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FOR AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE LIVING: COLLECTIVE CREATIVITY AND THE EARLY SOVIET NOVEL

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FOR AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE LIVING:

COLLECTIVE CREATIVITY AND THE EARLY SOVIET NOVEL

Massimo Balloni

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this dissertation is to consider the collective literary practices of the first fifteen years of the Soviet Union in order to suggest a shift in the proletariat from object to author of its own narrative discourse and identify the aesthetic strategies that made such a transition possible. In this sense, collective creativity became one of the most debated devices of its time. By looking at the novel as a large case study, I show how this literary genre had to be rethought to depict the new social order and accommodate the proletariat as the new protagonist in the historical process. As an overarching metaphor, I deploy a variation of the old dualism between the universal and the particular understood more technically, however, as reproducibility vs specificity. To lay bare this shift in the narrative discourse of the proletariat, I investigate the process by which, in the novel, the chaotic crowds of the Revolutionary years gained proletarian consciousness and became masses charged with building Communism. I trace the trajectory that leads from the collapse of the biography of the Civil War hero to *History of Factories and Plants*, a series of volumes in which the divide between the professional writer and the proletarian worker has been erased, the biography of the collective is narrated, and a Soviet epos is created. While, on the narrative level, war and the machine functioned as the main organizing principles of the crowd in the first decade following the Revolution, literary practice itself became the ultimate organizer of the collective in the early 1930s. Far from being antithetical to the cult of personality prominent in the Stalinist years, it is precisely these collective endeavors that, I claim, laid the groundwork for the poetics of Socialist Realism and the advent of the Soviet Hero.

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This dissertation is dedicated to Claudio.

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND CITATION

Russian names are transliterated according to the Library of Congress convention. Ligatures are omitted. Exceptions are made for accepted spellings of titles and proper names, e.g., Babel for Babel', Gorky for Gor'kii, Proletkult for Proletkul't, etc.

Should the soft sign at the end of names and titles be followed by an apostrophe, the soft sign is left out in order to facilitate readability, e.g., Vasilii Lokot's instead of Vasilii Lokot''s, etc.

In the main body of the text, citations are transliterated. Cyrillic is kept in captions and footnotes.

Translations into English are my own unless otherwise indicated.

…who wants a worker to die unplanned?

Isaac Babel, *Red Cavalry*[1]

[1] Isaac Babel, "Italian Sun," in *Red Cavalry*, ed. Nathalie Babel, trans. Peter Constantine (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 61.

INTRODUCTION

This epigraph might be inaccurate.

I will explain.

I am not referring to an issue of translation. True, after looking at the original Russian,[2] one could certainly argue that *neorganizovanno* is not "unplanned," but rather "unorganized"; this is not a trivial issue, because in 1926, the year in which the stories were collected in a single volume, the verbs "to organize" (*organizovat'*) and "to plan" (*planirovat'*) carried distinct socio-political connotations in the Soviet Union. One could also claim that, in his translation, Peter Constantine normalizes Babel's Russian, which is sharper and of a lower register, with the verb *podokhnut'*, for instance, blandly becoming "to die." For our purposes, though, Constantine's phrasing, being more direct and less wordy, functions better as an epigraph than numerous other English translations of the same line.

There is another reason why the epigraph might be inaccurate.

I am talking about its authorship.

The quote is certainly taken from Babel's collection of short prose, *Red Cavalry*, namely the story "Ital'ianskoe solntse" (Italian Sun). Here, Kirill Vasilevich Liutov, the narrator and Babel's alter ego in the book, recounts the night when his roommate Sidorov departed with an orderly for headquarters, allowing him to read a letter that Sidorov had left on the table. The letter, in which Sidorov tells his fiancée Victoria about his life as a soldier fighting in the Civil War and expresses his longing for the beauty and warmth of Italy, is supposedly reproduced verbatim in the text, with Sidorov presented by Liutov as its original author. In the English

[2] "Кто же захочет, чтобы работник подох столь неорганизованно..."
Isaak Babel', *Konarmiia*, 3rd ed. (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1928), 33.
https://imwerden.de/pdf/babel_konarmiya_1928_text.pdf (last accessed on January 13, 2018).

translation that I have used for the epigraph, this external authorial agency is also marked typographically: font and spacing are smaller and space is added before and after the body of the letter. Let us assume for the sake of the argument that the letter really existed and that Babel simply copied it in his diary—although he most likely did not[3]—only to reproduce it in "Italian Sun." If this were the case and if we fish the sentence out of the larger narrative framework provided by *Red Cavalry*, who is the author of the epigraph, Sidorov or Liutov/Babel?[4]

* * *

I should start this dissertation from where I will end it.

Maksim Gorky, in the closing speech of the twenty-fifth meeting (*zasedanie*) of the first Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, declared: "My certainty that this device of collective creativity can produce absolutely original and unprecedentedly interesting books is such that I venture to suggest our guests, distinguished masters of European literature, to also work in the same direction (*round of applause*)."[5] What did Gorky mean by "collective creativity"? It seems anticlimactic to make such a statement in the final speech of a Congress officially announcing the birth of the Soviet Writer. By the end of this dissertation it will be clear, however, how Gorky's statement perfectly fits within the rationale of the Congress and why Socialist Realism

[3] Babel does not mention the letter in his diaries, which he used as "raw material" for *Red Cavalry*.
[4] Sidorov's letter is not the only letter that Liutov uses in *Red Cavalry* and that is presented to the reader as someone else's utterance, as a piece of narrative grafted onto the story told by the narrator. In "Salt" and "Treason," for instance, the two letters, penned by soldier Nikita Balmashov, are not even framed by the narrator, thus comprising the entire body of these two stories. Some data: of the 31,510 words of the 1928 edition, the last of the "prerevised" editions, 5,158 appear *as if* Liutov simply reproduced them in *his* narration. This means that these external authorial voices account for more than 16% of *Red Cavalry*. Balmashov alone wrote more than 7% of it. I have included only the parts that are clearly marked as insertions and that in scholarship are usually referred to as *skaz*.
[5] "Моя уверенность в том, что этот приём коллективного творчества может дать совершенно оригинальные, небывало интересные книги, такова, что я беру на себя смелость предложить такую работу и нашим гостям, отличным мастерам европейской литературы (*аплодисменты*)."
See I. K. Luppol, M. M. Rozental', and S. M. Tret'iakov, eds., "Zakliuchitel'noe slovo A. M. Gor'kogo," in *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s''ezd sovetskikh pisatelei: stenograficheskii otchet* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo «Khudozhestvennaia literatura», 1934), 677.

and collective creativity are deeply connected. In order to unpack Gorky's statement and dissolve the confusion around the notion of "collective creativity" and how it was understood in the early 1930s, we need first to go back to the beginning of the twentieth century, when the initial publications on collective creativity appeared.

Soviet collective literature is still a vague object in scholarship.[6] Despite its frequent mention in studies devoted to the pre-Socialist Realism period, when it was first debated in public intellectual discourse first and then actively promoted by the Party, its contours are seldom defined. It is rarely the focus of the discussion and it is always ancillary to the "main argument," which, as a consequence, renders it either a blurry "utopian" outcome of the poetics of the avant-garde or merely the harbinger of Socialist Realism. But even framed as such, as Mary A. Nicholas and Cynthia A. Ruder point out in their article on the Soviet collective author of the 1930s, "issues of chronology, authorial motivation, the exact role of coercion in Stalinist literary and historical production, and even questions of terminology remain unresolved."[7]

The goal of this dissertation is to consider the collective literary practices of the first decades of the Soviet Union in order to suggest a shift in the proletariat from object to author of

[6] Most studies on Soviet collective creativity focus on the early 1930s, and especially on the volume about the construction of the Belomor Canal (which is also the only one that has been translated into English.) See Cynthia A. Ruder, *Making History for Stalin: The Story of the Belomor Canal* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998) and Julie Draskoczy, *Belomor: Criminality and Creativity in Stalin's Gulag* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2014). Evgenii Dobrenko talks about "brigade creativity" in *The Making of the State Writer: Social and Aesthetic Origins of Soviet Literary Culture*, trans. Jesse M. Savage (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), 365-406. See also Dobrenko's "Narrative as the Means of Producing Socialism: The Milk of the Present and the Curds of History," chap. 5 in *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*, trans. Jesse M. Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) in relation to the project *History of Factories and Plants*. Scarce articles investigate collective creativity in connection with Socialist Realism. See Mary A. Nicholas and Cynthia A. Ruder, "In Search of the Collective Author: Fact and Fiction from the Soviet 1930s," *Book History*, no. 11 (2008): 221-44, and Katharine Holt, "Collective Authorship and Platonov's Socialist Realism," *Russian Literature* 73, no. 1/2 (2013): 57-83. For a philosophical approach to collective creativity, see the recent volume A. A. Ivin, *Filosofiia kollektivnogo tvorchestva: istoriia, iazyk, moral', religiia, igry, ideologiia i dr.* (Moskva: Prospekt, 2017).

[7] Nicholas and Ruder, "In Search of the Collective Author," 221.

its own narrative discourse and identify the aesthetic strategies that made such a transition possible. I will also show why the writing practices of the collective, which I will refer to as "collective creativity," became an urgent and widespread issue in literary criticism and production at the beginning of the twentieth century: meaning, how they gained momentum following the Revolution, how they were reflected in the novel as a genre, and what ultimately links them to the succeeding poetics of the 1930s. Conversely, questions of reception and the important issue of editorial practice prior to publication, which greatly influenced the final form of some collective works (e.g., *Istoriia fabrik i zavodov* [History of Factories and Plants]), will only be marginally addressed and are left open for future analysis. Also, collective creativity has always occupied a peripheral position within the larger framework of collectivization, often as a bizarre, short-lived byproduct of it, as the umpteenth manifestation of Soviet utopism. In this dissertation I will investigate how mass collectivization might have informed the practice of collective writing, and I will inscribe collective creativity within the larger phenomenon of "labor collectives" (*trudovye kollektivy*) of early Soviet industrialization.

The dissertation will move in three main directions. The first is connected to historical background: if a literary form is "a recursive and mediated response to historical processes,"[8] I will show how the early Soviet novel was a response to the seizure of power by the proletariat and how it accommodated this new player in the historical process within the framework of the narrative. I will examine the novel as a mediated response to a historical rupture and as a point of confluence among a series of discourses that intersected in those years, especially the late NEP period, during which the tension between the individual and the collective acquired new political

[8] Ilya Kliger and Boris Maslov, "Introducing Historical Poetics: History, Experience, Form," in *Persistent Forms: Explorations in Historical Poetics*, ed. Ilya Kliger and Boris Maslov (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 1.

and social connotations. However, I will also attempt to free these practices from strict historicity, as the literary manifestation of social changes and Party mandates[9] by turning to the aesthetic mechanisms of these works in terms of how they are constructed and how they function as novels "without resorting to what lies outside literature."[10] I will show how, in the late stages of these projects, the *fabula* becomes fragmentary and develops according to the logic of fractal structures. Here, one may ask, following Bakhtin's claim that the novel is the most open-ended literary genre, whether it is also the most suitable to accommodate collective creativity, a mode of narration lacking a center.

It would be a mistake, however, to tie this interest in collective creativity in the early Soviet period too closely to either avant-garde movements[11] or to the social upheaval caused by the October Revolution, which prompted a discussion over the role of art in a Socialist society. In fact, every historical and cultural epoch strives towards the creation of its own version of collective authorship. In this sense, there is nothing inherently "Soviet" in the desire and attempt to collectively create a literary work. It is also easy to lose historical perspective and forget that "[t]here have been eras during which the personality of the artist was of no interest at all to the

[9] This is the theoretical foundation of most studies on collective literary works of early Stalinism. See S. V. Zhuravlev, *Fenomen "Istorii fabrik i zavodov": gor'kovskoe nachinanie v kontekste epokhi 1930-kh godov* (Moskva: In-tut Rossiiskoi Istorii RAN, 1997) and the already mentioned Ruder, *Making History for Stalin*, 1998 and Draskoczy, *Belomor*, 2014.

[10] "…не обращаясь к тому, что лежит вне литературы." These words were pronounced by Boris Tomashevskii at a symposium organized in Leningrad on March 6, 1927. Tomashevskii was commenting on how the Formalist method had introduced a new interpretative approach to literary works, by looking at what was given in the text without *necessarily* having to resort to external factors such as, for instance, the private biography of a writer. See D. Ustinov, ed., "Materialy disputa 'Marksizm i formal'nyi metod' 6 marta 1927 g.," *NLO*, no. 50 (2001): 50. Quoted in Ornella Discacciati, "La lezione di Boris Tomaševskij," *Ricerche Slavistiche* 14 (60) (2016): 524.

[11] In Italy, a group of Futurists called "I Dieci" published two novels: *Il Novissimo Segretario Galante: 400 lettere d'amore per ogni evenienza* (Roma: Sapientia-Edizioni dei Dieci, 1928) and *Lo Zar non è morto*, which came out for the same publishing house one year later, in 1929. In France, the *cadavre exquis* (exquisite corpse) was one of the methods used in Surrealist automatic writing to collectively produce drawings and short compositions.

audience,"[12] and for this reason, "[t]here was a great tendency toward anonymity."[13] Regardless of how this collective creativity was expressed, be it the neoclassical ode as the literary manifestation of the nation's sentiments towards the monarch or a victory at war, or the Romantic notion of myth, which explains its fascination with popular (*vsenarodnye*) fairy tales and legends, in this dissertation, I will avoid remarking upon similarity in order to circumscribe the specificity of the Soviet project, for which collective creativity did not function to promote authorial anonymity but rather to mandate that a name and a voice be given to the nameless and the voiceless of bourgeois literature.

The second focus of this dissertation is thus authorship. While critics of this era such as Viktor Shklovsky and Walter Benjamin variously conceptualized the lack or loss of an unreproducible originality, their focus remained very much on the work itself; but the shifting status of the author becomes an inevitable consequence of the shifting status of a text: because a work of art can be constructed using specific devices and reproduced, the individual artist is dispossessed of his claim to be its only author or, in Benjamin's terms, of the aura of originality. The artist becomes in this sense a producer.[14] In this dissertation, I will explore the implications of this rupture when we shift the object of reproducibility from the work of art to authorship itself. As an overarching metaphor, I will deploy a variation of the old dualism between the universal and the particular understood more technically, however, as reproducibility vs specificity. My goal is to show how this approach, which considers means of production rather

[12] Boris Tomashevskii, "Literature and Biography," in *Readings in Russian Poetics*, ed. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Ann Arbor: Dept. of Slavic Languages and Literatures, 1962; repr., Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2002), 47. Page references are to the 2002 edition.
[13] Ibid., 47-48.
[14] Walter Benjamin addressed the issue of the author as producer in a speech delivered at the Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris, on April 27, 1934. See Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 1998), 85-103.

than form, may be more useful to understanding collective works on both the external (authorship) and the internal level (structure, *fabula*, characters, etc.). Moreover, I have selected the genre of the novel due to four primary considerations: first, "[n]o other literary form has proved so pliable and adaptable to a seemingly endless variety of topics and themes";[15] second, it offers a corpus of collectively written works that have never been investigated in scholarship; third, unlike other literary genres, such as newspapers or *stengazety* (wall newspapers), which are collective by definition, the novel has been more conventionally resistant to the practice of collective writing; and fourth, the novel was and is largely perceived as the literary birthplace of the bourgeois hero.[16]

This is not to say, however, that I have in mind another reiteration of Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia or that any discourse is inherently dialogic due to its recasting of a previous utterance. I do not wish to imply that there is always a discursive collectivity at work even in individual authorship[17] or that the author is really dead. By applying these later theories of authorship, we risk performing a simple mathematical operation, called the "commutative property," on literary texts. That is, we risk reducing everything to the product of collective creativity just as the nineteenth century scholar might have reduced all works to the product of individual genius. From a more broadly popular theoretical perspective, we can indeed argue that any text is interwoven with previously written texts. However, my primary interest does not lie

[15] John A. Cuddon, "Novel," in *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, rev. ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 431.
[16] György Lukács defines the novel a "large epic form, the most typical genre of bourgeois society." ("…большая эпическая форма, самый типичный жанр буржуазного общества.") See György Lukács, "Roman," in *Literaturnaia entsiklopediia*, ed. A. V. Lunacharskii et al., vol. 9 (Moskva: Gosudarstvennyi Institut «Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia», 1935), 773.
[17] "There is always a collectivity, even when you are alone." Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?" in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, 15th ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 152.

in understanding collective creativity as a practice performed by a single subject or how the myth of the solitary romantic genius has been questioned.[18] If the idea of the authorial voice had to go through a reevaluation in early Socialist Russia, in collective creativity, the issue is problematic even if one adheres to the conception that a literary work is the product of individual genius. If the text is not reducible to a single authorial source, then can we argue that a collective mode of writing inevitably results in texts with multiple centers of gravity and multiple sites of enunciation or, to use a much abused word in literary theory, "polyphony"? What are the implications for plot-oriented works? Should we understand collective creativity as the cause or the effect of the idea that "[p]lot-oriented prose still exists and will continue to exist, but it has been consigned to the attic,"[19] as Shklovsky wrote in *Tret'ia fabrika* (Third Factory) in 1926? My larger point is that authors are not fully dead: a process of their dissolution can be compared to what, in mathematical terms, is defined as a "limit", i.e., a value (in this case—zero) that a function "approaches" without ever reaching it. The coherence of authorial voice never reaches its apex or nadir; it never quite dissolves, but it always keeps some traces of its individuality, generating a palimpsest of authorship. In this dissertation, I will uncover these traces by looking at how multiple authorial voices overlap in collectively produced texts, annulling, echoing, and amplifying each other. I will show how the idea of the collective, as something inextricably and ontologically linked to the proletariat as a class and one of the founding narratives of Socialist society, played out in the novelistic production of the two decades separating the October Revolution of 1917 from the advent of Socialist Realism as official practice in 1934. My focus

[18] See Jack Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
[19] Viktor Shklovsky, *Third Factory*, trans. Richard Sheldon (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1977), 4.

will be on those instances in which a group of individuals, intentionally or unintentionally,[20] physically penned the same literary work. In other words, my move is counterposed to Michel Foucault's claim that each author should be understood as a function, "as a site of cultural power rather than as a particular individual."[21] I am interested in the author as a specific individual.

This leads directly to the third consideration that I will pursue in this dissertation: the tension between biographical and literary personality (*biograficheskaia i literaturnaia lichnost'*).[22] From the point of view of literary evolution, Soviet collective creativity can be perceived as the struggle between two conflicting tendencies: on the one hand, its democratization of authorship can be understood as a resurgence of anonymity following the bourgeois ascendency of "the individualization of creativity—an epoch which cultivated subjectivism in the artistic process,"[23] in this case, embodied by the proletarian whole (*tseloe*); on the other hand, the same democratization of authorship, especially in the early 1930s, can be viewed as the celebration of the individual, since each specific personality (*lichnost'*) is now empowered to tell his or her own story. The rationale of a project such as *History of Factories and Plants*[24]—a literary manifestation of what the entire nation feels towards the Party and the

[20] On the topic of multiple authorship and intentionality, see Paisley Livingston, "Authorship, Individual and Collective," chap. 3 in *Art and Intention: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), and Darren H. Hick, "Authorship, Co-Authorship, and Multiple Authorship," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 72, no. 2 (2014): 147-156.
[21] Linda K. Karell, introduction to *Writing Together/Writing Apart: Collaboration in Western American Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), xii.
[22] On the problem of biography and creative personality in the 1920s, besides the already cited essay by Tomashevskii, see Viktor Zhirmunskii, *Vvedenie v literaturovedenie: kurs lektsii*, ed. Z. I. Plavskin and V. V. Zhirmunskaia (Sankt-Peterburg: Izd-vo S.-Peterburgskogo un-ta, 1996), 100-59, and Grigorii Vinokur, "Biografiia kak nauchnaia problema: Tezisy doklada," in *Biografiia i kul'tura: russkoe stsenicheskoe proiznoshenie*, ed. N. N. Rozanova (Moskva: Russkie slovari, 1997), 11-13. In the same anthology, see also "Biografiia i kul'tura," 17-88. For an overview of the various approaches to the study of biography in the same period, see Dmitri Kalugin, "Soviet Theories of Biography and the Aesthetics of Personality," *Biography* 38, no. 3 (2015): 343-62, and Angela Brintlinger, "Lives and Facts: Biography in Russia in the 1920s," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 96, no. 1 (2018): 94-116.
[23] Tomashevskii, *Literature and Biography*, 48.
[24] I will analyze these volumes in chapter six.

construction of Socialism—is not much different from the finality of the ode, but it was produced, in terms of both authorship and textual structure, using a radically opposed method. There is an intrinsic and irreducible tension in collectively-written literary works: on the one hand, these texts seem to share a willingness to bypass individuality, to loosen the—historically and socially determined—ties that inextricably link a text to its author and therefore to question the *auctoritas* that a given individual claims over a literary creation; on the other hand, for the same reasons, by blurring and defamiliarizing the very notion of authorship, by putting a mask on it, by multiplying it, they end up magnifying what they seem to conceal.

If the claim of the period that "in the shift from one historical epoch to another, the problem of artistic personality shows up in a different way"[25] remains true, how does authorship situate itself in a society in which the collective acquires new significance and weight – in which the "artistic personality" is to be embodied by the proletariat? Indeed, the "dethroning of the 'creative personality'"[26] was one of the dominant theoretical problems of the early twentieth century until Socialist Realism was introduced as its only acceptable solution and the creative personality as such was deemed unsuitable to Party-minded literature.[27] If the Revolution represented a "shift from one historical epoch to another" in which "the artistic personality shows up in a different way," then building a Socialist society also meant reconsidering the role of the old bourgeois author vis-à-vis the collective. In the shift from the novel as the narrative locus of the bourgeois hero to a Socialist literature that should "reflect[] reality moving from the

[25] See Iurii Libedinskii, "K voprosu o lichnosti khudozhnika," *Na postu*, no. 1 (1924): 39. ("При смене исторических эпох, проблема личности художника каждый раз ставится по иному.")
[26] Petre Petrov, *Automatic for the Masses: The Death of the Author and the Birth of Socialist Realism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 39.
[27] Evgeny Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Writer*, 178.

worldview of the proletariat as a class,"[28] the question arises as to how the proletariat should be depicted, by whom, and how these new "proletarian heroes" should inhabit a traditionally bourgeois genre. Rather than (re)consider the death of the author, this dissertation will look at how the novelistic genre changed in order to accommodate a different genus of "literary personality" and how the death of the (bourgeois) hero was the first step necessary to accomplish the narrative goals of the organized proletariat.

