. An old woman wearing a shawl and carrying the lit stub of a candle on a saucer stepped into the passageway. She peered at him. Swiftly she put out the candle with her fingertips but said nothing.

Andrei fought to keep his voice quiet and gentle. “Hello, Lyudmilla Sergeiyevna. Sorry to disturb you.” A widow, she had lived in one tiny cupboard of a room for years and when he was very young she used to shout at him for playing with a ball outside her window. His father always made a point of dropping off some small bit of food from the Military Commissary for her when he was in Moscow and Andrei used to bring her sticks for her small stove when he could find them.

They faced each other in the dark. She continued to stare, then backed away from him into her room. Andrei kept quite still, looking towards the courtyard and feeling for his laces. Moments later she shuffled out and fumbled for his hands. She put something covered with a cloth into them and closed his fingers around it.. He felt her hand rest on the top of his old fur hat. Then her fingers slowly tracing the sign of the cross on his forehead. He had stopped breathing. Hands at her side

she turned and slowly re-entered her room. The door closed quietly behind her.

He got up, stuffed the bundle in his coat pocket and walked quietly through a small archway towards the back entrance of the block, his eyes moving constantly. The courtyard was silent, dark windows rising in tiers. No guard as yet. A flashing thought that there might be one on the other side of the rear door stalled him. He listened, ear against the door. Nothing. Holding his breath he turned the key. It stuck at first but then clicked over. It sounded loud; Andrei snapped his head around to scan the yard. The door opened. He stepped through. No-one. Andrei locked the door and moved into the shadow of an old factory building by a torn down fence, his lungs going in and out, his breath freezing in the air. Go. Now. Go quickly.

In the distance he could hear a lorry. He had five or six hours to wait before people on early shifts began to appear on the streets. Keeping out of any light he moved around to the back of the factory to some derelict huts huddled against its walls. Keeping the huts between himself and the flats he walked swiftly away, head down, a worker heading to a late shift. Four streets later he hadn't seen a soul. He was tempted to keep walking but he remembered what his father had told him and made for an old church he knew with some abandoned outbuildings running off its courtyard. Here he slid down into the tight space between them where the snow was light. A brick wall running head-high screened him from view. He lay propped on his rucksack on an old pallet which had somehow escaped being taken for firewood, and waited. The cold had already started up his legs and he pulled the long skirts of his coat over them. Remembering the old woman's bundle, he pulled it from his coat and found bread smeared with salt and meat fat. He took two large bites and replaced it in his pocket. The taste of the bread somehow made him giddy. He didn't know why, then he had it. He was out. Without thinking he touched his forehead. The snow had stopped and it had become colder. His heart had stopped thumping and now that he was still he could again feel the sweat turning cold under his coat. A plume of breath rose above his face. Looking up he could see the long thin bar of black sky between the buildings, filled with stars.

Lying there he could think only of the night when his father had told him of the blue vase and Mendel. Just a week ago. He wondered where his father was. His mind raced over each sentence of their conversations, each word, tracking backwards and forwards as if repetition would bring understanding. Lying there, looking up at the line of stars between the eaves, his thoughts went back to the room. Whatever happened he knew he had seen it for the last time.

*

A week ago he had been alone in the room in the evening, sitting at the table by the stove and staring out the window at the falling snow, when his father had come home unexpectedly from his regiment. He had put his hand on his son's shoulder and kissed him hard on each cheek, an unusual event. Taking his long officer's greatcoat off, he hung it and his hat on the back of the door and sat down heavily at the table. A chipped green enamel lampshade hung down low over the surface from a flex in the ceiling. It cast a weak angular beam downwards but left the rest of the room in shadow. In the evenings Andrei liked to sit here by the window and read by the single lamp, a book flat under the light.

In that same light Miller looked at his father. It had been a month since they had seen each other. He seemed tired and suddenly old. Under the well-kept colonel's uniform he seemed also to have shrunk, the collar looser than it had been and the belt taken in another notch. His father took the belt off and unbuttoned his tunic. He sat quite still. The light showed up the lines in his face, the heavy circles under the eyes and the cropped thinning hair.

"Tea, Papa?"

His father nodded but said nothing. Andrei got up to pump the primus stove and put some water in the kettle. The small flame hissed under it, turning blue. Andrei got out the glasses and set them on the table. Then he sat down opposite his father. Neither said anything. Waiting for his father to speak, Andrei looked around him.

The room was four metres by six. They were lucky to have it. It had its own entrance from the landing and with a sink and a primus they didn't have to share a kitchen. Most people outside the privileged elite had only a few square metres per person and lived in communal apartments, one room to a family. A room like this might easily have five people squeezed into it. The ceiling was high, sagging, with half the cornice missing. One large window, divided into square panes, looked onto the onion dome cupolas of a church, now a storehouse, whose crosses were long gone. A table and three odd chairs sat in the centre of the room surrounded by a stove, armchair and broken wardrobe. At one end of the room a bed recess was cut into the wall. Andrei usually slept on a folding cot. The last piece of furniture was a tall bookcase, roughly made of heavy planking and other bits of wood hammered together and painted grey. It was nailed to the wall. On the bookcase were some odd volumes of Pushkin, and some books in French and German both in translation and

in the original. Goethe, Victor Hugo, Balzac. His mother's books.

Beside these were a range of novels from Dostoevsky, Gogol, Turgenev and Tolstoy. There were a few books of poetry; '*Stone*' and '*Egyptian Stamp'* by Mandelshtam had been there side by side with Pasternak's verses but his father had taken them wordlessly one night after the news of the poet's arrest and they had never re-appeared. Only the Pasternak remained. At the end of the short row, *Versts*, by Akhmatova stuck out slightly. Another shelf was filled with books on architecture and topography. Volumes by Grabar on Russian buildings sat beside heavy bound books on Russian and European buildings and other works on the history of Moscow and Leningrad.

Two silver photograph frames, the large assay marks showing the old Petersburg emblem of crossed anchors, stood on the middle shelf. One was a stiff group portrait of his mother's family taken in Paris around 1900 and the other was of his mother alone taken in 1914. The date and the photographer's stamp was on the bottom right hand corner. Fischer & Son. Fontanka 14, Petrograd. The photograph showed an austere young woman in a plain white blouse with a severe black bow around the throat. She had a sensible face with a deep intelligence in the eyes. A smaller photograph in a plain wooden frame showed the same face caught off guard, this time open and smiling, leaning back on a granite block with the Neva and the spire of the Peter and Paul fortress in the background.

Andrei's father caught him looking round the room. He pointed to the kettle. When Andrei had made the tea his father stared at the rising steam.

"You love this place."

"Yes, of course...You're back early Papa," Andrei said.

"Yes." said his father. He slid across the table a book wrapped in brown paper.

"Pushkin. One of the new editions. It's part of the frenzy. Seventeen million volumes this year they tell me."

"Seventeen."

"Yes. He's in favour. Pravda says he's 'semi-divine'. All of a sudden. I wonder what it means." His

voice sounded low. “Maybe to take our minds away from what they're writing now. Drink your tea, Andryoshka, we must go for a walk. It is a fine evening.”

Miller looked out at the snow swirling beyond the window, then back to his father. The colonel closed his eyes and slowly shook his head. He raised a forefinger to his lips.

They talked of the weather. How it was very cold now, even for Moscow. When they had finished the tea his father rose and fastened his tunic. He didn’t put on his belt but only shrugged himself into the greatcoat. Andrei pulled on an old jacket and a long dark coat, a soldier's coat dyed black, from the pocket of which he drew out a scarf and workman’s cap.

“Fits you well that coat” said his father, “I’m glad I kept it.” He put his hat on and motioning to Andrei to lock the door, began to descend the steps. The flat was on the top floor. Five flights led down to the street. Below him Andrei could see his father descending the circular stairs, following the curved handrail slowly down. His body moved in a tired way from side to side. Andrei locked the door and went down the stairs after him.

In the courtyard the snow was falling, quite thickly now, but there were still people passing under the great arch leading to the boulevard. Each figure seemed weighed down with their own thoughts. His father turned up his collar.

“I doubt they have any listening devices upstairs. But you never know. It’s good not to talk in rooms if you have an alternative. Something to remember.” Their eyes locked briefly and they began to cross the courtyard.

“Good Evening, Comrade Colonel.” It was Kruchkov, coming out from the shadow of the arch.

“Good Evening, Vasily Dimitrovich,” said his father. “Ever on duty.”

“Of course, Comrade Colonel,” Kruchkov said. “We must always be on guard. Our motherland is surrounded by enemies. Eternal vigilance is what we must keep. We are all soldiers in these times. In Pravda today there is news of the trials of more of them.” He pointed to newspapers pinned on wooden boards attached to the wall. In the dim light under the archway black headlines stood out. '**Death to Spies. Those who betray the Motherland-Shoot them like dogs. Unmask the**

Trotskyite conspirators.'

Colonel Miller glanced at the papers but said nothing, nodding to himself.

The caretaker grew more agitated. His hands balled into small white fists. "Enemies of the people. Saboteurs, spies, wreckers. They all confessed. Shooting is not enough for these swine. If it were me-"

"How would you do it, Comrade? You have a different approach?"

"Me?" He hesitated. "Approach?" His voice tailed off, then recovered. "I'm not sure what you mean, Comrade Colonel. I would leave that in the hands of the proper authorities. The state organs who protect us night and day from-"

"I thought you were saying something else. That the organs of state have made the wrong decision as to how to execute enemies of the people. That you have a different view?"

The man stared. "No. No. A figure of speech…Of course not. Never. The organs stand between us and …and …"

"Enemies of the people" said the Colonel.

"Exactly. Exactly. That is what I was saying. Exactly what ..."

"A peaceful night to you, Comrade."

Father and son passed through the arch, turned left onto the main road and left again into a side street.

"Andryoshka. You must listen. I have just done what you must never do. Spite vermin. I'm getting to be an older fool than I thought."

"He's foul."

“Not the point, as well you know. A snake he is, agreed, but not stupid. And so you have my apologies. I should have not provoked him. He is devious and a survivor. Speaks of military sacrifice. A friend warned me of him. During the war *and* the civil war his service was limited to the main sorting office in Petrograd. Supposedly directing mail. Opening it certainly. Probably stole half of it.”

Andrei looked at his father.

“And of course he was an informer. Then and now. A willing one. They aren't all, willing.” The older man shook his head gently. “ It is time we talked,” he said in a quiet voice. Andrei said nothing.

“That's good,” his father murmured, placing his hand for a moment on his son’s arm, then putting it back deep in his pocket. “Silence is good. Remember, spontaneity is dangerous, Andryoska. Guard against it and allow the snakes their hour. That way yours may come also.”

“What do you mean?” Andrei said. His father made a gesture with his head. They turned and walked on in silence, under falling snow.

*

“I am an old Bolshevik, but I am weak.”

“What do you…what’s that mean, Papa?”

“I’m not sure.”

They walked on. Moscow was dark around them. Few lights showed and most of the street lamps were out. On the pavement the snow creaked under their feet. There was no wind now and the snowflakes were falling straight down. Occasionally someone passed them on the other side of the street, a well wrapped bundle passing silently by. They took side streets, two dark blurs in occasional lamplight. Stopping in a doorway under a lop-sided sheet of iron holding up a pillow of

snow Andrei's father lit a cigarette. The door was boarded up and a single sheet of typing was nailed to the wood, the paper stained with brown rust marks. It could no longer be read.

The older man spoke at last, in a forced cheerful voice. “And how goes the law?”

“Okay. Next year’s the last, and I look forward to that.”

His father turned to look directly at him. Their faces were a foot apart.

“ That’s how you must think. Look forward. Do not forget that. Come on. ” He turned again and began to walk. Andrei fell into step beside him.

“Andryoshka, listen carefully. You’re going to be upset so prepare yourself for it.”

Andrei looked over at his father, who stared straight ahead.

“I've failed.”

“What?”

“I've failed. You, your mama, the country. Failed all of you. In various ways.” His voice trailed away.

“I don’t understand.”

“Listen.”

“You're an officer of the Red Army. Mama died ten years ago. I shall be a lawyer. What more-”

His father raised a hand slightly. At the corner where the lane met Old Stable Street the Colonel stopped. Above them in the darkness a large placard ten metres by fifteen covered the gable end of an apartment building. A familiar portrait of the Leader filled the rectangle. The huge moustachioed face looked out over the street through the falling white curtain. Colonel Miller looked up.

He smiled.“You know, I first kissed a girl in that building. I was younger than you are now. She was

rather beautiful. And kind. Karolina Perelman. Wonderful red hair. Her father's grocery shop was just here." He pointed to an empty shop front. One window was broken and boarded up. The other showed rows of empty shelves. The sign above the door said 'Moscow Food Trust'. Some faded illegible lettering was just visible behind it.

Andrei stared. He had never heard his father speak in this way.

"On the top floor landing. See it? The window in the centre with the light. Oh yes. I had a life too, once. Of course this was long before I met your mother. I was only sixteen. It was before the war." He looked up again, "Under the other Tsar."

Andrei couldn't stop his head swivelling round and his mouth opening.

"I know. I know. But I know also who I'm speaking to. Honestly, maybe, for the first time. Come on. Let's walk. Time is not something we have much of now."

They moved on down Old Stable Street. The snow was falling less thickly now. Babushkas, wadded and wrapped against the cold had their heads down and were scouring the pavement with long brooms of birch twigs, their long skirts swinging. A militiaman stood shivering on the corner. He saluted and Colonel Miller flicked the edge of his cap.

Out of earshot of the militiaman, Andrei's father began to speak.

"Let me go on for a bit. When I've finished you can ask any questions you wish. I don't say I will answer but you can ask. Agreed?" Andrei nodded. "I'm back early because they tell me I am to be promoted. Not such a good thing as you might think. A driver is coming for me tomorrow and then... back to Leningrad. A place is reserved for me on the night train. Everything is arranged, they tell me." Andrei's father pursed his lips. "I believe them."

"You love Leningrad…"

"Indeed I do. I met your mother there. And together with its many other attributes it has the distinction of being the city of your birth." Miller smiled briefly. "But it may not be such a happy trip this time I think."

Andrei said nothing. Confusion showed on his face.

“I think they plan to arrest me at some stage. No, don’t. Otherwise my heart may go also. Please. Just get a hold of yourself a little. I know it’s a shock. Look at the last few months. It's not just the General Staff they've butchered. Half the officers above field rank have been taken away. Many good men. They have not returned. Many are being shot. Every day. The army is being destroyed. We know it.”

“It’s mad. For what?”

“’For what?’ is a good but irrelevant question. 'Za shto?' is indeed what they shout before they get a bullet. So we hear. In the back of the neck, they say. But no reason is necessary for the NKVD. Another thing to remember.” Colonel Miller sighed. “They will wait till next week. It is important I get back to Leningrad. I have something to do there. They know that. They will give me some rope. It won’t happen until then. And, don't worry. It's all planned. I'll disappear. They won't be taking me.”

“What do you mean ….?”

“There is a plan. And a plan's first requirement is that it should survive a sally of the enemy. Yet another thing to remember. How many things to remember does that make? Anyway. First you must listen carefully. Agreed?”

“If you say it.”

“Good. If you listen and do as I say we’ll both meet up outside the slaughter house this country has become. I realise that is hard for you to hear. I want to talk about your life. Your future. At least I can give you that.” Andrei's father stopped speaking for a short while, then began again. “It’s lost. The Revolution. *We* have lost it. For your generation. We've allowed a beast to rule us. This beast needs blood. And he'll murder anyone. Our leader, our *Vozhd*, - he feeds on us. And the sorrowful thing is we've let him.”

“Papa…”

“No. Listen. An old Bolshevik speaks. I've seen two wars now, the big one and the civil, and two revolutions. And there's another war coming. Maybe I won’t live to see it. Along with many others. The beast has murdered almost all the good ones, thousands of them, but still he’s not satisfied. He's ruining the lives of millions. Still it goes on. He's jumping around in our blood and there is still no end to it. Arrests, denunciations. Camps in the wilderness with millions being worked to an early death. I've seen the documents about these places. And I saw the famines in the Ukraine. He made it so. Ten year old living skeletons lying in ditches eating grass. And looking at me as if I could help them. It was the opposite. I took part in grain requisition. Held a pistol to an old farmer’s head. I will not speak of it. It was another time'. He paused, his face still. 'Though I will be judged.”

Andrei felt he could say nothing; he stared at his father, who cleared his throat and spoke again.

“And people disappear off the street every day. We're no longer surprised. We just look down and pretend it did not happen. People. Just. Disappear. As if they never existed. Tortured. *Tortured* in a Socialist country. Shot. In their hundreds of thousands. For what? A madman’s smile. His bloated approval. Our shame is that we’ll never know how many.” Miller made a sour face. “For this the Revolution was fought.”

Andrei said nothing. His body had broken out in sweat. He looked at his father in the dark.

“And if I am taken, they'll come for you. You know their rules. Any relative is taken also. We don’t speak of it but you know it. But they won’t get either of us.” Andrei's father turned to grasp his arm. Both men stopped. “You are not for them. Remember that when things are hard. You are not for them.”

“Papa…”

“Not yet. Not yet. You must listen. You're to leave Russia.”

“*Leave Russia*?”

“Yes. I also. It's fortunate we have no relatives. Very fortunate. No argument. I will join you on the other side of the hill.”

“Where's that-?”

“The other side. I cannot say where. And I don’t know where you are going either. That way I can't tell the Oprichniki. We'll meet on the other side.”

“What 'Oprichniki'?”

“Them. Who else? In our regiment, amongst friends of course, we call them that. The Chekhists, the NKVD. What else to call them? Just like in Ivan the Terrible’s time. His thugs. They used to wear dog’s head and broom badges, didn’t they? Loyalty and the clean sweeping broom. Just a new Ivan, that’s all.”

Both men were silent.

“What I don’t know I can't tell, Andryoshka. That is why I am telling you little and why I don’t know where you are going. But you are going. Otherwise it will be the end. And soon. I'm on a list. And so will you be. So it's time. Listen.”

They began walking again. The face of Stalin above them, unblinking, stared out over the street. They passed an old palace behind railings, the space between its pillars filling up with snow.

“When the time comes you must go across the river. To Zamoskvoreche, to Pyatnitskaya, the old Church. You know it. Where we used to go.”

“The one built over the gate.”

“That one. The Zachachievsky. Where I took you when you were young. It’s now a small shoe repair place. A co-operative. Of sorts. Through the gate is a workshop. I'll tell you what to say.”

“It sounds crazy-”

“A friend is there. His name, so far as we're concerned anyway, is Mendel. A name to be silent about and to guard. Go to him. He is to be trusted. He will look after you and get you away.”

“How can I leave you? What does this mean?”

“It means there's a chance for life. And it’s not a sure chance but it's the only chance. And you're not leaving me. We'll meet on the far side of the hill, as I told you. Where exactly I don’t know just yet. Here are some more things to surprise you. Back at the room there's a cavity behind the wall. You're moving in there. Close your jaw. It looks odd hanging open like that.”

“A *what*?”

“I know. A little melodramatic, but it’s just insurance. When we return I'll show you. It's entered from the other landing and was a storage cupboard once. Long forgotten. And filthy. Now it's half a storage cupboard. And still filthy. *But you enter it from the other staircase*. That’s the thing. When you were at the young people’s camp with Roman this last summer and Vasily was away, I rebuilt it. It's small but it'll take a man lying down. I've tried it. The thing is we can’t afford to keep your things anywhere else or involve anyone else. In the end, you must just disappear. Tonight I'll show you how to get in there from the other landing and leave no traces. You must pack your rucksack with what you need.” Andrei's father made movements with his hands, as if he were stuffing a sack.

“A change of clothing, the photographs. A book to keep your spirits up. Food. Socks. But travel light. Keep the rucksack in the cavity. I've left money on a shelf. There's a small eye hole I'll show you and a false ventilation grill which will stand examination from the other side but it'll let you hear what’s said if they come. That may be important. Be ready to go always. Sleep in there. For a toilet you must use the normal communal one but in one of the other staircases. Pace yourself. For peeing I’ve put in a petrol container with a tight cap.”

“Disappear. *Disappear*? What do I say to Roman?”

“Nothing. At all. I know it'll be hard. He's a fine chap and you've known him all your life. But nothing can be said to him, for his own sake. They're almost certain to question him and it's better if he genuinely doesn't understand any of it. Even his hurt will help us. Later, we'll get word to him you are safe. When it's not dangerous to him or his mother. Andryoshka, don’t look at me like that. I know what he means to you. That's the reason I am saying it must be done this way. Please. For his sake.” His father looked away and spoke in a tired voice. “For everyone’s in fact.”

“What about Kruchkov? He watches always too.”

“He does, the slug. Here. Don’t ask.”

Without breaking step his father handed Andrei two keys. “They're for the back entrances which he keeps locked. He doesn't know about these of course. They'll let you in and out of the far block if you're careful. You use the other staircases and landings, not ours. Remember to move on the streets when other people are using them. Not in the middle of the night. If you find yourself in that position, hide till the people are out for the early shift. Then lose yourself in them. Get to Mendel. We can communicate through him. I'll be in Leningrad and making my own preparations. We'll meet on the other side, never fear. You must carry on as normal for the next week or so. The Oprichniki will expect me to be away and for your life at the university to continue. Let them. You wait. Every day as you leave your classes at four go out through the main gate. You must look without fail at the first floor window over the barber’s shop. You know it?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Good. Everything must go along as normal. That’s important. Say it to yourself a hundred times. Were you suddenly to disappear before time they would be alerted and everything would go wrong.”

“What’s ‘everything’? How would anyone know I've disappeared? I don't understand.”

“Ignorance in this case is bliss. They'll know because they'll be watching. At the moment they aren't. *But each day check that window.* If there's nothing but curtains in the window go home as normal but sleep in the cavity just in case. If there's a blue vase there may be danger. Be especially ready. They usually come somewhere between three and five in the morning. They'll search but not rip apart the flat there and then so you'll be safe. Leave quietly by the other landing and the back door and go to Mendel. Do you follow?”

