

1922

## Literary Silhouettes

### Boris Pilniak

One year after founding the literary journal *Red Virgin Soil* in 1921, Voronsky began to publish a series of literary silhouettes, introducing various writers to the reading public.<sup>1</sup> Opening this series in August 1922, the following article on Pilniak was the first major critical study of the young Soviet writer.

By 1922, the 28-year-old Pilniak had published two collections of stories (*With the Last Steamer*, 1918; and *Bygones*, 1922), as well as his first experimental novel, *Naked Year*. A representative of the Dostoevsky-Remizov-Bely tradition, Pilniak was fortunate to be the subject of Voronsky's thoughtful criticism.

From the early 1920s, Pilniak was associated closely with Voronsky, serving in 1922 as a member of the editorial board of *Krug* [Circle], a publishing house founded by the critic. In addition, many of Pilniak's stories were published in journals and almanacs edited by Voronsky: *Red Virgin Soil*, *Krug* and *Nashi dni* [Our Days]. Although their friendship cooled after the scandal surrounding the story, "Tale of the Unextinguished Moon," Pilniak and Voronsky maintained a strong respect for each other's work well into the 1930s.

Pilniak was arrested on his son's third birthday, 28 October 1937. Accord-

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From *Krasnaia nov'*, no. 4 (1922) pp. 252–269.

1. Two of these literary silhouettes have appeared in English: "Isaac Babel," in *Twentieth-Century Russian Literary Criticism*, edited by Victor Erlich (Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 182–197; and "Evgeny Zamyatin" in *Zamyatin's "We": A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Gary Kern (Ardis, 1988), pp. 25–28. Trans.

ing to the Military Collegium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, he was shot on 21 April 1938.

After his execution Pilniak remained unpublished for many years in the Soviet Union. The first anthology of his stories was printed in 1976, followed by a number of publications in the 1980s and 1990s. Three collections of Pilniak's stories exist in English: *The Tale of the Unextinguished Moon and Other Stories*, translated by Beatrice Scott, 1967; *Mother Earth and Other Stories*, translated by Vera T. Reck and Michael Green, 1968; and *Chinese Story and Other Tales*, translated by Vera T. Reck and Michael Green, 1988. *Naked Year* appeared in English in 1975. Interested readers can consult two valuable studies: Gary Browning, *Boris Pilniak: Scythian at a Typewriter*, Ardis, 1985; and Vera T. Reck, *Boris Pil'niak: A Soviet Writer in Conflict with the State*, Montreal, 1975.

## 1

At dawn the wormwood had a bitter smell, and Natalia understood; the smell of wormwood, with its legendary bitter aroma, the smell of the waters of life and death, filled not only the dry days of July, but also all our days of 1919. The bitterness of wormwood ... is the bitterness of our days (*Naked Year*).

### I.

**W**HAT IS the true face of human life?

Above the ravine, in a deep pine forest, two large, gray, predatory birds, male and female, made themselves a nest among the tree roots.

The male. "During the winters, he lived in order to eat, in order not to die. The winters were cold and terrible. During the springtime, however, he would mate. And then hot blood would course through his veins, it was quiet, the sun would shine, and the stars would blaze, and he would always want to stretch, to close his eyes, flap his wings in the air and cry out joyfully and without reason" ("Above the Ravine," *Bygones*).

The female sat in the nest, gave herself to the male, gave birth to her young and then became "solicitous, ruffled, and shrewish."

And thus they lived for thirty years. Then the male died. Old age arrived.

A new, young male possessed the female. The old was conquered in battle.

Human life—is the same. Its essence lies in the animalistic, in ancient instincts, in sensations of hunger, in the need for love and birth.

In the story, “A Year of Their Life,” three live in the forest: the hunter Demid, his wife Marina, and the bear Makar. They live in one home. Demid looks like the bear, he has the strength of a bear and the grip of a bear, and he smells of the taiga. “They, man and beast, understood one another.” Marina is the same. When she was giving birth to her first child, the bear approached her bed and “looked with his kind but dark eyes in a particular, understanding and stern manner.” They have the same birthplace—the deep taiga, springs, winters, sunsets, dew, life in common, life that is strong, forested, crude, free, solitary, immediate, face to face with the heavens, earth and forest.

The village. The Russia of thickets, drying barns, fields, peasant men and their women.

“They lived with rye—with horses, cows, sheep—with forest and grasses. They knew: just as the rye, which falls to the earth as seeds, gives birth to many new seeds, so, too, the cows and the birds give birth, and in giving birth again, they do so in order to die in birth—they knew that such was man’s fate: to give birth and in birth to ease death. So it was for the rye, the wolf, the horse, the pig—it was the same for all” (“Country Roads,” Bygones).

From the novel *Naked Year*:

The women were finishing the threshing in the barns, and the girls, after the summer’s hard work of harvesting, had a good time before their weddings; didn’t leave the threshing floors at night, but slept in the barns ... they sang their spirited medleys until dawn, and therefore [our emphasis—A. V.] the young men, who spent their days sawing wood, crowded together by the barns in the evenings.

Man is drawn to this bestial, age-old life; he longs for it as for paradise lost. His fall from grace, his discontent and discord begin the moment when for some reason, due to the force of things and circumstances, he is torn away from this life.

The peasant Ivan Koloturov, who is chairman of the soviet, settles down in a prince’s home that has been requisitioned. And then “suddenly he started to feel sorry for himself and his woman, and wanted to go back home to his

familiar stove.” In the story “The Inheritors” the remnants of the Rostov family live in the Rostovs’ ancient noble’s home. Life there is boring, lonely, ugly, superfluous and petty—because the revolution came and placed them outside life’s mainstream, tore them up by the roots and now they are drying out, rotting, and lying about like old and useless pieces of paper which have been tossed out.

The intellectual Irina knows that humanism is a fairy tale, and that what is real is the struggle for life, the body and instincts. She abandons her milieu with its brilliant discussions about Darwin and principles, goes into the steppes to a religious sect, becomes the wife of Mark, a river pirate, outlaw and horse thief, and begins to live a peasant life. Her hands become covered with calluses; she learns to sing and wear a kerchief like a good peasant woman. She has no time to “reflect”; she becomes her husband’s slave and precisely for this reason she is so happy and cheerful.

Pilniak is a “physiological” writer. His people resemble animals, and his animals resemble people. Oftentimes both receive the same coloring, words, images and approach. Pilniak consequently tells with such knowledge and mastery about wolves, bears and owls.