* * *

In 1983, Yugoslav author Danilo Kiš published a collection of short stories titled *Enciklopedija mrtvih* (The Encyclopedia of the Dead). In the story of the same name, the protagonist, during a visit to the Swedish Royal Library, stumbles upon the only existing copy of *The Encyclopedia of the Dead*, which contains "everything that can be recorded concerning those who have completed their earthly journey and set off on the eternal one."[29] Every single individual who lived after 1789 and whose name has not appeared in any other book becomes the protagonist of an entry in which his own life is the *fabula*. The volumes are compiled by a religious sect "whose democratic program stresses an egalitarian vision of the world of the dead"[30] and aims at "granting all God's creatures an equal place in eternity."[31] From this point of view, the raison d'être of *The Encyclopedia of the Dead* is to give voice to those whom Hesiod called *nonymnoi,* the "nameless,"[32] since every single story of every single individual acquires

[28] E. Koval'chik, "Proletarskaia sotsialisticheskaia literatura." In *Literaturnaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 9, 290. ("…литература, отражающая действительность с позиций и мировоззрения пролетариата как класса…").
[29] Danilo Kiš, "The Encyclopedia of the Dead," in *The Encyclopedia of the Dead*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1989), 43. For the original Serbian, see Danilo Kiš, *Enciklopedija mrtvih* (Zagreb: Globus; Beograd: Prosveta, 1983).
[30] Ibid., 44.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Guido Mazzoni, *Teoria del romanzo* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2011), 37. English translation: *Theory of the Novel*, trans. Zakiya Hanafi (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

the right to be narrated and bequeathed to posterity. Its rationale is antithetical to the epic, in which only those who perform great deeds earn the honor of being remembered. *The Encyclopedia of the Dead* is the literary apotheosis of the nameless and voiceless.

In a similar way, the frontispiece of O. Henry's collection of short stories titled *The Four Million* (1906) bears the inscription: "Not very lony [*sic*] ago some one invented the assertion that there were only 'Four Hundred' people in New York City who were really worth noticing. But a wiser man has arisen—the census taker—and his larger estimate of human interest has been preferred in marking out the field of these little stories of the 'Four Million'."[33] Despite O. Henry's project deals with the living and is slightly less ambitious than Kiš's totalizing narrative, the underlying ideology of the two literary works is the same: just as *The Encyclopedia of the Dead* gives voice to every single deceased, even—and most importantly—to those who lived unremarkably, O. Henry rejects the idea that only a small fraction of the population of New York is "worth noticing," and therefore proceeds to narrate the "little stories" of the ones left out.[34]

Soviet collective novels ultimately aimed at achieving this: the creation of an encyclopedia of the living.

[33] O. Henry, *The Four Million* (New York: McClure, Phillips & Co., 1906).
[34] In the 1920s, O. Henry was one of the most popular American writers in the Soviet Union. Indeed, Viktor Shklovsky, in the introduction to his aborted project "O sovremennoi russkoi proze" (On Contemporary Russian Prose), provocatively reminds the reader that the most popular Russian authors (not *in* Russia) were Jack London, O. Henry and Pierre Benoit. See Viktor Shklovsky, *Gamburgskii schet: stat'i, vospominaniia, esse, 1914-1933*, ed. A. IU. Galushkin and A. P. Chudakov (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990), 192. After the appearance of the first translations in 1923, O. Henry became one of the most widely read writers, with over 750,000 copies published in the next few years. See Deming Brown, "O. Henry in Russia," *The Russian Review* 12, no. 4 (1953): 253.

CHAPTER 1

ON COLLECTIVE CREATIVITY

The proletariat is, at its essence, collective.

Valerian Pletnev, "On Collective Creativity."[35]

Practice, Cognition, and Conveyor Belts

This laconic opening line of a short article penned by Valerian Pletnev and published in the journal *Gorn* in 1920, an official organ of Prolekult, aptly summarizes one of the founding tenets of early Soviet ideology as a whole: the idea that collectivism and the proletariat as a social class are inextricably and ontologically linked. While the meaning of the word "proletariat" does not lend itself to misleading interpretations, however, how should one understand the word "collective"? Within a simple Marxist framework, it conveys an immediate, intuitive meaning: since social being determines individual consciousness and not the other way around, the proletariat is a collective entity because its *mode of economic production* is inherently collective. However, the question remains as to how the meaning of the word shifted over time from the second half of the nineteenth century, when the word *kollektivizm* first penetrated the Russian lexicon, to the early 1930s, when it was being used on Soviet soil. What about *tvorchestvo*, then? If we opt, as we did, for "creativity," a common English translation of the word—with *kollektivnoe tvorchestvo* therefore becoming "collective creativity"—"creativity" also allows for a vast array of possible interpretations. This issue can be reformulated in multiple ways, each carrying a specific nuance: How much of a given work can be ascribed to a single author? How much *auctoritas* can a single author claim over *his* literary work? How much

[35] "Пролетариат коллективен по существу."
Valerian Pletnev, "O kollektivnom tvorchestve," *Gorn*, no. 5 (1920): 55.

"genius", to use a "word-signal" (*slovo-signal*) of Romanticism, is accountable for the creation of an original literary work? Without transforming this into a chain resembling Umberto Eco's "infinite semiosis"[36] (what does it mean to claim *auctoritas* over a text, what does it mean for a literary work to be "original," what is a "genius", etc…), in this chapter, I will briefly investigate the meaning of the words *kollektiv* and *kollektivizm* ("collective" and "collectivism", respectively) in Russian and Soviet society since they came into use in the second half of the nineteenth century. I will then show how "collective creativity" was understood after the October Revolution by tracing the intersection of three key concepts: first, what was understood by *kollektiv* and *kollektivizm* in Soviet culture; second, how the proletariat functioned as a collective entity; and third, what was involved in the production of literature.[37] In doing so, I will draw on material primarily from social psychology and literary criticism. My goal is to show how the concept of "collective creativity" evolved and how ideas from other scientific discourses might have contributed to shaping the understanding of its meaning. This will allow me to create a road map for subsequent chapters, in which I will show how this fluid dynamic was reflected in the novelistic discourse of the 1920s and early 1930s and how it can be used as a lens through which investigate its evolution.

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[36] The concept of "infinite (or unlimited) semiosis," introduced by Umberto Eco to unpack an implicit corollary in Charles Peirce's semiosis, should be understood as such: "Since the *immediate object*, in principle, is the sum of all the interpretants of a given sign, it follows that only partial cognitions are possible, in the sense that we can asymptotically approach a meaning without ever being able to grasp its overall essence. This is why semiosis is, by definition, infinite: because, as a matter of fact, one can, potentially, endlessly resort to new interpretants." ("Essendo l'Oggetto Immediato, in linea di principio, l'insieme di tutti gli interpretanti di un certo segno, ne consegue che sono possibili solo conoscenze parziali, nel senso che possiamo avvicinarci in modo asintotico a un significato senza poterne coglierne l'essenza complessiva. Ecco perché la semiosi è, per definizione, illimitata: perché il ricorso agli interpretanti è, per l'appunto, potenzialmente infinito.") See Stefano Traini, *Le due vie della semiotica: teorie strutturali e interpretative* (Milano: Bompiani, 2009), 229.

[37] For these reasons, besides reasons of genre, I will not analyze earlier manifestations of "collective creativity" in literature, such as the works by Koz'ma Prutkov, the fictional author invented by Aleksei Tolstoi and the Zhemchuzhnikov brothers in the second half of the nineteenth century.

There are two fundamental questions around which the debate over collective creativity in newspapers and literary journals of the time revolved. First: To what extent is writing inherently an individual matter? And, second, as its far-reaching corollary: How should writing be practiced? – e.g., as an intellectual activity within the larger framework of the idea of the collective; as an effective representation of the proletarian worldview; as the direct output of the group of people in charge of industrial production, etc. Those who tried to answer these two questions occupied two opposing camps, with a vast gray area between them. For some, this meant "collective creativity" understood as the "discussion" of individual ideas in a collective environment at events organized for this very purpose, such as various meetings (*zasedaniia*), including production meetings (*proizvodstvennye soveshchaniia*). The outcome of this approach, often still penned by an individual author, is nonetheless the product of the collective effort of a group of people, who provide the self-employed craftsman (*kustar'-odinochka*) with new ideas and help him ideologically reframe, polish, or discard his "raw material." On the other hand—and this view would often be associated, especially by their opponents, with the "corrupted" ideas of Aleksandr Bogdanov, the Proletkult, and LEF—collective creativity could be attempted within the larger framework of "production collectives" (*proizvodstvennye kollektivy*), i.e., the scientific division of labor under the supervision of the Party tasked with collectively creating, or rather producing, as if on a conveyor belt, the literary work. For obvious reasons, this idea would gain moment during the years of collectivization and the reconstruction of the economy. Yet these two opposing fields do not exhaust all available visions of collective creativity belonging to the time: for instance, as I will show in the last chapter, the volumes of *History of Factories and Plants*, the most significant collective literary project on a large scale ever initiated in the Soviet Union, would be the result of a yet another variation of collective creativity that, to a certain

extent, compromised between but also exceeded the two views outlined above. But let us return to what the words "collectivism" and "collective" meant in pre- and early Soviet society.

Despite giving a name to a core but fluid belief advanced by early Soviet ideology, the notion of collectivism predated the Revolution by several decades. Before Soviet collectivism sought to establish "a utopian culture of the future"[38] lining society's path to Communism, the word had already been encrusted with several contrasting meanings beginning in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In the decades preceding the Revolution, it was employed with mystical overtones in the Bogdanovian understanding of the proletarian body as an immortal entity overcoming the transience of the individual; in studies such as Anatolii Lunacharskii's *Religiia i sotsializm* (Religion and Socialism) of 1908; in the Symbolists' metaphysical abstractions; and in the idea of collectivism as "a synonym of socialism"[39] circulating among the workers themselves by the beginning of the twentieth century. This last meaning became even more prominent during the syndicalist experience after the aborted Revolution of 1905. In fact, even though it is unlikely that most workers were aware of the intellectual debates around *kollektivizm* in literary journals and politics, "they encountered similar language and argument in more accessible and popular settings and texts."[40] Nurtured by events such as the Paris Commune of 1871, the word had migrated to Russia from France, and it was the repository of several different political discourses. In the 1895 edition of the *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'* (Encyclopedic Dictionary), the entry "Kollektivizm" is penned by N. I. Veselovskii, who writes:

> The word "collectivism" does not have in scholarship one standard meaning. In the narrow sense of the word it indicates a particular school of thought of writers of Socialist

[38] Robert C. Williams, "Collective Immortality: The Syndicalist Origins of Proletarian Culture, 1905-1910," *Slavic Review* 39, no. 3 (1980): 389.
[39] See Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 76.
[40] See Mark D. Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910-1925* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 66.

> orientation who espoused the term "collectivists" in order to differentiate themselves from the other socialists; conversely, in a broader sense, it is used as a word having either the same meaning as socialism or a slightly different yet similar meaning to the latter. [41]

Veselovskii claims that the word was used for the first time by the French economist, Constantin Pecqueur, also cited by Marx in *Capital*, who argues for what he calls, in French, "*socialization*" (*sotsializatsiia* in Russian)[42] of capital and "of all the productive forces of nature, tools of labor and credit."[43] This would eventually help create a more just and prosperous society. Nikolai Kareev supports Veselovskii's claim when he observes: "The term "collectivism" seems to appear for the first time in Pecqueur's *Théorie nouvelle sociale et économique*, which came out in 1842."[44] For our purposes, though, it is important to highlight that Pecqueur opposed communism,[45] since, for him, communism impinged on personal freedom. This dynamic communism vs collectivism is indeed one of the most striking examples of how the word's meaning radically shifted over time: moving forward to 1938, the year in which the thirty-third volume of the *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia* (The Great Soviet Encyclopedia) was published and the project of *History of Factories and Plants* officially discontinued, collectivism and Communism (with a capital letter already) have now become synonyms: upon searching for

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[41] N. I. Veselovskii, "Kollektivizm," in *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*, ed. K. K. Arsen'ev and E. E. Petrushevskii, vol. 15 (S.-Peterburg: I. A. Efron, 1895), 699. ("Слово К. не имѣетъ въ литературѣ одного общепринятаго значенія. Въ узкомъ смыслѣ оно обозначаетъ ученіе особой школы писателей соціалистическаго направленія, присвоившихъ себѣ названіе коллективистовъ въ отличіе отъ остальныхъ соціалистовъ; въ широкомъ - оно употребляется или какъ совершенно равнозначущее слову соціализмъ, или съ нѣсколько своеобразнымъ, но близкимъ къ послѣднему значеніемъ.")
[42] On Pecquer's concept of "socialization," see Clément Coste, "Inventorier et inventer la société. Constantin Pecqueur (1801-1887): expertise sociale et processus de Socialisation." *L'Année sociologique* 67, no. 2 (2017): 423-52.
[43] Veselovskii, "Kollektivizm," 15:699. ("…всѣхъ производит. силъ природы, орудій труда и кредита.")
[44] Nikolai Kareev, *Istoria zapadnoi Evropy v novoe vremia*, vol. 6 (S.-Peterburg: Tip. M. M. Stasiulevicha, 1910), 510. ("Терминъ 'коллективизмъ' впервые встрѣчается, кажется, въ вышедшей въ свѣтъ въ 1842 г. 'Théorie nouvelle sociale et économique' Пеккёра.")
[45] Veselovskii, "Kollektivizm," 15:699.

the term *kollektivizm*, the reader is simply redirected to the entry "Communism."[46] Collectivism could also be a synonym of anarchism: in 1895, the year in which Veselovskii penned the entry "Kollektivizm" in the *Encyclopedic Dictionary*, Georgii Plekhanov published his seminal work *Anarkhism i sotsializm* (Anarchy and Socialism). In his polemical chapter against Bakunin, he disapprovingly cites a distinction made by his opponent at The Workers' Congress of Brussels in 1869 after being accused of being a Communist:

> I have been reproached with being a Communist. What difference, I have been asked, is there between Communism and Collectivism. I am really astounded that M. Chaudey does not understand this difference, he who is the testamentary executor of Proudhon! I detest Communism, because it is the negation of liberty, and I cannot conceive anything human without liberty. I am not a Communist, because Communism concentrates and causes all the forces of society to be absorbed by the State, because it necessarily ends in the centralisation of property in the hands of the State, while I desire the abolition of the State — the radical extirpation of this principle of the authority and the tutelage of the State, which, under the pretext of moralising and civilising men, has until now enslaved, oppressed, exploited, and depraved them. I desire the organization of society and of collective or social property from below upwards, by means of free association, and not from above downwards by means of some authority of some sort. Desiring the abolition of the State, I desire the abolition of property individually hereditary, which is nothing but an institution of the State, nothing but a result of the principle of the State. ***This is the sense, gentlemen, in which I am a Collectivist, and not at all a Communist***.[47]

Plekhanov also points out that "the word 'Collectivism' was used at this period in a sense altogether opposed to that which it now has in the mouths of the French Marxists"[48] and that "the most prominent champion of 'Collectivism' was at this time Michel Bakounine."[49] The word became part of the political lexicon used in Russian journals in the mid-1860s and, having been imported from France, it was understood as a concept diametrically opposed to Communism. Yet the meaning of the term was still very fluid: it was used, for instance, in a more philosophical

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[46] O. IU. Shmidt, ed., "Kollektivizm," in *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 33 (Moskva: Gosudarstvennyi Institut «Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia», 1938), 384.
[47] George Plechanoff, "Bakounine," in *Anarchism and Socialism*, trans. Eleanor Marx Aveling (London: The twentieth century press, 1906), 48.
[48] Ibid., 47.
[49] Ibid.

sense, in discussions over the difference between German and Slavic collectivism as opposed to Dutch individualism, or in connection with agrarian reforms. For instance, in an article published in *Narodnaia Volia* on October 11-12, 1885 the two meanings—collectivism as a marker of a specific *ethnos* or class and collectivism as a mode of production in agriculture—are juxtaposed: "Besides, England, where the peasants are as deprived of land as the city's working classes are of jobs, but where the idea of agrarian reforms are as popular among the mass of peasants as the idea of collectivism is among the mass of workers, is much closer to an agrarian Revolution than France, the country of small owners, or socialist Germany."[50] This version of collectivism as an initially agrarian concept finds validation in *Russkii entsiklopedicheskii slovar'* (Russian Encyclopedic Dictionary), where one can read: "Collectivism is a recent term. It appears that the first to have used it was Colins in Belgium, although his collectivism was primarily agrarian."[51]



Illustration 1. Schoolchildren. Print. Frontispiece in Lev Tolstoy, *The Complete Works of Count Tolstoy*, trans. and ed. Leo Wiener, vol. 4 (Boston: D. Estes & company, 1904).

[50] B. Bazilevskii [Vasilii Bogucharskii], ed., "Literatura partii Narodnoi Voli," 2nd ed. (S.-Peterburg: Energiia, 1907), 185. ("А на ряду съ этимъ Англія, гдѣ крестьяне такъ же обезземелены, какъ обездолены городскіе рабочіе классы, но гдѣ идеи аграрныхъ реформъ такъ же популярны въ массѣ крестьянства, какъ идеи коллективизма въ массѣ рабочихъ, стоитъ гораздо ближе къ аграрному перевороту, чѣмъ страна мелкихъ собственниковъ, Франція, или соціалистическая Германія.")

[51] See Sharl' Zhid, *Osnovy politicheskoi ekonomii*, ed. V. F. Totomiants, trans. Viktor Serezhnikov (Moskva: Studencheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1916), 437. ("Коллективизмъ датируетъ съ недавняго времени. Первымъ, повидимому, употребилъ этотъ терминъ Коленъ въ Бельгіи [1850 г.], но его коллективизмъ былъ преимущественно аграрнымъ.")

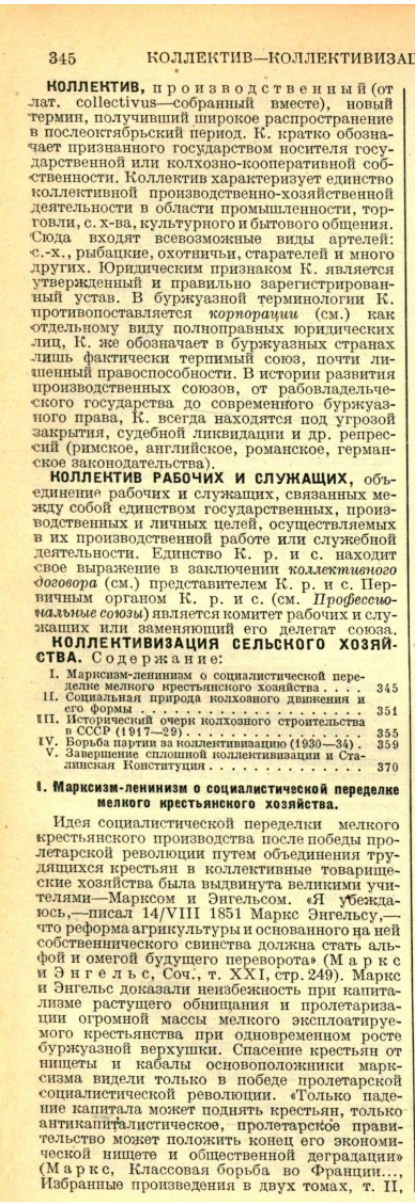
Such collectivism of the land-bound peasantry had its literary counterpart in Lev Tolstoy's vision of "collective creativity." In his 1862 pedagogical essay "Komu u kogo uchit'sia pisat', krest'ianskim rebiatam u nas, ili nam u krest'ianskikh rebiat?" (Are the Peasant Children to Learn to Write from Us? Or, are we to Learn from the Peasant Children?), Tolstoy describes how, as a teacher in a local rural school, he was struggling to find a way to teach peasant children how to write. He claimed that the children could not understand art and that they could not comprehend why one should write in the first place. Then he came up with the following "method" (*priem*):[52] by resorting to popular sayings, he asked his pupils to collectively write a story that would justify or explain a specific proverb. In the following pages, Tolstoy minutely describes the process of collective creativity, how every child became deeply interested and participated in the composition, with Fed'ka and Semka being the most active contributors. For Tolstoy, the main point was, obviously, to show how anything written by these peasant children would surpass anything he or any other writer would ever be able to put on paper, since children were only concerned with "artistic truth" *(khudozhestvennaia pravda*)[53] and were naturally endowed with the "chief quality in every art, the feeling of measure [*chuvstvo mery*]."[54] But, at the same time, he offers the reader a detailed description of how creativity functions, how the children understood the process as something similar to an assembly line, unconsciously dividing tasks among themselves: "Sémka needed mainly objective pictures . . . but Fédka had to evoke

[52] Leo Tolstoy, "Are the Peasant Children to Learn to Write from Us? Or, are we to Learn from the Peasant Children." In *The Complete Works of Count Tolstoy*, trans. and ed. Leo Wiener, vol. 4 (Boston: D. Estes & company, 1904), 192; Lev Tolstoi, "Komu u kogo uchit'sia pisat', krest'ianskim rebiatam u nas, ili nam u krest'ianskikh rebiat?," in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, ed. V. G. Chertkov, vol. 8 (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo «Khudozhestvennaia literatura», 1936), 302.
[53] Tolstoy, "Are the Peasant Children to Learn to Write from Us?," 194; Tolstoi, "Komu u kogo uchit'sia pisat'," 303.
[54] Tolstoy, "Are the Peasant Children to Learn to Write from Us?," 197; Tolstoi, "Komu u kogo uchit'sia pisat'," 305.

the feeling of pity with which he himself was permeated."[55] In Tolstoy, two distinct instances of creativity seem to coexist: while, on the one hand, we have the collaborative effort of the children, on the other each child contributes to the story according to his own predisposition, with a specific hierarchy soon emerging and with the most talented children eventually doing the job. This is important because one of the goals for Tolstoy is to show how the writing process contemplates multiple and, at times, antithetical presuppositions, with Semka being more detail-oriented and Fed'ka displaying a more vivid, poetic imagination. In this dynamic—collective creativity as a shared worldview among peasant children, the discussion in class of the given topic, the division of "labor" according to individual capabilities and talent, etc.—many key narratives concerning collective creativity emerge that, as we will see, would be debated sixty years later. Before engaging with the notion of the proletariat as a collective entity, let us now turn briefly from the abstract noun, *kollektivizm*, to its concrete form, *kollektiv*, as it was used during the same period.

While the word *kollektivizm* had from the outset strong political connotations, the word "collective" (*kollektiv*) was not a politically charged word,[56] and it "was registered as part of stable usage only by dictionaries published after 1934."[57] In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the term was used instead by social psychologists to identify the actions performed by a group of people.[58] According to Lloyd H. Strickland, a *kollektiv* was understood

[55] Tolstoy, "Are the Peasant Children to Learn to Write from Us?," 195.
[56] For a detailed analysis of the evolution of the word *kollektiv* until the 1930s, see Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*, 76-97.
[57] Ibid., 76.
[58] See Ekaterina A. Budilova, "On the History of Social Psychology in Russia," in *Directions in Soviet Social Psychology*, ed. Lloyd H. Strickland, trans. Eugenia Lockwood, Nadine Thurston and Inna Gavlin (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1984), 11-28.