“I think so.”

“Don’t worry. We’ll go over everything again, in more detail, later. Also- listen carefully. If there's a red vase, don’t go home- go to Mendel right away. Try to avoid being followed. I'll speak to you later about how to do that. If all else fails and you feel yourself to be in danger or that the Chekhists are following you go to the Sandunovsky baths first. There's an attendant who hands out the towels. He's got a hare lip. Quite bad. He'll watch for you. And guide you away. It's a busy place with

many exits and you can leave un-noticed. Then to Mendel. Take a roundabout route. We'll discuss this more later. Understood?"

"Yes. Blue-cavity, trouble coming but act normal. Red to Mendel right away. Sandonuvsky otherwise."

"Good. Mendel knows what you look like. I've shown him a photo. For the bath fellow I'll give you a Pushkin quote which he'll complete. At the Zachachievsky church- the shoe repair place- you tell whoever's there you've got two old pairs of boots you need remaking into one pair. He'll ask if they are brown or black. You'll answer unfortunately one of each."

"How will I know anyone?"

"You won't. That again is best. As I said you may trust Mendel. We're both trusting him with our lives but that trust is well placed. Follow what he says exactly. To the letter."

"I can't believe this, Papa…"

"Nor me. But it's real. We'll go back now. On the way I'll go over everything again. About identity documents, movements, the ways of the Lubyanka people You'll need to learn quickly. How to tell if you're being followed. How to be careful. Don't speak of anything in the flat. I don't think it's wired but it's good to get into the habit of silence in buildings. I'll give you half of a torn postcard. It's simple but it works. Anyone producing the other half is a friend."

Colonel Miller stopped under a light and turned. Andrei thought he looked very old.

"Well? Are you all right?" his father said.

"Honestly? I'm afraid. And for you, why don't we go now if it's so necess-"

"We can't. Just accept that. And being afraid is good. It'll make you careful. We're all afraid now. It's our world. One we've created, God help us. Odd that we still say such things. We expect him to help but don't believe he exists. But now we've a sort of hope. That's something you must never underestimate. I know you won't. Hope is all. Let's go back."

They turned and began to walk back towards Kropotkin Street. At an intersection Colonel Miller stopped and turned towards the centre of the city. Andrei followed his eyes and they stood there for some minutes without speaking. Between the buildings they could see searchlights in the distance and the dim outlines of the Kremlin spires towards the north east In the tenement buildings on either side of them a few brownish lights showed in some of the high windows; most were dark. Two men were walking by in silence on the other side of the street. A woman stood in a doorway at the far end, a bag in her hand, staring into space. A family, all holding a roll of old carpet, straggled along the frozen pavement, walking carefully. Andrei and his father moved for them, receiving a quiet word of thanks. When they had passed Andrei and his father started walking again. Somewhere a child was crying.

*

CHAPTER II

Old Stable Street, Moscow. 15th of December 1937. 1.30 am.

A man sits writing in a small room high up in an old building. He is about forty, thin, with a small sharp face. A long pale forelock hangs down limp and straight and this, together with a pair of round steel rimmed glasses perched on the end of his nose, gives him the air of a younger man, almost of a schoolboy. An oil lamp and half a candle sitting inside a tin lid light up the cramped cubicle of plywood walls. A single iron bed, an upturned packing case beside it piled with books, and the table at which he sits, fill the room. Standing with arms outstretched he can touch both walls. Above his head, the light fades to a Piranesi shadow. Where the wooden partitions chop into the tall plaster walls, a short line of massive cornice hangs suspended in dark air.

The street outside is silent. A lorry engine sounds sometimes from the Arbat a hundred metres away. Weak light comes in from a gap at the bottom of curtains made up of an army blanket sewn with an uneven cross- stitch to a piece of ripped damask. The only sound is the soft stabbing hiss of the pencil moving over the paper, its point jabbing in the circle of lamplight. The man writes quickly, pausing between groups of words. From time to time he looks up, his face puckered with thought, then his head drops into the light and his hand moves again.

A door opens in the corridor. The man's head rises and he stops writing. His ears strain to hear and he cannot stop himself glancing towards his own door, his neck extended. The large bolt, lock and wedge under the door look solid but he knows the structure is in truth flimsy and a determined boot

would have the wood in splinters. Nonetheless, standing outside himself he marvels at the illusion of the door, noting both its strength and its falsity, and storing them somewhere in the recesses of his mind.

He looks quickly at a scarred watch on the table. Only its hour hand remains. Half past one. It's Torpovsky coming back after his shift at the tram depot. As on every evening he enters the communal kitchen, boils water for tea and drinks a cup before taking one to his wife. The writer listens and his head sags back into his shoulders when he hears a kettle being filled and the distant musical clink of a spoon in a glass.

Placing his pencil flat on the table he stares at the exercise book. He knows the words filling its pages mean his death. The smallest of sighs escapes him. He moves the chair back and stands, rubbing at his lower back. His face is taut. A pinched nerve troubles him in winter. He pulls the curtain back. It's still snowing.

Beside the bed a half empty vodka bottle stands on the packing case. Making no noise the man fills a glass and sips at it by the window, grateful for its roughness.. The panes of glass are clear and beyond them the snow falls silently. He feels the whole city breathing in shallow, imperceptible, draughts of air. In his mind millions of lungs fill every building, street and square. They rise and fall as one, but uncertainly, waiting and listening just below the surface of sleep. He thinks always in images and earlier tonight he saw from behind the curtains one of the Crows, a single black police van moving slowly down the street, a torch beam lingering on house numbers. It passed his building and moved on but all night he thought of the black vans crossing and re-crossing Moscow, carrying lost faces, stricken and dry-throated in the jolting dark.

Loneliness hits him in the chest like a spear. He watches himself, the two small circles of his glasses flashing in the window pane. He thinks about what it would be like not to be alive any more, not to feel the burn of vodka in his throat nor walk the empty winter embankments of the Moskva river. No more towers half- hidden in falling snow; no gold leaves in Autumn on the boulevards; no fierce gleaming cupolas on a white-hot Russian summer day. He pours more vodka, the rattling chink of bottle on glass making him clutch them together quickly to still the sound. In a few hours the pavements below will be covered in people hurrying along, heads down but still alive. One day,

he knows, he won’t be amongst them; the whole swirling world will go on and he won’t be there. He cannot quite believe it.

And yet he does. One night, he knows, he’ll hear a sound at the end of the corridor, then low voices and swift confident footsteps in the hall.

*

CHAPTER III

Sitting on the snow between the walls, propped up by his rucksack, Andrei took a small drink of vodka from his father's flask and felt the warmth spread through him. He was tempted to take another but put the flask away. He thought over his life in the last week and it still made no sense. He had begun to think it was some sort of mistake and his father would come through the door with a laugh and an explanation. He had had a sense, no more, of not being alone on the streets and he knew Vasily clocked him in and out of the building. At first he had sat by the window as usual in the evenings and read Pushkin again, the book flat in the circle of light on the table, woodcuts for each chapter showing old St Petersburg; moonbeams on a bridge over the Moika, black footsteps in the snow, pillared shadows in the Winter Palace Square. The block, run by the Literary Fund was quiet, large and honeycombed with different stairs and passages, some cut out of older buildings connected to the main block. The tenants were mostly writers. How his father ever got the place was a mystery never explained to him.

The building had been blighted over the last two years by arrests and the disappearance of writers and their families. People who used to speak to neighbours now kept to themselves. On the streets people were wary of something they would not name. Staring out the window he could not bring himself to believe he would no longer be able to walk into the room, see the familiar photographs and books, and sit

with some tea in his father's chair by the stove. He had been granted the privilege when he turned fourteen. In that room, the world seemed a safe place. Only the cavity disturbed his thought, like a tooth ache. Each night he had taken took some rubbish down to the courtyard to place in the communal bins and made his way back up to the top floor by other staircases, noting the layout as he went. When it was quiet he would slip into the cavity and lie silent in the dark. With familiarity came sleep.

The main university lecture of the week, usually followed by a discussion, had been about the 1936 Soviet constitution, the one the papers called the Stalin constitution. The lecturer, normally quite a cheerful old man, a lively speaker given to the odd aside, spoke in a robotic trance throughout the morning, his face drawn. The ends of his fingers fluttered at the edge of the lectern. Unusually, he was wearing a coloured enamel badge of some sort in his lapel and a few of the students remarked on his nerves and best suit. He looked like a reluctant groom. Andrei noticed another man, middle-aged and silent, sitting at the back of the auditorium. He kept his hat on. The students nudged one another, looking over their shoulders. He sat there throughout the lecture, his expression one of mild boredom. Towards the end the lecturer began to look increasingly like a rabbit caught in bright light. Finishing, he gabbled together a few words on the subject for the next day, which no-one made out, and scuttled off the podium, notes clutched to his chest. The class broke up early. Some of the students felt deprived of the opportunity to insert polished phrases into the discussion. Most had prepared quotes from Stalin, some in case they were required to speak, others in any event. According to disposition all felt release or disappointment at the unexpected turn of events.

The next day a new lecturer appeared. Professor Rembovsky proved to be a very boring speaker. He delivered the lecture in an unbroken monotone, reading from his notes and looking up only occasionally. Andrei counted six mentions of Stalin in the first quarter hour. At the lunch break he went into the basement canteen where he had arranged to meet Roman. He had known Roman Brodsky from childhood. They had

gone to the same primary school on Kropotkin Street and had stayed together through secondary school and the Pioneers youth group. Andrei had enjoyed the camping and walking. His friend had not, his chubby body averse to all physical strain. Roman was studying languages and literature.

“Comrade! What news from the Rialto?” Roman said, on seeing him, his palms outstretched. He was always grinning. His large head was crowned with thick black hair. He looked around quickly to make sure they were alone.

“From the Rialto, not much” Andrei replied, also looking around. “Our new lecturer bores to Olympian standard.”

“What happened to the other one?”

“Gone.”

Each looked at the other.

“Ech,” Roman said, speaking quietly. He paused. “He wasn't so bad that old one, was he.”

“He wasn't. Don’t think about it. Nothing can be done.”

“No.” Brodsky’s voice sounded lost. “I suppose not.” His mouth turned downwards. He muttered something. Silence fell on them both.

What’s on today?” Andrei prodded his friend in the stomach, trying to cheer him up. Brodsky brightened.

“There's a choice of roast pheasant or buckwheat noodles.”

“Really?”

“No.”

“Then I think the noodles.”

“A wise choice. Game can be so disappointing in December, I find. *Et comme vin*?”

“In the event the Bordeaux is not yet ready for drinking I shall have tea.”

“Again, wisdom personified. The red, especially the 29, will be presumptuous and confused for a year or two yet.”

“Can Bordeaux be confused?”

“Language. Its beauty is its plasticity. A concept lost on you pedants of the law.”

“Balls.”

“Ever the mot juste.”

Andrei smiled, Brodsky also. He had won. “Directness is not a virtue always, Andryoshka.” They picked up discoloured plates and joined the line of students. Each again fell silent.

They found a table.“Come on.” Andrei said, “Why were you so cheerful anyway?” They threw grey salt on mounds of brown noodles. Roman prodded his without enthusiasm but lifted his head with the beginnings of a smile.

“Because the fair Larissa Nikolaevna bestowed her warm radiance on me this morning. After I had astounded the study group with a new and flawless interpretation of The Cherry Orchard from a socialist perspective.”

“Which is?”

“No cherries.”

Andrei spluttered a short laugh and paused. “Tell me you didn’t.”

“Almost. Actually I may have said there would have been lots of cherries if only Chekhov had seen the future and harnessed his talent to the Five Year Plan. Dying young he was of course deprived of the opportunity.”

Andrei barked out another laugh and looked around the room. No-one was paying any attention. Roman chewed and grinned at the same time. He lifted his fork like a trident.

“Clever.” Andrei said, “Could you elaborate?”

“I could but I won't. Be grateful.”

“I am. But was Larissa Nikolevna?”

“Sadly, with my body and furry pate, no. Not to mention the glasses, the thickness of whose lenses repels passion like bubonic plague. These things I know. Not to mention, also, the J word.”

“That’s two not to mentions. I thought we had agreed you would normally restrict yourself to one.”

“I pour out the fears of my noble and tender heart and you quibble on the number of not- to- mentions.”

“Sorry.”

“I needs must find comfort in language if nowhere else. Henceforth icy- hearted maidens and lamp-lit casements shall feature prominently.”

“I’ll get the tea.”

*

They walked under the portico, between the peeling stuccoed pillars and down the steps to the courtyard. Roman lived with his mother in a single room in a lane off the Petrovka and did not have far to go. He had on his head an old schapka of leprous beaver skin and wore a frayed overcoat which reached almost to his ankles. One cuff had been repaired and was a different colour than the other. Over one shoulder he carried a canvas bag of books. An arm of his glasses was bound with black string. The heavy thick lenses kept slipping down his nose and he had to push them back up every so often. They stood by the gates, outside the flow of students.

“Damn these. I’ve tried to get them fixed but I can’t find anyone who knows what they are doing.” He forced his glasses higher.

“Have your valet do it.”

“Normally I would but he is of course detained at my estate dealing with the harvest. I say that with all necessary hauteur.”

“The harvest. In December.”

“It’s a large estate.”

They walked slowly through the crowd.

“Lots of cherries?”

Roman beamed. “You see. Linguistically you are improving already. At the club tonight you shall shine. With my modest assistance of course.”

“Modest?”

“I speak figuratively. What time?”

“ Half past seven. Outside the Metropole. Everyone is meeting there. We can watch the swells going in to dinner.”

Roman raised an arm like an orator before a crowd. “You do not speak surely of our socialist betters?”

Andrei’s eyes flicked left and right. “Roman. Be careful. For God’s sake. Keep your voice down. One day someone will be listening.”

“I only speak to you. And Mama.” He plucked again at his glasses. “I must go. Via Tverskaya. She asked me to try for some bread at Yesiliev's on the way home. The artisanal baguette, I fancy.”

“Not Tverskaya. Gorky Street now. And Gastronom Number 1. State Grocery Shop

Number 1. As you know well. Repeat and remember. Yesiliev's no more. Jesus. You sound like a White Guard aristo." Andrei looked around again. "Be careful."

Brodsky pushed the glasses up the bridge of his nose. Behind the lenses his eyes blinked happily.

"As you wish. A White Guard aristo who speaks Yiddish. Good image." He paused for breath. "But no dawdling. I must go to prepare myself. Rare ointments. Balm. Essence of Myrhh. Larissa Nikolaevna awaits."

They stopped. Brodsky was looking for something in his bag. He looked up.

"Andryoshka. What's the matter?"

A large blue vase stood in the window above the barber shop.

Andrei felt both hot and cold. He only just stopped himself looking around. Instead, he looked at his friend. His brain seemed no longer to work. He stared at Roman's surprised face for a good while. Then touched his shoulder.

"See you tonight." He turned and walked quickly away. Behind him Roman's mouth opened and shut, causing his glasses to fall down his nose. By the time he had recovered himself and thought of shouting, Andrei was across the road beyond the tram line and into the crowd. Roman stood, blinking. Eventually he turned away, his shoulders drooping. Feet splashing through dark slush, his big head down, he walked slowly towards Gorky Street.

*

Andrei stepped down from the tram. Two men got off behind him; one crossed to the other side of the street and walked away towards the river, the other went to stand at the corner. A woman with a child went into the block. Following his father's instructions Andrei was careful not to look around but instead went to look in the window of the bakers at the plaster models of loaves, then joined the queue. Bread had been off the ration for three years now but there was never enough. He could see no-one looking odd or out of place. What, he thought, in these circumstances, was odd? He really had no idea. Feeling as if every nerve in his body was trembling he bought half a black loaf and headed towards the flat. The man at the corner was gone.

"Andrei Eduardovich, how goes the studies?" Kruchkov, emerging from his caretaker's apartment under the archway. His grin was greasy.

"Fine, thank you Vasily Dimitrovich. Sometimes boring, but that's the law for you."

Kruchkov picked yellow teeth. "Boring? Can it be? Our revolutionary law surely cannot be that. I just wish I had your opportunities. Some of us had to bear arms when young."

"Really. Didn't they clutter up the Post Office?"

Kruchkov started as if he'd been slapped. He sniffed twice. "You'll find it does not pay to cheek your elders. I don't think that day is far off either."

He waddled stiffly back towards his apartment entrance. A glazed window had been inserted into the stone wall beside his door. Behind, it was normally dark but though he could not be seen everyone in the block knew he kept a constant watch at all hours.

"He must like the new politics, the voting stuff," the babushkas used to say in the

courtyard, laughing so you could see the grey gums, "for who has more ayes than Vasily?"

Andrei walked past him to his own staircase, cursing himself. Kruchkov stood at his door his arms folded. The caretaker watched until Andrei had passed under the portal, then went inside.

Climbing the stairs Andrei's heart felt as if it would burst. He felt sick and frightened. Entering the room he switched on only a small side light and slumped down into his father's chair. Fear seeped through him, a sticky coldness. It gripped his bowels. He tried to remember his father's words.

"Andryoshka. Don't be afraid. The blue vase means take care, not disaster. Don't alert them. They prefer order. Habit. They'll come at their usual time in the early hours, that day or in the next few days following. Don't run. They will be watching and Kruchkov certainly will be as well. But prepare. Be in the hiding place early just in case. You won't be caught. You'll be behind the wall. Then you can slip away quietly down the back stairs. Prepare. Then *go*."

On the last night they had taken a glass of vodka in the darkened room, the first time Andrei had ever drank with his father. Moonlight shone through the window and the snow lay in smooth white blankets on the rooftops below and in rounded curves on the cupolas. They had sat with a single candle then gone to bed silently. In the morning his father had embraced him once, hard, then walked out the door. Andrei had cried, then sat by the window, trembling. After an hour he got up and pulled out his rucksack from the bottom of the wardrobe. In it he found a small silver vodka flask,full, and his father's watch and chain.

*

In the gap between the buildings it was growing colder. He had gone over everything again and again in his mind but it still made no sense. After two hours behind the brick wall he thought he would freeze to death. He knew he had to move. He drummed his legs quietly on the pallet and lifted his arms up and down. Stiff, he rose and began to walk back and forth in the little alleyway. It was a long four hours., his feet treading the snow flat in endless pacing. Ten forward, ten back. Faces crowded into his mind; his father's, stiff and tight, Roman's blank expression as he left him and the unlucky old lecturer who had ended up on a list. Kruchkov's sallow face too kept swimming back into his mind. Maybe his failure to keep a good watch would go badly for him. Andrei, surprised, felt a smile coming.

Eventually he heard traffic on the street. He squinted out from the gap. A fair few people were on the move. The cold had pierced him and he couldn't control the rapid clicking of his teeth. He beat his arms against his chest. Moving along the shadow of the huts he waited, then stepped out boldly onto the pavement. Without looking around he strode off turning onto the main boulevard. Trams ran early round the Garden Ring Boulevard circling Moscow. They'd be busy with people. He'd fight for a seat then rumble around the city. Blood began to return to his limbs. At the next corner he pulled the watch from his pocket and opened the silver case under a street lamp. On the reverse of the lid there was an engraving of Peter the Great, mounted, the Bronze Horseman of St Petersburg, and his father's initials. An inscription said the watch came from the atelier of Paul Bourier, by appointment to the Court of His Imperial Majesty. And what happened to him, Andrei said to himself, snapping the lid shut. His father's face again came into his mind and with it a sudden black depression, heavy and bleak. He looked around, feeling lost. Some people had gathered at the tram stop, wrapped against the cold, shuffling and coughing. A few more lights were on in the tenements. Then heads came up and he heard clanking; a tram was rolling

towards them. Somehow the sight cheered him, the wobbling metallic screech and the overhead sparks sputtering orange in the early morning dark. It was a quarter past six. He moved to join the waiting passengers. Mendel, he said to himself.

*

CHAPTER IV

The Writers' Colony, Peredelkino
15th of December 1937

Fadayev caught a late morning train into Moscow from Peredelkino on a brilliant winter day. It was cold and clear and the air smelled of pine woods. Walking down the road to the station, slithering every few yards over the hard packed snow, he looked over the white fields towards Pasternak's house. There was no sign of movement but a thin column of wood smoke rose from it, a pencil line into a china blue sky. A further ten minutes walk brought him to the long wooden railway platform, uncovered and bare with a small log shelter at one end. To keep warm while he waited, he marched up and down, arms flapping round his thick body. He was short and overweight, almost a comical figure in a long expensive black coat and large fur hat. Behind him, on the hill above the cemetery scattered birch trees stood bare and bright, silver grey against the snow.

He waited. The train arrived late, rumbling along the platform and coming to a halt. In the corner of the empty carriage one old woman sat beside a ripped sack of dirty vegetables. The train itself was grimy, inside and out. It set him down at the stucco palace of the Kiev station just before noon.

Before leaving his dacha he had wrapped himself in several layers against the cold. Standing at the tram stop he looked around at all of Russia standing impassive on the pavement. Patched coats, shawls wrapped tightly around peasant faces, bundles tied into grey sausages, red snub noses. Old men and solemn children. Old women giving unwanted advice to strangers about their babies. Mothers staring straight ahead. Fadayev ignored them all. There was a variety of headgear, from old cloth, ratty with age and use, to more wearable schapkas of plain sheepskin and cheap fur, mostly ex-army issue. Fadayev's was made of mink, deep brown and lustrous. It gleamed in the sun.