Pilniak is very sensitive to mother nature. He loves and knows her. He is able to underscore nuances and small, characteristic details which usually escape our attention. For the forest, sky, winter, autumn and snowstorms—he has many words and similes. “During the Indian summer, when the hardening earth smells like spirits, Dobrynia-Zlatopoyas-Nikitich rides throughout the fields. During the daytime his armor shines with the vermilion color of aspens, the gold of the birch trees, and deep blue of the skies (the blue is as strong as spirits). At night, however, his armor becomes as tarnished as burnished steel, which is covered with the rust of the forests, and has turned gray with the mists, but is still hardened, clear, full of noise of the first small pieces of ice, and shining with the stars of its joints.” “In human consciousness, spring, summer, fall, and winter somehow arrive at once,” and so forth.

Pilniak is drawn to nature as to a primal mother, or as to the prototype of the animalistic truth of life. In his works, nature is bestial, tempestuous, cruel, merciless, age-old, primordial and almost always absent any soft or caressing shades. “Winter. December. Christmas-time. Woodlands. Trees. Encrusted with hoarfrost and snow, they sparkle like blue diamonds. At dusk the last bullfinch cries out, and the magpie chatters away like a bone rattle.

Then there is silence. The enormous pines droop.... The night crawls along.... All around stand gloomy evergreens, hidden away from the juniper, with their slender branches tightly intertwined. The noise of the forest spreads eerily and evenly. The yellow piles of logs are mute. The moon, like coal, rises above the far end of the woods. It is night. The sky is low, the moon is red.... The wind howls, and it seems like the rustling of rusty chains.... And then at the far end of the forest, among the jagged pines, a wolf howls in the moonlight and other wolves play their bestial Christmas-time games.... [Our emphasis—A. V.] (Naked Year). Or: “The night was black, callous, autumnal; it fell over the empty, cold and savage steppes” (“The Balkonsky Estate,” *Bygones*). Here the beep of an automobile’s horn is absurd, as is the even sound of a propeller, forcing one to look into the sky. “The sky is low, the moon is red ... a wolf began to howl.”... That’s how it was when the “Lay of Igor’s Host” was written. And that’s how Russia has remained—the Russia of forest spirits, tree demons, house goblins, mermaids, water sprites, wolves, bears and incantations. This is not life, but biology. And this life must be shown by a man of great height, with sweeping movements and forest-like, somewhat drowsy eyes, much like a bear’s. And the new people in leather jackets would have to work a lot more, and go through many experiences before the iron railways could traverse these forests where the forest demons noisily pass by, and before nature could change its wild, prehistorical face for a more modern one. Much would have to be endured before the people of this Russia stopped believing in incantations, singing their “spirited medleys” and wedding songs, in which were combined shaggy antiquity, the forest depths and the wide fields. Before, instead of fairy tales about magic carpets where everything is done “as if by magic,” they, the people, began to believe in the phantasms of conquering the skies and earth with steel machines, in phantasms which are tomorrow brought to life. Before the people made up new tales about steel wizards and miracle workers who serve man—before they learned to dream not about the secret city of Kitez, but about transforming life through stubborn and fruitful labor, by overcoming the elements, and boldly delving into its secrets.

In essence, both nature and the animal life which Pilniak describes are sorrowful. It is no accident that the Arab scholar, Ibn-Sadif, says of this ancient life: “Sorrow, sorrow!” (“A Thousand Years”). In the story, “Death Beckons,” a mother says to her daughter: “Death beckons, the floodwaters beckon, the earth beckons, from on high, from the church bell tower, it beckons beneath

the train and from the train, blood beckons.” This lies “in the nature of things,” at the essence of life. The pages of *Naked Year*, where the death of the old man Arkhip is told, are filled with the same sorrow, which emanates from the very essence of life, from its very roots. The same goes for the “Simple Stories.” In general, this motif is no accident in Pilniak’s works. There is a certain restrained quality and sorrow in all his works, in his style and in his manner as a writer. Pilniak is ambivalent in his moods. Alongside the bold, fresh and impassioned, one often finds the opposite: the bitter and mournful. And who knows which mood will gain the upper hand in the end! For now we must simply note that the Russian Revolution emerges favorably in his works. And in it is found the sole salvation for the modern writer. Otherwise: sorrow, mysticism, despondency, slush and weak-willed romanticism.

Tightly bound up with Pilniak’s “physiology” and “biology” are love and woman. Pilniak devotes very much space to woman and love, going almost too far. And here he presents almost exclusively the physiological side. Here Pilniak has much in common with Artsybashev. But unlike Artsybashev he doesn’t relish the voluptuous: things are simpler, more village-like. Sometimes, however, his stories about love border on the pathological. The Chekist Ksenia Ordynina says:

I thought that Karl Marx had made a mistake. He took into account only physical hunger. He didn’t consider another driving force in the world: love ... sex, the family, the species—and mankind has not been wrong in idolizing sex.... I sometimes begin to feel, to the point of physical pain, I really sense how the whole world, all culture, all mankind, all things, chairs, stools, commodes and dresses are permeated with sex—no, not exactly, are permeated with sexual organs; and not so much the species, nation or state, but this handkerchief, bread or belt ... and I feel that the whole revolution—the entire revolution—smells of sexual organs (Ivan and Marya).

That Marx is introduced is neither here nor there. Marx never raised what for him was a meaningless question: what role hunger and love play in history. But Marx is not the issue here. Who needs all this pathology, and for what reason? What we end up with is either Rozanov’s sexual mysticism<sup>2</sup> or the transformation of the world into a brothel. What is worst of all is that these works, thanks to such a “creed” are overloaded with rapes and sexual acts,

whereas Pilniak's women, with a few exceptions, are cut from the same pattern. It's quite understandable, if you approach them with Ksenia Ordynina's "sociology" and see in them a slave, mother or lover, and not a woman with all her womanly-human qualities. That is why, for example, in the novella *Ivan and Marya* there is a kind of unpleasant aftertaste. The reader is left with a feeling of cold, of something hostile and unpleasant, despite a number of outstanding passages (the provincial congress of soviets, etc.).

In various articles and in different contexts we have had to note repeatedly the inclination of today's writers, artists, poets and journalists toward the primitive, and toward a simplified, uncomplicated life. With Pilniak this motif is present in his fictional writings and is expressed more strongly and clearly than with other writers. This is his point of departure, the key to his artistic activity—disenchantment with the values of modern bourgeois culture, awareness of the impasse it has reached; an impasse reached by our artistic life over the last ten to fifteen years with all of its stresses and strains (egocentrism, psychologism, Andreevism and Dostoevskyism, accompanied by internal devastation). There is a feeling of disharmony and a yearning for a normal, "correct" form of life; exhaustion from all these psychological subtleties and complexities. The Russian Revolution reveals the very depths of elemental forces and hurls into the arena of history the muzhik, the worker, people from the taiga, from the forests, and steppes, with their healthy, fresh, and internal relation to the world around them; the war and revolution, which showed the modern intellectual the meaning of the thing as such and the value of life in its simple, coarse and primitive form; and finally, being tired of the stormy days of the revolution—that is what nourishes these contemporary moods. With some of the writers motifs of the present order predominate (V. Ivanov, Ilya Erenburg, Mayakovsky); others have turned "philistinism" into a "pearl of creation" (A. Bely, and to some degree, Zamiatin). Along what lines these moods are advancing with Pilniak—we will see first and foremost in his attitude toward the Russian Revolution.