345 КОЛЛЕКТИВ—КОЛЛЕКТИВИЗАЦ

КОЛЛЕКТИВ, производственный (от лат. collectivus—собранный вместе), новый термин, получивший широкое распространение в послеоктябрьский период. К. кратко обозначает признанного государством носителя государственной или колхозно-кооперативной собственности. Коллектив характеризует единство коллективной производственно-хозяйственной деятельности в области промышленности, торговли, с. х-ва, культурного и бытового общения. Сюда входят всевозможные виды артелей: с.-х., рыбацкие, охотничьи, старателей и много других. Юридическим признаком К. является утвержденный и правильно зарегистрированный устав. В буржуазной терминологии К. противопоставляется *корпорации* (см.) как отдельному виду полноправных юридических лиц, К. же обозначает в буржуазных странах лишь фактически терпимый союз, почти лишенный правоспособности. В истории развития производственных союзов, от рабовладельческого государства до современного буржуазного права, К. всегда находятся под угрозой закрытия, судебной ликвидации и др. репрессий (римское, английское, романское, германское законодательства).

КОЛЛЕКТИВ РАБОЧИХ И СЛУЖАЩИХ, объединение рабочих и служащих, связанных между собой единством государственных, производственных и личных целей, осуществляемых в их производственной работе или служебной деятельности. Единство К. р. и с. находит свое выражение в заключении *коллективного договора* (см.) представителем К. р. и с. Первичным органом К. р. и с. (см. *Профессиональные союзы*) является комитет рабочих и служащих или заменяющий его делегат союза.

КОЛЛЕКТИВИЗАЦИЯ СЕЛЬСКОГО ХОЗЯЙСТВА. Содержание:

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I. Марксизм-ленинизм о социалистической переделке мелкого крестьянского хозяйства.

Идея социалистической переделки мелкого крестьянского производства после победы пролетарской революции путем объединения трудящихся крестьян в коллективные товарищеские хозяйства была выдвинута великими учителями—Марксом и Энгельсом. «Я убеждаюсь,—писал 14/VIII 1851 Маркс Энгельсу,—что реформа агрикультуры и основанного на ней собственнического свинства должна стать альфой и омегой будущего переворота» (Маркс и Энгельс, Соч., т. XXI, стр. 249). Маркс и Энгельс доказали неизбежность при капитализме растущего обнищания и пролетаризации огромной массы мелкого эксплоатируемого крестьянства при одновременном росте буржуазной верхушки. Спасение крестьян от нищеты и кабалы основоположники марксизма видели только в победе пролетарской социалистической революции. «Только падение капитала может поднять крестьян, только антикапиталистическое, пролетарское правительство может положить конец его экономической нищете и общественной деградации» (Маркс, Классовая борьба во Франции..., Избранные произведения в двух томах, т. II,

Illustration 2. Entry of the term "Kollektiv" in *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 33 (Moskva: Gosudarstvennyi Institut «Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia», 1938).

as "a group defined by common activity and a common goal, united by a common mood"[59] and, since social psychology "seems to have been built around the problem of dealing with society's irritants,"[60] was often used to refer to groups of criminals. According to Ekaterina Budilova, the first person to use the term *kollektiv* with this connotation was N. N. Iadrintsev, a journalist and explorer of Siberia who, arrested under charges of "Siberian separatism," was sent to the Arkhangel region in exile.[61] It was Iandritsev who, in 1874, used the word *kollektiv* as a "social psychological concept applicable to the community of criminals."[62] Therefore, at first a *kollektiv* is a disorganized group of people (primarily criminals) that reacts to external stimuli.[63] Having subsequently acquired a political coloring as a synonym for a Party cell (*iacheika*),[64] the original usage of *kollektiv* slowly became obsolete and, by 1932, when the first volumes of *History of Factories and Plants* were published, it was already framed and monopolized by the larger idea of collectivization of the economy. This latter meaning is what one will encounter

[59] Lloyd H. Strickland, "Russian and Soviet Social Psychology," *Canadian Psychology* 32, no. 4 (October 1991): 583.
[60] Ibid., 581.
[61] See Budilova, "On the History of Social Psychology in Russia," 18-19.
[62] Strickland, "Russian and Soviet Social Psychology," 581.
[63] We will address the implications of this statement in the next chapter, when we investigate the role of the crowd in Soviet novels of the early 1920s.
[64] Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*, 82.

upon searching for the word in the 1938 edition of *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia* (The Great Soviet Encyclopedia), in which the word *proizvodstvennyi* becomes its appendage.

When, however, did the proletariat become a "collective"? In his article, "Collective Immortality: the Syndicalist Origins of Proletarian Culture, 1905-1910", Robert Williams claims that the failed Revolution of 1905 was an important catalyst in this sense.[65] In other words, as Kharkhordin puts it, "the syndicalist experience of the Bolsheviks during the abortive revolution of 1905 had made them receptive to the idea of the proletariat as a collective body."[66] Within this framework, the individual matters as long as he is also relatable to a crowd of people and his specificity to the larger body of the collective. *Ocherki filosofii kollektivizma* (Essays on the Philosophy of Collectivism), published in Saint Petersburg in the summer of 1909, was the first anthology devoted to a philosophical investigation of the concept of collectivism and to its connection with the proletariat.[67] The volume, which came out for the publishing house *Znanie*, upon which Maksim Gorky had a major influence, features essays by Aleksandr Bogdanov, Vladimir Bazarov, Anatolii Lunacharskii, and Gorky himself.[68] As openly stated in the editors'

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[65] Robert C. Williams, "Collective Immortality: The Syndicalist Origins of Proletarian Culture, 1905-1910." *Slavic Review* 39, no. 3 (1980): 389-402.

[66] Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*, 78-79. Here Kharkhordin is paraphrasing Williams' argument.

[67] See *Ocherki filosofii kollektivizma* (S.-Peterburg: Znanie, 1909). Bogdanov had talked about collectivism in previous works, such as *Empiriomonizm* (1904) and *Ocherki po filosofii marksizma* (1908). *Ocherki filosofii kollektivizma* can be considered a reply to Lenin's *Materializm i empiriokrititsizm*, in which Lenin attacked Bogdanov's *Empiriokrititsizm* for his distorted "version" of Marxism before expelling him from the Bolshevik faction, thus officially ratifying a schism within Russian Marxist thought.

[68] This volume was the first important work in which the seeds of future political and philosophical debates over the meaning of collective creativity can be found. In the opening essay titled "Nauka i filosofiia" (Science and Philosophy), written in the form of four Socratic dialogues, Bogdanov, using the pseudonym N. Verner, puts forward an argument that, stripped of its Marxist overtones, can be fruitfully compared to what would become a common understanding of collective creativity: in a dialogue over the nature of the contribution of the individual genius to human progress, one of the two interlocutors points out that even Copernicus, considered by the other interlocutor the prototype of the misunderstood genius who stands by his unconventional truth, could not debunk geocentrism without scientific data that were the "fruit of collective creation" (плодъ коллективнаго творчества). Therefore, the first interlocutor

introduction to the volume, the overarching idea is that one of the distinguishing features of the proletariat's worldview is its collectivist nature: "Our main argument is the following: the worldview of the proletariat as a class—the embryo of the universal ideology of future society—is represented, in its very essence, by collectivism, a full, absolute collectivism of practice and cognition."[69] This ontological dimension is precisely what links Bogdanov's claim that the worldview of the proletariat "in its very essence" (*po svoei sushchnosti*) a collective one to Pletnev's statement that the proletariat is collective "at its essence" (*po sushchestvu*). Moreover, this claim vividly captures a crucial aspect of Bogdanov's early thought: for Bogdanov, "'collectivism' was the psychology of the working class, its consciousness of itself as a class."[70] As an interior and ontologically constitutive counterpart to their outward experience in modern industrial societies, Bogdanov argues that the collectivism of practice (or praxis) and cognition (*praktika i poznanie*) among the proletariat is an "endemic"[71] trait of its worldview. Believing that "the essence of all processes, in nature and in history, reposed in organization,"[72] Bogdanov understood practice and cognition as collectively organized processes. He believed that everything, including scientific knowledge, can be reduced to a strategy for organizing human experience. In his view, the very notion of the individual self was a strategy intended to organize

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claims, "Copernicus was just an instrument of this social subject" (Коперникъ былъ только орудіемъ этого соціальнаго субъекта). See N. Verner, "Nauka i filosofiia," in *Ocherki filosofii kollektivizma* (S.-Peterburg: Znanie, 1909), 30-31. In other words, the individual could be understood, in Nikolai Bukharin's words, as "a mass of compressed and tightly interwoven social influences." Quoted in René Fülöp-Miller, *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism: An Examination of Cultural Life in Soviet Russia*, trans. F. S. Flint and D. F. Tait (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1928), 6.

[69] Foreword to *Ocherki filosofii kollektivizma*, 5. ("Основная мысль, изъ которой мы исходимъ, такова: классовое пролетарское міровоззрѣніе—зародышъ всечеловѣческой идеологіи будущаго общество—по своей сущности представляетъ *коллективизмъ*,—полный, рѣшительный коллективизмъ практики и познанія.")

[70] Jutta Scherrer, "The Cultural Hegemony of the Proletariat: The Origins of Bogdanov's Vision of Proletarian Culture," *Studies in History* 5, no. 2 (1989), 202.

[71] Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination*, 107.

[72] Scherrer, "The Cultural Hegemony of the Proletariat," 206.

economic production and social life based on competition, which belonged to an ontological hypothesis that capitalist societies, with their focus on egoistic and antagonistic individualism, agreed upon and to which they assigned truth value. In other words, Bogdanov views the individual as an "epiphenomenon of public (collective) practice."[73] Conversely, if both the practice and cognition of the proletariat are collectively organized processes, a proletarian society will be collective by definition. The endpoint of this radical rethinking of the world down to our understanding of what constitutes "the self" would be the creation of a collective society by means of "man's biological evolution and his application of reason and science,"[74] with art assuming the task of organizing social experience.

Let us draw some preliminary conclusions: if, according to Bogdanov, anything can be reduced to forms intended to organize human experience, even the process of writing, an inherently solitary activity in bourgeois societies, can now be rethought in terms of a collectively organized activity. Individual creativity, as it is historically determined by socioeconomic conditions, is, within this framework, doomed to be overcome by collective creativity. In this sense, collective writing is the form that best expresses the collective experience of the proletariat and will be the default form of writing of an egalitarian "utopian culture of the future." Collective creativity, following the dicta of historical materialism, is not the manifestation of an external state of the world but should rather be understood within the project that Bogdanov would later set forth and expand upon in *Tektologiia* (Tektology). The collectivism of the practice and cognition of the proletariat is not detached from their external reality as historical materialists would claim. The collective subject "cannot limit itself to *adapt*

[73] Alexander Dmitriev, "Russian Pre-Revolutionary Marxism on the the [*sic*] Personality," *Studies in East European Thought* 61, no. 2/3 (August 2009), 108.
[74] Williams, *Collective Immortality*, 391-92.

to the environment in which it is situated and operates, but rather it should successfully *modify and structure it.*"[75] Inherently, proletarian collective creativity, within a Bogdanovian framework, aims both at producing and structuring reality: writing books about the new Soviet world meant not so much a return to the old novelistic discourse of mimesis as creating and structuring that world in the very process of narration (hence the later poetics of Socialist Realism) while, at the same time, returning to *itself* as the site of collective consciousness. In other words, through the practice (*praktika*) of collectively writing literature, the collective comes into itself as such. Authentic and mature "proletarian culture" was characterized, according to Bogdanov and the founders of the Capri school (Lunacharskii, Gorky), by two main goals: the achievement of the spontaneous initiative (*samodeiatel'nost'*) of the workers—i.e., their ability to decide for themselves without being "guided" by anyone—and the creation of a workers' intelligentsia (*rabochaia intelligentsia*) that would replace the hegemony of the bourgeois elite.[76] It follows that the professional writer could not produce proletarian literature: "Only a new intelligentsia, a workers' intelligentsia, which would not abandon the proletariat, would be able to forge the internal unity of the psyche of the class."[77] If "art organizes social experience,"[78] it follows that

[75] Silvano Tagliagambe and Giulia Rispoli, *La divergenza nella Rivoluzione: filosofia, scienza e teologia in Russia (1920-1940)* (Brescia: Editrice La scuola, 2016), 32. ("…non può limitarsi a *adattarsi* all'ambiente in cui è inserito e opera, ma deve riuscire a *modificarlo e a strutturarlo*.")
[76] While Lenin understood socialism in a political and economic sense, thus projecting the creation of a Communist society in the future, for Bogdanov it was, first and foremost, a social experience, and for this reason he located it in the present time. See Bogdanov's article "Sotsializm v nastoiashchem" *Vpered*, no. 2 (1911): 67-68. All the debates around collective creativity were irrelevant to Lenin, as long as they did not challenge his political leadership. Maybe it is just a coincidence that the first collective literary works started to appear only after Lenin's death, also considering Stalin's early infatuation with the Bogdanovian version of Bolshevism. The polemics between Lenin and Bogdanov of the first decade of the century conclusively showed Lenin's "substantial reduction of all gnoseological considerations and, generally speaking, of all philosophy, to politics, or rather, to a single political party" ("…sostanziale riduzione della riflessione gnoseologica e in generale di tutta la filosofia alla politica, anzi a un partito politico.") See Vittorio Strada, "Né fede né scienza," foreword to Aleksandr Bogdanov, et al., *Fede e scienza*, ed. Vittorio Strada, trans. Marilla Boffito and Nikita Strada (Torino: Einaudi, 1982), 18.
[77] Jutta Scherrer, "The cultural hegemony of the proletariat," 204.
[78] Ibid.

collective creativity organizes collective social experience. Bogdanov would not explicitly suggest what literary forms this new proletarian art should take. Only after Bogdanov's death in 1928, when he had already been labeled a Marxist heretic, would Gorky, one of the founders of the Capri school in the summer of 1909, assume the task of championing the most genuinely proletarian embodiment of this idea: *History of Factories and Plants*.

Let us return to Pletnev's article published in *Gorn*, an official organ of Proletkult, of which Bogdanov was the main theoretician. As far as the term "collectivism" is concerned, Pletnev claims that it can assume two contrasting meanings (*protivupostavleniia*):

a. Collectivism as "collective consciousness";

b. Collectivism as "collective creativity."

Pletnev begins by advancing the former via one of the core theses of Marxist historical materialism: "Being determines thinking. For this reason, the ideology of the proletariat cannot but be collective."[79] But since the idea of building Socialism was understood holistically, i.e., as not limited to politics and economics but also invested in the ideological reassessment of cultural production, what did Socialist literature mean? It would have been too simplistic and reductive to believe that it was only a matter of Socialist content, whatever that meant. Setting apart the issue of whether or not it was possible to have some genuine proletarian culture or not,[80] the overarching question was: What is the artistic form of authentic Socialist literature? If the ideology of the proletariat, which is now charged with the construction of Socialism, is inherently collective, does it mean that its literature should also be created collectively? In what way? And if not, what hinders the production of collectively written literary works?

[79] Pletnev, "O kollektivnom tvorchestve," 55. ("Бытие определает мышление. Поэтому, идеология пролетариата не может не быть коллективной.")
[80] Leon Trotsky would address this issue in his seminal work *Literature and Revolution* (1924).

When, in the late 1920s, the idea of the *kollektiv*[81] came to encompass all fields of production, artistic and non-artistic alike, the temptation to write literature collectively, especially in a project such as *History of Factories and Plants*, to create literature that embodied this collective worldview, was explored as one feasible option. If one accepts Bogdanov's statement ("the worldview of the proletariat as a class . . . is represented, in its very essence, by *collectivism*"), what are the implications for literary production? How should this be reflected in a literary work? Is it even possible to talk about the "collectivization of literature"? If not, what is embedded in literature, as a practice, that resists collectivization? After all, many artistic forms in these years were produced collectively: theater and cinema are two straightforward examples. If we assume that the proletariat is in charge of giving birth to Soviet culture and that its worldview is collective, how does this translate into literary forms, especially the novel, as a very popular yet profoundly bourgeois form?

Pletnev is aware of the vagueness surrounding the term "collective creativity"—"there is neither clarity, nor agreement, nor analysis"[82] with regard to it, he writes—and, from the outset, tries to diminish this confusion by introducing a crucial difference between "mass creativity" (*massovoe tvorchestvo*) and what he believes to be authentic "collective creativity."[83] He brings up the same example used by Bogdanov and, later, by Shklovsky: "In all the achievements of a technician, an artist, a scientist, the search is always for the 'red thread,' the idea by which he lived and that he expressed in his creations."[84] Yet he rules this "thread" out as an example of

[81] In *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*, Kharkhordin makes a distinction between "collective" (universal meaning) and *kollektiv* (with Communist connotations). In this dissertation, I am using the two terms interchangeably.
[82] Pletnev, "O kollektivnom tvorchestve," 55. ("…нет ясности, нет договоренности, нет анализа…")
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid., 56. ("Во всех достижениях техника, художника, ученого всегда искали 'красной нити', идеи, которой он жил и которую выявлял в своем творчестве.")

either mass or collective creativity. According to Pletnev, mass creativity occurs when many individuals contribute to create something as a group. He employs the example of factory production. This is not yet collective creativity either, he argues, because "their mass creativity expresses in material form an individual thought, individual creativity."[85] Instead, Pletnev sees in the collective discussion of ideas and thoughts the foundation of collective creativity: "For us, the foundation of collective creativity is, above all, the collective creativity of ideas, thoughts, the elaboration of a single collective consciousness, which determines itself by laying bare this idea in material forms."[86] In other words, Pletnev's argument is circular: to collectively create or produce culture we need to elaborate a collective consciousness which, in turn, is structured by its production. To illustrate what this means, he uses another example inspired by industry. He claims that only by the concomitant effort of multiple engineers who discuss how the "ideal" car should look and function can the product of the car factory be considered true "collective creativity." In cinema or theater, the performance of a troupe is not necessarily collective. It is, rather, mass creativity, and, Pletnev says, it cannot be considered collective unless originates from a prior collective consciousness transformed into a tangible product: "In the realm of collective creativity, we set at its foundation creativity understood as the transformation of the collective consciousness into material forms."[87]

Yet Proletkult, despite the importance of the role that it played in the social milieu of the early 1920s, was not the only cultural organization in which the idea of collective creativity was

[85] Ibid. ("…их массовое творчество выявляет в материальной форме индивидуальную мысль, индивидуальное творчество.")
[86] Ibid. ("Основой коллективного творчества является для нас, прежде всего, коллективное творчество идеи, мысли, выработка единого коллективного сознания, определяющего собою выявление этой идеи в материальных формах.")
[87] Ibid., 59. ("В области коллективного творчества мы кладем в основу творчество, как претворение коллективного сознания в материальные формы.")

actively explored.[88] Symbolists and Formalists also put forward their own theories of collective art.

Not even two years before the publication of Pletnev's article, a different idea of collective creativity was publicly discussed at the Bureau of Artistic Communes (*Biuro khudozhestvennykh kommun*). In a speech given on August 8, 1918, Viacheslav Ivanov, who at the time was the head of the theatrical department of Narkompros (TEO), a position that he would hold until the following year, laid out a vision of collective creativity that, in its purest form, would manifest itself in what he would call "syncretic enactment" (*sinkreticheskoe deistvo*). Without expanding on Ivanov's idea of *sobornost'* and how the collective proletariat could fit in it, it is important to point out that, while he was a spokesperson of Narkompros, "the dominant in all his speeches, both collegiate and public, was the idea of collective creativity." [89] This might suggest that Ivanov was trying to push his own vision of "universal art" (*vsenarodnoe iskusstvo*) using an official platform by considering how his ideas could be safely reframed—as, in fact, they were[90]—within the larger debates on proletarian art. Despite profound differences with what other critics and artists were saying in these years, in this speech, Ivanov chooses to reiterate one of the cornerstones of almost every contemporary take on collective creativity,

[88] I could not find any collectively written works in the first years following the Revolution. To my knowledge, the first post-Revolutionary collective novel(la) was Veniamin Girshgorn and Iosif Keller, *Universal'nye luchi* (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1924). In 1928, Girshgorn and Keller would be joined by Boris Lipatov and publish a longer novel under the title *Bestseremonnyi roman* (Moskva: Artel' pisatelei "Krug," 1928).

[89] "…доминант[а] всех выступлений поэта, коллегиальных и публичных, была идея коллективного творчества." For a transcription and a short analysis of the speech and of the abstract of the essay that, supposedly, was intended to be Ivanov's contribution to the new journal *Internatsional iskusstva*, see Aleksandr Lavrov, "Viacheslav Ivanov v neosushchestvlennom zhurnale 'Internatsional iskusstva,'" in *Viacheslav Ivanov i ego vremia*, ed. Sergei Averintsev and Rozemari Tsigler (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2002), 423. The project was discontinued and the journal was never published.

[90] This is, for instance, what happened in the article titled "Kollektivnoe tvorchestvo" published on the August 10 issue of the newspaper *Izvestiia*, two days after Ivanov's speech. See Lavrov, "Viacheslav Ivanov v neosushchestvlennom zhurnale 'Internatsional iskusstva'," 427-28.

which was the elimination of the individualistic psychology of the artist, not of his individuality.[91] Although in Ivanov's vision of collective creativity, categories such as artistic "genius" and "inspiration" still play a central role—such categories were not part of the larger debate on collective creativity—it is important to underscore how Ivanov's words could be ideologically reframed to accommodate the "proletarian narrative." For instance, Ivanov points out that, in order to achieve authentic collective creativity, an artistic commune (*khudozhestvennaia kommuna*) is not sufficient; what is necessary is a "spiritual connection" (*vnutrennee soedinenie*)[92] among its members. On a superficial level, the gap between this claim and the collective "essence" of the proletariat could easily be filled for the wider public. Moreover, expressions such as "one 'multifaced' spiritual body" (*odno mnogolikoe dushevnoe telo*)[93] could be juxtaposed to the mystical, Bogdanovian version of collectivism. What is important for our purposes is not Ivanov's vision of collective creativity *per se*, but rather that he shows concern for the same set of problems.