When the tram came he found himself jammed up against an old man with a hat jammed on the back of his head, who was eating a raw onion. Fadayev closed his eyes for the whole journey. It wasn't the only smell. In the carriage there was the sour, heavy odour of people who worked hard and had few opportunities for daily bathing. And soap was hard to come by. Some passengers carried sacks from the country, bringing food into Moscow to sell privately. On the left, as it was called. The tram smelled like a farmyard. Fadayev was glad to get off the train at Red Presnaya and into the street. In the fresh air all of Moscow seemed newly minted. Moving slowly, he made his way past the scarred tenements of Barricade Street to the open spaces of the Garden Ring Boulevard. He stopped short at the western end of Vorovsky Street, looking at the Writers Union Club.

It never failed to cheer him. The stone gateway, the circular drive up to the main building. Behind the forecourt the old mansion sat quietly, its neo-classical central block and two wings painted in soft yellow and white. It seemed to him as if it had come straight from a Palladian sketch book. No, not Palladio, Fadeyev thought, but perhaps one of his students, via Minsk. Not bad, he said to himself, I might use that. If he looked at the building through half closed eyes it had the look of a villa on the outskirts of a small Tuscan town, half way up a hill. Wine and summer laughter among the trees. Sun blinding on the terrace. Fadayev stopped in the driveway and took it all in. The house was supposed to have been used by Tolstoy as the Rostovs'

city residence in *War and Peace*. He could never forget that, loved the thought of it. There were no crinolines or carriages in the courtyard this afternoon, just three official cars and their chauffeurs off to one side, smoking in the crystalline air. Fadayev walked towards the main entrance, his good mood momentarily clouded. It took him a few moments to identify why. When he passed under the portico it came to him but he shook it away with a short movement of the head. He realised he had let his guard down, had allowed his mind to wander to an Italy he would never see.

Inside, the doorkeeper, an old man, hair combed over a balding head and thin cadaverous face, stiffly inclined his head.

"Ivan Konstantinovich. How pleasant to see you again may I say." He gestured to a young boy standing by and spoke in a different tone. "Take Comrade Fadayev's coat and hat."

"Good day, Josef. How are things?" Fadayev said, handing them over and smoothing his hair.

"Not too bad, thank you," the old man said. "Your table is ready now. I have your official post and some private letters which have come. Do you wish to go in immediately or wait till the time you reserved?"

"I'll wait in the reading room for a bit. Give me a table at two. A glass of something in the meantime I think."

"Of course. I'll have it sent in."

Fadayev took his letters and some recent editions of the Literary Gazette and settled himself in an armchair by the window of the reading room. A servant brought vodka. A large glass of it sat on a table beside him in the sunlight. The room was quiet and empty. On the far wall a clock ticked almost silently. In the gazette he turned up the letters column and there he was. A sharp denunciation of two writers of little account.

Backsliders. Individualists. Signed by himself and three others from the Union. It had been given a prominent position. Looking around, Fadayev could not suppress a small contented sigh.

Later, he began lunch with a large bowl of hot borscht and meat dumplings. It had the sour but savoury taste he loved. Then he ordered a beef goulash with noodles. At his elbow was a jug of water and a carafe of dark Georgian wine. From time to time he nodded to an acquaintance across the dining room. It was busy. People tried to catch his eye. Some he acknowledged. Waiters moved between the tables, laying and clearing cutlery and dishes, eddying to and from the kitchen in a constant white-jacketed stream. The room was austere in itself, high ceilinged and painted cream with dark brown wood panelling to head height. Polished brass chandeliers remained unlit but here and there table lamps were turned on against the winter afternoon. The weather had changed and beyond the windows, a low grey sky promised snow. Inside the room all was warm and comfortable, the lamps glowing parchment yellow above white starched tablecloths.

In the middle of his meal the head waiter approached Fadayev, his face signalling apology. Out of the corner of his eye he noted the wine carafe. It was almost empty.

“I’m most sorry Ivan Konstantinovich, to interrupt. Really I would not-”

“Don’t worry Kiril,” Fadayev said, waving his hand and raising a starched napkin to his lips, “What is it? By the way, another carafe.”

“Of course. Immediately.” He hesitated. “Comrade Bloch...”

“Bloch?” Fadayev frowned and lifted his upper lip a fraction.”*Bloch*?”

“Yes. He has asked to see you. I have explained you are dining but he insists it’s a matter of the greatest importance and begs the favour of seeing you for five minutes. He says it won’t take longer.”

“It had better not.”

“He is outside.”

Fadayev concentrated for a moment. Bloch was a minor hack of no importance and a fussy manner who wrote poor articles to order for one of the more obscure Trade Union journals. People shunned him, quietly, without being obvious about it. Russians never needed to be told why. He smelled like an informer. Seemingly oblivious, he cultivated his own small niche in the Writers Union and kept to the edges of events. He didn’t seem to mind being despised. Why that was so was unclear. Careful, thought Fadayev, careful. But the thought weakened and was swept away by the wine singing in his head. Fadayev felt capable. He pushed the thoughts of Bloch to the back of his mind and waved an expansive hand.

“Oh send him over. But bring the wine first.”

The waiter nodded and left the room. A few minutes later a younger waiter came to the table with another carafe of wine. Fadayev poured a full glass. Shortly afterwards Bloch approached Fadayev’s table. He was a small thin man, about fifty, with rounded shoulders, wearing a brown, ill- fitting suit. Grey, slicked back hair, a prominent nose and receding chin, coupled with large shining intelligent eyes, made him look like an inquisitive mouse. His head bobbed once.

“Ivan Konstantinovich. Very good of you to see me, so to say. I’m sorry to disturb you but I’m leaving for Leningrad this afternoon and I needed to speak to you. I heard you were due to be in the building.”

“Not at all. Sit down. How are things at … at...?”

“Printworker Journal.”

“The Journal. Precisely. A little wine?” Bloch nodded assent and Fadayev signalled for another glass. It was brought over immediately. When both glasses were filled Fadeyev tasted his and turned with a smile. Bloch also tasted the wine, swilling it around this mouth, then replaced the glass on the table. He said nothing.

“So. How may I help you?” Fadayev said.

“I came because of your position of authority within the Union.”

Fadayev nodded. He drank again and his mouth formed a small red circle.

“After all, so to say, you are the chairman of the Financial Committee…” Fadayev nodded.

“And the Editorial Board…” Fadayev nodded again.

“Both, so to say.”

Fadayev nodded for the third time, less benignly. Somewhere, he could feel irritation beginning to mount. He hated wordy fools who were without influence. Bloch carried on speaking.

“You are, if I may say so, one of the leading and most respected members of our Union. A creative artist published throughout the country. A fearless critic. A true Bolshevik and servant of the people. And of the Party. What did the Central Committee say, ‘The basic objectives of the Party in the field of literature and the arts can only be achieved…be achieved ….’

“‘By increasing the Party’s influence with the organizations of writers and artists and by strengthening Marxist communist criticism.’ I’m familiar with the quote. What is it you wish to speak about?”

“An important matter, may I say, most important, one which …”

“And?” Fadayev felt a small retaining strap fly loose inside his head. His face was red. He drank off his wine and pointed a forefinger at Bloch. “ And? You come here during my lunch. Fine. I allow it. You wish to speak to me. Fine also. Allow *me* to remind you I am a busy person. I have much to…”

Bloch interrupted him with a single word, switching to the familiar form of address reserved by the Russian language for friends, children or inferiors.

“Malchai,” he said softly. Shut up.

Fadayev stared, his eyes bulging. No-one ever interrupted him. No-one had said that to him in a quarter of a century.

“Be silent,” Bloch said again, his low voice contemptuous, “and listen.” His face had lost all animation.

Fadayev’s mouth hung open. Bloch moved back into the formal mode of address, his tone once more smooth.

“It concerns a book, Ivan Konstantinovich.”

“A *book*? ” Fadayev looked around the room, his eyes wide. You come to me here, *the Writers Union,* and bother me about a *book*?

“A book. Or, to be more precise, a manuscript.”

“What do you mean, a *manuscript*?” Somewhere, deep inside the recesses of his brain, the small voice which had earlier urged caution spoke again, telling him to

lower his voice. He paid more attention to it this time. His head shrunk into his shoulders. "What are you *talking* about?" Fadayev spoke through his teeth. He glanced quickly around the room again. People were eating and talking quietly but he caught a few people looking at him. He had begun to feel unwell; something was slipping away.

"It appears someone has written a book. And not a good one. Quite the reverse. One, so to say, which fails to respect the Soviet people. Or its leaders. A bad book. One might say so. One might indeed. And it's thought you might know something about it."

Fadayev felt cold hands at his heart. Cold wet fingers massaged his organs, slippery and chill. His throat closed. When he spoke his voice had almost disappeared. He coughed and began again. He lowered his head to the table.

"But what has this to do with *me*?" he said, hissing the words. His face had taken on the colour of an old dishcloth. It's thought *I* might know something...*It's thought...*" He stopped and stared at Bloch. "Who *are* you?" he asked in a whisper.

"That's not important."

Habit returned, momentarily and unwisely, to Fadayev. "Not important? Not *important*? I am the senior official of this Union. I demand…absolutely *demand*-"

"Very little, if you want my advice. Or even if you don't. I know who you are. It may be better for you if you don't know who *I* am. Perhaps, *perhaps*, if you think for a moment that much may become clear. As for your demands, someone wants to see you this afternoon. About the book. Manuscript, so to say. A car will be at the front door at three. That is all. Good day, Ivan Konstantinovich. Allow me to replentish your glass." Bloch stood up and poured wine smoothly from the carafe into Fadayev's empty glass. He replaced the carafe, still half full, on the tablecloth with a slight but audible thump. Dabbing a napkin at his lips, he crumpled it onto the table and left the

room. Fadayev looked straight ahead, his jowls hanging over his collar.

In the hall Bloch asked for the telephone at the porter's counter. After he was connected he spoke briefly into the receiver.

"All arranged. At three." Behind him he heard the breaking of glass.

He listened to a question from the person on the other end for a moment, then looked back into the restaurant. Fadayev sat still, his face a mask. In front of him, under his outstretched arm, a purple stain flooded across the tablecloth. It dripped off the edge and onto splinters of crystal and crockery littering the floor.

"Oh yes," Bloch said, speaking quietly into the receiver. He glanced back into the restaurant again, scratching the inside of his ear then examining his forefinger. "So to say. Yes indeed."

*

CHAPTER V

52 Vorovsky Street, Moscow. The Writers Union. 15th of December 1937

The car for Fadeyev arrived promptly at three. He couldn't make his hands do up the buttons on his coat. The driver, a stocky young man with a flat cap pulled down over his eyes and a smouldering yellow cigarette on his lower lip, saw and smiled to himself. Gently, he had been told, no excitement. Another man sat in the front beside the driver. He wore a heavy greatcoat and a hat and said nothing, not even turning in his seat.

"Good afternoon, Comrade" the driver said, his voice bright. He got out and opened the rear door. It rasped on its hinges. Fadayev got in and sat back, his heart hammering. He mumbled something to the driver, he wasn't himself sure what. The car lurched forward.

Fadeyev watched the streets of the city pass by, trying to memorise each balcony and corner. They moved along the Arbat towards the centre. Saving memories, he filed away the grey light and blue shadow, sloping metal roofs and ochre walls. Life all at once seemed very beautiful and made up of so many possibilities. A sadness flooded

over him. He knew it had happened to others; now it was happening to him. The people on the pavements hurried past. He could see ahead the Kremlin towers, red-brown and sharply pointed. Dusk was beginning to fall on the streets. Fadayev felt his mouth wobble; he wanted to cry.

At the bottom end of the Vozdvizhenka, under the Kremlin walls by the Borovitsky Gate, the car slowed. Fadayev dropped his eyes to the floor. When he realised the car had not turned left towards Revolution Square and the main road up to the Lyubyanka, but had turned right, his head came up like a starving dog smelling meat. He couldn't stop blinking. The car was moving towards the huge hole on the river embankment left over from the blowing up and demolition of the Cathedral of the Redeemer, then began to thread its way among the narrow lanes around Kropotkin street. Breaking out in sweat Fadayev couldn't stop himself looking into the mirror and the amused eyes of the driver, flicking backwards and forwards from the road to his passenger.

"Not far now," the young man said. Fadayev didn't reply. The other man remained silent.

The car slowed down and pulled up outside an old town house of three stories. On the ground floor a large door broke the dirty yellow, almost orange, plaster façade. On the floor above, a large Oriel window flanked by two others, long and thin, looked over the street and on the floor above that a row of three square casements stared out below a green metal roof, just visible under a covering of snow. The driver got out, opened Fadeyev's door, and pulled a brass knob to the right of the entrance. The door opened immediately.

"Comrade Fadayev," a voice said from the darkness. It took Fadayev a few moments to accustom his eyes to the sudden loss of light. Inside the house the temperature was hothouse warm. A small wizened man dressed in dark clothing two sizes too big for him indicated a large curved staircase. He and Fadayev ascended, their footfalls loud on the bare stone. The old man murmured to himself but Fadayev couldn't make him

out.

On the first floor the small man knocked on a tall mahogany door. At the sound of a bell he swung the door open and beckoned Fadayev into a long dark corridor which twisted and led to another, smaller, door. A second bell rang, more dully. The door opened and the old man led Fadayev into a large room with two tall windows whose shutters were partly closed. The room stood in half light and faced, from what Fadayev could see, into an interior courtyard. He had the strong impression he was no longer in the same building. The room was almost empty but its floor was filled entirely with a vast red Persian carpet. At Fadayev's end two leather armchairs were grouped in front of a fireplace of white marble. A ten foot high gold framed mirror sat on the mantelpiece. At the far end of the room, a small man perched behind a walnut and gilt Empire desk the surface lit by the green shade of a single lamp. Empty bookcases rose up the wall behind him. Though he spoke quietly, his voice carried across the room, inviting Fadayev to sit down. He gestured towards a chair. The small man who had accompanied Fadayev withdrew. Fadayev began the long walk over the red carpet towards the light.

The man behind the desk did not rise. Fadayev saw he was bald and his face was pockmarked. Small round glasses, gold. He looked about fifty. “So. Ivan Konstantinovich. Welcome. You don’t know who I am. My name is Suslov, Genady Ivanich. I imagine you know which organisation I work for.”

Fadaev willed himself to speak clearly but the words didn't come out well.

“Well-...Yes...That is-”

“Good. Will you take tea?”

Fadayev nodded. He stared at Suslov as if the man behind the desk could see the thoughts inside his head. Suslov rang a bell and leaned back in his chair.

“May I be frank?”

Fadayev nodded and swallowed at the same time.

“You are a person of importance in the Writers Union I believe.”

Fadayev nodded again, hesitantly.

“Excellent. There is a problem. With a book.”

Fadayev found his voice. “I know nothing about a problem book, I ...”

Suslov waved him to silence.

“I’m aware of that. That’s why you’re here. It’s precisely *why* you don’t know about a book that we have a problem. I hope I’m clear.”

Fadaev wanted to indicate that things were both clear and unclear but found himself unable to formulate a reply. In the middle of his struggle the door opened and the man who had escorted him from the front door wheeled in a trolley. The wheels squeaked and rattled across the carpet, the sound slicing at Fadayev's nerves. He winced and swallowed once. The tray contained a small lit samovar, tea glasses, sugar and a plate of plain biscuits. The man mixed the amber tea, left two glasses on coasters on the desk, and left. Fadayev decided to speak.

“I’m sorry Comrade. I’m...so… About this book. What book?”

Suslov stirred his tea, added a lump of rough brown sugar, and contemplated the steam. His eyebrows came together in the light of the desk lamp. He waited a full minute, the longest in Fadayev’s life, before replying.

“An important book. I believe. But I’ve never read it. Or all of it. Few people have- I

believe this also. It is a book which is apparently being written as we speak…"

Fadayev couldn't stop himself. "Who by?"

Suslov clapped his hands together gently. "Ah, you have it. I *knew* you were the right man. The very question I am being asked. By the General Secretary. And who better to know, I said to Comrade Stalin, than a luminary of the Writers Union. Exactly what I said to him."

Fadayev could feel the blood leave his face. He opened his mouth but no sound came out.

"Yes, the General Secretary is taking a personal interest. He's… Are you all right Comrade?" Fadayev leaned forward. "Do, please, take a biscuit."

Fadayev felt himself reach forward, pick up a biscuit and place it in his mouth. It tasted of sweet sawdust.

Eventually he managed a sentence. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

Suslov leaned back again and began counting on his fingers.

"Quite simple. One, you are a senior administrator of the Writers Union?"

"Yes. Of course."

"Two. You were a leading member of the Association of Proletarian Writers? A professional critic I'm told? You led the excellent attacks in the press and in the Literary Gazette on those writers who were less than enthusiastic about our literary rules. I don't pretend to understand the complexities, not being a literary man myself, but Socialist Realism? It's philosophy? Their failure to grasp... etc. That sort of thing?"

“Yes. But those articles were necessary I assure-”

“Of *course* they were necessary. I've read them. All of them. They were *just* what was necessary. Excellent in every way.”

Fadayev was silent. Suslov once again addressed his fingers.

“So. Three. The Writers Union is the body, authorised by the State, which oversees literature?”

“Yes.”

“Four. It controls all aspects of authorship- fees, the provision of apartments, special food allocations, special holidays, special medical care, dachas, education etc. etc. Of which abundance you yourself have been a beneficiary they tell me. The Union deals with the entirety of the writing life in fact. Would I be correct?”

“The Union does those things, yes.”

“How *is* the dacha by the way? Comfortable? You've had it what, three years now?”

“Yes. Well…yes.”

“And your Moscow apartment? Is it *comfortable* enough also? The new building on Lavrunshinsky lane isn't I? Quite nice they tell me. Is that your impression?”

“It's..excell-”

“Good. That brings us to number five. The end product of the Writers Union. And

that means books, doesn't it, they *are* the end product?"

"I suppose so, yes."

"Well then. There we are. Your organisation is responsible for all writing and books. That is why it sits in special buildings, eating special food, enjoying special privileges. It is the literary guardian of the people's future, the torch bearer of socialist beliefs, the watchdog over the Revolution's literature. As the General Secretary has observed, writers are the engineers of mens' souls. And women too I shouldn't wonder. A nice idea no? Literature being the engine of mens' *souls. Our* souls. Am I not correct? Do we have any?"

Fadayev's eyes bulged out of their sockets.

Suslov smiled. "Of course if the General Secretary says we do, we do, don't we?"

Fadayev felt his collar absorbing sweat. His body was leaking sweat. Evening was falling outside the windows but the room felt like the inside of a dark oven.

Suslov sat back and spread his hands. "So if there is a problem with a book, it is your problem Ivan Konstantinovich. Quite easy if you think it through. Which we have."

Fadayev thought. "What can I do," he said, his words flat.

"A good question as they say. Upon the answer much depends."

Fadayev stiffened his jaw. "Of course I'm ready to do my revolutionary duty."

Suslov looked across the lamplight. He saw the heavy sag of a well- fed stomach, red vodka veins in the cheeks, small eyes like an animal's, gleaming.

"Oh come now Comrade" he said, sitting back, his face disappearing from the light

with a flash of his spectacle lenses and a thin smile Fadayev could hear but not see, "Really. We'll need *much* more than that."

*

The two men sat in silence for a while. Suslov eventually stirred himself. His voice had changed.

"Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you. I hope I don't have to emphasise that should you be unwise enough to whisper even a word outside this room you and your family will cease to exist. You understand that, don't you?"

Fadayev nodded. He could not prevent himself swallowing.

"Someone is writing a book. That much we know. It is not a good book, it is not in any sense a good book, though I shall deal with this aspect in a moment, but it is a book. We have the first chapter and a brief synopsis of later chapters but that is all. Clear so far?"

Fadayev nodded again, but inside himself he felt something he could not pinpoint or define, slip away. His shirt was dank and hot and he could feel perspiration coursing between his thighs, under his arms. He wanted to rip off his shoes and scratch the mad itching of his feet.

"In a moment you are going to read this chapter and synopsis. You are the only person outside certain members of the state security organs, and of course the General Secretary, to do so. We very much hope something will occur to you. In the way of vocabulary, of the use of grammar, of …style. Something which will assist us in the identification of the author."

Fadayev floundered for words. "Of course, of *course* I'm only too ready to assist the

security organs but I really must say that this sort of thing is a job for masters of …"

"There is no choice in the matter," Suslov said. "None."

Fadayev said nothing.

"You have been selected - forgive me for frankness - not for literary talent but for a certain ability to categorise. You are one of the most senior critics in the Writers Union. You have read all manner of manuscripts - Fellow Travellers, writers published and unpublished, established and raw, of communist belief and from the reactionaries and the bourgeoisie. Even...they tell me...from abroad."

Fadayev sat slowly upright. He opened his mouth but no sound came out. Suslov raised his hand from the desk top. "We don't see anything *wrong* in this. Not *necessarily*. Of course for *some,* links beyond our borders lead to...well let's leave that for the moment. But not *everyone* my dear Ivan Konstantinovich. Some of our specialists have to know what is going on elsewhere. The Party recognises that. And if texts fall into their hands from unexpected quarters, shall we say, perhaps some tempting émigré morsels, it would be inhuman not to expect them to read those publications. One can even understand if they kept quiet about this activity. After all, who does it hurt?"

Fadayev half nodded, then caught himself.

"If there is an identifiable style, and if I may say so you'd better hope there is, we hope you'll see it. Now, about the book itself. I'm afraid, for reasons that will become clear to you, note taking won't be possible. So I advise you to listen carefully. You give us the name, or better *names,* you think *might* be involved and we'll do the rest. Before we begin may I offer you any refreshment? Some vodka perhaps? It is early I accept but may I press you to a little?"

Fadaev nodded like a seal. Suslov spoke into the solitary telephone on his desk and a

few moments later the same man as before brought in a tray with a newly opened vodka bottle, a single glass, and some slices of black bread spread with meat paste. He then left. After a nod from Suslov, Fadayev poured out some of the vodka. He felt his fingers tremble. Pressing the neck of the bottle firmly against the glass he poured the glass half full and swallowed it at once. Then he looked at Suslov, who nodded again. Fadayev filled up the glass once more, then took a careful sip.