## II.

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2. Vasilii V. Rozanov (1856–1919), writer, journalist, critic, philosopher. Shocked many with his open discussion of sexuality and family life. Author of *Solitaria* (1912), *Fallen Leaves* (1913–1915) and *The Apocalypse of Our Times* (1917–1918).

Pilniak greeted the Russian October Revolution primarily not as a breakthrough into the steel-encased future, but in a rebellious spirit. He sought and found in it an animalistic, prehistorical visage. This discovery is in complete harmony with his biological attitude toward life. October is good in that it is directed toward the past. The revolution freed the people from the tsar, priests, state officials; from the unneeded intelligentsia, and Rus' "receded into the seventeenth century." In the story about Peter and Peter I, and his offspring, Petersburg, they are depicted as an evil and unnatural presence, as an unnecessary mockery of Russia, as something profoundly hostile to her, something alien. Peter's entire activity is presented as complete debauchery, mischief and violence toward "the physiology of popular life." Peter I is a brilliant player, a maniac who never knew the real Russia, an ever-drunken syphilitic, a despot, murderer, and man with barracks-room ideals. So, too, with his reform activity, which is wild, unbridled, senseless and thoroughly alien to the people. When Peter drove his "little people" into the marshy swamps and forced them, like helots, to work on the construction of a new "paradise," "the old, canonical and crafty Russia, with its way of life, folk legends, songs and monasteries seemed to withdraw into itself, go into hiding, and it stayed hidden for two centuries. From Peter came cities, the West, the intelligentsia, the church (which was unneeded, distant from the life of the people, and which served as an appendage of the state), the despotism of "autocratic evil-doers."<sup>3</sup> All this weighed heavily on the people and suffocated them. It was a vampire, perverting and distorting peasant-cottaged Rus'. The Russian Revolution freed Rus' from this nightmare, from this alien excrescence, the trash and rubbish of civilization. October led Russia away from Petersburg to Moscow. The revolution was made by the people, who crawled out from their huts, villages, forests and fields, both wild and sown with rye. It was made by the muzhik and by the common workman. And there is no International, there is the popular, national, purely Russian Revolution, in which the people first of all reckoned with all that was oppressive and unnecessary, with the landlord, the intelligentsia and with despotism. "To hell with tea, to hell with coffee! We have our homemade brew. We'll choose our own priests. Believe in whatever you want, even in a stump" ("At Nikola on the White Springs").

Pilniak continuously returns to the theme of the national character of the

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3. A reference to Pushkin's "Ode to Liberty," where he calls Napoleon "a despotic evil-

Russian Revolution. In the novel *Naked Year*, Gleb presents an entire historiography in which it is not difficult to detect the pet views of the author.

There was native Russian painting, architecture, music and the tale of Iulianiia Lazareva.<sup>4</sup> Peter came along and Lomonosov with his ode on glass became an unbelievable obstacle. Meanwhile the genuine art of the people disappeared.... In Russia there was no happiness, but now there is.... The Russian intelligentsia has not taken to October. Nor could they. Since Peter, Europe has loomed over Russia, and below, under the horse reared up on its hind legs,<sup>5</sup> lived our people, as they have lived for a thousand years. The intelligentsia, however, are Peter's true children. People say that the father of the Russian intelligentsia was Radishchev. That's not true, it was Peter. With Radishchev the intelligentsia started to repent.

And the "miserable little priest" echoes Gleb's thoughts:

When power was established, people rebelled, joined sects, ran off to the Don, Ukraine, to the Yaik, and from there rebellions spread toward Moscow. And now they have reached Moscow, they've taken power into their own hands, and they've started to build their own state. And they'll build it, they'll arrange it in such a way that they won't bother each other, or get in each other's way, like mushrooms in the forest.... And Christian Orthodoxy arrived together with the tsars, with the alien regime.... After all, do you think you'll find anything about Orthodoxy in folklore? You'll find forest demons, witches, water sprites, but no Lord of Hosts.... Now that the muzhiks have come to power, Orthodoxy is in the same position as any sect.... Orthodoxy has lived a thousand years, but it will perish, perish utterly in twenty years, just as the priests are dying out. And Yegory<sup>6</sup> will start to walk about Russia, and water sprites, and witches, or Leo Tolstoy, or even, just you see, Darwin ("Two Conversations," *Naked Year*).

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4. Subject of the famous seventeenth century vita written by her son, Kallistrat Druzhina-Osoryin. Iulianiia combined a life of Christian piety with unsurpassed devotion to her husband and children. For a translation, see: *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*, edited by Serge A. Zenkovsky (New York: W. P. Dutton, 1974), pp. 391-399.

5. Refers to the statue of Peter the Great erected by Catherine II in Petersburg. Celebrated by Pushkin's poem, the "Bronze Horseman."

To Pilniak, even Marx looks like a water sprite.

As Pilniak sees things, the muzhiks are for the revolution because it freed them from the cities, the bourgeoisie and iron railways; because it returned the old Rus'—the pre-Petrine, genuine, muzhik, epic and fairy tale Rus'.

Gentlemen need their railways in order to travel to see their bosses, or to visit acquaintances. The muzhik doesn't need them. The muzhik is for the soviets, for the Bolsheviks, but he is against the communists, and against the city. "Petersburg is long since finished. We lived without it earlier and we'll manage now, my dear sir" (Donat)... "Soviet power means the cities are doomed ... and it means that we, for example, are rid of the bourgeoisie" ... (Nikon Borisovich)... "I say at the meeting: there is no internashenal, but there is the people's Russian Revolution, a rebellion and nothing more. Just like with Stepan Timofeyevich." "And Karl Marx?" they ask. "He's a German, I say, and that means a fool." "And Lenin?"—"Lenin, I say, is from the muzhiks, he's a Bolshevik, whereas you must be commonists" (Yegorka's grandfather).