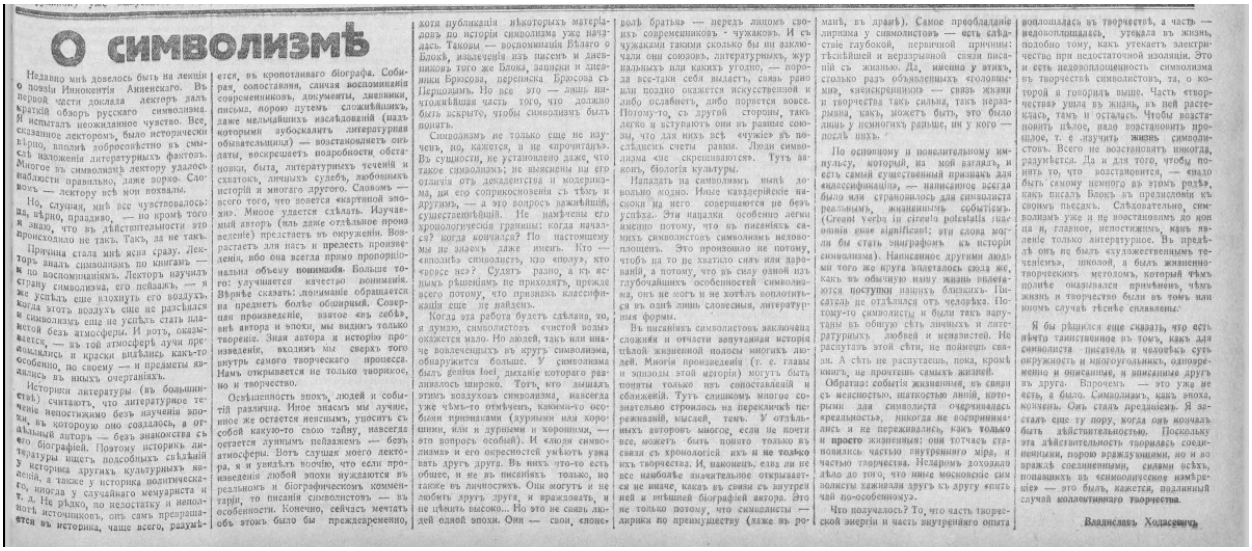
In an article titled "O simvolizme" (On Symbolism) and published in the Parisian émigré paper *Vozrozhdenie* on January 12 of 1928, nine years after Ivanov's speech, Vladislav Khodasevich declares how, as an artistic method that conflated art and life,[94] Symbolism represented a perfect example of what collective creativity is.[95] Reflecting on the possibility of

[91] In Ivanov's words: "Not the 'withering away' of individual initiative, but rather of the individualistic psychology in the artist." ("Отмирание отнюдь не индивидуального почина, но индивидуалистической психологии в художнике.") See Lavrov, "Viacheslav Ivanov v neosushchestvlennom zhurnale 'Internatsional iskusstva,'" 434.
[92] Ibid., 426.
[93] Ibid., 435.
[94] For an analysis of the Symbolist concept of *zhiznetvorchestvo*, see Michael Wachtel, "Zhiznetvorchestvo: The Conflation of Art and Life," in *Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition: Goethe, Novalis, and the Poetics of Vyacheslav Ivanov* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 143-56.
[95] See Vladislav Khodasevich, "O simvolizme," *Vozrozhdenie*, January 12, 1928, 3.

investigating Symbolism as an artistic method, Khodasevich defines Symbolism in terms of the indissoluble linkage between the lives and works of those who participated in it, which, for this reason, renders it "inaccessible as a purely literary phenomenon" (*nepostizhim kak iavlenie tol'ko literaturnoe*).[96] This is how the Russian poet concludes his article:

> The epoch of Symbolism is over. It has become tradition. I witnessed the moment when it stopped being reality. Since this reality was created by sometimes hostile, and yet, in this hostility, united forces of those who found themselves in the "symbolist dimension," this was, it seems to me, an authentic instance of *collective creativity*.[97]

The idea here is that, if life and art are indissoluble and the lives of those who were part of this "symbolist dimension" were entangled in a network of shared experience, then their art, too, must participate in this shared dimension, and its origin was intrinsically collective.



О СИМВОЛИЗМѢ

Недавно мнѣ довелось быть на лекціи о поэзіи Иннокентія Анненскаго. Въ первой части докладъ лектора далъ краткій обзоръ русскаго символизма. Я испыталъ неожиданное чувство. Все, сказанное лекторомъ, было исторически вѣрно, вполнѣ добросовѣстно въ смыслѣ изложенія литературныхъ фактовъ. Многое въ символизмѣ лектору удалось выяснить правильно, даже зорко. Словомъ — лектору всѣ мои похвалы.

Но, слушая, мнѣ все чувствовалось: да, вѣрно, правдиво, — но кромѣ того я знаю, что въ дѣйствительности это происходило не такъ. Такъ, да не такъ.

Причина стала мнѣ ясна сразу. Лекторъ анализъ символизмъ по книгамъ — и по воспоминаніямъ. Лекторъ нарушилъ страну символизма, его пейзажъ, — я же успѣлъ еще вдохнуть его воздухъ, когда этотъ воздухъ еще не разсѣялся и символизмъ еще не успѣлъ стать пластой безъ атмосферы. И вотъ, оказывается, — изъ той атмосферы лучи преломлялись и краски виѣлись какъ-то особенно, по своему — и предметы являлись въ иныхъ очертаніяхъ.

Исторіи литературы (въ большинствѣ) считаютъ, что литературное теченіе непостижимо безъ изученія эпохи, въ которую оно создалось, а отдѣльный авторъ — безъ знакомства съ его біографіей. Поэтому историкъ литературы ищетъ подсобныхъ свѣдѣній у историка другихъ культурныхъ явленій, а также у историка политическаго, иногда у случайнаго мемуариста и т. д. Не рѣдко, по недостатку и неполнотѣ источниковъ, онъ самъ превращается въ историка, чаще всего, разумѣется, въ кропотливаго біографа. Собирая, сопоставляя, сличая воспоминанія современниковъ, документы, дневники, письма, порою путемъ сложнѣйшихъ, даже мельчайшихъ изслѣдованій (надъ которыми зубоскалитъ литературная обывательщина) — возстановляетъ онъ даты, воскрешаетъ подробности обстановки, быта, литературныхъ теченій и сплетокъ, личныхъ судебъ, любопытныхъ исторій и многаго другого. Словомъ — всего того, что зовется «картиной эпохи». Многое удается сдѣлать. Изучаемый авторъ (или даже отдѣльное произведеніе) предстаетъ въ окруженіи. Возрастаетъ для насъ и предметъ произведенія, ибо она всегда прямо пропорціональна объему пониманія. Больше того: улучшается качество пониманія. Вѣрнѣе сказать: пониманіе обращается на предметъ болѣе обширный. Соверцая произведеніе, взятое «въ себѣ», внѣ автора и эпохи, мы видимъ только твореніе. Зная автора и исторію произведенія, вколнѣ мы сверхъ того внутрь самого творческаго процесса. Намъ открывается не только творящее, но и творчество.

Осѣдлянность эпохъ, людей и событій различна. Иное знаемъ мы лучше, иное же остается неяснымъ, уноситъ съ собой какую-то свою тайну, навсегда остается лунднымъ пейзажемъ — безъ атмосферы. Вотъ слушая моего лектора, я и увидѣлъ воочію, что если произведенія любой эпохи нуждаются въ реальномъ и біографическомъ комментаріи, то писанія символистовъ — въ особенности. Конечно, сейчасъ мечтать объ этомъ было бы преждевременно, хотя публикація нѣкоторыхъ матеріаловъ по исторіи символизма уже началась. Таковы — воспоминанія Бѣлаго о Блокѣ, извлеченія изъ писемъ и дневниковъ того же Блока, записки и дневники Брюсова, переписка Брюсова съ Перцовымъ. Но все это — лишь ничтожнѣйшая часть того, что должно быть вскрыто, чтобы символизмъ былъ понятъ.

Символизмъ не только еще не изученъ, но, кажется, и не опрочитанъ. Въ сущности, не установлено даже, что такое символизмъ; не выяснены ни его отличія отъ декадентства и модернизма, ни его соприкосновенія съ тѣмъ и другимъ, — а это вопросъ важнѣйшій, существеннѣйшій. Не намѣчены его хронологическія границы: когда началъ? когда кончился? По настоящему мы не знаемъ даже имени. Что — «символизмъ символизму, что опоэтъ, что кровосъ нея? Судить разно, а къ истиннымъ рѣшеніямъ не приходятъ, прежде всего потому, что признакъ классификаціи еще не найденъ.

Когда эта работа будетъ сдѣлана, то, я думаю, символистовъ чистой воды окажется мало. Но людей, такъ или иначе вовлеченныхъ въ кругъ символизма, обнаружится больше. У символизма былъ genius loci, дыханіе котораго ощущалось широко. Тотъ, кто дышалъ этимъ воздухомъ символизма, навсегда уже чѣмъ-то отмѣченъ, какими-то особыми признаками (хорошими или хорошими, или и дурными и хорошими, — это вопросъ особый). И «духъ символизма» и его окрестностей умѣютъ узнавать другъ друга. Въ нихъ что-то есть общее, и не въ писаніяхъ только, но также въ личностяхъ. Они могутъ и не любить другъ друга, и враждовать, и не цѣнить высоко... Но это не связь людей одной эпохи. Они — свои, «полубратья» — передъ лицомъ своихъ современниковъ - чужаковъ. И съ чужаками такими сколько бы ни заключали они союзовъ, литературныхъ, журнальныхъ или какихъ угодно, — порода все-таки себя выдастъ, связь рано или поздно окажется искусственной и либо ослабнетъ, либо порвется вовсе. Потому-то, съ другой стороны, такъ легко и вступаютъ они въ ранніе союзы, что для нихъ всѣ «чужіе» въ послѣдствіи стѣты равны. Люди символизма «не скрещиваются». Тутъ законъ, біологія культуры.

Нападать на символизмъ нынѣ довольно модно. Иные квадерійскіе нападки на него совершаются не безъ успѣха. Эти нападки особенно легки именно потому, что въ писаніяхъ самихъ символистовъ символизмъ недовоплощенъ. Это произошло не потому, чтобъ на то не хватило силъ или дарованій, а потому, что въ силу одной изъ глубочайшихъ особенностей символизма, онъ не могъ и не хотѣлъ воплотиться въ одинъ лишь словесный, литературные формы.

Въ писаніяхъ символистовъ заключена сложная и отчасти запутанная исторія цѣлой жизненной полосы многихъ людей. Многія произведенія (т. е. главы и эпизоды этой исторіи) могутъ быть поняты только изъ сопоставленій и сближеній. Тутъ слишкомъ многое сознательно строилось на перекличкѣ намековъ, мыслей, темъ. У отдѣльныхъ авторовъ многое, если не почти все, можетъ быть понято только въ связи съ хронологіей ихъ и не только ихъ творчества. И, наконецъ, едва ли не все наиболѣе значительное открываетъ намъ не иначе, какъ въ связи съ внутренней и внѣшней біографіей автора. Это не только потому, что символисты — лирики по преимуществу (даже въ романѣ, въ драмѣ). Самое преобладаніе лиризма у символистовъ — есть слѣдствіе глубокой, первичной причины: тѣснѣйшей и неразрывной связи писаній съ жизнью. Да, именно у этихъ, столько разъ объявлявшихъ «полную мнѣ, «неискреннюю» — связь жизни и творчества такъ сильна, такъ неразрывна, какъ, можетъ быть, это было лишь у немногихъ раньше, ни у кого — послѣ нихъ.

По основному и повелительному императиву, который, на мой взглядъ, и есть самый существенный признакъ для «классификаціи», — написанное всегда было или сгранилось для символиста реальнымъ, жизненнымъ событіемъ. (Creuni verbo in circulo poluisse ihre omnia esse significari: эти слова могли бы стать эпиграфомъ къ исторіи символизма). Написанное другими людьми того же круга вспоталось свои же, какъ въ обычную нашу жизнь вплетаются поступки нашихъ близкихъ. Писатель не отдѣлялся отъ человѣка. Потому-то символисты и были такъ запутаны въ общую сѣть личныхъ и литературныхъ любвей и ненавистей. Не распутать этой сѣти, не понимешь сюжетовъ. А сѣть не распутаешь, пока, кромѣ книгъ, не прочтешь самыхъ жизней.

Обратно: событія жизненныя, въ связи съ неясностью, шаткостью линій, которыми для символиста очерчивалась «реальность», никогда не воспринимались и не переживались, какъ только и просто жизненныя: они тотчасъ становились частью внутренняго міра, и частью творчества. Нелегкимъ доходило дѣло до того, что иные московскіе символисты замѣняли другъ къ другу «опытъ чай по-особенному».

Что получалось? То, что часть творческой энергіи и часть внутренняго опыта воплощалась въ творчествѣ, а часть — недовоплощалась, утекала въ жизнь, подобно тому, какъ утекаетъ электричество при недостаточной изоляціи. Это и есть недовоплощенность символизма въ творчествѣ символистовъ, та, о которой я говорилъ выше. Часть «творчествъ ушла въ жизнь, въ ней растеклась, тамъ и осталась. Чтобы возстановить цѣлое, надо возстановить прошлое, т. е изучить жизнь символистовъ. Всего не возстановить никогда, разумѣется. Да и для того, чтобы понять то, что возстановится, — надо быть самому немного въ этомъ родѣ, какъ писалъ Блокъ въ предисловіи къ своимъ пьесамъ. Слѣдовательно, симболизмъ уже и не возстановимъ во всемъ, главное, непостижимъ, какъ явленіе только литературное. Въ предѣлъ онъ не былъ «художественнымъ теченіемъ», школой, а былъ жизненно-творческимъ методомъ, который тѣмъ полнѣе оказывался примѣненъ, чѣмъ жизнь и творчество были въ томъ или иномъ случаѣ тѣснѣе сплавлены.

Я бы рѣшился еще сказать, что есть нѣчто таинственное въ томъ, какъ для символиста писатель и человѣкъ суть окружность и многоугольникъ, одновременно и описанные, и вписанные другъ въ друга. Впрочемъ — это уже не есть, а было. Символизмъ, какъ эпоха, кончился. Онъ сталъ преданіемъ. Я засталъ еще ту пору, когда онъ кончалъ быть дѣйствительностью. Поскольку эта дѣйствительность творилась соединеннымъ, порой враждующими, но и во враждѣ соединенными, силами всѣхъ, попавшихъ въ «символическое измѣреніе» — это былъ, кажется, подлинный случай коллективнаго творчества.

Владиславъ Ходасевичъ

Illustration 3. Khodasevich's article "On Symbolism" in *Vozrozhdenie*, January 12, 1928.

[96] Ibid.

[97] "Символизмъ какъ эпоха конченъ. Онъ сталъ преданіемъ. Я засталъ еще ту пору, когда онъ кончалъ быть дѣйствительностью. Поскольку эта дѣйствительность творилась соединеннымъ, порой враждующими, но и во враждѣ соединенными, силами всѣхъ, попавшими въ «символическое измѣреніе», — это былъ, кажется, подлинный случай коллективнаго творчества."

Despite opposing "the Shklovskian mechanistic approach to the study of the literary text,"[98] Khodasevich, like Shklovsky, viewed literature as "constant internal movement" (*postoiannoe vnutrennee dvizhenie*),[99] a "recurrent shift of forms and ideas" (*periodicheskaia smena form i idei*).[100] Yet, for Shklovsky, the creator also serves to make this movement apparent. This idea is at the center of a short essay titled "Kollektivnoe tvorchestvo" (Collective Creativity) and published in 1923.[101] Here, Shklovsky contrasts collective creativity with what he defines as "group creativity" (*gruppovoe tvorchestvo*). According to Shklovsky, all creativity is collective creativity in the sense that it is possible only within an established tradition. For this reason, he provocatively states that all creativity is "traditional creativity,"[102] in the sense of disclosing already existing "fluxes of literariness" that allow the collective to speak through the individual, who therefore becomes the mere catalyst of "his own" creation. The author, according to Shklovsky, in nothing more than "a geometric point where lines of collective creativity intersect."[103] On the other hand, group creativity is, rather banally, the concomitant effort of more than one author to produce a single work of literature. The novel *Iprit* (Mustard Gas), which Shklovsky wrote together with Vsevolod Ivanov in 1925, is an example of group creativity. As a corollary to this argument, while group creativity always implies collective creativity, the opposite is not necessarily true. In the abovementioned essay, Shklovsky quickly dismisses group creativity, which serves the sole purpose of distinguishing itself from collective

[98] Greta N. Slobin, *Russians Abroad: Literary and Cultural Politics of Diaspora (1919-1939)*, ed. Katerina Clark, Nancy Conde, Dan Slobin, and Mark Slobin (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013), 55.
[99] Vladislav Khodasevich, "Literatura v izgnanii," in *Literaturnye stat' i vospominaniia* (N'iu Iork: Izdatel'stvo imeni Chekhova, 1954), 262.
[100] Ibid.
[101] For the English translation, see Viktor Shklovsky, "Collective Creativity," in *Knight's Move*, trans. Richard Sheldon (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 2005), 42-45.
[102] Ibid., 45.
[103] Ibid., 43.

creativity—the thing that really interests him—by affirming that: "Real collectivity in creative work is deeper but also broader."[104]

In 1921, neurophysiologist Vladimir Bekhterev, to whose work I will return in the next chapter, published his seminal *Kollektivnaia refleksologiia* (Collective Reflexology).[105] In the chapter devoted to "Collective Creativity,"[106] he claims that, in recent years, creativity has no longer been understood as the product of the efforts of a single individual; that, in fact, "collective creativity plays a dominant role in mankind and that reasoning itself owes its existence to nothing other than collective activity."[107] Using the work of French socialist E. Durkheim as his main theoretical touchstone, Bekhterev expands upon the argument that, indeed, the "individual intellect activity essentially utilizes a collective experience, synthesizes it and makes certain conclusions on the basis of the appropriate material."[108] He believes, very much alongside Bogdanov, that "an individual genius himself is a product of society who personifies a synthesis of collective work"[109] and, in perfect consonance with what Shklovsky would argue two years later, that "the discovery is in the air, as it were, and an individual mind is nothing other than a vivid manifestation of this generalization."[110] Yet, unlike Shklovsky, Bekhterev argues that "this activity, fruitful as it may be, always bears the stamp of individuality"[111] and cannot really be defined as "collective creativity." Bekhterev's larger argument instead resembles Pletnev's: "the best results are achieved in those cases when individual creative activity is

[104] Ibid., 42.
[105] See Vladimir M. Bekhterev, *Kollektvinaia refleksologiia* (Petrograd: Kolos, 1921).
[106] I will quote from Vladimir M. Bekhterev, "Collective Creativity," in *Collective Reflexology*, ed. Lloyd H. Strickland, trans. Eugenia Lockwood, 205-220 (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 1993).
[107] Ibid., 205.
[108] Ibid., 206.
[109] Ibid., 212.
[110] Ibid., 213.
[111] Ibid., 206.

discussed in a collective, where, under cross-criticism from the people who work in other directions, the conclusions and decisions made by an individual person in the quiet of his study are polished, supplemented, expanded or generalized [*shlifuiutsia, popolniaiutsia, rasshiriaiutsia ili obobshchaiutsia*]. Naturally, they are disseminated and popularized in gatherings."[112] In brief, Bekhterev argues for what he calls "collective elucidation of the subject" (*kollektivnoe vyiasnenie predmeta*),[113] which would eventually allow for a "collective judgement" (*kollektivnoe suzhdenie*).[114] Bekhterev rejects the idea that the work of the collective is not comparable to the work of the individual, because the former will always be qualitatively inferior. On the contrary, he goes a step further and sees in the "joint effort of an individual and a crowd, or a composite personality" the key that enables progress and success. He believes that "better creative activity is achieved through joint work in which both the individual mind and the collective mind participate and where the former takes upon itself to prepare ad process the material, while the latter criticizes, supplements and generalizes."[115] As proof that authentic collective creativity can take the form of artistic creativity, Bekhterev brings up the paintings in old Russian churches by "Rublev and fellow-painters"[116] and, in literature, by Koz'ma Prutkov. For Bekhterev, a true creative act occurs when both the collective and the individual play a role: the former to "accumulate experience and facts and to bring together the results of the individual experience in the interests of the whole entity,"[117] and the latter "to synthesize these facts from a personal point of view."[118] Therefore, Bekhterev understands the evolution of creativity as a

[112] Ibid.; Bekhterev, *Kollektivnaia refleksologiia*, 201.
[113] Bekhterev, *Collective Reflexology*, 207; Bekhterev, *Kollektivnaia refleksologiia*, 202.
[114] Bekhterev, *Collective Reflexology*, 207; Bekhterev, *Kollektivnaia refleksologiia*, 202.
[115] Ibid., 212.
[116] Ibid., 213.
[117] Ibid., 214.
[118] Ibid.

circular process in which the collective is the sum and reworking (*obrabotka*) of individual creativity with the individual then synthesizing the collective product and so on, ad infinitum. This process stands true for how collective creativity was understood until economic collectivization was introduced and its definition shifted towards an understanding overlapping with economic production. In other words, collective artistic creativity here starts to be equated with what Pletnev dismissed as non-collective in 1920: the process of producing a machine in a factory and a book on paper already coincide.