"Again. Listen carefully." Suslov said, leaning forward, his voice becoming animated. "This book is treason. Filthy, abominable, treason. Any words you care to name- White Guard, reactionary, anti-soviet, counter–revolutionary, foul. It is trash. Why, you say to yourself, is so much trouble taken over it? "

Fadayev again nodded, but couldn't speak. He felt he was about to fall over.

Suslov sat back, his voice returning to normal. "Because it *might* be said that although it is all of these things some...unreconstructed persons might consider it to be not badly written. Stylistically speaking. The contents of course are, as I said, trash, but the Russian, well…"

Fadayev knew what that meant. The writing was good. He felt himself falling through empty air.

Suslov snapped his fingers. "Wake up. Even traitors may be stylists," Suslov said, "look at Trotsky."

Fadaev's eyes opened wide in alarm. Suslov continued smoothly. "Yes, we may as well get used to saying the word within these walls. Trotsky is still with us, enjoying the sun in…is it Istanbul or Mexico, I forget. Do you happen to know?"

"No idea. None."

Suslov gave a silky smile, putting his fingers together in a steeple. "No-one seems to

know anything *about* Lev Davidovich these days. Yet the papers are full of the names of people linked to him. Executions even, they tell me. Most odd. Never mind. Within this room all words are permissible, looking for this scribbler of counter-revolutionary trash."

"The book is... political?" Fadayev said, eventually. He felt faint.

"Yes. And more than political. It purports to set the events since the Revolution in the context of Russian history and thought. It describes personal relationships amongst the leaders of our movement and our country. It describes....policies. It even describes *landscape*."

"*Landscape*?" Fadayev's voice rose in fright. "Politics and *Landscape*?"

Suslov nodded, his lips pursed. "Oh yes. Church bells at evening over still water. The first snow. Cossack sabres and machine guns on the Nevsky. All that romantic drivel. It has music also. And streets, lots of streets. Moscow *and* Leningrad. Paris too. There's a list of them in the synopsis. It *might* be said that the book has pretensions, oh I don't know, to Tolstoyanism, whatever that was... This book attempts a... universality. A Slav universality. Of course a false one that doesn't exist. It has surface glitter, a trap for the unwary. And we know that in the struggle for Socialism there are many of the unwary." He looked across the table. "Or the uncommitted."

Fadayev considered this; fear stabbing him in the abdomen. He bit softly at his lower lip, thinking.

"Questions?" Suslov said, his tone indicating otherwise.

"Might it be said that the author of the book appears, even if he is an…enemy of the people, to be…so to say...well informed?"

Suslov considered. He pursed his lips, bloodless in the lamplight, again. "It might."

Fadayev nodded, his eyes closing swiftly. He tried to visualise his life after all of this was over and found that he couldn't.

Suslov pulled out from a yellowish file a small sheaf of typewritten papers. He slid them across the desk.

“Take it. And one glass of vodka. There is a table in the next room.”

“Fadayev licked his lips once and picked up the pages as if they hurt his hands. He looked up to see Suslov indicating a set of double doors which were now open. A single table, lamp and chair stood alone in the centre of another large room.

“Take your time, Ivan Konstantinovich. It's important not to rush this vital work. A preliminary view, that's the ticket. And names. In which as I may have said, the General Secretary is taking a close interest.” Suslov looked at his watch, then leant back, his hands open and expansive either side of the desk light. “Shall we say half an hour?”

*

CHAPTER VI

5th Floor, NKVD Headquarters, Dzerzhinsky Street, Moscow.
The Lubyanka. 15th of December 1937

In a room overlooking the Lubyanka Square a long table was set for a meeting. Three men sat at one end in winter uniforms, a single table lamp lighting up their faces. Colonel General Kirilenko, Assistant-Director of Section IV Special Duties, Colonel Zubov, his Deputy, and Major Stern, French Desk. Bottles of Narzan mineral water sat on the empty table. Kirilenko rose and walked over to the window. He spoke to the glass.

"Where is he?"

Kirilenko stared out of the window, his eyes compressed. A short man with a bull neck he smelled strongly of sweat. Squinting, he could see the long avenue running down to Revolution Square and the familiar outlines of the city, the top of the Bolshoi, the old city walls and the Metropole Hotel, the Kremlin towers. Every street was clogged with pedestrians, moving slowly. The light was failing and the snow on the rooftops was turning grey.

"I repeat. Where is he?"

"Well, Comrade General-" It was Zubov.

Kirilenko grunted, cutting him off. There was a silence. The noise of traffic in the

square below was a low rumble. Returning to his chair he sat down heavily. He opened a bottle of mineral water and drank a glass.

“Piss. Right. Usual rules. Any notes to be left with me. Nothing to be taken from the room. No stenographer. Well, we know why we're here. Zubov, what do we have?”

“After his unauthorised disappearance three days ago as a servant of the peop-”

“Get- on- with- it.”

“Yes, Comrade General. In essence he appears to have left Berlin two hours before he was due to meet our man. We don't know what happened to his network but our source over at the barracks should have more for us on that very shortly-.”

“For his sake, I hope so.”

“-And we think he's heading for Paris.”

“*What*?” Kirilenko sat very still. “Do I have this correctly? A man we have been dancing around for half a year, a man who we have been ordered to squeeze then liquidate has disappeared to France shortly after our approach?”

“Yes,” Zubov said, “though of course he didn't know it was us. We posed as Belgian with an offer of material in Brussels. Once he was in there he would have been brought to Leningrad by boat from Antwerp. Then of course here, where he-.”

“Most clever. Had it succeeded. May I continue Zubov? So kind. And this man, the *senior Red Army Intelligence controller* in Germany, this *fucker* who thinks he's *above* the Revolution, who refused to work with us *and* shat on us from a great height, has vanished. Because no-one kept a close eye on him. Vanished. And you *think* he's going to Paris.”

No-one spoke.

Kirilenko smashed the table twice with a large fist. “Paris? *Paris*? What the *fuck* is he doing in Paris? You *think* he’s in Paris? Report for God’s sake. He pointed at Stern. *You* have the French desk. For the moment. I am becoming irritable.” He sank back in his chair.

Stern adjusted his glasses and looked at the paper in front of him. His voice was steady. “Comrade General, we have a report of him in Antwerp the day before yesterday. He was seeking help from a man he knew in Spain in 35, a militant who works on the railways. This man is ours and knew him as Minsky at that time, obviously not by his real name or his code name at the GRU.” He looked at a note. “Archimedes. His German work name is Hans Albrecht. For his cover a Sudeten Czech. Journalist, pro-Nazi.”

“Archimedes.” Kirilnenko said to himself.

Stern looked up. “Yes. Our source at the barracks tells us that he has had that name since beginning service fifteen years ago. We can't find his original name.”

“So. Archimedes we-don't-know-his-real-name was in Antwerp talking to his old comrade while one of our vessels was in the port waiting for him and our men in Berlin were running around with their cocks in their hands.”

“It appears so. Regretfully.”

“The bastard was in a café on the quayside and we didn't know.”

“In essence. Yes.”

“The idiots from Berlin are to be brought back. Today. Put them in the inner prison. Zubov. Arrange a court-martial. I will preside personally. Continue.”

Stern adjusted his glasses. “Our fellow in Antwerp reports weekly to one of our controllers on railway matters or anything else he hears. He mentioned Minsky in passing as being in trouble. The controller merely noted the name and passed it on yesterday. A check with Registry shows that Minsky was a cover name for Archimedes in Barcelona-”

“What was he doing in Barcelona?”

“We don't know exactly. Attached to the International Brigades.”

“That useless bunch of bastards. Go on.”

“The railwayman gave him the keys to a room in Paris belonging to a friend away in Algiers for six months. He and Archimedes got drunk, our man less so. Archimedes intimated he was running away.”

He sa*id* this? To someone he hadn’t seen for *years*? ” Kirilenko leaned back in his chair and looked at the ceiling. “He must be losing his touch. Why would he take such a chance? To someone he knew in *Spain.* Did he say running from who?”

“Yes, Comrade General. Us. He hinted us.”

Kirilenko grunted and closed his eyes.

No-one spoke in the room. Kirilenko rose and again walked over to the window. Outside, the square was almost empty. People usually avoided passing by. A single black van was moving slowly along the curb through dark slush, about to turn into the Lubyanka.

“Fuck.”

“Yes, Comrade General.” Zubov stared straight ahead. Kirilenko turned.

“And fuck again.”

“I am in the process of preparing a report for you summarising everything about Archimedes since we approached him.” Zubov spoke in an official voice.

“By Four o’clock.” Kirilenko spoke to the window. “Anything at all from our *friends*?”

“Nothing. The daily Military Intelligence liaison meeting has taken place for three days now nothing was said. Of course they know he’s gone. We are trying to find out what is happening at the barracks but it is difficult. Our source says a lid has been clamped down tight and there is much movement on the top floor.”

“I'll bet. Who I wonder was the first to christen the GRU the *barracks*?” said Kirilenko quietly. “Do they think because they are army intelligence they're *soldiers*?” No-one spoke. “They're a nest of fancyboy intellectuals who think they can swan around abroad supposedly acquiring information. We know better. Dilettantes who like living it up in Berlin or Vienna and think they are immune. Well they're not. As many have discovered. Trotskyite shit. We should have shot them all in June with their precious generals.” He came back and sat down again.

There was silence in the room. No one answered. Eventually, Stern spoke.

“Comrade General. We believe he is now in Paris or on his way there after Antwerp. Archimedes is travelling on false papers. The informant does not know his new name. Archimedes wouldn’t tell him. But we do have the address of the room the informant gave him. It is being monitored now. He speaks good French and knows the city but we know exactly where he is going. He can't get away. I have alerted our operatives within the émigré community. We cannot risk causing an uproar with the French but all other measures are being taken.”

“We need to *find* him. This order came from the top. Need I say more?”

“Yes, Comrade General.” Stern couldn't prevent the bob of his adam’s apple. “ I mean no.”

“Call in every favour. Activate all teams. I want reports every hour. To be taken alive if possible. Dead if not. Screw the French. The boss wants this one. Has he family in Berlin? Relatives in the motherland?”

“None that we know of, Comrade General. There are rumours, no more, of a family split up during the Civil War. Down in the Ukraine. But as we don't know his real name we can't do any tracing.”

“The GRU know his real name though. They must.”

“Presumably. But we haven't got access to that yet. Our man is trying.”

“Tell him to try harder. Or he’ll be in a camp. Forty below zero digging coal with a lump of wood. He’ll last a month. If that.” Kirilenko looked towards the window. “Something you two should bear in mind.”

He tapped the table. “Stern, leave us. Report back this afternoon.” Stern left the notepad and walked stiffly from the room. Kirilenko turned to Zubov who thought to himself that he had never before seen Kirilenko look frightened.

“And what about this fucking book?”

“We got the courier with the chapter and-”

Kirilenko picked up a pencil and snapped it in two. “I know that. And the arsehole killed himself. *Before* we got anything. Have our idiots from Leningrad who allowed

that been dealt with?"

"Yesterday. All three."

"Where?"

"Here. Downstairs. The officer wounded two of them when they arrested him. Had to bring them by train with a doctor."

"So I read. Did they cry for their mamas?"

Zubov hesitated.

"Never mind. And?"

"Cremated. Then to the Donskoi cemetery. Unmarked."

"No pensions to any families. Not a single rouble. Wives to the camps. Children to the wherever the hell they take them. I ordered that and I want it done."

"As you ordered."

"I want everyone involved to understand how important this is. No room for failure. Do you *know* the pressure I'm getting?"

Zubov knew better than to reply.

"What about our literary Colonel's son?" He looked at a notepad. "Andrei Fucking Eduardovich Miller."

"Disappeared. We're looking. Everybody's looking. Pulling people in all over the city. We're -"

“It's a hanging matter,” Kirilenko said quietly. He looked away.

“We have an expert from the Writers Union looking at the chapter. If it's one of their members we'll have him.”

“And if it isn't?”

“We'll get him somehow. They can't publish here. And for abroad they have to get it out.”

Kirilenko was motionless, his eyes closed. “That's all. Report by five.” Zubov left the room. Kirilenko sat for ten minutes, thinking. He pulled an opened bottle of vodka from a cabinet beside the table and drank a full glass. Then, rising, he move slowly towards the window. Lights were on in the Kremlin and in the trams running down the hill. He slammed the glass with both hands.

*

CHAPTER VII

Place de la Republique, Paris XI. 15th of December 1937

The man known as Archimedes stood with his back to the Place de la Republique and looked up the Rue du Faubourg du Temple. He cursed the damp cold silently. A dewdrop clung to the end of his nose. The small suitcase he carried weighed heavily in his hand. He set it on the pavement and pulled his scarf tight. He needed to think things out. But somewhere in the warm. On the first side street to the right, the Rue de Malte, he knew there was a small café which used to have an old stove kept going at all hours. He picked up the suitcase and began walking. His feet were sore. Anyone looking at him would see a thin middle-aged man in a grey coat and hat walking slowly with a suitcase, another commercial traveller looking for a cheap hotel.

It had been a few years but the name of the place was still the same. Things didn't change much in this quarter. The Auberge du Parisot leaned against a closed butcher's shop on one side and a patisserie, also closed, on the other. He looked around once at the silent street and walked into the café, triggering an almost inaudible bell. It was light inside and the old stove was still there. It glowed in a corner. A small man,

plump and balding, stood behind the battered zinc bar. He wore a home knitted v-necked pullover too large for him. The sleeves were rolled up to his elbows. He said good day in a way that indicated he thought it anything but. Archimedes took a seat in the corner looking out through the window. He ordered a demi of beer, drank it off and ordered another and a Calvados. The spirit glass felt beautiful and heavy in his hand.

"Not much of a day, Monsieur." The man sounded as if he came from the Aveyron, the vowels nasal yet flat. His face was brick red.

"Not much." Archimedes began to feel a little more relaxed. The trip from Belgium, avoiding the express trains and taking the slow country routes coming down the Pas de Calais and then inland from Normandy, had tired him. He had left the railways at St Germain en Laye and come the last ten kilometres into Paris by autobus. At the outskirts he changed and caught local buses to the Place de la Republique. No need to visit any of the big stations, he thought, not good places at the moment. A few more steps and he was safe. He considered ordering another Calvados but decided against it.

He had pored over his Plan de Paris on the way from Brussels but he looked at the small brown book again now. The Rue Auguste Barbier was a short dog-leg street between Avenue Parmentier and the Rue de la Fontaine au Roi. Some poet, Bobrovsky had said. It was at the northern end of the 11th arrondisement not far from Metro Goncourt. He knew it vaguely. Any fountain had long gone. It was a poor part of the city. He recalled the area from the twenties, when he had first come to Paris from Russia. It was full of Poles, Serbs, Bulgarians, White Russians, Turks- every immigrant under the sun; even some French. There were streets of Jewish people who had arrived after the Great War; on market days here you could hear speech from every God-forsaken shtetl and broken down village of the old Austro-Hungarian empire.

Bobrovsky had told him the room at number 7 was not ideal but he was welcome to it.

It was a maid's room, a Chambre du Bonne, up underneath the eaves and would be as cold as hell at this time of year. Also, it had no rear exit of any kind and the street was so small that it could be cut off with only a few men. Against that it had two very desirable characteristics; there was no need to register at a hotel in the book inspected every night by the Police and, most importantly, no-one knew of its existence. He had known Bobrovsky since Spain and trusted him. But he wished he had not got drunk with him or talked so much about the old days. Archimedes finished his Calvados. He knew he was drinking too much these days but without it his hands shook. They had come close to getting him in Berlin. Russians. His own people. He shook his head and picked up his suitcase.

At Boulevard Jules Ferry, where the canal disappeared underneath the street, he passed the bronze statue of the little Parisienne and touched her foot for luck. It was worn shiny by a thousand other passers- by. On the other side of the road was a large café he knew well from before, Le Grand Café de la Capitale des Balkans. It used to seethe with men in long moustaches smoking foul tobacco and drinking plum brandy, all shouting at each other about politics. By the look of it nothing had changed much. Capital of the Balkans, he thought, what hell-hole claims that sad title. He'd been in a few and wanted never to return. As he began the incline up the Rue du Faubourg du Temple, threading his way amongst the other pedestrians, he passed a fish stall. The owner was gutting fish on a wooden block with a long knife and a smell came to Archimedes from across the years. He saw his mother on a Black Sea quayside slapping a fish before she bought it for supper. He felt tired down to his boots and his eyelids were heavy. People with shopping bags bumped around him. Not far to go now, he said to himself. I need sleep.

And so he almost missed them. Fifty metres away. Two men in suits and hats sitting in a black Renault just below the junction of Avenue Parmentier and the Rue du Faubourg du Temple where the street narrows. Windows open on a cold winter day. Another man might have stopped dead but he carried on walking slowly, then blended into a small crowd standing around a street trader's stall. He came instantly awake, scanning the street with his eyes but not his head. All seemed normal. The only traffic

appeared to be carts and lorries with the occasional open-backed bus. Horse droppings on the cobbles steamed in the cold. Children shouted a street game on the pavement. The big car was about twenty metres from the crossroads, sitting alone. It probably meant nothing but an old instinct made him turn left into the Rue Bichat and then immediately right so as to emerge on Avenue Parmentier a little way from the junction and looking back down at the boot of the car. The street was lined with small shops and cafés and he chose the Café du Paradis, a plain-looking place with a good view, and put his suitcase down by a table near the door.

"Good day Madame. A Calva if you please. Large."

A large woman nodded and poured it from a plain green bottle. Archimedes looked around. He chose a likely candidate - scuffed shoes, probably unemployed, intelligent eyes, late twenties. Sitting all day, by the look of him, over the remains of a glass of beer and the racing paper. Two fat purple- faced men were gesturing forcefully and arguing about Leon Blum and the Popular Front at the bar and Madame, polishing glasses, went back to them, her face indifferent. Archimedes sat down at a table one away from the young man.

"Bonjour Monsieur. A cold day."

The young man looked at him, suspecting something. He raised one eyebrow.

"And to you Monsieur. It is."

"Sorry for the interruption. I'll be frank. I've a favour to ask which only involves you in asking someone nearby a question. That's all. Twenty francs. Ten now, ten later. May I explain and would you have a glass while I do?"

A long pause. Lips gently pursed. A look at the calvados. A ghost of a smile. "If you like. It's been a slow day." He folded the paper in two and laid it on the table. The man known as Archimedes called for the drink. He waited until it had been brought

over to the table.

“May I ask how you feel about the police? Forgive the abruptness.”

“I suppose it depends on the policeman. It’s fair to say I'm not invited to their Christmas dance.”

“Clear. I've been away and am going home. At the moment I'm not in good odour with the cops and I think two *flics* I recognise are waiting for me at the corner over there in the big Renault. If you agree I need you to ask them for directions - to the hospital St Louis might be best - and get a clear look at them. Perhaps in passing you might see if any gentleman is hanging around the entrance to Rue Auguste Barbier. Then head down Rue de Faubourg du Temple and back here by the Rue Bichat. If you feel like it, twenty francs – if not, no harm done.”

The man gave him a long cool look. “Your French is excellent Monsieur. If I may say so. Really.” He smiled and thought for a moment. “Twenty francs?” He blew air out through his nostrils and looked faintly amused. “What harm? You're aware of course that the Hospital St Louis is five minutes walk away?”

“I am.”

“It’s a strange world Monsieur. And getting stranger.”

“Without doubt.” Archimedes said.

“I’m bored. It’s agreed. Back in a minute.”

“Don’t you want half the money?”

“With a story like that, I think I trust you. ”

The man called Archimedes watched the young man saunter down the avenue. He finished his drink, ordered another, then went outside the café to stand amongst the people waiting for the bus, collar turned up. He lit a cigarette and stood under the awning, one eye on his suitcase inside the café, just a fellow in the crowd. He watched the young man crossing the main road and carry on down the Avenue Parmentier, crossing the avenue itself near the entrance to the Rue Auguste Barbier. He then turned turn back towards the main junction and the car. He was looking around, as if slightly lost, like someone from the country, and spoke to two people in the street as if to ask directions. This boy is a natural, he thought.

When he reached the junction the young man turned left into the Rue de Faubourg du Temple and walked over to the Renault. He leaned in the car window and quickly withdrew. Again he leaned in the window. A moment later he backed away from the car, his palms raised in front of his body. Then he walked away down the Rue du Faubourg du Temple and spoke to a man in a bowler hat who gesticulated towards the west. The young man followed the direction given and disappeared from view. Three minutes later he was back in the café. He gave a single low whistle.

“Not polite, your friends.”

“No?”

“And not French, or *flics* either, but maybe you knew that.” A lazy smile.

Archimedes acknowledged the sally with a slight nod of the head. “Maybe... It's in your paper. ” The young man opened the paper slightly, then closed it, nodding once.

“Thanks. One tall party, moustache, big nose. He was the driver. The other was a short fellow, bald, bad teeth. Neither seemed to know, or care, where the hospital St Louis was. If you ask me they’d know where a hospital was in Warsaw, or Kiev maybe, somewhere that way. My granny was from around there.”

“What did they say to you?”

“ Eventually? Something to do with my parentage.”

“Impolite. As you say.”

“Yes. Their French was poor but their meaning was clear. And...”

“And...?”

“They looked cold. Even with heavy jackets. Buttoned up too. I suppose it was the windows being open.” He smiled with one side of his mouth.

“Ah yes. The windows. Then what.”

“I made sure to ask someone else for directions so they could see me. Of course the chap pointed me down the Rue Bichat. So here I am.”

Really, Archimedes thought, a natural.

“What about the Auguste Barbier entrance?”

“There was a fellow with a tool bag and wearing workers overalls standing near the entrance. At the bus stop. He looked as if he had been there a while. Certainly he failed to take either of the two buses which use that stop and came along together. Don’t they always. It didn't seem too clever to speak to him as well as the boys in the car but if you ask me his face looked as if it had been made by the same factory as theirs. One shouldn’t judge by appearances, as my grandmother, who always did, used to say, but, well ...you know. Lumpy. I had the feeling that had I asked him for the best way to the Academie Francaise, he might not have known.”