In Boris Pilniak's "historiosophy," therefore, many elements coexist in quiet harmony: muzhik anarchism, Bolshevism of the year 1918 and a peculiar kind of revolutionary Slavophilism, plus populism. The weak side of this "historiosophy" can be easily revealed as soon as we turn to the sources which nourish it. What rings out most clearly of all is disillusionment with Western European bourgeois culture:

I have been abroad a lot, and I felt like an orphan there. People in their derby hats, frock coats, smoking jackets, tails; with their trams, buses, metros, skyscrapers, shine, splendor, hotels with all the comforts, restaurants, bars, bathrooms, the most delicate linen—with nighttime maids who come quite openly to satisfy the unnatural needs of men—and what social inequality, what philistine morals and rules! And every worker dreams of owning stock shares, and so does every peasant. Everything is dead, and there is nothing but mechanization, technology and comfort. The path to European culture led to war.... Mechanized culture forgot about culture of the spirit, about intellectual culture.... European culture leads into a blind alley.

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6. Another name for Georgii, the patron saint who slew the dragon.

These words are spoken by Gleb (Naked Year), but in the context of other works by Boris Pilniak it is absolutely clear that the author himself is speaking through Gleb's lips.

European bourgeois culture has reached an impasse. That is so. It is almost nothing but mechanization. To a significant degree this is true. But there have been better times: Kant, Hegel, Marx, Schiller, Goethe, Ibsen—do we really have to list the names of all those who have enriched the treasure house of the human spirit! And can we now say that “everything is dead,” and that it no longer proceeds along this line of continuity? Bourgeois culture in the West still possesses great powers of resistance, and in the intellectual realm it continues to fight for domination. The culture of the West is “in decline,” it is doomed. But both in the realm of technology and in the intellectual realm there remains an enormous inheritance which the new world must grasp, and assertions that “everything is dead” by no means proceed along this line of continuity. In addition, this culture can only be conquered with its own weapons: steel and concrete. European art is in rapid decline. But nevertheless... Wells dreams about steel wizards, about transforming worlds with the human mind, whereas we still have to deal with wood goblins, mermaids and forest demons.

To continue. Why is the jump made from the mechanistic world of Western European culture into the deep, dark past, to pre-Petrine Rus', with the author refusing to look into the face of the future? “There” we have almost nothing but mechanization, and here we have spiritual wealth? Where, in what way? In our songs, legends and fairy tales? These are no longer effective, they are outmoded. What is meaningful and alive are dreams about transforming the world, conquering the skies, the depths of the earth and the oceans. In poetry and the truth of peasant labor, the truth of immediate life? But this is shown by Pilniak at the end of his novel once again from the standpoint of peasant customs, incantations, and love in threshing barns. And what about typhus, famine, lice and the submissive passivity, and the epic, yet business-like purchasing of coffins? And the “sorrow, sorrow pervading everything in this ‘thousand-year-old,’ primordial life”? All this is an absolute dead end. There is not even a trace of spiritual wealth here. “Let the trains stop running in Russia. Isn't there beauty in the simple torch [which peasants use to light their huts], in famine and in suffering?” (Andrei). Of course, there is not. What type of beauty is there when man squirms like a worm, like the last “quivering creature”!

The forward movement of the human spirit is measured by the power of man

over nature. And if “total mechanization” is now extinguishing man’s spirit, the key lies in social inequality, in the decline and collapse of the structure based on man’s domination over man, and not in the fact that technology, as such, is driving out all that is spiritual. The inability to separate the chaff from the wheat is evident in the sentence: “Every worker dreams of owning stock shares.” Where does this come from, what facts can substantiate it? The vast majority of workers in the West have been denied the possibility of dreaming about owning stocks, because for the broad masses such dreams have been empty and meaningless. Only various thin layers of workers could dream of owning stocks. In any case, we don’t have to talk about such a thing after the war of 1914. What happened with Pilniak happens often now with sensitive intellectuals. Western bourgeois culture is disintegrating and pushing them away. Many people can see this who have nothing to do with the immediate class struggle or with communism. The inability to find a way out, and a cautious attitude toward politics, to the struggle of workers for what is new, forces these sensitive and sincere people to search for a way out of the impasses in the past, and in strange compromises (Wells and others).

Later on it is natural that Pilniak asserts that “there is no International” and that our October Revolution is a national revolution. Indeed, what kind of International could there be if there, in the West, “every worker dreams of owning stock shares”? Meanwhile, the national character of the Russian revolution is confirmed mainly by the fact that it uncovered old, peasant-hutted, primordial Rus’ and freed it from everything alien. This only partially and superficially corresponds to what actually happened. There indeed was the anarcho-Makhnist<sup>7</sup> struggle, in which the Makhno anarchists repeated almost word for word that they didn’t need any railways, that they didn’t need any factories, post offices, cities, bourgeoisie, and so forth. There were similar movements in Siberia and in other places. There was a time when the villages turned inwards, became reclusive and fenced themselves off in a hostile manner from the cities, and saw anything to do with urban life to be bad. There was such a tendency. It was fed by inertia, apoliticism and village backwardness. Certain effects were produced by Soviet policy, which consciously tried to isolate the village from the city, by the mistakes of the Soviet regime and by all kinds of absurdities, of which there were very many. But in general this movement was headed and nourished by kulaks and landowners in the countryside. Finally, the Russian village returned “to the seventeenth century” because of

famine, high mortality, lack of commodities, devastation and disease. As an artist and chronicler of everyday life, Pilniak correctly grasped the essential traits of peasant moods. He made an unquestionable error, however, when he generalized these traits and used them to deduce his own particular form of “historiosophy.” In general these were the centrifugal, and not the centripetal, forces of the Russian Revolution, and the moods of the village were by no means exhausted by them. If the Communist Party managed to subordinate the Red Army to its discipline and ideological hegemony, then this happened first of all because the communists, despite various difficulties, found a common language with the young and new village, or with its most advanced sector. The limited significance that the moods of the Kononovs had in the Russian Revolution can be seen, among other things, by the present evolution of the countryside. The chronicler of the modern-day village hardly has to deal seriously today with the ideology of the Kononovs, of grandfather Yegorka, in the form in which it is described by Pilniak. All this is in the distant past. In the village we now have Americanism, the new bourgeoisie and the poor, a thirst for knowledge and steam-driven plows. In the village there are many other complex processes. All this is infinitely far from the views that the city and railways mean nothing to us. Under the guise of patriarchal, peasant-hutted, Kononov, pre-Petrine Rus’ with its fairy tales and incantations, doesn’t Boris Pilniak present us, without realizing it, what is in essence this new, Americanized, eager, grasping and thriving village, but which is decked out by him in peasant headdress and costumes? Doesn’t he give us a Russia which is singing old legendary songs and which is furiously defending the old rituals? There are moments in history when the new wishes to dress up in old costumes and new wine is poured into old wineskins. I have strong suspicions about the family of the sectarian horse thief Donat and Mark. Here we have bandits, and the steppe, and peasant ritual, and the simplicity of a savage life. But at the same time there is craftiness and self-interest. The family “takes care of itself.” Or: “well, our faith will be a muzhik’s faith” (Naked Year). What kind? This is the main point.