Just as *Gorn* was an official organ of Proletkult (until 1923), *Na literaturnom postu* was the journal of RAPP beginning in 1926. In 1931, literary critic Viktor Pertsov published a two-page article in the latter titled "Kollektivnyi avtor" (The Collective Author),[119] in which he tackled "collective authorship" within the larger project of *History of Factories and Plants*. Pertsov asks whether or not this striving (*stremlenie*) towards the achievement of collective authorship reflects some sort of fetishism of the collective (*fetish kollektiva*).[120] Pertsov's main argument, which reflects an understanding of collective creativity in the years of collectivization and the call (*prizyv*) of shock-workers into literature, is the following: "the participants in this book did not lose their individuality during the subsequent assemblage of the material, but rather retained their individual creativity. Even so, the book makes up a unified work, not a collection of discrete essays, sketches, etc."[121] Several keywords here should be underlined: "to lose (or to be deprived of) one's individuality" (*obezlichivat'sia*), individual creativity (*individual'noe tvorchestvo*), "unified work" (*tsel'noe proizvedenie*), and "collection" (*sbornik*). The stress on

[119] Viktor O. Pertsov, "Kollektivnyi avtor," *Na literaturnom postu*, no. 3 (1931): 21-22.
[120] Ibid., 21.
[121] Ibid. ("…участники книги не обезличивались в дальнейшей композиции материала, а сохранили индивидуальное творчество. Тем не менее книга составлялась как цельное произведение, а не как сборник отдельных очерков, зарисовок и т. п.")

the fact that such a book would be both individual and collective would be one of the defining (or at least projected) features of the volumes compiled for the series of *History of Factories and Plants*. Moreover, Pertsov underscores that the book can function as a testimony of proletarian struggle and resilience and can serve as a role model for other workers in other factories to pursue the same path and achieve the same goals, "a call, as it were, for Socialist competition" (*kak by vyzov na sotsialisticheskoe sorevnovanie*).[122]

Whether or not Socialist literature should be produced like any other industrial object, i.e., as if on a conveyor belt by means of the scientific division of labor (*nauchnoe razdelenie truda*), was a hotly contested issue in the 1920s and especially in the early 1930s when, as we have seen, the word *kollektiv* became associated with the period of reconstruction and the collectivization of the economy, with "production" as its necessary antecedent ("production collectives" – *proizvodstvennye kollektivy*). The ideas advanced by the opposing factions are characteristically expressed in two articles published in 1931 in *Na literaturnom postu*: the first, titled "Rekonstruktsia literatury" (The Reconstruction of Literature) is by M. Vostrogin; the reply, in line with RAPP's ideology and titled "Rekonstruktsia lefovshchiny" (The Reconstruction of *Lefovshchina*), was written by Dmitrii Urgin.[123]

In the first article, Vostrogin's goal is to propose how to reconstruct literature in the period of total reconstruction, and therefore demonstrate literary production "according to the principle of the scientific division of labor and based on Socialist methods of production."[124] Vostrogin develops his arguments along two main lines: first, the opposition between the

[122] Ibid., 22.
[123] See M. Vostrogin, "Rekonstruktsiia literatury," *Na literaturnom postu*, no. 7 (1931): 17-21; Dmitrii Urgin, "Rekonstruktsiia lefovshchiny," *Na literaturnom postu*, no. 7 (1931): 22-27.
[124] See Vostrogin, "Rekonstruktsiia literatury," 17. ("…по принципу научного разделения труда и на основе социалистических методов производства.")

collective and individual author (*kustar'-odinochka*); second, the juxtaposition of literary vs industrial production. The article is divided into three sections: in the first, the author puts forward the theoretical background to his argument; in the second, he outlines the developmental stages of the literary process; in the third and last, he shows how collective creativity functions in practice. Believing that literature "will inevitably become a more powerful organizer of the masses than the press,"[125] Vostrogin calls for the establishment of "creative collectives" (*tvorcheskie kollektivy*)[126] which, like "powerful artistic and literary workshops" (*moshchnye khudozhestvenno-literaturnye masterskie*)[127] working according to the principle of the scientific division of labor, will eventually become the only mode of literary production. The initial stage of this process presupposes a stock of "artistic and literary raw material" (*zagotovka khudozhestvenno-literaturnogo syr'ia*),[128] before the *kollektiv* would take on the task of constructing the *fabula* and plot. This process would enfold during various meetings (*zasedaniia*) under the supervision of what Vostrogin calls a "literary director" (*literaturny rezhisser*),[129] whose role should be occupied by the most solid (*sil'nyi*)[130] writer. Vostrogin describes what Pletnev, eleven years before, had labeled "mass creativity" but with the crucial difference that, in this case, the output is no longer of a single author. While the importance of meetings (*zasedaniia/soveshchaniia*) is often underscored in articles on collective creativity, what is peculiar to Vostrogin's view, and one of the main reasons he would be harshly criticized, is how the actual process of writing should function: as far as dialogues are concerned, different authors should assume responsibility for different characters, in order for each character in the literary

[125] Ibid. ("Ей [литературе] суждено стать более мощным организатором масс, чем прессы.")
[126] Ibid., 18.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid., 19.
[130] Ibid.

work to speak in his own language—an unattainable goal, according to Vostrogin, even for the greatest writers (*kazhdyi geroi govorit svoim, tol'ko emu svoistvennym iazykom*); the scientific division of labor would also imply that literary elements such as descriptions (*opisaniia*) would be provided *ad hoc* by writers specialized in a given field. To this process, superintended by the literary director, Vostrogin introduces the idea of "creative competition" (*tvorcheskoe sorevnovanie*) among writers as one of the guiding forces of the creative process. Eventually, during the last stage of this industrial process (*prigonka/montazh*), the literary product would result from the best chunks of text assembled or montaged together to form a whole.[131] Vostrogin's article is very rich in terms of ideas and solutions: for instance, he reelaborates issues developed and debated throughout the 1920s by Formalism—e.g., when he talks about how the division of labor would "lay bare the creative devices of the writers" (*obnazhit' tvorcheskie priemy pisatelei*)[132]—as well as Proletkult and LEF, then integrates them into what would become one of the most defining features of the 1930s: Socialist competition (*sotsialisticheskoe sorevnovanie*).[133] Vostrogin concludes by saying that self-employed writers, once become aware that "they cannot compete with the high quality of works produced by these

[131] Ibid., 20.
[132] Ibid.,
[133] To my knowledge, the best example in terms of actual application of this theory, is embodied the Italian collective SIC (Scrittura Industriale Collettiva – Industrial Collective Writing). Their method was created in 2007 by Gregorio Magini and Vanni Santoni, most probably unaware of the Soviet experiments in this direction eighty years earlier. Their first and, so far, only novel, titled *In territorio nemico* (In Enemy Territory), was published in 2013. It was penned by 115 authors. See Scrittura Industriale Collettiva, *In territorio nemico* (Roma: Minimum Fax, 2013). Their method is available online at https://www.scritturacollettiva.org/metodo.html. An outline of how SIC's division of labor is organized can be found at http://www.scritturacollettiva.org/files/Brochure%20SIC.pdf. See also "Collective Writing and the Historical Novel in the Information Age: The SIC Method," *Blending*, Spring 2014, http://www.scritturacollettiva.org/files/uploaded/file/sic_bm_s14.pdf. (all links last accessed on January 13, 2019).

workshops"[134] would voluntarily join the brigades and eventually "liquidate themselves" (*samolikvidirovat'*)[135] as a class.

A harsh reply was given in the subsequent pages of the journal by Dmitrii Urgin. First, Urgin enumerates the points in Vostrogin's article that he will address: "Writers, as a class, will be liquidated; artisanal labor will die as a 'throwback' of bourgeois society; the work of art will be built according to the principles of the scientific division of labor; literature will turn into industry…,"[136] then he moves on to deconstruct, so to speak, these very claims. By using the one-size-fits-all suffix *–vshchina* (*proletkul'tovshchina* and, as in the title of the article, *lefovshchina*), Urgin accuses Vostrogin of recasting ideas already advanced by Proletkult and LEF (he even quotes Boris Arvatov's *Iskusstvo i proizvodstvo* [Art and Production] and Nikolai Tarabukin's *Ot mo'lberta k mashine* [From Easel to Machine] to demonstrate the similarities and derisively remarks that Vostrogin's theses would have made Bogdanov happy). According to Urgin, Vostrogin is describing an artistic phenomenon of the past that has therefore already been historically overcome (*istoricheski preodolennyi*).[137] To prove his point, Urgin alludes to the paintings in the churches of Iaroslavl' and on Pont Notre-Dame in Paris, where artists would work according to the principle of the scientific division of labor—while ignoring basic Marxism and the meaning of class. According to Urgin, "[n]ot only do the Communist form of labor in the arts and the literary art workshop not coincide, but one contradicts the other."[138] Despite

[134] Vostrogin, "Rekonstruktsiia literatury," 21. ("…не могут конкурировать с высоким качеством произведений, выпускаемых мастерскими…").
[135] Ibid.
[136] Dmitrii Urgin, "Rekonstruktsiia lefovshchiny," 22. ("Писатели, как класс, будут ликвидированы; кустарный труд вымрет, как «отрыжка» буржуазного строя; художественная работа будет построена на основе принципов научного разделения труда; литература превратится в промышленность…")
[137] Ibid., 23.
[138] Ibid. ("…коммунистическ[ая] форм[а] труда в искусстве и художественно-литературная мастерская — не только не совпадают друг с другом, но противоречат одно другому.")

withholding detailed alternatives to Vostrogin's proposals, Urgin claims that the "utopian workshops" (*utopicheskie masterskie*)[139] described by his opponent should be substituted by "production meetings" (*proizvodstvennye soveshchaniia*) that embody the authentically "new form of collective collaboration" (*novaia forma kollektivnogo sotrudnichestva*).[140] Resorting to a term (*sotrudnichestvo*) that Belinsky had used almost one hundred years before him (1845) to describe the collective literary practice of some French writers,[141] Urgin does not explain how these meetings would actually unfold. He ends his article claiming that Vostrogin is either an enemy (*nash vrag*)[142] or that he has a superficial knowledge of Marxism. Since he would not go as far as considering the first option plausible (*pervogo ne dopuskaem*),[143] Urgin relegates the task of mocking Vostrogin to Kukryniksy's satirical vignettes.

As one can see from Urgin's article, in the early 1930s, very distinct understandings of collective creativity had taken shape: one was strongly influenced by industrial work and equated the literary process with any other industrial practice; the other, which categorically refused any practical comparison between industry and literature, boils down to collective engagement and "production discussions" under the supervision of the Party. For instance, while an article advancing a view similar to Urgin's titled "Kollektivizatsia pisatel'skogo truda" (The Collectivization of Writing) appeared in the pages of *Literaturnaia Gazeta* on June 9, 1930 and was simply signed, "THE AUTHOR" (*AVTOR*),[144] another article, published in *Brigada*

[139] Ibid., 26.
[140] Ibid., 24.
[141] Vissarion G. Belinsky, *Fiziologiia Peterburga*, ed. V. I. Kuleshov and A. L. Grishunin. (Moskva: Nauka, 1991), 10.
[142] Vostrogin, "Rekonstruktsiia literatury," 27.
[143] Ibid.
[144] "Kollektivizatsiia pisatel'skogo truda." *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, June 9, 1930, 3.

Khudozhnikov,[145] minutely describes how several brigades (*brigady*), each specializing in a specific task, created posters at the *LENIZOGIZ* workshop (*masterskaia LENIZOGIZ*). The goal of the article, penned by Georgii Brylov, who figures not as an author, but rather as the workshop's spokesperson,[146] is to initiate a conversation around such practices.[147]

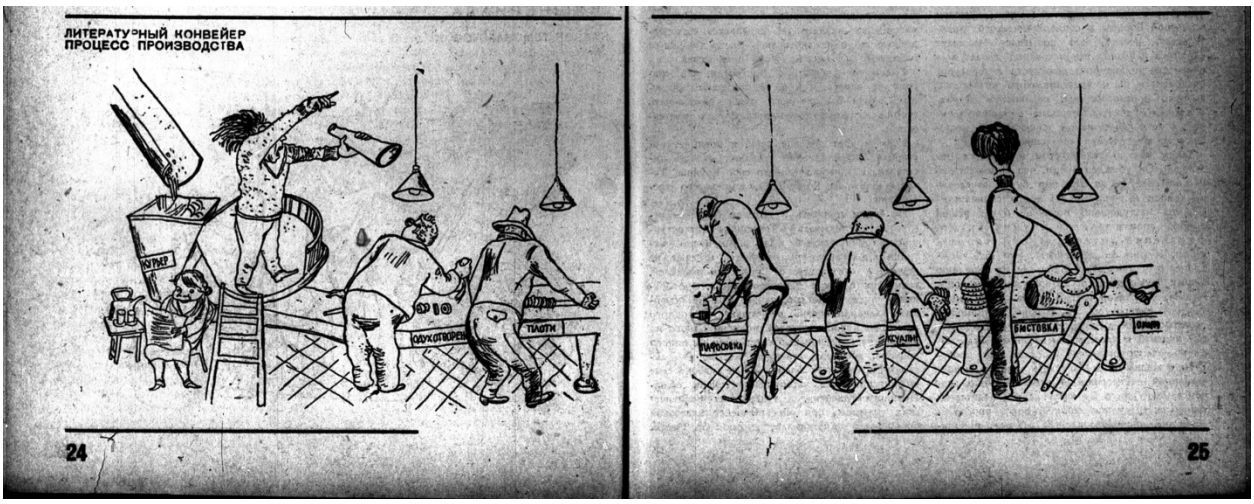


Illustration 4. One of the three vignettes by Kukryniksy mocking Vostrogin's article. Ironically, Kukryniksy was a collective of artists (Mikhail Kupriianov, Porfirii Krylov, and Nikolai Sokolov).

What do post-Revolutionary literary works disclose in terms of the collective consciousness of the proletariat and these competing notions of collective creativity? The history of collective creativity in the 1920s and 1930s in the Soviet Union would see the shift from a vision of collective creativity in which the author (the professional writer) gives voice to the unorganized collective of the proletariat, to the narratives of *History of Factories and Plants*, an enormously ambitious project in which the worker, having acquired proletarian consciousness (and literacy), personally contributes to these volumes. One of the distinguishing features of

[145] Georgii Brylov, "Kollektivizatsiia khudozhestvennogo truda," *Brigada khudozhnikov*, no. 2/3 (1931): 20-21. *Brigada khudozhnikov* was a short-lived journal issued between 1931and 1932 by the Federation of Associations of Soviet Artists (ФОСХ — "Федерация объединений советских художников").
[146] Ibid., 20. ("Слово для сообщения об опыте художественной мастерской ЛЕНИЗОГИЗа имеет т. Брылов.")
[147] At the end of the article, the journal invites readers to send questions.

Soviet collective creativity was its attempt to embody the authorial voice of the proletarian collective, the purest expression of a new, Socialist mode of narration.

In the novels about the Russian Civil War that were published throughout the 1920s, two related processes can be observed: on the one hand, the dissolution of the old bourgeois hero; on the other, the redefinition of the figure of the self-employed professional writer (*kustar'-odinochka*) and, along with it, the abstract figure of the author as a category. In the next chapter, I will investigate how this "assassination of the hero" took place, what kind of authorship can be attributed to it, and what its implications are once we have stipulated that the proletariat is, "at its essence," collective.

CHAPTER 2

THE BIOGRAPHY OF THE CROWD

> The petty bourgeois is accustomed to dividing human beings into heroes and the crowd.
>
> Maksim Gorky, "On Cynicism."[148]

The Death of the Hero

In her 2017 article "Uzhasnoe zrelishche: revoliutsionnaia tolpa i kollaps reprezentatsii" (A Dreadful Sight: The Revolutionary Crowd and the Collapse of Representation), art historian Ekaterina Bobrinskaia argues that, at the turn of the twentieth century, "the crowd became one of the central motifs of a specific mythology of modernity."[149] She perceives a distinct contraposition between the organized masses, represented, for instance, by a division of soldiers, and the "amorphous crowd of workers" (*besformennaia tolpa rabochikh*).[150] While, on the one hand, a military unit is depicted by the artist as a conglomerate of distinct, dynamic individuals, the defining feature of the crowd is that it is a motionless "dark stain" (*temnoe piatno*)[151] on the canvas: "The crowd of workers . . . appears as a black, faceless mass of bodies stuck together in a shapeless lump."[152] In paintings by Valentin Serov or Iurii Annenkov, Bobrinskaia argues, the crowd is therefore an entropic entity that devours the individual. When, in later years, the crowds of workers would eventually acquire contours and physiognomies, their individual members no

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[148] "Мѣщанинъ привыкъ дѣлить людей на героевъ и толпу."
Maksim Gor'kii, "O tsinizme," in *Literaturnyi raspad: kriticheskii sbornik*, ed. IU. Steklov et al., 2nd ed., vol. 1 (S.-Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo "T-va izdatel'skoe biuro," 1908), 296.
[149] Ekaterina A. Bobrinskaia, "Uzhasnoe zrelishche: revoliutsionnaia tolpa i kollaps reprezentatsii," *Iskusstvoznanie*, no. 1 (2017): 199. ("…толпа стала одним из центральных образов особой мифологии современности.")
[150] Ibid., 202.
[151] Ibid., 198.
[152] Ibid., 202. ("Толпа рабочих . . . предстает черной, безликой массой тел, слипшихся в бесформенный ком.")

longer forming an amorphous blotch on the canvas but having become clearly distinguishable, this mutation would inevitably imply serialization: the crowd becomes a metaphor for the dehumanization of the individual, who has been reduced to a mere cog in the machine, an insignificant component in an era of mass production typical of Modern, capitalist societies.[153]

Indeed, the crowd is one of the main characters that populate post-Revolutionary literary works, but it is neither a "faceless mass" nor a serialized entity standing in for the mechanical reproduction of the human. Unlike the crowds, for instance, in Serov's *Barrikady. Pokhorony N. E. Baumana* (Barricades. N. E. Bauman's Funerals), the same year of the aborted Revolution of 1905,[154] or the workers storming the Winter Palace in Annenkov's *Vziatie Zimnego dvortsa* (The Storming of the Winter Palace) of 1920, the crowds in the novels and novellas of the early 1920s, which are often narratives about the Civil War, ultimately resemble the organized collectives depicted elsewhere in painting: in Italy, by Giuseppe Pelizza da Volpedo in *Il quarto stato* (The Fourth Estate) in 1901; in France, by André Devambez in *L'appel* (The Call) of 1907. What they have in common is that the dreadful nebula of indistinct faces is transformed, throughout the narration, into an organized unit made up of concrete individuals. In the novels of the 1920s, this

[153] In Russia, crowds started to appear in figurative art in the first half of the nineteenth century. Karl Briullov's iconic *Poslednii den' Pompei* (The Last Day of Pompeii), 1833, is arguably one of the first paintings (and a *unicum* for Briullov, who was a portraitist) in which a crowd comes to the fore as a distinct object of representation. Yet at the center of Briullov's investigation is not the power of the crowd. In what can be perceived as an interesting flip of the terms, the element of chaos, that fifty years later would be often be associated with crowds, here is embodied by the Romantic, catastrophic force of nature symbolized by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius overcoming the crowd itself. In other words, here, although chaos descends upon the crowd, it is not one of the latter's defining features. Later, in the second half of the nineteenth century, crowds will become the main subject in many of, for instance, Vasilii Surikov's renowned monumental paintings. Just as, in France, the appearance of crowds in figurative arts can be linked to the revolutionary events of 1830, 1848 and 1870, in Russia, the crowd became an object of fertile artistic investigation especially after the Revolution of 1905.

[154] In the second half of the nineteenth century, funerals became a common theme in paintings, where they were a sort of "image-signal" of the *peredvizhniki*. See, for instance, Konstantin Makovskii's *Pokhorony rebenka* (Child's Funeral) of 1872.

process is facilitated by the main hero, who is often the fictional double (*dvoinik*) of the historical author.

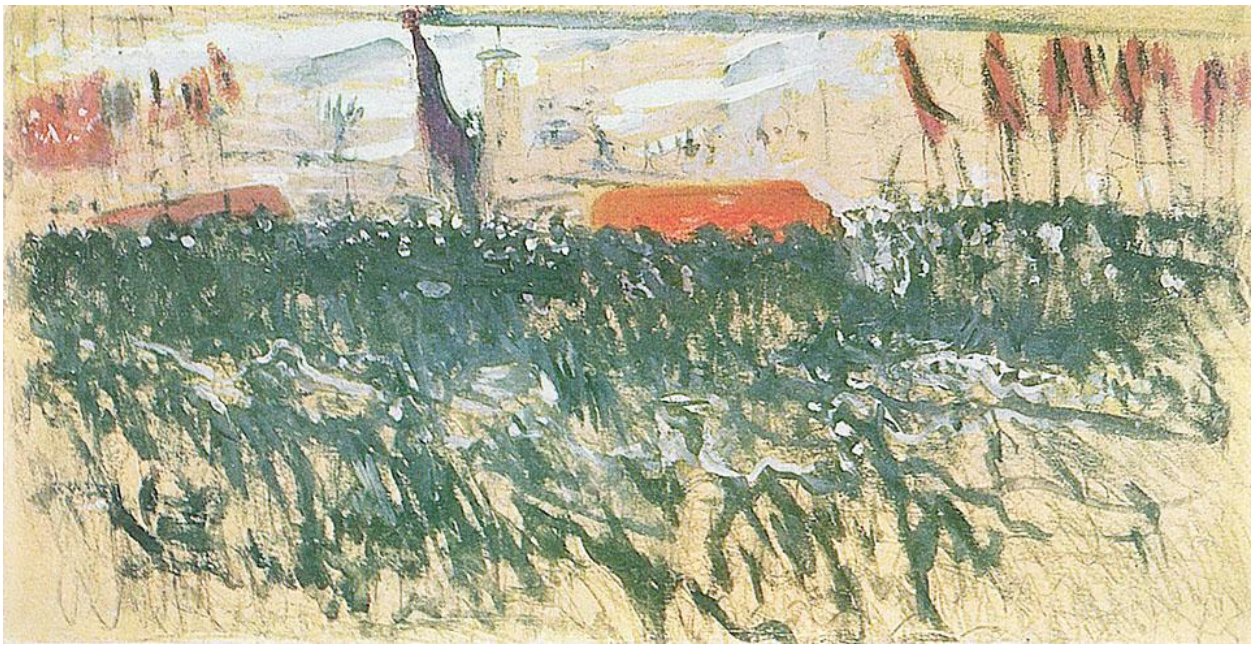


Illustration 5. Valentin Serov, *Barrikady. Pokhorony N. E. Baumana*, 1905, sketch, paper, watercolor, charcoal, gouache, 50 x 99 cm, State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia, Moscow.

In Dmitrii Furmanov's pseudo-biographical novel *Chapaev* (1923),[155] one of the most popular novels preceding Socialist Realism and a classic of early Soviet literature, the author narrates the 1919 campaign from the point of view of Fedor Klychkov, who is fighting the Whites under Kolchak in the 25th Army Division of Commander Vasilii Chapaev. The story begins at a railway station, where the workers' detachment (*rabochii otriad*) convenes before leaving for the front:

[155] Andrew B. Wachtel defines a "pseudo-autobiography" as a "first-person retrospective narrative based on autobiographical material in which the author and the protagonist are not the same person." See *The Battle for Childhood: Creation of a Russian Myth* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 3. In terms of proletarian pseudo-autobiographies, the case of Aleksei Bibik's novel *K shirokoi doroge* (Towards the Open Road), the first novel by a worker published in Russia (1912), is exemplary. The protagonist, Ignat Pasterniak, is a fictional version of Bibik. See Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination*, 71. Bibik's novel, despite being long forgotten now, was widely popular in the 1920s.

> The station is thronged, black with people. The cordon of Red Army men can hardly hold back the buzzing excited crowd. The workers' detachment, mustered by Frunze, is due to leave for the front at midnight, and workers have assembled from all the plants and factories of Ivanovo-Voznesensk to give a send-off to their comrades, brothers, fathers, sons. . . .[156]

These opening lines are important for two reasons: first, the crowd of workers assembled on the platform is indeed a dreadful and chaotic sight;[157] and second, their gathering from factories and plants across the region ("…workers have assembled from all the plants and factories of Ivanovo-Voznesensk…") represents a perfect metaphor for the formation of collective creativity—i.e., the transformation of illiterate proletarians whose story is narrated by the professional writer into workers who, having gained proletarian consciousness, are able to narrate their own story in *History of Factories and Plants.*

Yet the paragraph that follows shows how, in the early 1920s, the individuals who form this crowd of workers, even though they cannot be equated with Serov's blotches of black paint on the canvas, still cannot be identified within the larger, more powerful entity to which they belong:

> The new "soldiers" look ludicrously awkward and gawky—**many of them** are wearing the grey army greatcoat for the first time and it sits badly on them. It looks bulging and puffed up like lumps of dough in a kneading tub. All the same, they are good boys! Just take a look at **that one** now—he's tightened his belt into such a "wasp's waist" that he can hardly breathe, poor fellow, but still he walks with a jaunty swagger and the clatter of his boot rings out over the platform. Or **that one there**—resting his hand caressingly on the hilt of his clumsily hung sword with the air of an old-timer, and looking very important as he argues with his neighbour. **Another** has a revolver slung over one hip and two bottle-necked bombs over the other; a snake-like cartridge belt is twined around his middle and he marches briskly up and down the platform, eager to parade before his friends and relations in this warlike shape.

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[156] See Dmitri Furmanov, *Chapayev*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1941), 9.