“Or cared?”

“Just so.”

So, he thought to himself. *Bobrowsky.* What a foolish, foolish man am I.

“I am obliged to you. The name is Walter Bennerlink. Will you have another?”

“ Jean Yablonsky. Please. Beer. I think I’ve worked up a thirst.”

“Will you take a Calva also?”

Yablonsky assented with his eyebrows.

Archimedes looked out onto the grey street, his mind moving rapidly. A taxi telephoned from here, the destination a hotel address in the twelfth arrondisement, then change that in the cab. Another taxi at the Gare de Lyon for somewhere in the Fifth. Walk from there. A hotel up by the Pantheon. After that he'd return by cab to see whether the men in the Renault were still waiting or Yablonsky had sold him to them as soon as he had gone. Either way he'd know where he stood. He looked at the Frenchman. They smiled at one another and Archimedes turned his head towards the bar. “Two beers and two Calvas, Madame,” he said. “Large ones.”

*

CHAPTER VIII

Off Pyatnitskaya Street, Zamoskvareche, Moscow.
16th of December 1937

Walking through the early morning streets Andrei took bites out of the bread the old woman had given him. He felt light-headed and tired at the same time. At nine o'clock he passed the Borovitsky gate at the south west corner of the Kremlin and crossed the Moskva river by the Great Stone bridge.

*

[In order to include the following three chapters in the fiction portion of the thesis a portion of this chapter has been excluded. It deals with Andrei's wanderings through Moscow and his arrival at the church where he meets Mendel, a small nondescript man who looks like an ordinary worker. In reality he is a senior officer of Red Army Intelligence. He produces lemons, an event almost unheard of in Moscow in the winter of 1937, and is thus an understated figure of power. The character Fyodor is introduced briefly into the chapter when Andrei meets him for the first time. Mendel feeds Andrei, explains that there is no news about his father but that more will be revealed to him later. Andrei, exhausted, sleeps the day through.]

*

When one of the men wakened Andrei darkness had already fallen. After he had washed his face in a basin of cold water he was taken across the yard to Mendel's hut. The frozen air took his lungs by surprise. Inside the room Mendel sat by the stove, feeding it with wood. The flames lit up the faces of two men sitting in the corner.

Both stood. One was an old man with a white beard who wore a long brown coat. The other was younger, with small round steel glasses and a forelock hanging over his brow. A blue scarf of some soft material was looped around his neck. He smiled hesitantly. Andrei wasn't sure of his age. Mendel pointed.

“Pyotr. Ivan. Pavel. We don't need other names.” Andrei shook hands with the men. Mendel brought out a bottle of vodka, some dried fish and a large loaf of black bread. He held up a lemon as if it were a Fabergé egg. The man with the glasses grinned.

 “Sit down gentlemen. Pavel is from the Ukraine,” Mendel said in a conversational tone, setting out glasses. “But he hasn’t been back there for a while.”

The old man nodded. “That is so,” he said, turning to Andrei, “have you ever been?”

“No,” he said, “never.” The man with glasses said nothing.

“But you have heard?”

“Of the...problems? Yes.”

“Problems I suppose one might say...Disaster might be a better word. Excuse my frankness.”

Andrei looked at Mendel.

“I asked Ivan to come to speak to us,” Mendel said. “We all like books and he’s a writer.” He poured some vodka and smiled. “And we all like books.”

'Used to be,' the old man said. He nodded at the fire.

Mendel opened his hands towards the old man, who stroked his beard and looked at his own hands before speaking.

“The Ukraine. The grain requisitioning. The murdering. The senselessness.” The old man spoke quietly, without emphasis.

Andrei responded. “You hear about things of course, but unless you get out of Moscow and travel what can you know? It doesn't appear in Pravda.”

“Yes. And maybe people don’t really want to hear.” He looked at Andrei. “Young man, I don’t mean you. Or you,” he said, turning to the man with glasses.

Andrei looked back and forth between Mendel and the old man. He said nothing. Mendel cut the bread into slices with a large clasp knife. The old man stared into the fire. Eventually, he spoke. His voice was low and calm.

“I believe you have had some trouble. Of course I don't know details. But trouble.”

“Yes.”

“I'm sorry for that. It's part of our country’s sadness-I can say little more. What we've given your generation. Sorry.”

“I thank you.”

The old man nodded again.

“I've been asked to speak about something. Maybe you believe it maybe you don’t. But it’s true.”

“I have no reason to doubt you.” Andrei looked at Mendel uncertainly.

“In our world, you have every reason,” the old man said. “Ttruth is a stranger to Russia now. It was always... quite a distant relative, met with at weddings and

funerals. But now…”

Mendel opened the stove with a steel rod and threw in more wood. Flames licked at the mica window. Inside, something hissed. Beyond the window panes no lights showed in the dark.

The old man gathered the three others with a single glance. “Seven years ago, in 1930, I was living near Vavarskoe, a little village fify versts from Kharkov. It was the back of beyond. The roads were just tracks among the fields. Before the revolution it had had a shop of sorts but when I came to live there it had a closed church, a bath house and about eighty people and a priest. They were all farmers in a small way, with some livestock. A few had a bit more money, and employed labour at sowing and harvest but mostly they all rubbed along without much in the way of cash. Now, of course,” he said, looking directly at Andrei, “the whole countryside has nothing at all.”

Andrei didn’t know what to say so he nodded.

“I came to live there for a number of reasons,” the old man said. “ I’d been a medical student, then turned to teaching language and literature in Kiev. Before the revolution I was one of those who felt they could change the world by education. We moved out into the countryside and travelled among the people with a few blackboards and books. Tolstoyan, as they say. It didn’t really work.”

“May I ask why not?”, the man with the glasses said, his voice deferential. He blinked behind his glasses.

“Us. Them. Who knows. I’m sure if I ever did I don’t know now. But we tried. To change hundreds of years of backwardness in a generation wasn’t at all easy. The Soviets are right about that. Anyway I found myself liking bits of the villagers. Many were ignorant, some darkly so, but many others were as Tolstoy described, an odd combination of piety, greed, violence and unexpected kindness. I never married and

ended up living with my books in an old house by the river on the edge of Vavarskoe. I am…" he said, looking up with a shy smile, "…or rather was, interested in literature." "And linguistics," he added after a moment, murmuring, half-apologetically, "I wrote some books once."

"I look old I know. But I'm only fifty. I was in the big war. What I saw there convinced me the Revolution was right. I was for the Bolsheviks. What the people lacked under the Tsar would now be remedied. There would be something like freedom. There was hope. I fought in the Civil as well, humping my books around in my knapsack like some fool. Out of the line I taught soldiers to read and write. Even met Isaac Babel. Of course he stays silent these days, too honest to put pen to paper in the world we have now. Anyway. Shrapnel ripped open my shoulder, then I was invalided out. It was of course a bad time, but there was hope, as I say. I was a Red, and proud of it. After the war I went back to teaching. Never joined the Party but, you know, I did believe. Travelled round the province with my blackboard, same as before."

"In 1929, the Ukraine started to starve. It went on for three years and more. If it hadn't been for the Americans and their food assistance it would have been much worse but it was bad enough. I have seen children dying in empty fields and families lying beside carts, their mouths stained green with grass and the flies at them already."

He took a long drink of vodka.

"Forced collectivisation. Well, we told ourselves, the revolution demanded sacrifices. It would never be easy. But of course gradually the truth sank in. On and on it went. Arrests, deportations, shootings, more arrests. They needed the grain for the cities, they said, and that was true, so they did. But not that way. The farmers were being ground down, the countryside ruined. Corpses hanging in trees at crossroads. Bodies in ditches. People were dying in their thousands. Then tens of thousands. Then hundreds. Because of that mad bastard Stalin. And his hangers-on."

Andrei stared. The words shocked him. The man with the glasses took them off and polished the lenses on his scarf.

Mendel cut some more bread. “We are amongst friends,” he said, “heresy is allowed.”

“It took us some time to realise that truth was heresy of course, and heresy truth,” the old man said, “but once that realisation sinks in, well, certain things flow from it.”

“I was still teaching what the revolution would bring, still talking about the bright future, when the requisitioning party arrived in the village in the autumn. To be truthful the people thought I was harmless, that’s why they didn’t kill me. I was just too stupid. And besides I taught for nothing and asked for little from them. Also, I did some basic doctoring for free. Delivered a few babies too.”

“It was coming on to Winter. One day wet, the next cold and dry. The soldiers arrived with two lorries and a cart in the afternoon. Not soldiers. Chekhists. Leather jackets and everything. There were eight of them, heavily armed, led by a very young man. Epstein. Short, with a small moustache, like Yagoda, his Secret Police God. We were all told to assemble in the centre of the village and Epstein, after a speech about the Revolution, told the people he wanted all their grain. They would be left enough to live on but all the rest had to be loaded on the lorries. ‘Enough to live on’ turned out to be a few kilos of grain per person per month and wouldn’t have kept a flea alive but there was no room for compromise. They were given 24 hours.” The old man fell silent, plucking at his beard.

“What happened?” said Andrei.

“Well, they didn’t hand it all over. That was for sure. Or not enough. Two reasons. The people couldn’t see why they should starve in the coming winter, they had grown the stuff after all and secondly…” The old man shrugged.

“Secondly?”

“Secondly, Epstein was...well...obviously a Jew.”

Andrei just stopped himself looking across at Mendel. No one spoke. Then the old man began to talk again.

“I know what it sounds like. But it was true. The villagers were not saints and no different from most of the country people who had prejudices too deep to understand. Or to change. I tried. They hadn’t been fond of Jews for a few hundred years. Still weren’t, some of them. Others realised what nonsense it all was. I don’t know how far back you have to go to understand it all. I’ve given up. It was prejudice pure and simple. A pox of the mind. No use to the world. But all I know is Epstein was a Jew and he wasn’t getting the grain.”

“On the following day he summoned the people and the Headman. Everybody was there, women in kerchiefs, children, men in muddy clothes. The Chekhists with rifles, standing on the lorries. Anton Pavelich was the village Headman. He had also fought in the Civil and had lost half of an arm. Red Cavalry. You know, the Babel stories. Even had a Soviet medal. He had it on his chest that day. On his best jacket. Empty arm pinned up neatly. Some of the grain had been surrendered but he told a lie of course about the rest. The village didn’t have a great deal but some was hidden away and he wasn’t telling. I can see him now, standing in front of Epstein with his cap off.” The old man took a bit of bread and chewed it. He cleared his throat and changed his voice.

“You’re a fucking liar.”.

“No, your Honour.”

“Comrade Commissar.”

“Comrade Commissar.”

“And a disgrace to the Revolution.”

Andrei exchanged surprised looks with the man wearing glasses. The old man's voice went back to normal. “Pavelich said nothing. Everyone there knew Epstein was too young ever to have even been in the *Civil*, never mind the Revolution. Pavelich had though. Been in both. He had had to cut bits of his own arm off with his own knife. Anyway, he just stood there, holding his hat with his good arm.”

“So. There we were. Without any warning Epstein pulled his pistol from his holster and shot Pavelich in the forehead. Quite calm about it. He watched him crumple and fall face-down in the mud. He then shouted that he wanted the grain on the morrow and told us to go home. Some men tried to lift Pavelich. The back of his head was missing.”

“'He stays. Leave him'. That's what Epstein said. The Chekhists lifted their rifles. The men laid him back down in the mud. I walked away. Later that afternoon I looked down the roadway. Pavelich was still lying there, face down in dung.”

No one spoke in the room. Mendel poured out three more glasses of vodka.

“What happened with the grain?” Andrei said.

“Nothing,” said the old man, “it didn’t come to that…No...no...” The old man looked at the floor.

“Go on, please,” said Mendel quietly.

The old man’s face became still. “That afternoon all the Chekhists got drunk. They took a young girl who was ordered to cook for them into the Bath house. There they did bad things. Really bad. She was only sixteen. From a small family, only her and her father. Mother dead. Old Pavlenko was away in Kharkov. Thank God. He couldn't

hear her shouting. People covered their ears. Father Pavel was the only one who tried to do anything and they beat him senseless in front of the Banya. I'm not religious of course but he was a good man and they beat him like a dog. Unconscious. He lost an eye."

"My God," Andrei said.

"Yes. He was absent that day."

Again, no one spoke.

"They let her go eventually. When the women went to her house she had hanged herself from the rafters."

"Her father came back from Kharkov that night. Some of the men met him at the edge of the village and told him. I was there. He was a small man, a good farmer, quiet, with a club foot and a special built up boot. At ploughing time you could spot him from a distance, going up and down behind the horses. That night he looked like you had told him he was about to die. Then he looked at all of us in turn. Men turned away. They took him to see his daughter. I didn't go with them. I couldn't."

"That night the temperature fell. Steel cold. Frost. Some of the men came to my house. They told me I could leave the village if I wanted but they had decided to deal with the Chekhists and if I was going, to go now. The priest was in my house lying in the back room by the stove. I said I would stay. I don't know why. The men said they were going to confront Epstein in the Banya, where they were having a party. One of the Chekhists could play the accordion. You could hear the mazurkas and the noise all over the village. They had plenty of vodka and had ordered food to be brought in to them."

I asked the men what they were going to do. They mumbled in their beards. "They are beasts," they said, "and do not deserve to live."

“They have guns,” I told them.

“We know. But it won’t matter,” they said, “they can have all the guns in the world.”

“Others will come.”

“They just looked at me. “This too we know,” they said. “But we shall be gone. There is no staying in this place now. They will destroy us anyway. We have nothing to lose.”

“I asked them what they wanted of me and they said nothing. They knew I was a Red, or sort of a Red, and wanted to know if I would warn the Chekhists. I told them I would not. I knew the girl and the father. They were good people.”

“They said they believed me. But they left Petrovich, a big man, with me all the same. Later that evening, when the party was still going on in the Banya, I saw men assembling in the shadows of the houses. I put my coat on and went out to them. They began moving towards the bath house. I can still remember the tune drifting out over the road. It was a slow, sad tune. Polish I think. I noticed there was no longer a sentry guarding the front door of the bath house and asked where he was.”

“With his maker,” one of the men said, out of the corner of his mouth. I found out later some women, looking suitably cowed, had taken food to the sentry outside the bath house and the one guarding the arms in the Chekhist’s quarters. Both had been over confident and unafraid of women. When each bent to lift the cloth cover from the bowl…” The old man made a single chopping motion with his open hand. “Each died with an axe in his head.”

“There were about twenty men, all silent. As we came up to the Bath house a young boy emerged from the side of the building and whispered to one of the men. Artyom Fillipovich..Last name Ignatiev. He was now acting as Headman. The boy handed

Fillipovich a small bag and the Headman patted the boy on the shoulder and told one of the men to take him away. The boy went to protest but Fillipovich spoke to him gently and he was led away."

"What was he doing there in the first place?" Andrei said, immediately sorry he had interrupted.

"I asked the same question. It was to do with the layout of the Bath house. There were two big rooms, one for men the other for women, and each had a smaller room off the main for boots and clothes. A storage place to keep things dry while people went into the steam. The women taking in the food had reported that the small room was where the Chekhists were kept their clothing and guns. Each of them had one of those artillery Mauser pistols, with the long handles and a magazine in front of the trigger. Broom- handled I think they call them..."

"They do." Mendel looked up and gave a faint smile.

"Yes, broom-handled. I thought it was. The boy had slipped in through the small window used for ventilation and handed the pistols out to one of the men who had been in the army. He emptied the magazines. It's pretty simple to do. If you know. All of this was whispered to me in a few sentences. We stood there in the dark, in the rutted road, twenty men and me. In complete silence now. Just the yellow lights from the bath house and the bright moon on the frost. From inside there was singing. It was carrying over the fields."

"So the Chekhists had no weapons?" Andrei said.

"Oh, they did. All the Mausers were replaced, back into the holsters. They only lacked ammunition."

The man with the glasses drank his vodka and put the empty glass on the table. Mendel poured some vodka for him and the others.

“The men pulled open the door and filed into the Bath house. Me at the back. The accordion music stopped. There wasn't much steam but the place was was filled with smoke and the smell of fried food. And vodka. Like a distillery. There were some oil lamps on the walls and light from the open fire. No one moved. Most of the Chekhists had towels round their waists but two were naked. Epstein stood up. His face was red with drink.”

“He shouted at them. “You sons of bitches!” he shouted, “back to your kennels.” The men made no reply and Epstein began to look uneasy. You could see him counting. “Comrades,” he said then,“we all want the same things. Let's not be enemies.” Behind him I could see the Chekhists. They of course didn't look happy.”

Mendel muttered something to himself. Andrei didn’t catch it.

The old man scratched his chin. “Epstein tried to fool them. You know, conciliatory. He told them he would read them the words of Lenin explaining everything. The book was in his bag next door. That's what he said'.”

“ The men just snorted. Fillipovich held up his hand. He said 'If you like - we have time'.”

“ Of course, Epstein went into the inner room and came back right away with three pistols, one he held and the other two he gave to two of the Chekhists. They stood there, happier men than they had been a moment ago. They cocked the pistols.”

“ ‘'Now fuck off,' Epstein told them, 'or all your women in this shit pit will be widows tonight'. I remember his words after all this time.”

“Fillipovich said it was a woman they had come to speak about. Epstein told him to address him as 'Comrade Commissar.’ The men laughed of course. Epstein didn't get it. He smiled as well. From nerves. Then the smile went away.”

“ 'This is her father. Comrade Commissar,' Fillipovich told him. I remember his tone. Not angry at all. More...matter of fact. The men moved aside and old Pavlenko moved forward, dragging his leg. Never mind a pin, you could hear a feather drop; just the soft scraping over the floorboards. He looked at each of the Chekhists in turn.”

“Epstein’s face looked green. He knew something was wrong. Started to shout. Telling them to get out or he'd shoot. All that sort of thing. No one moved. He raised his pistol, pointing it at the girl’s father. I can see his face, all screwed up and red. He pulled the trigger. And the hammer clicked on an empty chamber. We all flinched but there was only that dry tap. I tell you, in the silence of that room, well it...” The old man shook his head. “He cocked and fired again. So did the others. Then they ripped out the empty magazines and stared at them. Just stared at them. Then they stared at each other.”

“It was so quiet. I noticed a sack being passed through the village men to the front row. With nothing said they started to hand out sickles and cleavers. Long leather aprons too, all dark and stiff. Each man tied one on himself. No fuss. Tying the bow in front. Finally, someone handed the girl’s father a short-handled scythe and a whetstone. He started to sharpen the blade. One of the Chekhists started shouting about how men would be sent looking for them but he didn't finish, just fell silent. That ringing, you see. The whetstone. Back and forth.”

Mendel levered open the stove door and checked the fire. The old man stopped speaking. Mendel looked up and nodded.

The old man drank some vodka. “Pavlenko stopped. He put the stone in his pocket and tested the edge with his thumb just as if he was about to begin a field. I had to get out. No one tried to stop me. The men were studying the Chekhists...” The old man

paused. “As if they were cattle. One of them, no clothes on I remember, holding an empty Mauser. Well he crossed himself.” The old man looked at Andrei, Mendel and the other man in turn. “I’m not exaggerating. The Chekhist crossed himself.”

“I hadn't gone five steps when it happened. A thump like an axe biting into a log. The scream was terrible. High, strangled. High. *High*. Like an animal. Then it started. All the men moved forward, lifting and swinging the blades. They were shouting, the Chekhists screaming. Screaming. All of them screaming.”

“I got out the door and ran. It went on for a long time but got fainter as I got farther from the village. Eventually all sound stopped. I stood there. There was that frost and a big white moon over the fields. From that distance I saw flames. Curling round a roof. Thatch does that. I walked back quickly. The bath house was on fire. The men stood beside it in orange light. I saw them. Their eyes were huge, I remember that. Huge. And dark splashes on their faces. Wet. Hanging in the beards. Some of them were wet from their faces to their boots.”

Mendel poured out more vodka, the old man lifting his cup and taking it to his chest. He took a sip.

“What happened?” Andrei asked.

“It had all already been decided,” the old man said, “the lorries were stripped and dismantled, then thrown in the river. The two guards' bodies were thrown into the flames. Like bales of hay. Each man set fire to his own house and last of all they burned the church. The grain was distributed according to the size of each family. Then the icons by lot. By morning there was nothing left but embers.”

“And the people?” the man with the glasses said. He sat forward.

“Each family left in its cart. Some people combined, others went off alone. There was a heavy frost that morning and a fog. At daylight I watched them go. From the

crossroads in every direction. Children in the back wrapped up against the cold. Women with babies. The able bodied on foot. After fifty metres they all became shadows in the mist - then nothing. Gone. I could hear the horses' hooves. And a baby crying. Then nothing. In ten minutes, nothing. Just the fog and the silence. I was the last to go. They'd given me food for myself and the priest, who they liked. I put my old horse in the traces and left. You could smell the burning for a good distance but there was no wind. Just fog. We set off in the direction of Kharkov, then realised that's where reinforcements might be coming from. I turned off onto back roads and we wandered. For days. Slow. "

"How did you manage after that?" Andrei said.

"We were a little conspicuous, it is true. Father Pavel was not wearing vestments of course but his head was still heavily bandaged. He had regained bare consciousness before we left but he was in great pain. Moaning, you know. Being jolted in the back of the cart didn't help but there was no choice - we had to get away. He died on the second day. "

Andrei could think of little to say. "You were a friend to him," he said finally.

"I wish I could have been a better one."

"What happened then?"

"Well…"

"For another time I think," Mendel said quickly, but in a quiet voice. He put a hand on the old man's sleeve. "It's late and there's a lot to do tomorrow. I'll have someone show you where to sleep." The old man nodded and pulled on his heavy clothing. He embraced Mendel, Andrei and the man with the glasses in turn.