Pilniak is a complex writer who has not yet settled down. He is drawn to

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7. Nestor Makhno (1888–1934) led a peasant anarchist movement in the southern Ukraine during the Civil War. Makhno’s troops fought against the German invaders, White-Guardists, and then the Red Army. When his movement was routed by Soviet troops in 1921, Makhno fled abroad.

the old, pre-Petrine world and draws the reader there by virtue of a clearly aroused national feeling. This revolutionary nationalism and national-Bolshevism in Pilniak's works is more evident than with any other of the modern-day writers and poets working in Soviet Russia. It is a broad phenomenon which is profound and which is genuinely tied to a yearning for the old world, to a newly awakened love for the past.

Writers abroad from the White camp are trying to prove that this is something they can use. They are profoundly mistaken. Pilniak's works very clearly demonstrate the basic motifs of this mood. Here we find no yearning for old Russia, its way of life, icons, churches, and so forth. There is no hint of this in Pilniak's pieces. We will prove this below. The old Rus' has vanished, it has disintegrated and there is a new Rus', a genuine Rus', a Rus' of the worker and muzhik. For the first time this Rus' has felt and recognized itself as a great and free force, and seen itself as its own master. Starting with October, the slave who had been maimed and broken for centuries rose up for the first time and became a human being. Hence his pride, his national consciousness, his patriotism and the accompanying love for the historical, insofar as he showed himself to be an independent force in this history. A new, genuine Rus' has begun to be felt. In this light, Boris Pilniak's "historiosophy" loses its Slavophile coloring, and obtains a certain symbolic and figurative expression that reflects what exists in the young republic of Soviets. This is common not only to people of Pilniak's frame of mind, but to us as well, for "since October, we are defensists, too."

We repeat, however, that one cannot reduce Pilniak's "historiosophy" to this one motif. It does indeed contain traces of Slavophilism, which proceeds from recognition of the West's "decline" and from the inability to find another way out. It proceeds as well from a peculiar, one-sided artistic reworking of rural moods during rebellions of the Makhno-anarchist type.

With Pilniak there is no sense of unity; he often seems to break into fragments. He still has not found a strong foundation, therefore his thoughts and images collide, fail to harmonize, and even contradict each other. If we have started a political debate with him here, then it is primarily because such a debate is essential to Pilniak as an artist, as the most talented chronicler of the revolution, for the absence of a sense of integration can certainly be felt in his works. Let us pass on to this question.

## III.

Boris Pilniak's best and undoubtedly most significant work yet (of those which have appeared) is the recently published novel *Naked Year*. In essence this is not a novel. There is not even a hint of unity of construction, of plot and so forth which the reader usually demands when he picks up a novel. Portraits of provincial life of the nineteenth century are sketched with broad strokes. People are linked not by plot, but by a general style, by the spirit of the days they have lived through. One gets the impression that the author is unable to focus on one thing, to select one side of our tumultuous reality. It attracts him in its entirety; he is prisoner of the full complexity of the new reality, and perhaps that is as it should be. The revolution has completely transformed the old way of life, everything is turned upside down, and the artist is right when he tries to take in as much as possible, to give an integral, full picture of the shift and of the catastrophe.

Pilniak's city is much like Okurov. It resembles Chekhov's provinces under the conditions of the new Soviet reality. Its past, pre-revolutionary, sleepy, absurd and stagnant everyday life is masterfully depicted by the author. The revolution reduced some to ashes, eviscerated their last vestiges of life and hurled them overboard; it created complete chaos in the minds of other native philistines. Prince Ordynin had always led a dissolute way of life, but in the early days of the revolution he is transformed from a drunkard into an ascetic and mystic. The merchant Ratchin comes every day to the place where he had a shop, and sits there, like a dried out mummy, from morning till night. The city intelligentsia "lost its laws of behavior." Yegor Ordynin drinks and slips into depravity: "When you lose your laws of conduct, you want to act like a clown. You want to make a mockery of yourself.... I have no laws. But I cannot forget the truth. I cannot avoid myself. Everything has perished. And what a different truth it is that has taken its place!" ... His brother Boris has also "lost the laws." He rapes the maid Marfutka, but this seems to be insignificant: "I've done worse to myself! Understand—I've lost what's holy. We've lost everything."... And later he explains what was holy for him: "Then [before the revolution—A. V.] I thought that I was the center from which every radius extended, that I was everything. Soon I learned that life has no radiuses and centers, and that there is the revolution in general, and everyone else is just a miserable creature in the clutches of life."

The essence of the internal collapse of the intelligentsia has been grasped with amazing correctness. They thought that “I am everything,” “we are the center of everything.” But when these thoughts were tested it turned out that there was “the revolution in general” and everyone else was in the clutches of life. Many volumes, studies, poems, novels, surveys, and so forth, were written about these centers, about these peacocks spreading their tails, until a new master came along and swept all this rubbish into the trash bin.

Gleb Ordynin, a young man, vacillates in torment, seeks answers, purity and truth, is sickened by blood and violence and doesn't know what to do with himself. His sisters are cocaine addicts and degenerates, and only Natalia amounts to something, but she is with the communists ... but we'll deal with them later on.

When you read the chapter about the house of the Ordynins, the thought involuntarily arises: “If only this theme were given to our foreign community to chew over, how many tears would be shed, how many moans there would be, what noble indignation over ‘those who've crucified our motherland,’ and so forth. How many violins would weep! How much excellent patriotism would be expressed, how many psychological ‘surveys’ would be written about ‘centers,’ along with memoirs about bars and restaurants!”

But the novel's author reveals a miserliness, a coldness, a dry and factual mode of exposition, an approach from the side. For all this is alien, gone by, passé, unnecessary and faded.

Other intellectual philistines have also “lost the laws of behavior.” There is the cowardly, ever adaptive Sergei Sergeyich, who is constantly snickering obnoxiously into his fist. Of course, he splenetically cries out: “We all know about the brutocracy, the famine, robbery.... Pork at seventy-five.” Of course as he cries about the Russia that has perished he makes himself some coffee, “after closing the door more tightly” and having fetched “from a secret hiding place a bit of sugar and a piece of cheese.” And without fail he serves in one of the Soviet establishments, where he writes timely articles in the Gazette about how no bank transactions have occurred during the last month and how no deposits have been made.