[157] In the original Russian, the words "толпа" and "толпиться" occur 49 times throughout the novel. "Толпа" occurs 19 times in the very first chapter of the book alone, often associated with adjectives conveying, like in the first two lines of the novel, noise and blackness (e.g., "могутная черная рабочая толпа"; "…как любима, дорога ему черная толпа, как тяжело с ней расставаться"; "…кричала и вослед бежала гибкая черная толпа"; etc.).

> This **mighty black mass** of workers looked on and spoke of them with pride, love and unconcealed enthusiasm.[158]

Here, Furmanov provides the reader with a description of distinct elements of this crowd, but he falls short of identifying concrete people. What we have, instead, is a series of pronouns devoid of any referents.[159] Throughout the novel, the more this crowd is organized by Fedor Klychkov, Furmanov's *alter ego* ("When the revolution broke out he at once discovered that he had a gift for organizing"),[160] and Commander Chapaev ("In 1918 Chapayev was a first-rate fighter; in 1919 he was not only famous as a fighter, he had become an organizer as well. But he was an organizer of a special sort"),[161] the more these empty signifiers acquire a distinct personality and are anchored to concrete individuals. For instance, when the workers' detachment has already left for the front, this is how Furmanov describes the first encounter between Klychkov and Chapaev's "boon companions"[162] (*bratva*): "Every face unique, worthy of an epic poem. No two fellows alike among the whole crowd, and yet all dovetailed together perfectly, like a piece of masonry. Theirs was a rock-like unity. They formed one common family, and what a glorious family it was!"[163] This collective portrait is the epitome of the trans-biological Soviet family—of soldiers, but elsewhere of workers and of writers—formed by individuals who do not share blood ties but by people who stand together in facing a common goal: here, victory against the enemies of the Revolution, but later the victory of Communism.

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[158] Furmanov, *Chapayev*, 9.
[159] In the original Russian, where the English says "All the same, they are good boys!," Furmanov also adds the word "хлопцы" (lads) as a collective noun to indicate them. The English translation omits this word. See Dmitrii Furmanov, *Chapaev* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1947), 5. ("…это хлопцам не мешает оставаться бравыми ребятами!").
[160] Furmanov, *Chapayev*, 13.
[161] Ibid., 187.
[162] Ibid., 105.
[163] Ibid., 61-62.

Furmanov, who fought during the Civil War, was certainly not the first writer to explore the dynamic between the proletarian crowd and the individual. In Maksim Gorky's *Mat'* (Mother), written during his 1906 trip to the United States and published in the same year, many of the motifs that will be developed in later novels are already present. Besides portraying the struggle of the working class against capitalist exploitation, Gorky introduces topoi of early Soviet literature, such as the importance of education for the working class, the tension between man and machine, and the redefinition of the traditional family. The way the crowds are depicted in *Mother*, though, positions the novel much closer to painterly representations of a black, rumbling entity than to the more orderly masses described in post-Revolutionary novels. In fact, there is a terminological difference between the word "crowd" (*tolpa*), understood as a disorderly, yet not necessarily violent, entity, and "mass" (*massa*), which already presupposes, in the Soviet context, a certain degree of Socialist consciousness and organization.[164] In the novelistic discourse of the 1920s, the process of organization occurs on two levels, which are chronologically contiguous: first, the organization of a crowd of people into a military unit; later, the organization of a crowd of workers into a mass of workers.[165] Similarly, in terms of authorship, in the early 1920s, the traditional writer can be perceived as an organizer of the crowd, which is unable to narrate its own story. Since, in a classless society, the proletariat would eventually be able to organize itself without any external guidance—of a commander and of the Party—authentic collective proletarian literature would be produced only when the workers would no longer need writers (be it the professional writer in the 1920s or the Party official in the

[164] For a short overview of the evolution of meaning of the word "crowd" (толпа) in Russian, see Dustin Condren, "'Tolpa': Russian," in *Crowds*, ed. Jeffrey T. Schnapp and Matthew Tiews (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 328-31.

[165] Stories set during the Civil War were predominant in the Soviet novels and novellas of the first years of the 1920s. In 1923, a thematic shift occurred: while war stories were still being published, the first production novels started to appear in print. See chapter five of this dissertation.

1930s) to intercede for them. The process of creating a unified proletarian body is the dominant theme of these narratives about the Civil War, in which the main hero, like the author, shepherds the people and transforms them into a cohesive whole, a "glorious family." Later, the collective novels of the 1930s can be considered a major step forward in the process of self-organization by the same workers, who are now the objects and the authors of the narrative.



Illustration 6. Félix Vallotton, *La foule de Paris* (The Paris Crowd), 1905, woodcut on cream wove paper, plate: 6 5/16 x 8 7/16 in. (16 x 21.5 cm), image: 5 7/16 x 7 11/16 in. (13.8 x 19.5 cm), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/390873. In this woodcut, the chaotic crowd is organized on two levels: by the frame (the faces piled on top of one another emerging from the right side) and by the extended arms of the policeman. Moreover, as art historian Bridget Alsdorf pointed out, at a closer look the people in the crowd appear paired up, thus stressing once more the idea of reproducibility of the members comprising a crowd. (Panel discussion, "Crowd Wisdom: Three Scholars Take on the Multitudes," Princeton University Art Museum, April 26, 2018). On this topic, see also Bridget Alsdorf, "Félix Vallotton's *Murderous Life*," *The Art Bulletin* 97, no. 2 (2015): 210-28.

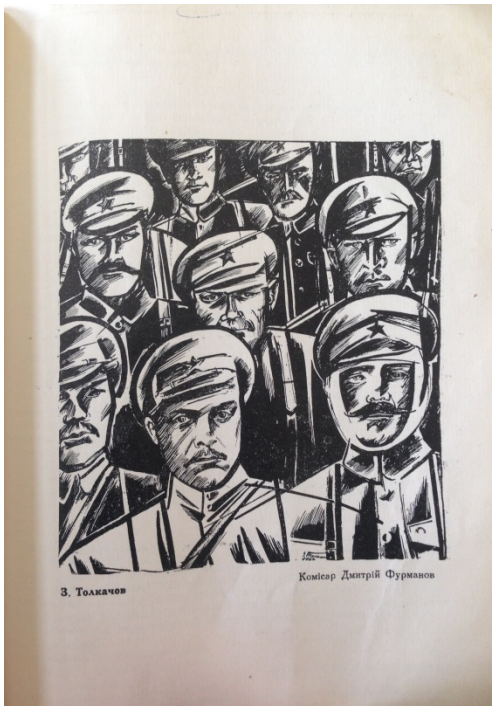


Illustration 7. Z. Tolkachov, *Komisar Dmytrii Furmanov*. Print. *Molodniak*, no. 10 (1927). Unlike in Vallotton's woodcut, in this family portrait of the military unit that appeared in the official organ of the Ukrainian Komsomol, there is no external organizing principle, not even the framing functions as one. Moreover, Furmanov is indistinguishable from all the other soldiers.

In *Chapaev*'s opening scene, the spectacle of the crowd of workers convening at the train station is accompanied by a feeling of joy ("the buzzing excited crowd") stemming from the exhilarating post-Revolutionary atmosphere. This subtext of jubilation cannot be present in Gorky's *Mother*, and the crowds here remain a dark, rumorous entity whose enthusiasm is quickly stifled by the police. Only a smaller cadre of people, namely those revolving around Pavel Vlasov, who read books and "spoke unusual things"[166] are fully fleshed characters as described by Gorky. The watershed lies, obviously, in the contrasting outcomes of the two Revolutions or, alternatively, between the historical defeat of 1905 and the triumph of 1917 that separate the novels' respective dates of composition. In *Mother*, the first real crowd scene occurs when the workers gather at the entrance of the factory to hear about the "Muddy Penny"[167] (*bolotnaia kopeika*). The crowd of women is described as "a crowd buzzing and humming in excitement."[168] However, *Chapaev*'s opening scene, in which the soldiers have not been organized yet, carries a striking resemblance with the opening lines in *Mother*, in which gloomy people leave their homes like "frightened roaches"[169] headed to the plant where they work:

> Every day the factory whistle bellowed forth its shrill, roaring, trembling noises into the smoke-begrimed and greasy atmosphere of the workingmen's suburb; and obedient to the summons of the power of steam, people poured out of little gray houses into the street. With somber faces they hastened forward like frightened roaches, their muscles stiff from insufficient sleep. In the chill morning twilight they walked through the narrow, unpaved street to the tall stone cage that waited for them with cold assurance, illumining their muddy road with scores of greasy, yellow, square eyes.[170]

Here, even the factory is portrayed as a terrifying entity awaiting its daily human sacrifice. This contradictory, dual movement, both spatial—from home to the factory in *Mother*

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[166] Maksim Gorky, *Mother* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1907), 7.
[167] Ibid., 81.
[168] Ibid., 83. The English translator leaves out the adjective "black" (*chernaia*), which is present in the original Russian.
[169] Ibid., 3.
[170] Ibid.

and from the factory to war in *Chapaev*—and emotional—at once turbulent and exuberant in *Chapaev*, enthusiastic and gray in *Mother*—exemplifies the divide between the passive role of the crowd in 1906, with the exception of Vlasov's "boon companions," who take on the task of educating the workers, and the intoxication of the masses following the 1917 revolution. The initial scene in *Mother* would not be possible after 1917. Now, the workers are leaving their factories, joining the Red Army, and fighting in the Civil War for the victory of the Revolution. In literature, they will return to those same factories only in the mid-1920s, where they will find them in ruins. The old capitalist "tall stone cage" had been destroyed and the new Socialist machine was yet to be built.



Illustration 8. Giuseppe Pelizza da Volpedo, *Il quarto stato*, 1901, oil on canvas, 293 × 545 cm, Museo del Novecento, Milano, http://www.museodelnovecento.org/it/collezione?in-10-capolavori?giuseppe-pellizza-da-volpedo. This monumental painting powerfully conveys the idea of the proletariat as a formidable, unstoppable, and united force. The woman who leads the crowd carrying an infant can be compared to the mother portrayed in Gorky's novel.

The understanding of the individual self (*lichnost'*) as part of a larger collective body has deep roots in Russian cultural history. It is certainly true that, "[c]ontrary to the Orientalizing

stereotype of Russia's essential collectivist culture and to the history of disregard and harsh oppression of the individual in Russia's social life, a strong countercurrent in Russian intellectual life continuously and vigorously asserted the prime importance of the individual and the self";[171] however, the concept of the self, regardless of its shifts in meaning,[172] nonetheless contained a strong social and civic component and was not understood as a morally and socially discrete entity. This dynamic manifested itself in the tension between "individual" and "individualistic," which was one of the tropes of early Soviet discourse and permeated most debates on collective creativity. This dynamic between the self and the collective, the idea that the "philosophies and stances of collectivism had long been entwined in a common relationship—sometimes a tidy dialectic, often a troubled dialogue—with ideas magnifying the individual and the inward self"[173] is crucial to understand both the genesis and the pragmatics of collective creativity.

Let us go back to *Chapaev* and try to understand what happens in literary practice to this tension between individual personality and the collective, on the one hand, and the professional and proletarian writer on the other. First of all, the individuals who populate the novels and novellas of the 1920s are reproducible, in the sense that the number of the people in the crowd, like fractal structures, can increase in number *ad libitum* not only without altering or disrupting the whole (the proletarian body) but also, and most importantly, by precisely reiterating its configuration. They are also specific, in the sense that they retain their individuality; they have distinct faces with which the author acquaints the reader. In fact, before concluding that

[171] Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination*, 62.
[172] See Steinberg, "Knowledges of Self," chap. 2 in *Proletarian Imagination*, for a discussion of the notions of the self in Russia. For a detailed study of the evolution of the meaning of the word *lichnost'*, see also Viktor Vinogradov, "Lichnost'," ed. V. V. Lopatin, in *Istoriia slov: okolo 1,500 slov i vyrazhenii i bolee 5,000 slov, s nimi sviazannykh,* ed. N. IU. Shvedova et al. (Moskva: Institut russkogo iazyka im. V.V. Vinogradova RAN, 1999), 271-309.
[173] Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination*, 103.

Chapaev's companions form a glorious family, Furmanov spends a couple of pages providing the reader with a detailed description of some of these individuals:

> Kochnev left the room. Fedor thought he looked like a professional athlete, he was so swift, light, supple and sinewy. He wore a short quilted jacket, with short sleeves, a very small cap pressed on the back of his head, boots and puttees. He could not have been thirty, but his forehead was already furrowed with wrinkles. His eyes were light grey and had a cunning twinkle in them; he had a way of tweaking his broad nose with his finger and assuming a mischievous air. He had the teeth of a wolf, white and very strong; and when he laughed he bared them ferociously as though he were going to tear people to shreds.
>
> Then there was Chekov. He had extraordinary bushy red eyebrows, a formidable moustache, a powerful jaw and his Mongolian cheek-bones. His thick lower lip hung down like a blood-soaked leech, his jaw protruded like a square block of cast-iron, and above it, sprouting fungus-like, was his pasty-coloured nose, covered with beads of sweat. From under his shaggy eyebrows his eyes glowed like live coals. His shoulders were square and broad, his hands heavy and strong like the paws of a bear. He must have been a little over forty years of age.
>
> Ilya Tetkin, a Red Army man with a fine record of service, a house-painter by profession, was busying himself with kettles, cutting bread into big chunks, shouting wise-cracks back and forth and laughing uproariously at his own jokes. He was very good-natured, noisy, popular with the other men, fond of songs and games, always performing all sort of amusing antics. In years he must have been a little older than Petka—twenty-six or twenty-eight.[174]

After Kochnev, Chekov, and Tetkin follow the descriptions of Vikhor, Shmarin, Averka, and Leksey. These descriptions, much more detailed than the initial rough sketches of the crowd at the station, seem to grow exponentially with the level of organization of the detachment. In Boris Kustodiev's painting *Bol'shevik* of 1920, the multitude of people, guided by the overwhelming presence of the Bolshevik in the middle carrying a long red flag, is no longer a black stain on canvas, but it is comprised of individuals whose physical features are starting to become recognizable. By the same token, the professional writer is conceived as someone who is already a proletarian and/or has experienced, to a greater or lesser extent, this proletarian collectivism alongside the people whose stories he narrates. In other words, the writer cannot be outside of the

[174] Furmanov, *Chapayev*, 60-61.

world over which he claims authorial agency. How does the main hero, however, who is often the fictional *alter-ego* of the author, manage, in Trotsky's words, to "unite them by a general slogan [*obshchim klichem*]"?[175]



Illustration 9. Boris Kustodiev, *Bol'shevik*, 1920, oil on canvas, 101 x 141 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, https://www.tretyakovgallery.ru/collection/bolshevik/.

To better grasp the implications of this tension between the heterogeneity of the crowd and its "rock-like unity" and to understand how these novels can be interpreted as snapshots of the new Socialist family, we need to go back to the notions of *kollektiv* (collective) introduced in the first chapter. To do so, we need to turn our attention to the manner in which the crowd, as a

[175] Leon Trotsky, "The Proletariat and the Revolution," in *Our Revolution: Essays on Working-Class and International Revolution, 1904-1917*, trans. by Moissaye J. Olgin (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1918), 30.

social phenomenon, was perceived by social psychologists in the last decades of the nineteenth century and triangulate it with the idea of the collective as a group of people "united by a common mood."[176] This will allow us to frame the idea of a collective as a crowd with a commonly perceived identity. Once this perceived identity is the collective identity of the proletariat, one can talk about the proletarian masses (*proletarskie massy*). The tension between the collective and the crowd can be traced back to the last decades of the nineteenth century, when works focusing on the behavior of the crowd were published by sociologists and psychologists in both Europe and Russia. Among them, the figure of French psychologist Gustave Le Bon certainly stands out.

In 1895, Le Bon published *Psychologie des foules* (Psychology of Crowds), translated into English as *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind.*[177] In this foundational work on collective psychology, Le Bon's aim is to scientifically determine the psychology of the crowd, understood as an entity *per se* that displays characteristics unique and irreducible to the sum of the characteristics of its discrete elements. Le Bon's perception of the crowd not in terms of the spatial or geographical co-presence of physical bodies but rather of "psychological co-presence" (*compresenza psicologica*)[178] lends itself to more productive analysis, because it allows us to graft it onto the idea of the presumed collective consciousness of the proletariat. Within this framework, proletarians, simply by virtue of this shared psychological bond, form a crowd even when they do not congregate.[179] The fact that Le Bon also identifies the crowd as the

[176] Strickland, "Russian and Soviet Social Psychology," 583.
[177] Citations refer to Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1903).
[178] Carlo Maria Zampi, "La folla criminale e la responsabilità individuale" *Rivista di criminologia, vittimologia e sicurezza* 8, no. 3 (Settembre-Dicembre 2013), 32. http://www.vittimologia.it/rivista/articolo_zampi_2013-03.pdf (last accessed on January 13, 2019).
[179] Even though Le Bon never mentions the proletariat, he does bring up social class which, alongside casts and sects, he perceives as a "homogeneous" crowd.

fundamental social entity capable of shaping the course of modern history can therefore also be interpreted from a Marxist perspective: "The age we are about to enter will in truth be the ERA OF CROWDS."[180] This, however, with an important caveat: in his study, Le Bon describes the self as subjugated "to the *law of the mental unity of crowds*,"[181] which is determined by external "impulses," making it "the slave of the impulses it receives"[182] in the same way the conscious state of an individual is coercively suppressed by a hypnotist.[183] While "the individual possesses the capacity of dominating his reflex actions . . . a crowd is devoid of this capacity," and its behavior "is at the mercy of all external exciting causes and reflects their incessant variations."[184] Unlike other scientists interested in the psychology of the masses, such as the Italian scholar Scipio Sighele, who in 1891 had published one of the first studies on the crowd titled *La folla delinquente* (The Criminal Crowd)[185] and vehemently accused Le Bon of plagiarism, Le Bon's goal is to push back against a limited understanding of crowds that reduces them to terrifying, chaotic entities capable only of criminal, bloodthirsty actions; on the contrary, and under specific conditions, the crowd is indeed capable of heroic deeds, of which history itself is actually comprised. It all, according to Le Bon, boils down to "the nature of the suggestion to which the crowd is exposed."[186]

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[180] Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 15.
[181] Ibid., 26.
[182] Ibid., 41.
[183] Hypnotism was a popular practice in the second half of the nineteenth century in Russia. See Ilya Vinitsky, "The (Dis)infection: Art and Hypnotism in Leo Tolstoy," chap. 7 in *Ghostly Paradoxes: Modern Spiritualism and Russian Culture in the Age of Realism*, (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2009). On the topic of hypnotism and group psychology, see Daniel Pick, "Freud's 'Group Psychology' and the History of the Crowd," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 40 (1995): 39-61.
[184] Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 41.
[185] Scipio Sighele, *La folla delinquente* (Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1891).
[186] Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 37.

In Furmanov's novel, the "black crowd" (*chernaia tolpa*) at the station is later exposed to the suggestion of the leader Chapaev, thus acquiring, by virtue of infection, the heroism displayed by their commander. For Le Bon, crowds "place themselves instinctively under the authority of a chief,"[187] whose "will is the nucleus around which the opinions of the crowd are grouped and attain to identity. He constitutes the first elements towards the organisation of heterogeneous crowds, and paves the way for their organisation in sects; in the meantime he directs them. A crowd is a servile flock that is incapable of ever doing without a master."[188]

In Russia, Nikolai Mikhailovskii's "Geroi i tolpa" (Heroes and the Crowd),[189] published in *Otechestvennye zapiski* in 1882, was the work that, before Le Bon, tackled the issue.[190] However, Le Bon's *The Crowd* was an influential work in Russia even before its translation in 1896 under the title *Psikhologiia narodov i mass* (Psychology of the People and of the Masses).[191] Russian psychologists, and especially pedagogical psychologists, interested in studying the upbringing of children in a collective environment, had long criticized the dominant notion in almost all Western studies of the crowd, understood as an impulsive, chaotic, and ontologically violent entity that would always be morally and intellectually inferior compared to

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[187] Ibid., 134.
[188] Ibid.
[189] See Konstantin N. Mikhailovskii, *Geroi i tolpa: izbrannye trudy po sotsiologii v dvukh tomakh*, ed. V. V. Kozlovskii (Sankt-Peterburg: Izd-vo "Aleteiia," 1998).
[190] For an overview of Mikhailovskii'ideas, see D. S. Gorbatov, "Teoriia «geroev i tolpy» N. K. Mikhailovskogo: osnovnye idei," *Sotsial'naia psikhologiia i obshchestvo* 5, no. 4 (2014): 5-13. While Mikhailovskii was interested in the relation between the hero and the crowd, other works such as Ekaterina Letkova's "Psikhiatro-zoologicheskaia teoriia narodnykh volnenii" of 1884, also published in *Otechestvennye zapiski*, and Vladimir Sluchevskii in "Tolpa i ee psikhologiia," which appeared in the monthly journal *Knizhki nedeli* in 1893, focus on the crowd. For an analysis of Sluchevskii's position, see D. S. Gorbatov, "Fenomen tolpy v otechestvennoi psikhologii: kontseptsiia V. K. Sluchevskogo," *Sotsial'naia psikhologiia i obshchestvo* 6, no. 3 (2015): 21-29.
[191] See D. S. Gorbatov and S. N. Bol'shakov, "Fenomen tolpy v rossiiskoi psikhologo-pedagogicheskoi mysli kontsa XIX — nachala XX," *Problemy pedagogiki i psikhologii*, no. 3 (2015): 240. For the differences between Le Bon's and Mikhailovskii's theories, see E. P. Belinskaia, "U istokov sotsial'noi psikhologii: sravnitel'nyi analiz «psikhologii mass» G. Lebona i kontseptsii «geroev i tolpy» N. K. Mikhailovskogo," *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta. Psikhologiia* 14, no. 1 (2012): 9-18.

individual.[192] In Russia, psychologists and pedagogues put forward a more dynamic relation between the hero and the crowd that would eventually lead to the idea of the proletarian masses as a morally *superior* entity to be organized rather than resisted. Therefore, participation in the Soviet collective moves the individual in the opposite direction. The self is not devoured but rather enhanced, and the individual joining the crowd becomes a better person in doing so.[193]

The connection between inner, mental states and the outer, material world was paramount to psychology in justifying its status as an independent scientific field. In fact, in Russia psychology was a relatively new discipline that had emerged only in the second half of the nineteenth century after detaching itself from the abstract inquiries of philosophy and theology and anchoring itself in the material world of data-driven disciplines such as ethnography and sociology.[194] It had to struggle against the official ideology of orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality (*pravoslavie, samoderzhavie, narodnost*') which tended to conflate psychology with race and theology. This approach to psychology, which attempted to interpret mental phenomena as the direct manifestation of external stimuli fit well within the social philosophy of

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[192] Among the Western scholars who, at the turn of the century, published works on crowd behavior, Pasquale Rossi, an Italian sociologist, was the only one who perceived the leader as someone other than "a very despotic authority" (Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 137) or as a primarily negative figure able to manipulate, or rather infect the passive crowd. In *L'animo della folla* (The Soul of the Crowd) of 1898 and, later, in *Sociologia e psicologia collettiva* (Collective Sociology and Psychology) of 1904, his most famous work, Rossi puts forward an idea of the crowd that is not a destructive force *a priori*, but rather an entity whose negative impulses can be controlled by educating the individuals who comprise it. Rossi believed that the crowd, a "neutral" entity in normal circumstances, had the tendency to debase and devour the individual self. However, being a socialist, Rossi could not perceive the political struggles and fight of the proletariat as an inherently negative phenomenon from a psychological standpoint. On this topic, see Zampi, *La folla criminale*, 36-37. Rossi's work was barely noticed in Russia, his books were not translated into Russian, and only *I suggestionatori e la folla* (The Influencers and the Crowd) of 1902 was mentioned—in its 1904 French translation—in a scholarly publication of 1908. See Gorbatov and Bol'shakov, "Fenomen tolpy v rossiiskoi psikhologo-pedagogicheskoi mysli kontsa XIX — nachala XX," 241.