"Good luck boys," he murmured, and stepped out into the night. Andrei heard

someone speaking to him outside.

“So. Gentlemen.” He turned to the man called with the glasses. If you would return to your hut we'll meet again in the morning. A peaceful night to you.”

The man with the glasses nodded and shook Andrei's hand. “Good Fortune to you,” he said.

“And to you,” Andrei said. The man pulled his scarf round his neck and left. Mendel turned towards Andrei. He stood in the open doorway. The yard was in darkness. Some flakes of snow blew across the threshold.

“You’ll be moving on in a little while. We’ll discuss it tomorrow. Much to talk over. Bed down here tonight. Someone will bring your rucksack. I'll say goodnight then. Don't worry.”

“Don't worry?”

“No. You're safe. Don't forget. I can get lemons in a Moscow winter. That should reassure you. I hope it does. A little anyway.” A half smile.

“Where? Where am I going?” Andrei said, his face alive in the lamp light.

Mendel smiled briefly. ”How do you like Turgenev?”

“Well enough.”

“Good,” Mendel said, just before he closed the door. Again a half smile. “I think you need a Month in the Country.”

*

CHAPTER IX

5 King's Bench Walk, The Temple, London. 16th of December 1937

Towards six in the evening it was already dark. London was brightly lit but in the Temple soft shadows were cast by gaslight. Two men in their sixties, one a retired colonel named Blake, nominally of engineers, the other a serving general at the War Office, sat beside a fire in an upper room of a building overlooking King's Bench Walk. Outside, a square was bordered by gardens towards the Thames and barristers' chambers on the far side. Every window was lit up. The noise and traffic of Fleet Street, a few hundred yards north, could not be heard.

The general, a small, bird-like man with silver hair, smiled and held out a glass. The other man, tall, neatly dressed, filled it from a square decanter on a side table.

"Thanks. Are you *sure* he's the right man for this job, Tom? It could be hellish tricky."

"I am. But of course the decision is yours sir."

The general grunted. He rose and went to the window. Below, typists, clerks and messengers were moving quickly in every direction carrying bundles of papers. Amongst them dark-suited barristers trooped back from court with less animation, robe bags over their shoulders. He spoke to his own reflection in the glass.

"He inherited a *house* from somebody. Have I got that right?"

“As the file says. His old commanding officer in the war. Died a widower and without children. Left him the place. Needed a lot of work. Which he hasn't the money to do.”

The General turned and leaned back on the sill. “What sort of a place?”

“Big. Stockbroker Tudor. Leans a bit. Jungle of a garden.”

“Sounds as if you like it.”

“I do.”

“Inside?”

“Icons everywhere. Indian stuff from his time in Peshawar. One old housekeeper, everything a bit dusty. Why do you ask?”

“Oh you know. Background. One likes background... Time spent in reconnaissance is seldom wasted etcetera.” He sipped at his glass.

“And your general view of this fortunate legatee? Forgive the lingo Tom,”he said, glancing back at the window, “it’s being surrounded by all these damn lawyers. Quite gives one the willies. It’s a beautiful *place* of course but how do you stand living amongst them?”

“They're not so bad on the whole. A chance came up for a flat here through Jenny’s father who's a judge at the Old Bailey, as you know. I took it. Some very smart people live next door you know, more your milieu than mine.”

“Who?”

“The Nicholsons.”

“*Harold and Vita?”*

“The same.”

“Good God. People will be living in Islington next. Anyway, about Flanders. Tell me what you really think.”

“He's clever enough to deal with the beggars at MI6 and outsider enough not to be beholden to them. Experienced. Sensible. Limp slows him down a bit but nothing wrong with his mind. Wouldn’t have put his name forward otherwise.”

“It won’t be an easy job, Tom.”

“He’s not entirely an easy chap, as you may find. But he's what you want.”

The General, neat in a fine grey suit, looked into the fire. He used tongs to pluck a lump of coal from the scuttle and placed it on the flames.

“I don't know... I accept all you say of course...” He looked up. “But I've never engaged a man who’s been tried for murder before.”

“Acquitted.”

The general shot the other man a glance. “I think I’d picked that up. They did a brief précis of his file for me at the office. Quite interesting. Not the normal…” His voice tailed off while he thought. His mouth puckered.

“What exactly *is* it he does for you?”

“He runs a small team dealing with Russian emigrés in Paris. He's got a leg man

there, and a clerk and some girls here. We declare him to the French and we share some information with them. There's an office in Villiers Street by Hungerford Bridge. The cover is timber importing."

"And you came by him how?"

"After Russia he was seconded over to the RIC in Dublin and when that all finished he went to the Intelligence people in India. Ten years there, Frontier mostly. Peshawar. Attached to the Frontier Scouts for a bit then got a bullet in the leg from a tribesman. From a long way off he told me. He was quite impressed. Invalided out in '32 and back here. I took him on at the end of '33."

The General shifted in his chair."Have I got this right? Born in the early nineties. Galloway direction. Father a schoolmaster. No money. Good results at school but not good enough for a scholarship. Went into the timber trade."

"He was. After a year in an architect's office. Don't know what happened there. Don't think he could afford the fees for a full apprenticeship."

The General looked at his glass. "Sent to Russia in 1913 for a year to deal in Baltic timber. St Petersburg. Picked up Russian surprisingly quickly. And a fiancé it seems. Engaged too young to a Russian woman. All went wrong. Would that be fair?"

"We all do daft things when young. Especially abroad. The heady air of Simla, sir, that sort of thing." Blake turned to the General with a face innocent of mischief. The other man coloured.

 "You're not shy, Tom."

" Not not shy sir- retired officer without ambition."

"The General snorted and held out his glass. " What happened after that?"

“Timber freighter from Petersburg when war was declared. Landed at Leith and joined up in Edinburgh. In the ranks. A Kitchener battalion of the Royal Scots. He eventually got to France.”

“When was he commissioned?”

“Early ’16. Then they transferred him. Lucky. His old battalion were cut to bits on the first day of the Somme.”

“I remember. One of the Edinburgh City battalions.” The General's face looked thoughtful. “How the hell did he end up in his other regiment? As far as I can see he'd never even *been* to the West Country.”

“Not sure. I asked him once. Something about meeting two chaps in a pub off the Aldwych.”

A brief smile. “Glad to see some things don’t change.”

“Thereafter wounded…”

“Where?”

“Shoulder. Lucky again. After convalescing he ended up back on the Somme later that year. Got the MC there.”

“How did he end up with you in Russia?”

“After they told me I was going to Archangel I knew I’d need Russian speakers. I’d never come across the language before. Put the word out and he responded just before they were going to demob him. We were running networks in Northern Russia, during the ‘intervention’ as the historians now call it, our ill-starred venture into the Russian

Revolution. He became my assistant. Good too. An aptitude for it."

"Not an easy time."

"You could say that. Bloody awful. Never seen the like. I suppose civil wars are always the worst. Hard to say who was the nastiest between them, Bolsheviks or Whites."

"What was his attitude to the Bolos?"

"That's a bit of a mystery. He didn't seem very impressed with what had gone before - that comes from his year there I expect. He saw quite a lot. But he didn't buy the new world of the comrades either. He very rarely mentions politics."

"All right...That brings us to his court martial for murder"

"That."

A small point but I hope you don't mind me raising it."

"It's in the file. As the lawyers say hereabouts - a triumphant acquittal. Also in the file."

"It is. But what I want, Tom, is to know what *happened*."

Blake lifted the decanter but the General shook his head. Blake poured some in his own glass and took a long drink.

"In truth there isn't much to tell. As you know His Majesty's Government thought it a good idea to involve us in the Russian Civil War to stop the spread of the Red Menace. We were stuck in Archangel attached to the Whites. They quartered us in the former clap hospital. Me, a small staff, a company of the Middlesex, and Flanders. He

was our Russian speaker. As a posting it wasn't much fun.”

“Did the Bolos *abolish* clap? One hears they abolished so much.”

“Not exactly. What a place. Reds and Whites about as bad as each other. Atrocities every other week. I went into a barn one frozen morning and found six naked men hanging from the rafters. They were missing vital parts of their anatomy. Sword cuts.” Blake made a face and drank from his glass.

“Anyway. We had orders not to interfere with what the Whites were doing. That was hard to stomach, I may say. But that's what we did. One night we had a mess dinner with the Russians. It had been a hard week and we'd brought back several prisoners. To loosen their tongues the Whites had put them in iron cages out in the open. It was cold as anything. Twenty degrees of frost. I protested but to no great effect. The prisoners were well clothed and wouldn't freeze to death anyway. Thought I'd sort it out in the morning. In the mess people were sitting around a big stove or playing cards. Flanders was on his own in a corner reading old Tatlers. A card school was going full blast and someone had started up a gramophone.”

Blake stirred the fire and put on more coal. He glanced at his watch.

“The card school started arguing amongst themselves. All very Russian. I couldn't follow it. A big fellow, Ostrovsky won in the end. Quite an efficient sort for a White, but a bully. Used to hit his chaps, that sort of thing. Some of them did.”

“Good Lord.”

“And worse. Anyway, he put his cards down and went for the door, pulling out his revolver. I heard the word 'plennik'. That I knew. It means 'prisoner'.”

“Thank you. He was going to threaten the prisoners?”

“No. Shoot one. That's what the card school were playing for. He won. Found all this out later of course.”

“Ah.”

“Quite. He wanted to shoot one in particular, he said. A Petersburg Jew the Whites thought was a spy. He was on his way out the door when Flanders spoke to him. Quite calmly. I turned and looked over my shoulder when I heard his voice. He was holding a big pistol, one of those American 45 things with the half- inch calibre bullet. Same as the Martini-Henry they used at Rorke's Drift - a man-stopper if ever there was. I recognised some of what he was saying - '*plennik*' and '*nyet*' amongst them.”

“And?”

Well. That was that. Ostrovsky's pistol came up and there was a sound like a howitzer going off. Ostrovsky went backwards over the sofa with a hole in his chest you could drive a carriage through. Another card player went to lift his holster flap but thought better of it. Sensible fellow. Blighter gave the sort of a smile you muster after losing at bridge. Then he put his hands back on the table.” Blake lifted his glass. “And that's it. I called the guard out and the place was soon filled with a sergeant and six riflemen from the Middlesex. Open- mouthed, I need hardly say, but loving it. Soldiers. Flanders handed me his pistol, butt-first, then tucked the unfinished Tatlers under his arm. And off he went under escort. Didn't turn a hair.”

“The Court-Martial?'

“Back in London. Russian General got shirty the following day, wanted a firing squad. General Ironsides told him that if anyone was going to shoot a British officer it was he. I got orders to put Flanders under close arrest and put him on the next boat. The Middlesex cheered him up the gangplank. Despite being told not to. Acquitted at Court Martial.”

“After your written evidence.”

“Yes.”

“Without a stain...”

“Ish. What did you expect. The Foreign Office got their knickers twisted round their necks. Complex political situation... international fight against Bolshevik menace etcetera. A British officer whose ideas of co-operation was, shall we say, *unorthodox,* was surplus to requirements. Off to Dublin Castle on the next mail boat from Holyhead.”

“I see. No medals then.”

“No.”

“Weren't the *Bolos* keen to give him something? Hero of whatever it is? Not many imperialist capitalist lackeys have actually *shot* a White Guard officer after all.” The General lifted his glass. “ Even on a mess night.”

Blake gave a thin smile and looked at his watch. “You'll be able to ask him yourself sir. He's due.”

*

Both men went to the window. There were fewer people about now, hurrying to Blackfriars in the dark for the suburban trains or walking up to Fleet Street to catch a bus for Charing Cross. Blake pointed to a figure fifty yards away approaching from the direction of Temple tube. He wore an overcoat and hat and carried a stick. His pace was steady under the gas lights but he limped slightly, the left foot thrown out at each step. They saw him disappear below the window and a minute later a manservant showed him into the room where he immediately slotted a heavy ash plant

into the umbrella stand. The General looked him up and down. He saw a man in his mid-forties, greying dark hair, stout but not fat, below the middle height. His suit was pressed but old. Blake shook hands and made the introductions. He moved beyond the door to lock the ante-room outer door. They sat round the fire, each with a glass.

“A cold night,” the General said.

“It is sir.” Flanders' voice was dry, neutral.

“But not as cold as North Russia, I imagine.”

“Few places are.”

The General lifted a buff file and held it up. “Thank you for coming. Mind if I run through some of this with you?”

“I don't mind.” Flanders thought in the firelight the old man looked like a small bird of prey.

For half an hour he took Flanders through his life on paper. He ignored chronology, moved from subject to subject, and often doubled back to earlier ground, then re-doubled back again, all in a quiet, disinterested voice. At one point without preamble he spoke in a foreign language. Blake looked up, alert, not understanding.

“How's your language Do you keep it up?” The old man spoke to Flanders in swift Urdu.

Flanders replied in the same language. “I don’t. Serviceable only I'd say, these days. Though I miss the hills at dawn or evening- as must you.” The general grunted to himself and reverted to English. Blake sat back.

Finally: “Not married?”

“My life didn't seem to suit it.”

The General closed the file and placed it on the table. He thought for a moment and sat back in his chair, crossing his hands over his stomach.

“I'd like you to take on a job for me.”

Flanders looked at Blake, who nodded almost imperceptibly.

“What sort of job is it?”

“A tricky job. One you can't refuse if I explain it to you. The word 'secret' doesn't begin to cover it.”

“Is it within my capabilities?”

“Yes.”

Flanders glanced again at Blake. Another slight nod.

“All right sir. Say on.”

The General stretched out his legs and crossed his ankles. He appeared to study his toecaps. “The thing is,” the General said mildly, not taking his eyes from his shoes, “I'd like you to catch a spy.”

*

CHAPTER X

Yaroslavsky Station, Komsomol Square, Moscow. 20th of March 1938

Andrei's train arrived mid-morning, late. He left the station and walked at random in the bright sunshine, glad to be back in the city. Moscow smelled of cement.

*

[In order to include the most important scenes from this chapter a portion of its initial narrative has been excluded. It deals with Andrei's time in the country working in a logging camp. There he learns from Mendel of his father's suicide on being captured in Leningrad and his courage in refusing to betray anyone to the NKVD. The scene is being set for Andrei in a later chapter to be offered revenge for his father's death with the prize of one of the NKVD men whose arrest Mendel can engineer. The policeman's wife and children will also suffer,as is the norm in Soviet Russia and Andrei has to make the choice, his character in the book developing thereby. Andrei's appearance has changed with a beard and pudding bowl peasant haircut and Moscow is changing also. He is met by one of Mendel's men, the monosyllabic Volodya, and taken to a safe house to rest.]

Later Andrei heard the soft knocking. In an instant he was up. A key turned in the door and Mendel appeared. As usual he wore a flat cap on his shaven head and workman's overalls. His hands were rough looking and raw. He embraced Andrei and held him at arms length.

“Country life agrees with you, I see, “ he said, sitting on a crate and pulling out from his coat a bag which smelled of bread and sausage and some tea. Finally, he held up two lemons.“Well, you'd be disappointed otherwise. There are some plates and glasses in that box. Why don’t we get that stove going?”

When the water had boiled, they sat on a bunk and ate. The shouts of children filtered up from the courtyards below. Mendel looked at him appraisingly.

“Well. No-one followed you, you’ll be glad to know. I am anyway. I’ve had your back watched since the station. How did you find Volodya?”

“Chatty.”

Mendel laughed. “He is that. A good man to have on your side in any…difficult situation though. It might be thought that he'd stand out but in fact he is ignored or avoided by people because of his deformity and can go many places where another man might not. You may meet him again. But for now I imagine you want to know what happens next.”

“Very much.”

“I've got a job for you. Cover. In a factory.”

“All right.”

“And, if you would do me a favour at the same time, I'd be very much obliged. Shall we have another glass of tea?”

Andrei sat on the edge of the bed waiting for Mendel to speak.

“I need you to look after someone. A writer. More than. Actually, you've met. He was the fellow in Zamoskvareche, the one with the glasses when you met Ivan from the Ukraine. You haven't forgotten that.”

Andrei saw Mendel was looking at him with more than ordinary attention.

“I remember. And I'll look after whoever you need me to.” he said.

Mendel smiled and he touched Andrei gently on the shoulder. His shaved head gleamed in the light from the high window. He sipped his tea. “He’s a genius. How else to put it I don’t know. He’s a literary genius, the like of which this country, and a Europe we're still part of whatever they say, hasn't seen since Pushkin. And I don't exaggerate.”

“Who is he? Have I read him?-”

“No. No-one has. He’s unknown, writing only for himself. He is also, in many things, naïve and foolish- he behaves like one young in years, though he is no longer. His mind simply doesn’t see the everyday, except in his writing. In many ways he’s childlike. He of course likes to eat- but cannot devote time to finding food. He likes- too much, between us- to drink, but has to scrounge vodka. And when he finds it he drinks to oblivion.”

“A Russian then.”

“Of course he’s a Russian. But not a *stage* Russian. His true world exists inside his brain and nowhere else. There he makes fine, balanced judgements, draws inferences,

sums up complex aspects of character in a single phrase. In normal life he can do none of that. He flounders, badly dressed and hungry amongst the problems of everyday existence like a caricature of an artist in a garret. And most of all, most worrying of all from my point of view, and yours... well, he cannot gauge risk. Not at all."

"And you want me to look after him."

"I ask that. He's only survived until now by luck and the fact that in his outward appearance he's unremarkable. He says very little, an advantage in our times. And a more ordinary-looking person you'll not find. But he needs someone to watch out for him. In return you'll be helping him, and us all."

"What's the reason he needs to be looked after, other than he flounders a bit. We all do."

Mendel looked directly at Andrei. "He's writing a book, a fine book, an amazing book, which we'll enable him to complete. In this country, as in no other, the right book can be worth the earth. You know that. It can change the minds of men. This one will set Russia, *Europe* by the ears."

"And those who murdered my father? Are they involved?"

Mendel thought for a moment and paused. "Yes. I can only give you one. I'll speak of it another day. May I?"

"That's something."

"Indeed it is. And more than something. We all do well to remember in these times that we work with the possible. Without going into details, that which is possible becomes less and less each day. What I can do on a Monday night becomes impossible by Tuesday morning. We have been lucky so far."

Andrei looked closely at the other man. His voice had fallen away. On the angular face minute lines of tension hatched the skin. Tiredness seeped from him.

"Of course I agree to whatever you wish," Andrei said.

"Good." Mendel gave his small smile and Andrei felt the relief in the other man. "There's something else. I couldn't tell you before. Your father was carrying part of this book, a chapter, when they arrested him. I'm afraid I asked him to. I've got to tell you that."

"He did it freely?"

"No. Courage made him do it."

Andrei saw a picture of his father making tea in their room, standing in his slippers, his greatcoat over his shoulders, laughing about something. Mendel waited.

" He was taking it to an intermediary in Leningrad who was to take it to the West. They caught him. I don't yet know how. The rest you know. He died without betraying anyone. He didn't talk."

Andrei sat back. "Have you read this book?"

"Only the part your father was carrying. But I can tell you it grabs you by the throat and holds you. Our lives suddenly have meaning in those pages. Your father had read this portion also. He knew the risks but decided nonetheless to carry on. He was a man, a patriot, though of course the present...authorities have another view. They are running scared. Very scared. This makes them extremely dangerous."

"How so?" Andrei put down his glass.

“It’s right you know the risks. As I understand it three writers suspected of being the author have been tortured, then shot, in the last year. Two senior officers of the NKVD who have failed to find the book or the author have also been taken to the punishment cells. Taken down in the lift from their offices. Shot.”

“How do you know?”

Mendel pursed his lips.

“Please accept it from me.”

“All right. Two shot. There’s now a third?”

“Yes. With a small team. Of course it has to be small. Otherwise the rumours begin. The last thing they want is a work of genuine value, an all encompassing Russian work of genius appearing in the West where they've no control. The next worse thing is word getting out in Russia that it even exists. Or might exist. Thinking about it I’m not sure the latter isn't more powerful than the former. We're the land after all where fact runs a poor second to invention.”

Andrei thought for a few moments. “What does this book say?”

Mendel himself paused, leaning forward slightly, his elbows on his knees. “ It tells us something I thought in my lifetime I’d never hear. It tells the truth about the Revolution. All of it.”

A silence hung between them. Andrei looked directly into Mendel’s eyes.

“My God.”

“That’s one way to look at it. Not being a believer I don’t often use the expression but when all is said and done it may be the only one that fits.”

“I still don’t understand.”

“You will later. For the moment I can tell you that it’s all there. Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin’s rise to power, his part in Kirov’s murder, his paranoia, the deliberate famines, the crushing of the sailors at Kronstadt, collectivisation, the falsities, the massive lies. And now the faked trials, the legalised murders, the lists of arrests, the deaths, the plots that don’t exist, the ones that do. The secret graveyards out beyond the city. Butovo for example. Hundreds are being shot there every night. It's going on all over the country. The lives of millions squandered by a paranoid criminal. It’s about us, all of us.” He tapped the packing case twice. “In the end, it’s about humankind.”

“Some of these things are known, other things are hidden. How does the author get such information?” Andrei hesitated. “From you?”

“I’m the conduit, that much I will say. More you don't need to know. I've said too much already but you are taking on a task and you should know something of it.”

“And what am I to do?”

“Just look after him. To get the book finished. I got him a job as a night watchman- terrible pay, bottom of the line- where he writes. You and he will be sharing a room at the Hotel Lux. That place on Gorky Street. It’s just around the corner from here. His old place was getting too dangerous. The Lux is where the foreigners from the Comintern stay-or used to stay, mostly they've been shot. All committed communists working for the international success of the Party. Some are still alive but not many. Some of their families have survived but ...well...it won't be that long till they go to the camps if they haven't already. Foreigners equals danger to Stalin. The country is to be sealed even tighter than before. A hermetic seal between us and the rest of the world.”