Thrown into confusion, the provincial “know-it-all” of the type who earlier loved to obtain everything “by using their brains,” completely lost their intellectual equilibrium. It is well known that in our provinces there was no small number of such types from Okurov and Rasteriaev. Take Semion Matveyev

Zilotov. He is stirred up by the war, revolution, Freemasonry, the West, Russia and old books. So he works out a theory: "Russia must be crossed with the West, we must mix our blood. After twenty years, a man will appear." We will be saved by a pentagram—the star of the Red Army. "God should be cast down. There should be a devil, but not God." In practice, the necessary man is sought in the person of Laitis, head of the police. He must interbreed in the monastery with the virgin Olenka Koonts, and their offspring must turn out to be the salvation of the world. This has all been figured out in the old masonic books and a "sign" has been given. Everything ends this way. Laitis receives what is required, Olenka Koonts is by no means a virgin, but poor Zilotov, whose plans are ruined, perishes in a fire.

Besides a depiction of everyday life, there is also a biting irony toward our homespun Russian mysticism. Mystical theories about "crossbreeding" Russia with the West, as we now know, are very much in vogue, and they sometimes remind us of the delirium in Matvei Zilotov's brain which has been consumed and eaten away by old books (Eurasianism, Spenglerism, etc.).

Another provincial "philosopher," a deacon who has been completely baffled by the surrounding world, sits in a bathhouse and refuses to come out; he is searching for the true word "to make the world different." In particular, he is very interested in the questions: when did people begin to milk cows, and how did it happen, and why did they start? His hypotheses, doubts and questions are unexpectedly resolved by a certain Draube, who assures the deacon that two fellows began to milk a cow for the first time as a mischievous prank. The deacon is crushed. "That means that the whole world is a prank."... The Deacon decides ... to join the Communist Party and serve it through faith and truth ("Blizzard").

A commune of anarchists which was set up in the provinces also loses its way. It perishes due to squabbles over money.

A New Russia is in the air. Despite assurances regarding the stability of everyday consciousness, in Pilniak's novel and other things the Russian Revolution has turned everything upside down. His provinces deeply feel that the old has passed away. Almost all of Pilniak's main characters speak about "making the world different": the archbishop Silvester, the deacon and Matvei Zilotov. Others sense the truthfulness of the new world and revolution: Gleb, Boris, Yegor, Andrei, Draube, the muzhiks, young fellows and old men. They are not actively creating the new world, but each one in his own way has suf-

ferred through and sensed its arrival.

Others are building the new life. The leather jackets. The Bolsheviks.

In the Ordynins' house, the Executive Committee gathered upstairs: people in leather jackets, Bolsheviks. These men in leather jackets, each the same size, a leather-jacketed handsome fellow, each strong, with locks in ringlets beneath caps pushed back, each with sharply protruding cheekbones, lines by their lips, each with iron movements. This was a selection of the best from the shabby Russian people. In leather jackets—you can't say a bad word about them. This is what we know, this is what we want, that's what we'll do, and that's it!

Arkhip Arkhipov is the chairman of the Executive Committee. "During the day he sat in the executive committee, wrote papers, and then rushed around the city and the factory." ... "He pronounced the Russian word 'mogut' as 'magut'" ... "wielded his pen like an ax" ... "awoke at dawn and bit by bit studied books borrowed from everybody: Kiselev's algebra ... Marx's Capital, Ozerov's science of finance."

Pilniak later tells how they started up a factory which couldn't be started up; it had been destroyed during the war with the Whites. "For there was nothing that couldn't be done, for they couldn't not do it."

"Enregetically fooction." That's what the Bolsheviks were all about.

Several people enregetically fooction: Arkhip Arkhipov, the worker Lukich, Donat, Natalia. Natalia Ordynina tells her brother:

"Everyone who's alive should go."

"Go where?"

"To the revolution. These days will never be back again ... without bread and workmen you will die, and all your theories will die. But it's the muzhiks who give us bread. Let the muzhiks and workers dispose of their valuables themselves."

This "enregetic fooctioning" of the Bolsheviks against the background of the disintegrating old order is noted by Boris Pilniak everywhere:

"Hey, Comrade Boris, open up."

The communists had come.... Comrade Elena cried out in the blizzard:

"It's a blizzard. We're having a good time. Is it possible to sleep on such a night! There's a blizzard."

The soldiers tumbled into the house, with snow, with the blizzard, with ice. The house—an old fool—began to roar, whistle, and dishes rattled on the shelves....

“Comrade Boris, my dear philosopher: over the earth there’s a blizzard, over the earth is freedom, over the earth is the revolution! How can anyone sleep?! How wonderful! How wonderful! It’s Comrade Elena!” (“Blizzard”).

“I’m not a Bolshevik,” the author says about himself, “but generally it’s easier to keep company with the Bolsheviks. They are filled with audacity and joyfulness” (“Three Brothers”).

Pers, a member of the Central Committee of the Iranian Communist Party, is completely intoxicated with the new truth. “Poor, naked, starving and beautiful Russia has arisen against the rest of the world and the entire globe.... She is the bearer of a dazzling truth.... Seas and volcanos have been moved.” ... And as if underscoring the power of these words with dull, gray philistinism, a certain engineer answers him: “My shoe needs fixing and I feel like sitting down for a while in a foreign restaurant” (“Ivan and Marya”).

“Sovnarkom—is something strong, nocturnal, owl-like.... The Moscow Kremlin is covered with gray moss. The clock strikes in the Spassky Tower.”

“Who-there-sleeps-in-Spas-sky-Tower....”

“All Moscow is blanketed in smoke, for the surrounding forests are burning; I am standing there where Ivan the Terrible stood. I am a writer, and next to me stands a man, a writer and a Bolshevik. An automobile which had grown bored with standing still spent all day going around Moscow, but the man grew tired, and now he’s standing in his undershirt, with an open collar, his shoulders sagging. Above Moscow, above Russia, above the world —re-vo-lu-tion! What demon, in defiance of the devil and God, hurled the globe into the interplanetary Etna? What, then, is mysticism?—If you dig about in the ulcer of the Salvation Cemetery in Ryazan and if you compare the Holy Virgin to Yarilo—what, then, is mysticism? To say that famine and lice are radiant joy—to hurl the earth into the volcano?! Moss on the stone breasts of the women-idols?! ... If you compare the stone women to the surgeon’s probe—and didn’t the people of old pray to the stone women?” (“Riazan Apples”).

With a surgeon’s probings against mysticism—these are the thoughts that come to the author in the strong, night owl Sovnarkom-Kremlin!