“Is such a place safe? Sorry to ask but-“

“You do right to ask. It suits our purposes. There's a hostel annex in the back courtyard for domestic workers, that’s where you’ll be living. And I've someone there. He'll keep an eye out for you. There are other Russians there but the Organs don’t bother with them. It’s the old Communists - German translators, the Hungarian left-wing journalists, the French dreamers. That's who they want. The ones who might be having second thoughts, the ones who’ve concluded this isn't the Revolution they had in mind.”

Mendel poured some more water into the pot and pumped up the primus stove till it gave a good flame. “ The Lux isn’t well named, but the best I can do at the moment. There are advantages. Temporary and transient workers passing through there, doing shifts at all hours. Two more won’t be noticed. I have arranged things with the manager. He thinks you are informers of mine. With the heavy beard and the new haircut you look very different from your appearance a year ago and your ward- his name is Mirnov, Fyodor Arkadeyovich - isn't known to the system at all. A fortunate thing. Your papers are in here. Learn the details.” Mendel proffered a dirty brown envelope.

“Your new name is Popov, Andrei Andreiovich. Different date of birth. Born near where you were staying in the North. Don’t get into long discussions with anyone about your past. Family perished in the Civil War etc. No dependants.Like many another.You look like a country boy in the big city. There are thousands. People have been scattered to the four winds. No-one will care.”

“How long? And what's to happen in the end?” Andrei said, taking the envelope.

“Months, not years. He’s been working on it for four years and is quite close to finishing. I hope. After that we get the manuscript to the West. Paris probably, though that is not yet decided.”

“How'll it get there?”

“You’ll take it.”

Andrei gave a double yelp. “Me? How?”

“That, I’m considering.”

“My God. How much of the book is finished?”

“A good question. He won’t let anyone read it. After losing the first chapter when your father was arrested - he's not to know about that by the way - he had to re-write it from his first notes. Now he won’t confide in anyone and won’t even tell me where the manuscript is. Not in his lodgings. Perhaps hidden at a friend’s or at work. That’s one of the things I want you to find out.”

“You want me to spy on him?”

Mendel spoke wearily, rubbing his face. “Yes. It’s necessary. Get used to it.”

Andrei grimaced. Mendel spread his hands.

“It’s for his own good, not to damage him. I hope he’ll come to trust you and in turn you'll save his manuscript and give it life. It sounds high flown but it’s quite real, I assure you. All Russia must read it. The *world* must read it.”

“When do I go to the Lux?”

“If you agree, he’s waiting. Now.”

Andrei opened the envelope to find his face staring from an internal passport, a creased dirty birth certificate and a Moscow Residence permit. Behind the passport, in

a blue rubber band was a small wad of paper roubles. “Okay” he said, and then in a quieter voice, “Let’s go.” They walked down the three flights of old stone stairs and across the courtyard, picking their way through people hurrying by. The children were playing with a small ball, their shrieks rebounding off the courtyard walls, and some women were arguing shrilly about washing clothes but Andrei walked straight past, hearing nothing. Paris.

*

If the name of the Hotel Lux was intended to convey an opulent interior of damasked splendour, it failed. The lobby bore signs of old grandeur but the rooms were divided and sub-divided with thin plywood partitions, the un-carpeted halls were loud with childrens’ running feet and the staff were indifferent at best, more usually drunk and surly. On Andrei’s second evening he couldn’t find the night porter until he looked behind the high desk to see the man curled up on the floor, an empty bottle of vodka cradled in his arms. The toilets stank, the water was lukewarm for an hour each day and the bathroom arguments legendary. Every European language filled the corridors; the nasal vowels of Poland, Finnish words like cracking walnuts, the crisp rasp of German and astonishing long runs of Hungarian where the ends of each word to Andrei’s ears sounded the same. In the canteen early one evening, after a bowl of greasy soup and a large lump of dark bread, Andrei counted Italian, Spanish, English, French and something that sounded like all four.

“Rumanian,” Fyodor said, lifting his mouth from a chipped cup of lukewarm tea. He rubbed a black smear inside the cup with his thumb, which only made it larger. He peered at the stain through steel spectacles, his straight fair hair falling over the small

round rims, then gave up. He continued to drink the tea.

Andrei looked at him. "How do you know?"

"Odessa. Where I come from. You hear it a lot there. Or used to."

Andrei said nothing, just nodded. They sat in silence for a few moments. Fyodor cleared his throat. "Any vodka?"

"Half bottle in the room."

Fyodor looked around the canteen. Two small women in stained coats, elderly and overweight, were clattering dirty dishes into piles and shouting at one another. Small children were chanting a song at the far end, their parents snapping at them in a tired and listless way. Beside them a small group of adults on their own sat looking at each other across the table, chain- smoking, largely in silence. Their faces were rigid in a haze of blue smoke. "Let's get it and get out of here, it's depressing." Fyodor said. "A walk? How about a walk over to Zamoskvoreche?"

They turned out of the hotel and down the slight decline of Gorky Street in the dusk, collars up and hands deep in pockets. Autumn had come.It was cold. In Revolution Square the wind tugged at the bottom of their coats. The crowd swept them along when the traffic policeman pointed his white stick. On the slope up to Red Square they found themselves where the chapel of the Iberian Virgin chapel had stood for centuries until its demolition six years before.

There was no traffic. Fyodor stopped in the middle of the road and looked up. Andrei followed his gaze, finding only the open sky and a few emerging stars.

"This is where it was." Fyodor said, head still back, "we're underneath the arches now."

“Yes, I remember the place, but do you know I was never inside-”.

“Two fairy towers and two arches. So the coach could draw up and the Iberian Virgin icon could be passed down and driven off to whichever poor soul needed its heeling powers. Famous, as you’ll have heard, throughout the city. People stopped in the street, some falling to their knees, when it passed. You're too young to remember all that. Even from a distance you could see the flurries of people crossing themselves as it passed. A great fat Izvozchik in a top hat drove the coach like he was a Field Marshall, not a glorified cabbie. He thought he had the Czar and the Crown jewels in the back - not two priests. Honestly, he used to rattle along, his head going in a lordly way from side to side as if *he* was the miracle. Quite a sight.”

Andrei looked around quickly. They had received a few odd glances from passers by.

“Best to keep your voice down. What was it like? Were you inside?”

Fyodor looked at him. “Often. Very often. Especially in winter. You can’t imagine it, the richness, the colour, the smells. Everyone was there, peasants straight from the fields, hats in hands, young women praying for fertility, stealthy merchants with a long list of sins. The stone pillar where the icon stood was black. At first you thought it was finger marks, then realised it was kisses.”

“It'd need Levitan to paint it.”

“Oh indeed. He'd be just the man. Capture it for certain.”

“And could you equal him in words?”

Fyodor made no reply. He looked at Andrei for some time, then gave a small quick smile. With his lank forelock, small round glasses and muffler wrapped twice about his neck he looked more like a schoolboy than ever.

“Mischevious, Andrei Andreiovich. You see my desire to speak about my writing as well as my reluctance to do so. And you link me to a man I admire, but in such an open way I can't take offence.”

“And…”

“The answer I believe is yes, I 've written about it, how well it’s not for me to say. But I remember it as though it was yesterday and as though there was not air above our heads but that fantastical chapel. On our visits from Odessa my father would take me and later I'd come on my own. Especially, as I said, in winter. I'd stand at the back and watch. It stirred the heart as nothing else. It does still. And I'm not alone…”

Andrei followed his glance to the side of the road where a small group of old women sat on wooden crates. In their mixtures of drab clothing and bright cotton kerchiefs they looked like bundles of brown cloth topped by a dab of paint. They appeared to be mumbling, almost inaudibly, and now and again they would dip their heads briefly in unison. People ignored them, sweeping past singly and in small groups.

Fyodor stood with his back to Red Square. The Lenin mausoleum was over his left shoulder. A long line of people waited for admittance even this late in the day. He smiled.

“It was *wonderful*. On a winter afternoon, late on, it would begin to grow dark and all the candles would be lit. The iconostasis burning with light, climbing in hammered gold sheets up to the ceilings. Lamps glowing in front of the icons- rows and rows of them - all those solemn, long-ago faces and the sorrow of them, alive in the candle light. Not just flickering, but rippling in the air currents against the gold and the stone. Small forests of flame. *Trembling* flame. The people were shoulder to shoulder. Then the first thumping bass chant. Carrying to every corner. When the choir responded, you could hold the centuries in your hand. All those swelling hearts and the faces bright amongst the white candles. Shoals and shoals of candles all tipped with fire. Up and up the voices. Climbing up into the incense. And all of them, the poor, the rich

the ugly, the deformed, the beautiful- all of them crossing themselves in a rolling sea of movement across the body of the church. Slow waves of hands crossing and re-crossing - thumping on foreheads and sweeping across the heart. It was a Diaghelev ballet. And the snow falling past the windows, each flake held in yellow light, as if for ever."

Fyodor fell silent. Andrei spoke quietly. "Are you a believer?"

Fyodor did not respond. He had taken off his glasses and was polishing them on his scarf. He seemed mesmerised by the group of older women sitting on the wooden crates. They continued to sit murmuring to themselves. Pedestrians moved around them in a constant flow.

"*Are* you?" Andrei said again. He spoke softly.

"Me?" Fyodor said, turning, "Of course not."

"But…"

"One mustn't forget that the home visits and healing miracles of the icon were only available to those who could pay. Not much of the divine in that concept I should say."

"And the people? Their faith? The feeling in that room?"

"That's of course a different matter. I don't question it. After all, neither, really, do the Communists. That's after all what the Party is trying to recreate but with images of tractors and factories and plenty. There'll be halls of worship, whatever happens. They just won't contain representations of Christ. No prizes for guessing whose picture there *will* be."

"No."

“And instead of St Nicolas the Wonder worker, or Saint Catherine of Sinai, we’ll have whatever members of the Politburo have managed to stay alive. It'll be a rather mobile iconostasis.”

“But that scene you’ve just described. It moved you. All of it- the colour, the heat, the feelings of the people… those voices…”

“It did, and does,” Fyodor said, replacing his glasses and blinking twice. He turned to continue the walk, “but we must remember who else was present; - remember what Baedeker says. They made up a considerable proportion of the congregation, among the peasants, the deep voiced priests, the comely women and the rich merchants with bad consciences…” Fyodor smiled like a naughty boy.

“Who?” Andrei said, falling into step.

Fyodor half-turned and smiled broadly. “Criminals, Andrei Andreiovich. Pickpockets. The place was absolutely stiff with them.”

*

Passing the shops with empty windows, known formerly as the Trading Rows but now known as GUM, the State Universal Store, they looked across the cobbled

expanse of Red Square to the Kremlin walls, russet swallow-tailed battlements taken from an Italian landscape painting.

“What would the Kremlin be without the Italian architects, do you think?”

“Smaller.”

“At least. Do you think the Vozhd ponders that? What do you think he’s doing in there at this moment,” Fyodor asked in an ordinary voice, “having a cup of tea? Signing a few thousand more death warrants?”

Andrei looked round quickly. “Keep your voice down,” he hissed, “That’s enough to get us killed. Just that.”

Fyodor looked downcast. “ Sorry,” he said quietly, his eyes blinking behind his spectacles, -“Wasn’t thinking. Any of that vodka?”

“The river.”

On the bridge, they stopped to lean on the parapet and look back at the city. The wind had fallen. Lights were on all over the Kremlin. To one side St Basils stood at the bottom of Red Square like a child’s toy. Where the Redeemer Church had stood until a few years ago over to the West there was an empty space.

Fyodor narrowed his eyes. “I believe that they plan to erect a giant palace of the Soviets with a central pillar half a mile high. Then they’re going to put an even more gigantic statue of Lenin on it. Hand raised in salute. To whom is not immediately clear. A masonry birthday cake. Never liked the Redeemer Church myself, too smug and stodgy. The 19th century at its worse. But I think I’d prefer it over the cake.”

Andrei smiled, and tugged his scarf, a worn thing with several holes, round his throat. It was getting colder.

“Vodka.” Fyodor said, his face turning in anticipation.

Andrei got the bottle out. It was wrapped in paper and stoppered with a wooden plug. Fyodor took a deep swig and handed the bottle back. Andrei took a small sip.

“And again,” Fyodor said. “Please.”

Andrei handed the bottle back and watched the other man drank half of the remaining liquid. “That’s enough for the present,” he said, “We’ve got tonight to think of.”

Fyodor said nothing but handed back the bottle, pulled up his collar, stuck his hands back in his pocket and began walking. Andrei followed. They looked up at the stars and walked on in silence.

Turning into Pyatnitskaya Street, they slowed. Small wooden and plaster houses filled either side of the road and they passed the Zachachievsky church in silence, each raising his eyebrows to the other. Andrei touched the empty bench his father used to sit him on. Woodsmoke drifted on the cold air. There were few people on the pavements. Andrei remarked on the quiet and the lack of construction.

“It’s why I come,” Fyodor said, “I feel like an Oblomov character here. It allows my mind to drift.”

“Where does it drift to?”

“The past. Of course I prefer it.”

“Why?”

“Selection. One may choose. And of course one has the decided advantage of not having to live through it.”

“What of the present, or even of the future?”

“The future I cannot bear to think about. I’m glad I’ve no children. I’m not a courageous person, I know that. And I certainly haven’t got the courage to have children.”

Andrei was about to speak but Fyodor shook his head. “And of the present we shan’t speak, if you’ll allow. It'll ruin our walk.”

“What past do you select?”

“The best bits. Our Russian past. I take the easy path. Leave aside the monsters and tyrants who've disfigured our consciousness. Never mind the bones without number of the poor who were forced to build Petersburg and died there nameless and scrabbling in the mud; think instead of that incomparable place in the slanting winter sun. One of the wonders of the modern world. Don’t look at me like that, I’m exaggerating for effect. But not by much.”

“Was it worth it? The deaths of all those nameless people, for architecture.”

“That’s one of the questions. I fear on balance it was. For us of course, not them. I certainly find it all too easy to put them out of my mind when I look at the Winter Palace Square. It’s one of our problems, the over- sufficiency of people, the never ending streams of them pouring in from every corner of the country. The individual simply does not matter. There are more of them than the world, the Russian world, needs. Or can cope with.”

“So-”

“So an indifference to the individual, and therefore to the fate of that individual is one of our three problems. We can't seem to see that such indifference allows the present

situation to arise, and that our collective and individual suffering therefore also continues. Our often stated national saying is a wish to ‘live like people’ “not, you’ll note, ‘live like a person.’ An important difference. In other words, it’s our own fault. But within that fault lies perhaps our salvation, a feeling of responsibility to the collective world beyond the individual. Question of balance in the end.”

“The second?” Andrei looked around. The street was empty. They continued to walk.

“Size. The administration of the biggest country on earth. The immensity defies comprehension. We straddle Europe and Asia from t from the Baltic to the Sea of Japan. And yet Japan, which could just about be squeezed into a Siberian district for God's sake, beat us hollow. We're backward. The Bolsheviks are right about that part. But the question is how does the state govern and administer such a colossal country for the benefit of the people without oppressing and coercing that same people?” Fyodor threw his hands up. “How does it *rule*?”

“Well? How?”

“I’ve no idea. Not the faintest.”

Andrei stopped and faced the other man, who also stopped. “But aren’t you writing about that?”

“Not at all. That’s for the people to decide. Eventually. I'm saying what has happened. What went wrong.” He stamped his feet gently in the cold. “Can we carry on walking?”

They passed a man walking the other way, his face deep in his collar. “And number three. Our third problem?” Andrei said.

Fyodor took his glasses off the bridge of his nose and stared about him with unfocused eyes. “The most difficult, the most intractable of all. One I doubt is

susceptible of any solution. Not for years." He pulled a dirty square of cotton from his pocket and again began to polish the lenses as he walked. "Yes. Sadly. I believe it to be so."

He said nothing more, but continued to walk slowly, looking at the old buildings in shadow. Andrei walked alongside him. At the next corner Fyodor stopped. "Shouldn't we be getting back? I heard a rumour there was going to be some sort of meat later." He squeezed his eyes together. "Maybe that was yesterday." He looked around. "It's getting on."

They began to retrace their steps. In silence they walked back towards the river and paused again on the bridge.

"Well?" said Andrei.

Fyodor turned, startled. "Well? Well what?"

Andrei fought to contain his impatience. "The third problem. The third-…"

"Oh. I'm sorry. Really. Didn't I say?"

"No."

In front of them the Kremlin sat on its hill. Ivan the Terrible's Bell tower, rose over the floodlit roofs, a slim white finger.

Fyodor took his glasses off and blinked his eyes. "It's as they say I'm afraid, Andrei Andreiovich, it's as they say…" He put his glasses back on and touched Andrei's sleeve. "The Renaissance. We missed it by a country mile."

*

As the autumn days grew shorter they settled into a routine. Andrei saw Mendel once a week by arrangement in different parts of the city. He thought Mendel looked older each time. At the Lux Fyodor always returned in the early morning from his boiler room just as Andrei was waking. The hostel was quiet, its halls deserted, and Fyodor would make two cups of tea in the kitchen, bringing them along to their room, handing it over formally. No matter how many times Andrei raised the subject Fyodor always addressed him by first name and patronymic. "Forgive me Andrei Andreiovich, I'm a little old now to change." They would sit together, not saying much, then Andrei would head up Gorky Street, wrapped tightly in his long coat. Fyodor usually stuffed waxed cotton balls into his ears and slid under the rough blankets, his coat spread over them.

Towards late afternoon Andrei would return and it would be his turn to make the tea. Fyodor slept so deeply he would have to be woken up but the instant he smelled the tea he would be sitting up in bed, knees bent, breathing in the steam.

"Really, this is excellent tea." He would say, smiling, the same thing every day. Very occasionally Andrei would acquire a bit of lemon from the women in the canteen and would slice it into two halves. Fyodor would beam. "Lemon...you are becoming another Mendel. Really." He would shake his head in quiet enjoyment. "Smell the Crimea, Andrei Andreiovich. Smell the South."

In the early evening they would usually go downstairs and across the courtyard to the dining room where they would wait in line with the others for an evening meal of potatoes or buckwheat with some sort of over-boiled stew of vegetables or gristle. On other nights there would be gobbets of preserved fish or thin, almost transparent, beetroot soup. At communal tables each nationality usually kept to its group but from

time to time a foreigner would speak and some sort of acquaintance would spring up. More often a polite distance was kept. One November evening Fyodor started speaking to three sad looking children sitting on their benches. They responded brightly but their mother, returning from the queue with a tray of food, took them to the other side of the room without a word.

Fyodor looked as if he had been slapped. “They think we’re informers. Spies.” Andrei pushed a potato round his plate. “It’s not personal,” he said.

Fyodor nodded silently, his forelock going up and down. He pushed it to one side but it bounced back as always, almost touching the top of his glasses. Andrei could see he was upset.

“I’m afraid they do.” Andrei said softly. “We’re Russians, and feared. Do you see the Poles? Paler than usual and going about like ghosts. The last of them were arrested in the middle of the night on Friday night and never came back. They have families. The women all look as if they have raw ulcers. Look. Gently does it.”

Fyodor reached over for bread and as casually as he could, looked across the tables. Half a dozen young and middle-aged women sat in a group, arguing in low voices and smoking, hard faces tight with worry. Children plucked at their sleeves. The women ignored them.

“They can’t even trust each other. How are they to know none of them are stool pigeons.”

Fyodor still hadn’t spoken. His mind seemed far away. He let out a small sigh. “A walk?” he said.

*

Back at the Lux, Andrei noticed a new assistant manager. This one sat behind the desk saying nothing, his eyes swivelling unblinkingly. His look, as if he had a right to ask anyone their business, betrayed him as NKVD as surely as if he had worn the blue hat. The old assistant manager, a small thin man called Shevshenko, who had always looked harassed and tired, dark rings under his eyes and his hair falling out in handfuls, disappeared. No-one ever mentioned his name again.

One evening in late November Andrei came back to find the room smelled of vodka. An empty bottle lay on the floor. Fyodor had been drinking heavily for two weeks. He was lying on the bed fully clothed and snoring, his glasses lying beside the bottle. Scattered to one side were some handwritten sheets of cheap brownish paper. A pencil lay on the floor.

Andrei tried to wake him but Fyodor snored on. He moved him onto his side and picked up the glasses and paper. Lying on his bunk he tried to read the sentences written in tight slanting script. He found it difficult, some words being clear but the majority running across the page in spiky arabesques. Notes in pencilled balloons filled every space on the paper. It took him fifteen minutes to decipher a sentence which, as far as he could tell, concerned a field and an abandoned house. He gave up and tidied the papers away. Then he fell asleep for an hour waking only when his stomach told him it was time to eat. He managed to rouse Fyodor. In the canteen, the writer's hands quivered; he couldn't eat kasha.The grains of boiled buckwheat littered the table between them.

"I can't go to work. Don't feel well. Honestly. I can't."

"Was it the full bottle?"

Fyodor nodded, then winced. "Someone was selling them at work. Home made…"

“You’re drinking Samogon? God Almighty. You never know what’s in that stuff, it’s-”

Andrei broke off. Fyodor averted his face and was sick over the floor. People on the surrounding tables looked away, the mothers turning the heads of the children.

“I’m sorry, I am really…Oh God-”

“I’ll get a bucket.” Andrei went to the cleaners room and returned with a wooden bucket full of water, some rags and a long handled mop. While Fyodor sat on a bench, his face in his hands, Andrei cleared up the mess. “Come on,” he said, once he had finished, “let’s go back to the room and you can get some sleep.”

“I’m so sorry Andrei Andreiovich,” Fyodor mumbled, before falling asleep. Andrei waited till it was two hours to go before Fyodor's shift was to begin, and woke him. He made him wash, still befuddled, his hands trembling, before taking him out into the cold air and walking him north up Gorky street towards Pushkin Square. “I’m coming with you,” he said; Fyodor had just looked grateful.