Boris Pilniak knows that there are “Comrade Laitises” and military com-

manders who waste their time in mocking philistines (“Riazan Apples”), and our everyday life contains terrible things. He has stripped bare to the point of naturalism the dark, nightmarish story about “The Mar Station” and “Mixed Train Number 58” with hungry bagmen paying off requisition squads with a consignment of women who are more beautiful than the requisitioners need. These are bitter and difficult pages, written with extraordinary artistic power. But, as they say, that’s not what is essential. The main thing is those who “enregetically foocation,” who never say it can’t be done, who are bold and joyful, and in whom there is something owl-like, strong and nocturnal. The new Russia smacks of them, and they have done in once and for all the Chekhovian, Okurovian, Rasteriaevan Rus’ of the Ratchins, Ordynins, Glebs, Borises, Zilotovs and Sergei Sergeyiches. That is why it is so easy for the author to toss in the direction of these citizens: “To hell with all of you, do you hear. You’ve turned sour.” In the boring, gray and frozen everyday life of the provinces Pilniak senses that the revolution continues: “It was a bright day, a weekday. Morning arrived on that day with a blue snow. Boring. A Soviet working day. But it turns out: this boring workday is also—the true revolution. The revolution continues” (“Blizzard”).

Pilniak’s novel and other works leave an aftertaste of sorrow, of wormwood. But this smell is strong, refreshing and “fabulous.” It is introduced by people in leather jackets.

Boris Pilniak is an artist who is young and hasn’t settled down. There is much in his works that is contradictory; some things stand off to the side. It is impossible to bring his thoughts and images together into one unified system of views. Surrounded by those who “have lost their laws,” in the historical dust of the people the “leather jackets” look particularly fresh, new, bold, necessary and vigorous. Yet these new people appear very strange; they are iron-willed and joyful, and seem to have descended from another planet to old, quiet, sluggish Russian Asia, along with peasant-hutted, pre-Petrine Rus’, which is resurrected by Pilniak and extolled as the herald of a new and free life. By the end of the novel the author has done everything—with incantations, and weddings, and girls in the threshing barns with their young men—in order to attract the reader’s sympathy to peasant-hutted, canonical Rus’. But the reader nevertheless looks at it with the eyes of an outsider, and the Kononovs remain people of prehistorical times. Here the author is neither convincing nor successful, despite his mastery. Leather jackets and Rus’ of the seventeenth century ...

are from two different epochs. They don't get along with each other. Some of them "enregetically foocion," starting up factories which "cannot be started up," and talk about tractors or electrification. The others live like a bird, or a tree, their essentially zoological life with wood goblins, house demons and incantations. With Pilniak we have a strangely peaceful intermingling between a love for leather jackets and a love for zoological Rus'. "And Yegory will start to walk about Russia, and water sprites, and witches, or Leo Tolstoy, or even, just you see, Darwin." The author is still not certain who it is that "will walk about Rus'." Meanwhile, there is little cause to harbor any doubts about this question. The entire new, revolutionary way of life is hostile to "witches," yet organically linked to Darwin. Darwin is already roaming about Rus'. It is no accident that the Arkhipovs are quietly studying him at night along with a number of other authors. Essentially there no longer is any pre-Petrine Rus', it has entirely vanished. We do have both the Rus' of leather jackets and poor peasants, and the Rus' of the new urban and village bourgeoisie; and between them there is hostility and fighting.

It is as difficult to argue with Pilniak about pre-Petrine Rus' as it is with a man who claims that black is white.

We are, however, centrally concerned not so much with the theoretical correctness of this or that "historiosophy" as we are with the author himself, the major figure among the young writers, who displays great daring and independence, as well as indisputable artistic gifts. He is an artist who knows and has accepted today's way of life, and who has set out to give us a unified picture of the revolution. The difficulties here are very great. There are no beaten tracks; the old images and types cannot be renovated, repainted and resewn—this won't do. But how many writers' groups have tried to get by with such "hand repairs." We have to begin to cultivate virgin soil, to find our own way. But to whom much is given, much is expected. Pilniak has been given much, and the demands made upon him must be greater than usual. Neither in *Naked Year* nor in other works does the author reveal an inner unity or a unified portrayal of 1919, or the revolution, and the author's imagery splits into opposed fragments. His works are woven together from different, yet miraculously intertwined and contradictory moods. Leather jackets and Darwin join with witches and Kononovs; sexual mysticism is combined with biting irony toward mysticism in general; biology and the animalistic with a poem about Bolsheviks who are conducting a merciless war against the animalistic and who want to gird the

world with steel. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are joined with the twentieth, sorrow is combined with joy. In all this there is something that is artistically unfinished, or not thought through, or not attributable to one world outlook. It is as if the author stands in the middle of a crossroads. If you go down that road, you will lose one thing; if you go down the other road you will lose something else. There is an inner conflict and disharmony in the artist himself, in his inner core. And isn't he so attracted to the zoological, biological, the immediately given and the simple because he wants to and needs to overcome this duality? The author seeks the organic and biologically simple in life. With the same needs he turned to the Russian revolution and even tried to find in the leather jackets what is "lumbering," "Pugachevian," "strong," "nocturnal" and "owl-like." In this respect he is unified and consistent in his own way. But Pilniak has not given us a unified portrayal of the revolutionary days. It seems that this is because he has been hampered by the contradictory nature and disharmony of the writer's experience as an artist. The author's general world outlook as an artist is as yet unclear. Perhaps, for 1919, it was enough to say to oneself: the revolution is chaos, rebellion, Pugachev, and so forth. Today this is clearly inadequate, and it was even inadequate then. One needs a more profound, organic insight into our epoch in order to tie everything together into a single whole. And here the problems of the international and national, about Darwin and Yegorii, about primitive huts and electrification must be resolved; they should not be brought together and tossed into one pile.<sup>8</sup> This is by no means a matter of indifference for today's writer and for artistic creativity—to have or not to have a unified, emotional and far-ranging insight into the essence, into the soul of our revolution; to have or not to have one center of gravity and the corresponding theoretical clarity, for all this is reflected in works of art in this most vital way.

In the end, the leather jackets, Arkhip, Natalia, Lukich, Donat, Elena and others are superb in Pilniak's works. The freshness and all-powerful audacity are faithfully and skillfully noted. But then this is not everything. These are only the most essential external symptoms. People "enregetically foocion."... But in the name of what, why, where; what will later happen with these people? And what horizon are they seeking? What role did they play in the Russian Revolution? What will they give Russia, what are they giving now? For, after all, they are real, live people. The same thing applies to the countryside. Pilniak sought vestiges of the animalistic—he loves and knows well animalistic

tropes, and he found them in the village. But that, too, is not everything, it is just a piece, a part of life.