“You’ll want these,” Andrei said, taking out the papers from the inside of his coat. “Not something we can leave in the room.”

Fyodor took the thin sheaf without a word and stuffed them in a pocket. He carried on walking, eyes straight ahead, glasses bobbing slightly on his nose, an automaton among the evening crowds on the pavement. Dark had fallen long since and lights had come on along the whole avenue, not bright lights but a hesitant, worn-out yellow. A few years before Tverskaya had been a pleasant meandering street, not very wide, of three storey buildings straggling from the centre to the north. Now, as Gorky Street, it was an arterial thoroughfare of eight traffic lanes lined on each side by vast apartment blocks. Some of the old buildings had simply been moved back on rollers, a triumph of heavy engineering. Trams and trolleybuses clanged past constantly on steel rails in both directions with tired people staring out of the windows. The crowds seemed never ending.

They walked in silence. Both the writing and the manuscript had become issues between them. Fyodor had been reluctant to discuss any aspect of his writing, nor would he disclose the size or whereabouts of the manuscript. Most of his writing was done at work on the night watchman's job but if he was working in the room when Andrei came back he would gently pack up the papers and take them with them that night when he went to work. Whenever Andrei had tried to raise the matter Fyodor had simply apologised.

"Sorry Andrei Andreovich. Please forgive…Don't ask me about these things," he would say gently, turning away.

Andrei decided it was time to try again. Mendel had looked hunted the last time they had met. His nails had been bitten down into the flesh. Andrei glanced over at Fyodor. His eyes were swollen and his face was bloodless under the lamplight as he trudged along. Andrei felt himself change into someone he only slightly recognised as he made his calculation. When they came abreast of the Moscow City Council building he spoke.

"It's dangerous. That's the first thing. If you get drunk and you've got that writing on you or you leave it somewhere we could be finished. Both of us. Badly."

Fyodor said nothing.

"And if you pass out somewhere and something happens to you your work could be lost. All those years for nothing. We need to have a plan if something goes wrong."

Fyodor turned to look at him without slackening pace, then returned to staring straight ahead. They kept moving.

"If you don't care about that, what about all the people who've helped us? What about Mendel? The Volinskys? All of that goes for nothing because you've got the

artistic temperament?"

"I'm sorry Andrei Andreiovich. Truly… I realise you've helped me this evening when you don't want to. And you've been so very good, so very good. And now you're angry. But I'm afraid, pathetic as I sometimes am--"

"Stop feeling sorry for yourself. It's what drunks do and it's getting boring. I'm taking you to work because I promised Mendel I'd look after you. Well I will. Until he releases me from that undertaking. I hope that's soon. Never thought I'd say that. No more talking about it. It's finished."

They walked on in silence, Andrei angry, Fyodor with his head down. At Pushkin Square, a place they often went to for the gaiety of the crowds, young lovers meeting, friends hugging, they said not a word. Turning into Trubnaya Boulevard Fyodor neglected to mention, as he never normally failed to do, the destruction of the Monastery of the Passion, one of the most beautiful buildings in the city, and the erection of a concrete and steel box to lodge the Party's newspaper. IZVESTIA was written in huge letters across the front. He said not a word and they walked on. After half an hour, just before the great squat monster of the Butyrki prison, they came to the gates of the factory.

"That's it. You're here. I'm heading back to the hotel," Andrei said, resignation and tiredness in his voice. They stood under a street lamp beside a wall plastered with slogans about the second Five-Year Plan.

"Please don't be angry with me. I know I should feel differently. You're right about all that… But since my chapter was lost and I had to do all of it again…"

"It wasn't lost."

"Yes. It was, I-"

“It was taken. Along with my father.”

Fyodor’s glasses jolted. His head moved back in surprise. “Your father? What does he-?”

“He was taking your manuscript out to Leningrad when he was arrested. He died there. Eventually. Mendel told me. Took his own life. But he didn’t betray anyone, otherwise you and I wouldn’t be here now.”

“You never said…” Fyodor’s voice was small and quiet in the empty street. He looked down. They faced each other, two figures in old overcoats, hands deep in pockets.

“Mendel said better not to. It would only complicate relations between us, he said. He was probably right.”

They stood in silence for a minute. Fyodor’s face looked confused, filled with too many thoughts. Eventually he took his glasses off and gave a small sigh. “Will you come into the watchman’s room with me? I’d like to show you something.” He put the glasses back on his nose and blinked. “Please.”

“Why would they let me in?”

“Peter, the man I take over from won’t make any trouble.” He paused. “He drinks.” He reached inside a wooden box and tugged on a length of wire. From beyond the wall Andrei could hear a bell and footsteps crossing a yard.

*

There was a grating of hinges and the gate swung open. An old man holding a lantern greeted Fyodor and stood aside.

“Pyotr Denisovich, this is my friend. I don’t feel so well tonight and he will sit with me a while. Perhaps you could join us for a drink before you go off watch?”

The old man grinned and relocked the gate. They followed him across the yard to the watchman’s room past a large riveted boiler which lay silent and cold. Andrei looked round the room, noticing a table, a broken sink, some metal lockers lining one wall and four chairs. The entire back of the room was piled up to the ceiling with coal and a small cast iron stove looked blistering hot in a corner. After the cold outside the room was stifling.

“I’m glad you came Fyodor Arkadeovich, even though you don’t feel well”, the old man said formally, “I want to go home tonight. I’m very tired.” His face was miss-shapen and red. He brought out three cups and waited till Andrei filled them half way. Andrei sipped his but the other two men drank theirs down in one. Fyodor exhaled deeply and slumped back in his chair.

“Another before you go?” Andrei said to the old man, who nodded quickly. When he had finished he bade them both a peaceful night and Fyodor walked him to the gate. Andrei was sitting warming his hands by the stove when he returned.

“He’s a nice old fellow, but the drink is killing him.” He looked straight at Andrei. “Can I have some more?” He sat down.

Andrei shrugged his shoulders and Fyodor half-filled his cup, sipping it slowly this time.

“Would you tell me about your father?” he said, his voice subdued. “Then I’ll explain about the manuscript.”

“Nothing much to say. Mendel needed someone he trusted to get the first chapter to Leningrad. From there someone else was to get it to Europe, through Finland or by sea. He told me my father was arrested with the papers but he doesn’t know exactly

how it happened. From what Mendel could find out, he wounded two of them. And in the prison managed to kill himself before a second interrogation. That's all I know." Andrei unhooked the stove and put on more coal, leaving the door open.

Fyodor looked lost. He closed his eyes and spoke very quietly."I wish I knew what to say. Bravery like that. It's beyond me..."

Andrei said nothing but continued to stare at the flames.

"Who *is* Mendel?" he said finally.

"I don't know," Fyodor said. "But a while ago I came across this."

He took out his glasses case and took out a folded newspaper photograph. It was of a group of army officers applauding at one of the show trials earlier that year. Mendel was in the second row, smiling.

Andrei stared at the uniform and medals and the face above them. He shook his head like a terrier.

"I know," Fyodor said. "I wasn't sure if I should say. Of course from all the information he has given me I realised he must be a functionary of some sort, clearly with power. And a deep hater of Stalin and what he did to the Revolution. He's obviously a soldier who survived. In the intelligence world I should say. Not many did."

Andrei brought the photograph up to his eyes. "Well. I think he knows what he's doing. He believes your book will change the way people think. Will it?"

"I don't know. I hope so. I want to say that for good or ill only the truth will make us...I was going to say 'free' but I suppose I mean 'whole'... It's not an original concept I realise, I don't claim originality. But here and now it is of relevance. God knows

we've nothing else."

"Since we're talking about it, how long till it's completed," Andrei asked.

Fyodor hesitated for a moment, pursing his lips, then nodding. " I'm almost there. It's been three years and more. But one more month ought to see it done. It's almost over."

"Does Mendel know?"

"No, he doesn't." Fyodor hesitated. "I presumed…I presumed…that's why he paired you up with me..."

Andrei lifted up his head sharply and looked directly at the other man. Fyodor's face was twisted in embarrassment. Andrei said nothing. Fyodor grimaced and his fingers fluttered on his knees.

"Please don't get angry. I know we're on the same side. It doesn't really matter. But if you tell me it isn't so of course I believe you …"

Andrei again remained silent, and turned his head back. He spoke to the stove.

"It's so. But not so cut and dried. He asked me to do my best to look after you. Anything I learned which would help that, I was to tell him, yes. Is there any reason he shouldn't know? He's done a lot for you. And me."

"It's difficult to explain. I need his help of course and I'm more grateful to him than I can say. To you too. But I want to keep things myself to the very last moment. After I hand it over…everything ends. I'll never write anything again. I know that."

"How do you know such a thing? It's a stupid thing to say."

“I agree. But it’s true nonetheless.. We each have our own truth. Mine is that soon... I’m finished.” He coughed.

“But he needs to make arrangements. You must see that-”

Fyodor simply nodded and gave the slightest of shrugs.

“I think he needs to be told,” Andrei said. “Will you allow that?”

“Would you tell him anyway?”

Andrei remained silent. He threw more coal into the stove. The flames died momentarily and a hissing sound filled the small room. The silence returned.

“No.”

“Honestly?”

“Not until you're ready It’s your book. But I want to persuade you also that it no longer just belongs to you – otherwise why write it. It belongs to those who've gone and those who might read it. The time is near. And I believe he *is* under a great deal of pressure. He helped us. We *owe* him.” He held up the photograph and lifted his eyebrows. “Well? It's your photo.”

Fyodor took his glasses off and blinked. With his jaw he indicated the stove. Andrei threw it on top of the coals. It gave a small puff and blossomed into flame. Andrei clapped Fyodor on the shoulder.

“And he needs to make preparations we can only guess at. With dwindling resources. Think of the risks he runs to give your book life. You've written it. Now let it live.”

They sat for a full minute in silence, the stove door open and the red coals bright. Fyodor rose to his feet and moved over to the other side of the room, beckoning. Andrei joined him. A number of rusty iron lockers were plastered into the wall. None were locked and the first one opened easily. It was empty but for a small pile of rags. Fyodor pulled them out to let Andrei look in.

“And?” Andrei said, hie eyes looking closely at the rusty streaked sides of the locker.

Fyodor went to the corner where a tangle of taps, spouts and valves came together on the wall. He pulled one of the pipes and Andrei heard a small metallic noise coming from the locker. Fyodor reached in and pressed the back panel. A flap six inches high swung back into the wall and when his hand came out again it held a manuscript bundle about four inches thick. He handed it to Andrei, who looked at it open-mouthed.

“That’s it. The panel opens with a long lever,” Fyodor said.

“Who *built* this? Andrei said, putting his hand into the hidden space. It was the size of a large reference book.

Fyodor grinned, his glasses flashing. “Me. My father was a watchmaker you know. It seems I’m not entirely lacking in some practical ability. There were some long nights here and there’s a tool shop next door. It’s a simple rod and spring going to the panel. Pulling on that pipe releases it. Doing the reverse closes it. You can't see it. With all the dirt in there I think it’s pretty safe unless they demolish the wall.”

Andrei bent again to reach inside the locker with splayed fingers.“Well I’m damned. Just don’t know what to say. Unbelievable. It’s so good.” He straightened, holding the manuscript in both hands. The top page was a mass of close handwriting in black ink with violet-coloured corrections in the margins.

Fyodor looked like an anxious child. “No title yet. Funny, after all this time. Do you want to read a bit of it? It’s mostly in manuscript – but some I typed on the office machine here. There's no 'b' or 's'. Broken. Special thin paper as you see. Hard to get. Mendel gave me it. I only type when there’s absolutely no chance of anyone coming. Well anyway,” he said, his voice suddenly shy, “ you can tell him. It’s almost done.”

Andrei hefted the manuscript in his hand. He placed it gently on the table and grasped Fyodor's shoulders. Neither spoke.

“Vodka,” Andrei said finally, his arms dropping to his side. He pulled a chair to the fire and lifted the first page.

*

CHAPTER XI

The brief Russian autumn moved to its end. Fyodor and Andrei walked the city in all weathers. Leaves fell and gathered in the gutters in brown heaps. Sharp bright periods were followed by short days of sullen rain. Moscow became grey again. Along the ring boulevards, following the line of the old city wall, people walked alone or in pairs between the trees. They talked in undertones, or sat in silence on the benches, bundled up in coats and waiting for winter.

Fyodor entered into a new phase of work with the coming of the short days. Frost began to trim the window panes in the early morning when he brought Andrei tea. Andrei would study him closely over the rim of his mug. The book coming to an end seemed no longer to fill him with melancholy as he allowed himself finally to be caught up in the excitement of its final revisions. His face had become more drawn, less boyish, and though his forelock still hung straight down over the small round glasses and the bright grin was still the same it seemed to Andrei that his friend had finally said goodbye to something that had remained of youth. Now there were bags under his eyes, like pale delicate bruises, and networks of tiny lines in the skin, minute seams of age which had become visible, as if for the first time. The realisation came to Andrei suddenly, and made him sad.

On one of their walks across the city Fyodor had spoken for the first time about publication. It was a foggy, dank day. A pair of silent figures they moved in the dusk between the rows of graves in the cemetery of the Don Monastery, a place they often came to. It was deserted save for a few old women clearing the drifts of wet ochre leaves. Fyodor came to a halt under the walls of the New Cathedral. Its bricks were a scarred red, its cupolas great bulbous domes hanging above them in the mist. "Not so new really," he said, "They only call it that because of the really old one over there." He pointed to a small painted church with rows of rounded gables. His words were slow, almost physically painful, as if he feared an immediate bolt of lightning. Andrei saw anxiety behind the small round glasses. Fyodor had pulled his head down deep behind the blue coils of his scarf. They could hear among the trees the faint rhythmic strokes of a scrubbing brush on a headstone.

"Paris. Is it really possible? Can it be?" Fyodor said, his voice mournful. He took his glasses off and held them in his hands. Without them he could see little. He blinked myopically. "*Really*?"

“If we make it so. With a bit of luck. Mendel knows what he’s doing.”

“Have you seen him in the last few days?”

“I met him as usual last week. I told you. He seemed fine, but strained. I think he’s under a lot of pressure and believe me, he was happy to hear you’re almost done. He made me go over again all the emergency procedures. Three times. I said I knew them. He got a bit short with me. I haven’t seen that before.”

“He *is* under pressure isn’t he?”

“Without a doubt. What he calls the art of the possible. It’s becoming less so every day. Look at the papers. Still headlines about new spy rings uncovered, new arrests, new trials. Wreckers, saboteurs, revisionists, Trotskyites, this tendency that tendency. People denounced because others want their flat, for a job, for a woman. Demonstrations outside courtrooms screaming for the death penalty before the first words of evidence. All orchestrated beforehand. No real evidence at all. That editorial in Pravda for God’s sake, the one calling for anyone convicted of anything to be shot like dogs. It made me ashamed to be Russian. Is all that in the book?”

“It is.”

“Good. The word ‘foreign’ is being repeated in the same way as people spoke of the black death. That’s not a good sign. Look at the Lux. Almost all the Comintern people are gone. No-one speaks of them. 'Ten years without the right to correspondence' their families have all been told, those that are left. Mendel says that means execution.”

“Yes. . . It's true. A morgue. When I came back from my shift this morning there were three German women crying together in the lobby. You know what that means. And last week those two little Hungarian brothers…”

“I know. God forgive me I don’t even know their names-”

“They were always pleasant to us, always. Photographers they were, did you know that? Dandies. Always a buttonhole flower. Speaking French, laughing about Paris, Budapest, Vienna… And then

one of them jumps out of a fifth floor window at three in the morning when they come for him." Fyodor turned away slightly, muttering obscenities Andrei had no idea he knew.

Andrei waited until Fyodor had fallen silent. "And is he also in the book?"he said.

"Yes. I call him Istvan."

"Good. His brother's still free, for the moment."

"But do you really think it can get to Paris? Will it ever be published? I just cannot believe it so." His face fell and his head pulled back into his upturned collar. "Really. I cannot." He put his glasses back on and tightened his old scarf until only the steel rims and his nose remained above it.

"You just finish it. And we'll do the rest. Trust Mendel. I believe we'll do it. I do."

A considerable silence, then a huge smile splitting Fyodor's face. He pulled his hands from his pockets and grabbed Andrei round the shoulders. They stood amongst the gravestones, and hugged each other. The old women looked up briefly and smiled.

Early the following morning returning from work, Fyodor was arrested in the courtyard of the Hotel Lux.

*

It was the frenzy of the knocking, not the muted volume, which brought Andrei awake. When he pulled open the door he found the surviving Hungarian brother, Ferenc. The little man, hair dishevelled and in his bare feet, stood in his striped pyjamas and an overcoat. His face was flushed and his eyes were wide open. He hissed rather than spoke, the sinews in his throat standing out like

bowstrings.

“Pliss. Pliss. Hurry. Your friend taken. Get out. Get out I tell you. Quick. Come with me.” He grasped Andrei's shoulders and shook him, hard. “*Come.*”

Andrei threw on his clothes and boots and stuffed whatever papers there were into the rucksack he always kept packed. He followed the small figure who was already hurrying down the corridor, the black wings of his coat flapping over bony ankles. They moved quickly through the maze of temporary wooden partitions, up, then down some stairs, until Andrei found himself, his lungs screaming for air, in a store room of the main hotel.

“After Istvan dead, have looked these places,” the Hungarian whispered in stilted Russian, “ You …regardez,”he added, lapsing into French, “ Un Corbeau, un corbeau.” Andrei nodded to show he'd understood. A Crow. The other man pointed to the window, pulling back a sliver of yellowed muslin curtain. Andrei could see they were in the main hotel opposite his own room in the hostel. In the courtyard was a large black van. No markings but everyone knew. The back doors of the van were splayed wide but the vehicle faced towards them so Andrei couldn’t see in. Beyond the doors a small crowd of people in various states of undress had gathered. Some of the women were crying. A squad of NKVD soldiers, rifles high across their chests, held them back. It seemed as though people were waiting for something. The van sat like an evil thing.

The Hungarian had given up trying to piece together his indifferent Russian, and spoke in quick French. “They came early. With a list. Looking for Germans. What few were left.”

“Fyodor’s not a German. And why wouldn’t they come to our room?”

“Don’t know. Kleinfeld the writer fellow started shouting and woke us all up. He wouldn’t go quietly and shouted the place down. They clubbed him and dragged him down the stairs. People started saying things to the soldiers. I heard the officer shout at a sergeant that they still had two to get. He kept saying ‘Two more, two more'. I think that’s what they’re waiting for. The men are either not there or have hidden. They could start searching the place. We probably shouldn’t wait long here.”

“But I still don’t understand, why-?”

“I don’t know if they were waiting for him or not. He was just *there*. Maybe the wrong place wrong time. Maybe quota. He came round the corner and they grabbed him. And that was that. Filth.”

“Was he carrying anything?”

The Hungarian’s eyes flicked over to Andrei, looking at him closely. “Not that I could see.”

“Are they searching our bit, the hostel?”

“I don't know. But I thought it best to get you. Just in case.”

Andrei grabbed the Hungarian’s hand with both of his. “I won’t forget it.”

“I liked your friend. I’m so sorry.”

“ And I about your brother. *Slov nyet*,” he said in Russian. The Hungarian stared at him without comprehension so he moved back to French. “ It means ‘*there are no words*,’he said quietly. The Hungarian nodded. Andrei thought quickly. “I must try to see my friend.”

“Impossible.” He lifted the curtain slightly again. “You see? There must be a dozen goons out there.”

“They’re still waiting for something. And no-one has come into our bit of the hostel. It must be the German fellows they’re still looking for. I’m going down into the courtyard.”

Ferenc sighed. “And they say *Hungarians* are crazy. Okay. We’ll just slip into the crowd from the back. Follow me.”

The crowd had become restless, some women holding babies and jeering at the soldiers in good Russian. Others used their own languages. The courtyard filled with shouts in a dozen different tongues. The guards, all young, looked frightened, white knuckles round rifle stocks. They kept looking around for their officer. Andrei and the Hungarian joined the crowd just as shouts came from the hotel. A man was led out, his arms handcuffed behind his back. The crowd fell instantly silent.

Andrei turned his head. Fyodor was sitting closest to the door of the van on the right hand side. His hat had gone and his head was lowered. He was holding his glasses, staring at them, not moving. His wrists were handcuffed. On the steps the arrested man refused to walk and begun to shout in German. Shouting started again from the crowd. A bottle exploded on the side of the van. An officer, an older man with folds of flesh bulging over his collar, emerged from the hotel and called for silence. When none came he drew a pistol from a holster and fired a single shot in the air. After a few seconds silence the shouting began again, some of the women holding up the young children. Andrei cried out Fyodor's name. His head came up, looking around wildly, His hands were cuffed and he fumbled with his glasses. The officer shouted and the soldiers jerked the rifle bolts, ramming a round into every breech. At another command an untidy volley ripped into the air.

All shouting stopped. The women shrank back, covering their children with their own bodies. Andrei felt the raw sweetness of cordite flood into his nostrils. At the rear of the van the German was thrown bodily into the space between the benches. He lay on the floor, breathing heavily. Another vehicle backed into the courtyard. The doors were open and it was empty. At a word from the officer the guards began to file slowly back towards it, entering in pairs. The officer stood facing the crowd, blue hat on the back of his head, and his pistol still out. His mouth was a twisted slit.

But for one baby crying there was silence. Fyodor managed to put his glasses on. He scanned the crowd with one eye closed and finally found Andrei. They stared at one another. Fyodor's shoulders rose and fell once. He tried to smile. His glasses were twisted and crumpled on his nose, one lens missing. A sad uncertain smile finally came, then faltered. The last thing Andrei saw before the steel doors slammed shut was the bent glasses and two thin manacled hands raised in slow benediction.

* * *

END OF FICTIONAL PORTION OF THESIS