The question of the author's unified inner core now takes on decisive significance. This is not only because the role of the writer's word in our days assumes extraordinary significance in the general turbulence of life, but mainly because we have entered a period in which we will truly and sincerely work over and internally reflect on all that we have experienced in the past five years. The artist who doesn't understand this will soon prove to be behind the "spirit of the times." The place of the orator at a meeting is now occupied by the artist and scholar, and they must be tribunes and prophets with "the word of god" on their lips.

#### IV.

A few words about Pilniak's manner of writing. Pilniak is definitely fresh, independent and original. Of course, it's not difficult to follow the influence of certain older writers on him: in his description, for instance, of the Ordynin-city, one can discern Chekhov and Gorky; the deacon in "Blizzard" is reminiscent of "The Councilors"; Andrei Bely and Remizov undoubtedly affected the construction of his latest works. All this, however, is not essential. The author is too original and innovative.

His style, first of all, is very inventive and original. The structure of speech departs from usual norms. Turns of phrase are absolutely unexpected and uncustomary. An old grammarian should be horrified by them. Speech is wide-ranging, uneven; words are cast with a wide and free-wheeling sweep, fan-like, in all directions, or else they are scattered all at once in clumps. Pilniak loves words. He loves their history, their original, root meaning, their core. "Words, for me, are like coins to a numismatist." And here Pilniak is true to himself, to his basic artistic method: to seek the primeval, the innocent,

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8. Not long ago, in the newspaper *Utrennik*, no. 2, Boris Pilniak announced the following in connection with his leaving the newspaper *Nakanune*: "I myself must be a supporter of the Changing-Landmarks group." We feel that this is a mistake. Boris Pilniak has changed no landmarks; here, however, it would be appropriate to make one proviso. Evidently, over the last period Boris Pilniak has somewhat changed his attitude toward the International, by accepting the formula: we need the International for the West (in works as yet unpublished). This brings Pilniak somewhat closer to one side of the "Changing-Landmarks" supporters: for them, the International is a weapon for achieving purely national goals. This juxtaposition is also incorrect from beginning to end.

that which is not besmirched by today. The author often commits sins against subject and object. He often uses the hyphen: sometimes you have to guess, and reread the sentence. A word serves as a hint; behind it lies a whole circle of ideas. His speech is essentially conversational, but it is eloquent in a mannered way. The printed word is audible; you hear how the author speaks and to whom it belongs. It is loud, sweeping, unsystematic and without external connectedness or structure. Words are hurled about like heavy cobblestones. From sentence to sentence the transitions serve as a means of contrast: “The wires along the Ryazan road rang out like the Third International. A vehicle on two wheels—that’s what misfortune is called.” There are many parenthetical words, explanations, insertions. Repetitions appear with stubborn frequency. Given the apparent generosity and wide sweep, there is great economy here. A whole system of images and conceptions is squeezed into each sentence.

Not only is chapter torn away from chapter, but paragraph from paragraph. A stylized manner of thinking—he writes as he thinks—when a person shifts from one thing to another, is especially characteristic of involuntary thought. Ideas swim about chaotically and freely, like clouds in the sky. A brush stroke in one direction, a stroke in another direction, then in a third, and then in a tenth, and in the end a whole portrait is created with a few more brush strokes. Sometimes Pilniak plainly abuses this manner, and the reader must overcome the pages and bind them up by force. When this becomes too extreme, as in the novella *Ivan and Marya*, it is wearisome. Unlike the Serapion Brothers and the majority of young writers, Pilniak has no engaging or interesting plot line, and in general there is no plot. These are not stories, or novellas, or novels, but poems in prose. They are a mosaic, a mechanical linking together of chapters. *Naked Year* is composed of independent études. And several other works, in addition, yield to easy uncoupling: “Blizzard,” “Riazan Apples,” and so forth.

Incidentally, about *Naked Year* from the standpoint of economy. In the novel there are 142 pages, of modest format. In these hundred and one-half pages, he has crammed in so much artistically developed material that it would freely suffice for as many novels as there are chapters in *Naked Year*. How far has all this gone, not only from the time of Goncharov’s *Ravine*, but from the time of later works, for instance, on the eve of the war and the revolution? Herein lies the style of our epoch. Even Chekhov and Bunin appear diluted in comparison with such compactness and economy.

In general everything is chaotic, noisy, forever transgressing normal boundaries, loud, exclamatory, and written with extreme nervous tension and concentration, like seawater in an estuary. Pilniak writes not with his heart, but primarily with his nerves.

His images and similes are not hackneyed, they are their own, they are fresh, but they also are repeated stubbornly. The figures of several characters are highly individualized and clearly delineated: the deacon, Sergei Sergeyich, Zilotov, the old man Arkhipov and others. They are always sketched impressionistically. Yet there are also passages which should be avoided. Semion Semionich is speaking at a meeting of anarchists: "I close the meeting, comrades. I would like to share with you another fact. Comrade Andrei is going to marry Comrade Irina. I think that this makes sense. Does anyone have something to say? No one has anything to say" (Naked Year). This protrudes journalistically and unforgivably from the novel. (After all, the book is a poem.) Such passages are not infrequently found with Pilniak.

Pilniak is a writer who emerged not long ago, but meanwhile one can already detect that he has worked on himself a great deal. And he already has more than one imitator. Traces of his influence can be found with ever-growing frequency, especially among the young writers. This is the best evidence that in his person we have a great and independent artist.

Pilniak's talent will quickly grow stronger. This is particularly noticeable in his latest works, tied with impressions he received from a trip abroad. Although they haven't appeared yet in print, they are, in our opinion, the best of all that he has written so far. And it appears that pre-Petrine Rus' has been shoved somewhere off to the side.

In general, this is a very disorderly and talented man. If it is true that every genuine artist must have his own fool, then Pilniak has several. It would be good if he freed himself from some of them.

Speaking more simply and directly, we must say finally and conclusively to those who speak about good and justice dryly and nastily: "To hell with all of you, do you hear, you've turned sour!" And we must align ourselves completely with those who can be sensed throughout the new Rus'. (Out with the pre-Petrine Rus', out with romanticism of sex, out with the excesses of naturalism, etc.) Why? Because it is only here that people listen "seriously and for a long time," sincerely, according to their conscience, and not there, in the literary mansions, where delicate and restrained smiles predominate, where

everything is in good taste, but essentially dry and nasty. Why? Because of the revolution, leather jackets and Bolsheviks. Because the “revolution continues.” Because Pilniak has real talent, and because talent and the revolution are now inseparable. And even more so because today a truly great artist can only be a prophet-artist, artist-leader and artist-tribune.