[193] The idea of *perekovka* (reforging) in a collective environment stems precisely from this dynamic.

[194] See Boris Lomov, "Introduction: The Context of Soviet Social Psychology," in Strickland, *Directions in Social Psychology*, 1-7.

revolutionary democrats such as Chernyshevsky, and later within a Marxist, historical materialist perspective. In fact, historical materialism, in its dialectical understanding of the world (the human mind vs the objective reality external to it) perceived knowledge as arising "from the influence of the material world on the knowing subject, who is also, in the final analysis, a material being."[195] Physiologist Ivan Sechenov was the first to "substantiate[] the idea of the conditioning of the psyche by the objective world,"[196] thus inaugurating "the period of the formation of the materialistic psychological theory . . . and the struggle with the predominant trend then headed by theologians."[197]

Vladimir M. Bekhterev was "a famous physiological psychologist and a pioneering social psychologist"[198] who developed Sechenov's work and in the 1880s and 1890s, "turned the arguments that in the 1860s-1870s were confined to an *ideological polemic* into foundations of a transformative *scientific movement*."[199] Despite his studies would be later obfuscated by the experiments conducted by Ivan P. Pavlov, "his contemporary and arch rival,"[200] Bekhterev's research was situated within an ongoing debate on mass behavior prompted by people such as V. Sluchevskii[201] and D. Bezsonov.[202] Bekhterev, in his attempt to objectify the study of psychology by collecting scientific data, identifying patterns, and eventually operating on the subject, opposed the disciplinary usage of abstract terms such as attention, will, memory, imagination

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[195] Loren R. Graham, *Science in Russia and the Soviet Union: A Short History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 100. Quoted in Tagliagambe and Rispoli, *La divergenza nella Rivoluzione*, 15.
[196] Lomov, "Introduction: The Context of Soviet Social Psychology," 1-2.
[197] Budilova, "On the History of Social Psychology in Russia," 15.
[198] Strickland, "Russian and Soviet Social Psychology," 582.
[199] Andy Byford, "V.M. Bekhterev in Russian Child Science, 1900s-1920s: 'Objective Psychology'/'Reflexology' as a Scientific Movement," *JHBS Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 52, no. 2 (2016): 104.
[200] Byford, "V. M. Bekhterev in Russian Child Science, 1900s-1920s", 99.
[201] See V. K. Sluchevskii, "Tolpa i ee psikhologiia." *Knizhki nedeli* no. 4 (1893): 5-38 and no. 5 (1893): 5-23.
[202] See D. D. Beszonov, "Massovye prestupleniia v obshchem i voenno-ugolovnom prave" (S.-Peterburg: Tipo-lit. K. L. Pentkovskogo, 1907).

and, most importantly, consciousness, and proposed "the remodeling of psychological realities into 'reactions' to external stimuli."[203] In his studies of pedology (the study of the development of children), Bekhterev located in the reflex, which was at the center of both Sechenov's and Pavlov's research, the schema (*skhema*) that would allow him to shift from the physiological to the psychological. For Bekhterev, the "reflex" was the core mechanism by which he understood "not so much a phenomenon of the nervous system, but a transferrable model . . . a 'schema.'"[204] The reflex was so crucial to Bekhterev's "objective psychology," within the broader framework of "reactions to external stimuli," that it would be renamed "reflexology" after the Revolution,[205] when Bekhterev started to apply his findings on preschoolers to a wider spectrum of human behavior.[206] In *Kollektivnaia refleksologiia*, Bekhterev explores "instances of spontaneous cohesive group behavior"[207] and often uses the example of the crowd being carried away by the speech of a powerful orator as the quintessence of the collective experience. Bekhterev viewed crowds not only as potentially disruptive, chaotic, and dreadful entities, in which, as Le Bon claimed, the individual self and will disappear, "but also as positive, creative and heroic forces."[208] According to Bekhterev's notion of behaviorism, the crowd is a group of people that achieves cohesion through reaction to external stimuli. Here, there is an important underlying narrative that connects his work on pedology to crowd behavior: in the same way that

[203] Andy Byford, "V. M. Bekhterev in Russian Child Science, 1900s-1920s," 106.
[204] Ibid., 113.
[205] Ibid., 100.
[206] Following Bekhterev's trajectory throughout the 1920s, he was able to navigate the complex transitional period of Russian psychology during the first Bolshevik decade. The translation of some of his key concepts to a wider spectrum of human behavior was probably dictated by opportunism and by the necessity to receive State fundings. These were the years in which particular interest was put on schoolchildren, especially waifs (*besprizorniki*), and how to reintegrate them into society. Later, volumes like *Bolshevtsy*, which we will analyze in chapter six, would be the literary testimony of this goal. Within the official Socialist discourse, Bekhterev's original focus on preschoolers only was too narrow. See Byford, "V. M. Bekhterev in Russian Child Science, 1900s-1920s," 114-18.
[207] Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*, 77.
[208] Strickland, "Russian and Soviet Social Psychology," 583.

pedologists aimed at developing an exact science to study the child and help him in turning into a fully developed adult (and, after 1917, a fully developed Soviet citizen), the crowd can be interpreted as a child lacking proletarian consciousness that needs to be educated and turned into an integral whole. Whereas, in the case of the child, it is the school educator through the help of the psychologist who is in charge of implementing a correct upbringing, in literature these roles are taken up by the hero. This dynamic can be also translated to the level of authorship, with the professional writer helping to shape a cohesive group of new proletarian writers.

The ongoing interaction between the literary system, on the one hand, and extra-literary systems on the other (*kollektiv*, *lichnost'*) informs much of the evolution of early Soviet literature of the 1920s. While, in later years, and most evidently after the collectivization of the economy in 1928, the word *kollektiv*, as we have seen, would be associated with production, throughout the 1920s, and especially in the years following the Revolution, it would resonate with behaviorist undertones.[209] At this point, the thread linking the notion of *kollektiv* to the crowd and, most importantly, to the way crowds are portrayed in the novels of this period should be apparent: like a toddler whose psychology "emerges as a set of reflexes, out of which, gradually, elements of thought and willful action arise,"[210] the crowd, at this stage of development, is an entity that lacks consciousness, but simply reacts to the stimuli provided by the leader. It is the leader, the hero of the traditional novel who neutralizes the element of fear with which chaotic, formless crowds inevitably begin.[211] Yet it takes a peculiar kind of hero, one who lacks his own biography and, often functionally, overlaps with the implied author, to unite them. The "collapse

[209] In terms of theoretical approach, a "military collective" can be interpreted and studied as any other collective. Military psychology was an important field of research in the early twentieth century. See Budilova, "On the History of Social Psychology in Russia."
[210] Byford, "V. M. Bekhterev in Russian Child Science, 1900s-1920s", 112. Here Byford is referring to Sechenov's theory.
[211] Bobrinksaia, "Uzhasnoe zrelishche," 225.

of representation" that Bobrinskaia identifies in painting occurs, in the case of the novelistic hero, at the biographical level. This shift from a biographical to a functional, or better, to an indexical plane of representation, is what characterizes early Soviet artistic discourse.

Furmanov's novel can be considered a good example of the new "orientation" (*ustanovka*) that literature, previously "formed around a bourgeois center," was trying to find.[212] *Chapaev* marks the watershed that separates the hero-centric narrative of the bourgeois novel from the new Revolutionary/proletarian literature, in which the individual hero is functional to the portrayal of the collective. In fact, in an article published in *Na literaturnom postu* in 1931 and titled "O Furmanove i proletarskoi literature" (On Furmanov and Proletarian Literature), Leopol'd Averbakh commemorates the deceased writer,[213] whom he perceives as an "authentic proletarian writer, in a way the prototype of the new writer that is taking shape in our Party in the Revolutionary period."[214] One important point in Averbakh's article is his discussion of genre. I introduced *Chapaev* as a pseudo-biographical novel, but in those years, detractors of Furmanov's work would criticize *Chapaev* for not fitting within the any specific generic parameters.[215] Indeed, the prose is fragmented, with distinct sections grafted onto the main plotline (Chapaev's biography, the letters, the battle of Piliugino, Fedor's diary). Elements taken directly from Furmanov's experience during the war[216] makes the literary work a hybrid between a memoir, a

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[212] Leon Trotsky. *Literature and Revolution*, trans. Rose Strunsky (New York: International publishers, 1925), 10.
[213] Furmanov died of meningitis in 1926. A longer version of the article by Averbakh first appeared in *Oktiabr'*, no. 3 (1929): 147-57.
[214] Leopol'd Averbakh, "O Furmanove i proletarskoi literature," *Na literaturnom postu*, no. 7 (1931): 4. ("…подлинный пролетарский писатель, в известном смысле классический образец того нового типа писателя, который формируется в нашей партии в эпоху революции…")
[215] Ibid., 6.
[216] In his article, Averbakh talks about Furmanov's diaries as "literary raw material" (литературное сырье) for the novel. The overlapping of these two practices (literature and war), just as in Babel's *Red Cavalry*, is another recurring motif of the 1920s. Besides stressing the need for literature to keep up with the pace of the Revolution—we will expand on this topic in chapter five—Furmanov was aware of the importance of a manly role model for the mass readership. In fact, one difference between the novel and

novel (too fragmented and too short), and a novella, bringing Furmanov closer to the work of the factographers. Yet Averbakh reminds the reader that "[t]hese critics forget that not only do literary classifications exist, but are also created. And they are created precisely by such writers as Furmanov. And, even more so, they are created in particular in an epoch like ours."[217] Averbakh here is recasting on the level of genre what, as we have seen, Iurii Libedinskii had written about authorship: "in the shift from one historical epoch to another, the problem of artistic personality shows up in a different way."[218] This concern for a redefinition of the artistic personality and a reclassification of the literary genres is crucial in order to understand how Soviet literature evolved in the years following the Revolution.

The idea that the plot-oriented and hero-centric novel was doomed as a genre was widespread in the 1920s, and it is exemplified in a short essay titled "Konets romana" (The End of the Novel) that Osip Mandelstam wrote in 1922. In this short essay, Mandelstam foresees the demise of this literary genre, which he defines as "a composed, self-enclosed narrative, complete

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the 1934 film of the same name and directed by the Vasilyev brothers that contributed to perpetuating the myth of Commander Chapaev. In Furmanov's novel, the legendary Anka the machine-gunner (*Anka pulemetchitsa*)—and women in general—is essentially absent. The issue, here, is related to the hyper-masculinization of the Revolution and the widespread perception of the feminization of power as one of the main causes of the fall of the Romanov family. In his diaries, for instance, Furmanov mentions how the peasants would constantly mock the Tsar for his "unmanliness." See Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 17. In the 1930s, this hyper-masculinization of the Revolutionary period is no longer present. On this topic, see Eliot Borenstein, *Men without Women: Masculinity and Revolution in Russian Fiction, 1917-1929* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000). For an analysis of the mythologization of Chapaev in Soviet popular history, see Jason Read Morton, "The Creation of a 'People's Hero: Vasilii Ivanovich Chapaev and the Fate of Soviet Popular History," (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2017), http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/etd/ucb/text/Morton_berkeley_0028E_17068.pdf (last accessed on January 13, 2019).

[217] Averbakh, "O Furmanove i proletarskoi literature," 6. ("Эти критики забывают о том, что литературные классификации не только существуют, но и создаются. А создаются они именно такими писателями, как Фурманов. И создаются они, в частности, особенно в такие эпохи, как наша.")

[218] Libedinskii, "K voprosu o lichnosti khudozhnika," 39.

in itself, about the lot of a single person or a whole group of people,"[219] on the basis that modern novels are losing interest in the "life story of their characters"[220] which is the "motive force"[221] of the *fabula*. For Mandelstam the idea is that there is "an existing link between the fate of the novel and how at a given time the fate of personality in history is viewed"[222] and that "[t]he contemporary novel was at one and the same time deprived both of the *fabula*, that is, of the personality that acts in the time belonging to it, and of psychology, because psychology no longer substantiates action of any sort."[223] The novel modeled around the biography of the hero, then, is compromised because, if there is no psychology left to underpin the hero's actions, the novel itself, as a genre, collapses: "What happens to the novel after this is simply a story of the dispersion of biography as a form of personal existence; more than dispersion—the catastrophic collapse of the biography."[224] Indeed, the 1920s are years in which "materiality and physicality [not psychology] support aesthetics."[225] It is no longer psychology that "substantiates action"—and Mandelstam is right about this—but action that substantiates psychology, as a perfect reiteration of historical materialism, and, as such, action becomes the ultimate litmus test of the collective worldview of the proletariat.

Despite the biography of the traditional hero beginning to disintegrate, post-Revolutionary novels are not deprived of the *fabula*. Instead, what we have in *Chapaev*, in

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[219] Osip Mandelstam, "The End of the Novel," in *Selected Essays*, trans. Sidney Monas (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), 85.
[220] Ibid.
[221] Ibid.
[222] Ibid., 86.
[223] Ibid., 88.
[224] Ibid., 87.
[225] Serguei Oushakine, "Formalism and Revolution: A Sentimental Journey" (PowerPoint presentation, Conference: Two Revolutions and Beyond, Columbia University, New York, NY, November 3, 2017), https://harriman.columbia.edu/event/conference-two-revolutions-and-beyond (last accessed on January 13, 2019).

Aleksandr Serafimovich's *Zheleznyi potok* (The Iron Flood), another fundamental literary work of these years (1924), or, to a certain extent, even in a later novel (1927) such as Aleksandr Fadeev's *Razgrom* (The Rout),[226] is the biography of the crowd understood as an entity *per se*. *The Iron Flood* tells the story of an army of peasants, a "motley crew" that, in order to join the Red Army, "had marched through the shrapnel of the German battleship, had fought the Georgians, had lost its children in the mountains, had furiously fought."[227] They are led by commander Kozhukh,[228] who is eventually able to gain their admiration to the extent that, by the end of the novel, he becomes a sort of collective father: "*Batko*... lead us where you will! We will give our lives…"[229] The crowd does not have motives yet; it follows the leader, it reacts to the impulses provided by him. *Chapaev* and *The Iron Flood* are not the stories of the commanders, Chapaev or Kozhukh, but rather of how the Revolutionary crowd, at first disorganized, chaotic, and rebellious is turned into a conscious body willing to serve, without any external stimuli, the higher goal of the Revolution.[230] To quote what Aleksandr Serafimovich wrote in his introduction to a later edition of the novel: "I took anarchist mass [*sic*] which refused to obey and was prepared to bayonet its leaders if they displeased them and led them through terrible torments to the point when they realized they were a part of an organized force

[226] There are important differences between *Chapaev* and *The Iron Flood* on the one hand, and *The Rout* on the other. I will expand on them later in the chapter.
[227] Alexander Serafimovich, *The Iron Flood*, 4th rev. ed. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 157.
[228] It should be stressed that these commanders simply function as organizers of the masses, but the unity of the masses does not ultimately *depend* on them. This was, instead, one of Mikhailovskii's points: the crowd would return to its previous state once the leader has disappeared. In the Soviet context, however, there is a teleological aspect to this dynamic—Communism—that is absent in other theories on crowd behavior. In other words, this dynamic presupposes an evolution of the crowd as an entity. Any return to the previous state is ruled out from the outset. As far as Kozhuzh is concerned, it might be worth pointing out a terminological aspect: besides being a traditional fur coat, in industry, the term "кожух" indicates a "non-structural" element of a construction.
[229] Serafimovich, *The Iron Flood*, 172.
[230] On Chapaev and "the creation of heroes from chaos," see Angela Brintlinger, "Born in the Crucible of War: Chapaev and His Socialist Realist Comrades," chap. 1 in *Chapaev and His Comrades: War and the Russian Literary Hero across the Twentieth Century* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013).

of the October Revolution."[231] This is what many novels about the Civil War are about: take a riotous mass of people who do not want to lose their property (there is a scene in *The Iron Flood* in which Granny Gorpina tells Alexei: "What do the Bolsheviks think they're doing? What's the Soviet power going to do? To hell with it if my samovar is lost!"),[232] and show how they are united into a Revolutionary mass through the mediation of the main hero. Both Chapaev and Kozhukh lack psychological depth; they are flat (*kartonnye*) characters, who again demonstrate the priority of action over psychology. Chapaev's or Kozhukh's heroism does not lie in their exceptionalism but in their ordinariness: "If we were to analyse Chapayev, and to ask ourselves whether it was owing to 'superhuman qualities' that he attained his immortal fame and became a 'hero,' we should see that he was on the contrary extremely human, even lacking in many valuable qualities…"[233] Even Chapaev's death, for instance, is extremely human. There is nothing particularly heroic in it; it just happens, almost unexpectedly. The reader needs these heroes as central figures on the level of the narrative but not as biographical heroes: the individual biography of the hero disintegrates within the novel because it is no longer necessary to his function in the plot, and when his biography is given, it is almost folkloric (Chapaev's father is a gypsy actor), because the hero does not need to exist outside war itself: "when the masses grow up in wisdom and culture, the need for men like Chapayev will disappear!"[234] Or: "A Chapayev could only arise in those times. In other days there was not and could not be a Chapayev. Chapayev was born of the masses as they were at that time and no other. That explains why Chapayev could command 'his' division so brilliantly."[235] In those times, the hero

[231] Serafimovich, *The Iron Flood*, 10.
[232] Ibid., 30.
[233] Furmanov, *Chapayev*, 194.
[234] Ibid., 148.
[235] Ibid., 187.

is an exemplary element of the masses, an outgrowth of the crowd who, when the masses have gained proletarian consciousness, will simply fall off like a vestigial limb. Yet, even by the end of these novels, when these crowds have been resolved into a collective body, their transformation is still incomplete. In the early 1920s, this collective body still lacks proletarian consciousness. For this reason, the evolution of Russian literature in the 1920s can be investigated as the process through which the crowds underwent in order to gain proletarian consciousness: as Serafimovich writes in the very last page of the book: "They did not understand, they did not know how to express it, but they felt it."[236] The crowd feels the Revolution, but it is still unable to understand it. Truly collective works will appear, as we will see, only when these crowds have reached maturity and, without the crutches and stimuli provided by the hero and the author they are able to understand and actively produce, not only receive their own narrative. At that point, the function of both hero and author, like the educator whose charge has reached adulthood, will be completely redundant.

So, on the one hand, we have fluid, chaotic crowds that are usually turned, throughout the novel, into a whole, a unity, a glorious family by the main hero, and, on the other, we have the author, the professional writer who educates the masses. One of the reasons that the individual author is still central is that, at this stage, the same way the crowd stills need Chapaev and Kozhukh to guide them, the individuals among the readership still need Furmanov and Serafimovich because they are unable to narrate their stories. Later novels about the war display a different dynamic between heroes and crowds. Thus, we encounter Levinson, the Commander in Aleksandr Fadeev's novel *Razgrom* (The Rout), and another classic of early Soviet literature. In *The Rout*, the crowd is from the outset a united whole. In a sense, Fadeev picks up the crowd

[236] Serafimovich, *The Iron Flood*, 175.

at the stage in which Serafimovich has left it. As readers, we do not witness the same process of ideological growth that we see in *Chapaev* and *The Iron Flood*. As a hero, Levinson is even more unassuming and we know even less about his biography. Although his men perceive him as "a man of special, superior breed"[237] they do not need him to remain organized: "They [the partisans] too, flowed into the crowd, a compact, cohesive mass that did not break up."[238]

In the years leading to the introduction of Socialist Realism, in the same way that the "flow" of workers is molded into a conscious collective and the indexical function of the hero takes precedence over his biography, the mass readership becomes a collective that no longer needs the professional writer. This very last stage coincides with the appearance of a Collective Writer whose main characteristics are his reproducibility: with each individual "fragment"[239] produced by this Writer, whose worldview is shared by the authors of other fragments, the addition or subtraction of each individual author to a collective would not change, ideologically, the overall structure of its production, even as each singular writer maintains his specificity, *his own* voice, *his own* individual style. This would be possible by the conflation of the figure of the author—or rather, authors—with the hero and, eventually, with the crowd itself. From this perspective, the ultimate goal of Revolutionary literature, in its purest proletarian manifestation, is not so much about the writer reaching out to the people (this, as we have seen, is just an intermediate stage, and it was nothing new in literature) but about the people reaching out to the author and eventually absorbing his role. Whereas, in these narratives, the death of the hero

[237] Aleksandr Fadeyev, *The Rout*, trans. O. Gorchakov (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956), 50.
[238] Ibid., 41.
[239] As Gorky wrote in "Narushenie Lichnosti" (The Destruction of the Individual Self): "a writer is not a mirror of the world anymore, but a small fragment of it" ("…[п]исатель уже не зеркало мира, а маленький осколок.") See Maksim Gor'kii "Narushenie Lichnosti," in *Ocherki filosofii kollektivizma*, 68.

occurs through the transformation of the biographical hero into an indexical function, there are other cases in which this shift occurs by reiteration, i.e., by creating multiple centers of gravity around which a story narrated by one or more authors revolves. Whereas the case of *Bol'shie pozhary*, which we will analyze in the next chapter, is emblematic in this sense, Isaac Babel's *The Red Cavalry* functions in a similar way.

In the very last chapter of Gorky's *Mother,* the mother, who now has come to *understands* what her son was doing, goes on a very dangerous mission: to take the printed pamphlets of her son's speech to another town. When she is recognized at the station by a spy, she understands that she will soon be arrested and that her only way to fulfill her mission is to deliver the speech on that very spot to the people around her: "One paper was carefully pulled from her hands. She waved the papers in the air and flung them into the crowd."[240]

The novels of the 1920s are such pamphlets disseminated into the crowd. Spies are still present. But they are now coming from abroad.

[240] Gorky, *Mother*, 494.

CHAPTER 3

DEATH BY ITERATION

Do we have a center? No.

Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov, *The Twelve Chairs*.[241]

The Inextinguishable Fires of *Bol'shie Pozhary*

In 1926, Mikhail Kol'tsov, editor-in-chief of *Ogonek*, came up with the idea of publishing a *roman-feuilleton* starting with the first 1927 issue of the weekly satirical magazine. For this purpose, he summoned twenty-five of the most popular or—as the caption that advertised the novel claimed—the most "prominent" (*vidneishie*)[242] writers of the time, and asked each of them to contribute one chapter. The only technical restriction to authorial freedom was that each author would have to pick up the plotline where the previous one had stopped. This is how *Bol'shie pozhary* (Big Fires), the first Soviet chain novel, came to be.[243]

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[241] Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov, *The Twelve Chairs*, trans. Anne O. Fisher (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 232; "Центр у нас есть? Нету." Il'ia Il'f and Evgenii Petrov, *Dvenadtsat' stul'ev; Zolotoi telenok* (Moskva: Eksmo, 2014), 164.

[242] The novel was advertised on the front-cover of the last 1926 issue of *Ogonek*. The list of the participants, following the order in which their chapters appeared in the magazine, was: Aleksandr Grin, Lev Nikulin, Aleksei Svirskii, Sergei Budantsev, Leonid Leonov, Iurii Libedinskii, Georgii Nikiforov, Vladimir Lidin, Isaak Babel', Feoktist Berezovskii, A. Zorich, Aleksei Novikov-Priboi, Aleksandr Iakovlev, Boris Lavrenev, Konstantin Fedin, N. Liashko, Aleksei Tolstoi, Mikhail Slonimskii, Mikhail Zoshchenko, Vera Inber, N. Ognev, Veniamin Kaverin, Aleksandr Arosev, Efim Zozulia, and Mikhail Kol'tsov.

[243] To my knowledge, the first attempt to produce a chain novel in Russia dates back to 1911, when the first installments by Aleksandr Kuprin of a *roman-burime* titled *Tri bukvy* (Three Letters) were published in *Sinii zhurnal*. I. Potapenko, Vas. Nemirovich-Danchenko, A. Averchenko, A. Kamenskii, Teffi, A. Izmailov, O. Dymov, I. Iasinskii, A. Budishchev, P. Gnedich, and A. Roslavlev were, supposedly, the other participants. Yet the project was soon discontinued. See Fedor Kuleshov I., *Tvorcheskii put' A. I. Kuprina* (Minsk: Izd-vo Ministerstva vysshego, srednego spetsial'nogo i professional'nogo obrazovaniia BSSR, 1963), 414.
Besides *Bol'shie pozhary*, I was able to retrieve three other collective novels that were published under the Soviet Union and one in post-Soviet Russia. The titles are the following:

- *Smeetsia tot, kto smeetsia* (He Who Laughs … Is Laughing), published in the illustrated weekly magazine *Nedelia* between April and June 1964;

As a genre, chain novels can be loosely compared to the "exquisite corpse" of Surrealism or to the "linking poetry"[244] of Japanese *renga*.[245] In *renga* poetry, the participants (*renju*) convene in a prearranged location with the purpose of collectively composing a poem. The first guest, who can be either the most experienced among the *renju* or the one who enjoys the highest reputation, initiates the poem with a strophe "that matches the current atmosphere or mood."[246] Afterwards, the other collaborators take turns to continue the poem in a sequence by linking each strophe to the previous one by means of imagery or meaning. While the rules of *renga* are complex and well established in the Japanese literary tradition (for instance, the initial strophe, called *hokku*, must consist of three verses of 5-7-5 syllables and it must include a reference to a season of the year), the rules of chain novels have never been strictly codified. The underlying idea is similar, but there are crucial differences in practice: without convening in a prearranged location, and therefore without any kind of spatial co-presence, several writers take up the

- *Letiashchie skvoz' mgnovenie* (Flying through an Instant), published serially in the magazine *Tekhnika-Molodezhi* between September 1966 and April 1967;
- *Letaiushchie kochevniki* (Flying Nomads), serialized in five issues of the monthly magazine for young pioneers *Koster* between July and November 1968;
- *Dolg platezhom zelen* (Dollars, When Dollars Are Due), serialized in eleven installments of Saratov's weekly newspaper *Novye vremena* between July and October 2004.

Four out of the five novels mentioned, including *Bol'shie pozhary*, are also illustrated, which further complicates the issue of authorial agency. The illustrators are: *Smeetsia tot, kto smeetsia* — Viktor Chizhikov; *Letaiushchie kochevniki* — Aleksandr Skolozubov, *Letiashchie skvoz' mgnovenie* — Robert Avotin. Conversely, corny stock images accompany the text of the online version of *Dolg platezhom zelen*, https://www.nvsaratov.ru/nvrubr/?nvr=13273 (last accessed on January 11, 2019). While the 2009 edition of *Bol'shie pozhary* is illustrated by a single artist, A. L. Egorov, the original 1927 installments feature drawings by six different illustrators: S. P. Ladygin (Grin's chapter), K. Eliseev (Libedinskii), Boris Efimov (Babel'), Nikolai Kochergin (Zorich and Kaverin), V. S. Svarog (Iakovlev), and B. I. Antonovskii (Zoshchenko). An investigation of the interaction between text and drawings in terms of collective creativity lies beyond the scope of this dissertation.

[244] Tadashi Ogawa, "The Trans-Subjective Creation of Poetry and Mood: A Short Study of Japanese Renga," *Journal Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 1, no. 2 (2009): 193.

[245] Scholars also refer to it as "linked poetry" or "linked verse."

[246] Ogawa, "The Trans-Subjective Creation of Poetry and Mood," 195.

challenge of writing the same novel, each picking up the plotline where the previous writer left off. Most importantly, there cannot be any discussion of the plot beforehand.

The serialization of *Bol'shie pozhary* in *Ogonek* was advertised in the December 26, 1926 issue, the last of the year. On the front cover, the portraits of the twenty-five writers who had been summoned by Kol'tsov to participate in this literary endeavor are divided into a regular grid of five rows and five columns.[247] The arrangement of the portraits in the grid, regardless of the direction in which one chooses to decipher it (left to right, top to bottom, etc.) does not correspond to the chronological order in which the twenty-five installments would be published in the journal. Actually, it does not seem to follow any specific order. One may argue that since the list of the participants was, apparently, not definitive, the order of the composition also still had to be decided—after all, the publication of the novel spanned over six months, with the last installment by Mikhail Kol'tsov published on June 19, 1927, leaving margins for change along the way.[248] However, it is difficult to imagine that not even the first few links of the chain were not already planned, particularly taking into account that Aleksandr Grin, who penned the first installment, published in the first issue of 1927, simply edited two chapters of an already existing (and unfinished) novel that he had been writing since 1924.[249] Grin is portrayed seemingly at

[247] Ivan Kasatkin, Artem Veselyi, and Il'ia Erenburg, whose portraits are featured on the 1926 cover, would not participate in the project. For this reason, the portraits of Veniamin Kaverin, Nikolai Liashko, and N. Ognev, the three writers who replaced them, do not appear on the 1926 cover. This was also the case for *Letiashchie skvoz' mgnovenie*, the collective novel published in *Tekhnika-Molodezhi* between 1966 and 1967: in the introduction to the first installment by Mikhail Emtsev and Eremei Parnov (who published many of their works as a micro-collective), it is mentioned that 10-12 writers would participate (without providing their names, though) proving how the definitive number was still uncertain. Eventually, the story would be signed by eight writers.

[248] The issue covers the assassination of Soviet Diplomat Piotr Voikov, who is portrayed on the front cover, killed in Warsaw twelve days before, on June 7, 1927.

[249] The working title of the novel was *Motylek mednoi igly* (The Moth of the Copper Needle). It was published for the first time in 2001 in *Fandango*, a collection of Grin's most significant (*bolee znachitel'nye*) short stories and novellas. What Grin did with his unfinished novel is similar to, as we will see in the next chapter, Nikolai Borisov did in the same year with books by other authors in *Zelenye iabloki*. Besides using only two chapters, Grin simply changed the title (from *Motylek mednoi igly* to

random in the lower left corner of the front cover. The portraits do not seem to be arranged according to any sort of authorial merit or individual accomplishments either, provided that such a measure would be possible. Moreover, despite the presence of Babel's portrait on the top left corner, the arrangement does not follow alphabetical order. It is actually difficult to think of any rationale that led the editorial staff to arrange the portraits the way they did. All in all, it seems that the order is simply arbitrary.[250]

On page eight of issue no. 20 of May 15, 1927, five months after "Strannyi vecher" (A Strange Evening), the first installment of the novel, penned by Grin, a chapter titled "Doshel do Ruchki!" (Hit the Bottom!) by Vera Inber, the only woman alongside twenty-four men, was published. Leafing through the magazine from page one, though, the reader would have stumbled upon another portrait before eventually getting to Inber's story. In fact, page three displays the

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"Strannyi vecher"), minor elements in the text, (*muka* becomes *kashchitsa*, "Spartak" theater on Lunnyi boulevard becomes "Bellevue" theater on Kamskii boulevard, etc.), and the name of some, not all, of the protagonists: for instance, while the "court martial archivist" (архивариус военного суда) Vorvii Gizel' becomes "court martial clerk" (делопроизводитель военного суда) Varvii Migunov, and Vakel'berg turns into Berloga, the name of Gizel's/Migunov's maid remains the same (Efrosiniia). It would be worth investigating the reasons beyond Grin's edits in *Motylek mednoi igly*. This would be of particular interest in connection with *Zelenye iabloki*, with the crucial difference that, while in *Zelenye iabloki* a single writer edited and repurposed texts by other writers, here the author of both source and repurposed text is the same. See Aleksandr Grin, "Motylek mednoi igly," in *Fandango*, ed. R. V. Grishchenkov (Sankt-Peterburg: Kristall, 2000), 1188-1209.

[250] The chart below reproduces the front cover of the magazine, with a grid of five by five in which the portraits of the twenty-five writers are arranged. Each cell represents the portrait of one writer, with the numbers indicating which chapter the portrayed author has written in the chain:

9	11		3	25
23	18	20	19	2
10	6		17	8
5	24		14	4
1	12	13	7	15

The portraits of the three writers who eventually would not participate in the project—Ivan Kasatkin, Artem Veselyi, and Il'ia Erenburg—occupy the central column, with Kasatkin on the top, Veselyi in the middle, and Erenburg underneath him. They would be replaced by Nikolai Liashko (chapter sixteen), N. Ognev (chapter twenty-one), and Veniamin Kaverin (chapter twenty-two).

official group portrait of the twenty-seven members of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee. Visually and structurally, this portrait is strikingly similar to the cover that had advertised the novel five months before, and one can assume that *Ogonek*'s subscribers and especially *Bol'shie pozhary*'s *aficionados* might have been reminded of it. The two portraits, though, differ in two important aspects: the first, less relevant for our purposes, concerns the medium of representation; the second has to do with the arrangement of the single portrait that occupies the larger picture. In terms of the medium, in the case of *Bol'shie pozhary*, we are dealing with drawings,[251] which visually are in line with the numerous vignettes that are one of the distinctive features of *Ogonek* and, generally speaking, of both satirical magazines (e.g., *Krokodil'*) and journals (e.g., *Na literaturnom postu*) of the time, the members of the Central Executive Committee are photographed. However, the second major difference concerns the arrangement of these drawings/photographs on the page. Indeed, in the group portrait of the Party members, the pictures are arranged according to a specific order related to status. This hierarchical structure of the group portrait, together with the contrast with the apparent randomness of the group portrait of *Bol'shie pozhary*, is what I would like to explore in further detail.

The photographic portrait of Mikhail Kalinin, Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR from 1922 to 1938, the year in which the Committee became the Supreme Soviet, is displayed in a prominent position, in the top center of the page. Grigorii Petrovskii, chairman of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, appears on Kalinin's left, whereas Aleksandr Cherviakov, chairman of the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic is on his right.

[251] In the actual installments of the novel, each chapter features the photographic portrait of the author who wrote it, with the exception of Tolstoi and Zoshchenko, whose portraits are drawn by N. E. Radlov.

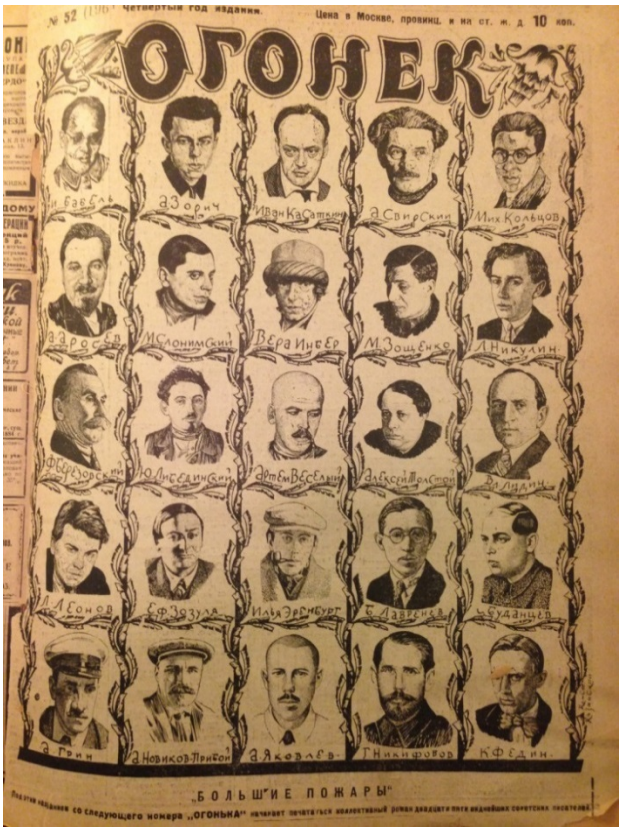


Illustration 10. Front cover of *Ogonek*, no. 52 (1926) with the group portrait of the twenty-five authors of *Bol'shie pozhary*. The caption underneath reads: "'BIG FIRES': Under this title, starting from the next issue of 'Ogonek,' we will begin publishing a collective novel by twenty-five prominent Soviet writers." ("БОЛЬШИЕ ПОЖАРЫ": Под этим названием со следующего номера 'ОГОНЬКА' начинает печататься коллективный роман двадцати пяти виднейших советских писателей.")

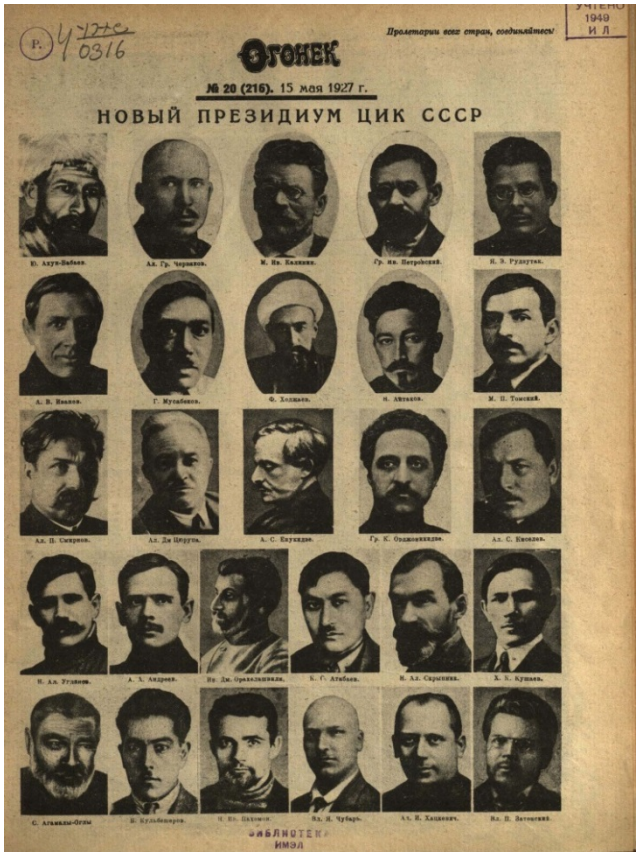


Illustration 11. Page three of issue no. 20 (1927) features the group portrait of six chairmen and twenty-one members of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee. Mikhail Kalinin, chairman of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, appears in the top center of the page, with Grigorii Petrovskii on his left and Aleksandr Cerviakov on his right.

Retrieved from https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/book/81893.

The elevated status of the six chairmen within the Committee is underscored by the arrangement of the six portraits in the top center of the page and, stylistically, by the adoption of oval frames instead of the rectangular ones used for all the other members of the Committee. That said, no other feature sets apart the chairmen from any other member of the Committee: all the portraits are of the same size, same color, same plain background ranging from light to dark gray, with the initials of first name and patronymic—for those who have one—and the surname in full inscribed underneath. Visually, the most relevant criterion of individuality that vouches for either ethnicity or plain and simple personal choice is the attire: for instance, the two representatives of Uzbekistan, Iuldashbai Akhun-Babev in the top left corner and Faizulla Khodzhaev, who appears underneath Kalinin, both wear a cap, while the rest of the members of the Committee dress in style ranging from suit and tie to military tunics.

Let us go back to the cover of *Ogonek* and ask ourselves a simple question: how does one structure a group portrait of professional writers instead of Party members? Why, in this case, was the choice made to arrange them apparently at random? What does this affected arbitrariness convey in terms of authorship and collective creativity? Besides starting from the top left corner and filling the positions alphabetically, what other ideologically "neutral" options were available? In fact, when in 2009 the twenty-five discrete chapters of *Bol'shie pozhary* where collected and published in a single volume,[252] the names of the authors are dutifully listed following the alphabet. The list is reminiscent of the long alphabetized entries that Soviet readers would encounter a few years later in *History of Factories and Plants*, beginning with titles such as *Byli gory Vysokoi* (The Tales of Mount Vysokaia) of 1935 or *Belomorsko-Baltiiskii kanal*

[252] See Aleksandr Grin et al., *Bol'shie pozhary* (Moskva: Knizhnyi Klub 36.6, 2009). Page references will be to this edition. In abbreviated citations, I will refer to the last name of the author who penned the specific chapter from which I am quoting: e.g., Libedinskii, *Bol'shie pozhary*, *.

imeni Stalina: istoriia stroitel'stva 1931-1934 gg. (Belomor: An Account of the Construction of the New Canal between the White Sea and the Baltic Sea), the most famous volume that came from the series.[253] In contrast, the group portrait of the Central Executive Committee is structured according to debatable, yet objective criteria—a chairman holds a higher position than an ordinary member; Russia, Ukraine and Belorussia became constituent republics of the Soviet Union before Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, besides, arguably, holding a higher status as countries; the Russian chairman is displayed at the very center of the portrait to underscore the centrality of Russia, etc. What are the criteria for performing a similar operation with writers instead of politicians? A vague concept like "talent," which was and still is considered one of the defining features of any great author, does not seem to be a plausible option: who should one prioritize in the portrait then, Babel or Zoshchenko? Should we estimate "popularity," or should we consider more "measurable" options, such as "copies sold" or "age"? All in all, besides the alphabet—and even an alphabetized portrait hardly demonstrates a convincingly purposeful order—nothing really seems to fit. The reason is that authorship does not offer objective parameters for such categorization; it partakes of a more ontological status: one is or is not a writer. The creation of the Union of Writers would correct precisely this: now that being a writer meant having a membership card issued by the Union, its status was pushed from an ontological priority to a functional one in terms of one's allegiance to the Party. What the Union of Writers did was bridge the gap between a group portrait of writers and a group portrait of Party officials. Indeed, had the group portrait of *Bol'shie pozhary* been composed after August 1934 instead of

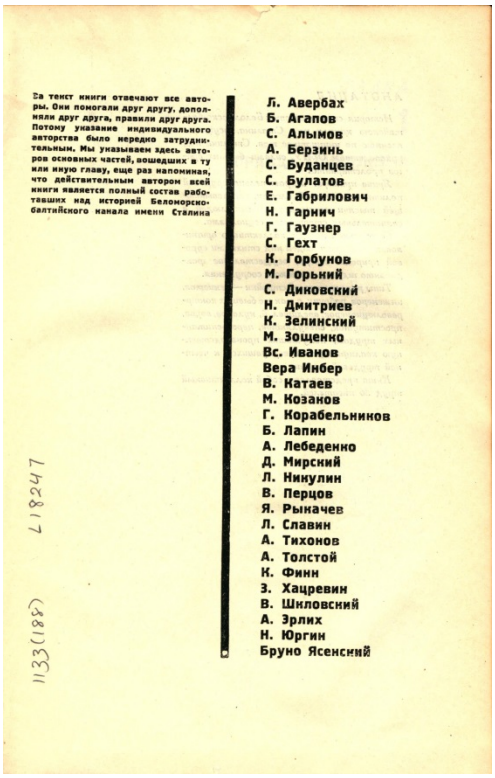
[253] The content section of the 2009 edition of *Bol'shie pozhary* displays the photographic portraits of all the twenty-five authors, each associated with the number, page, and title of the corresponding chapter. However, this is not a group portrait: besides the fact that the interaction of text and image prevails over the strictly visual element, the twenty-five photographs are arranged on three pages, thus disrupting the very essence of a portrait.

December 1926, at least three criteria might have come into play: first, only writers who were members of the Union would have been eligible to be photographed; second, their roles within the Union might have also been considered (Gorky, being the chairman, might have occupied a position comparable to Kalinin's); third, the years of membership might have been taken into consideration as yet another factor.

The group portrait of the Central Executive Committee in issue no. 20 (1927) of *Ogonek* is one of the first examples of what would later become a distinctive genre of Soviet visual discourse and which would comprise the collective portraits of the Politburo and the *doski pocheta* (boards of honor) with proletarian workers. This Socialist embodiment of the religious iconostasis "was remarkably insistent on the stylistic anonymity of individual portraitures . . . Being on the board was not really about the individual's personal achievements; it was about being incorporated into a new form of collectivity."[254] Even though this phenomenon would become particularly evident in its late Soviet form, its 1927 incarnation prefigures elements that would contribute to a more dynamic structure both visually—an oval frame for chairmen vs a rectangular frame for all the other members—and structurally—the three "main" countries (Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia) positioned above the other three (Transcaucasia, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan)—and Kalinin, the chairman of Russia, functioning as the focal point of the portrait, clearly marking the political hierarchy within the Committee. In the Soviet Union, the collectivization of the group portrait would eventually lay bare its "self-referential" element.[255] The importance of these portraits lies in the fact that the individual here, while retaining his uniqueness (he is indeed *physically* distinguishable from the others), it is also identical to all the

[254] Serguei Alex. Oushakine, "Presence without Identification: Vicarious Photography and Postcolonial Figuration in Belarus," *October*, no. 164 (Spring 2018): 58.
[255] Ibid., 59.

other members. In group portraits, the primacy of the representational function collapses, and the social function of the individual within the collective becomes the dominant. In other words, in a portrait "individuality was perceived as a necessary point of entry into a system, as a metonymic connection to a larger social 'structure' or 'function'."[256] We are back to the tension between specificity and reproducibility that we have seen in the previous chapters: the group portrait that appeared on the front cover of *Ogonek* in 1926 is symptomatic of this dynamic of replacement of the "portrait-biography" of the old professional writer with the "portrait-index" of the new proletarian writer.[257]


За текст книги отвечают все авторы. Они помогали друг другу, дополняли друг друга, правили друг друга. Потому указание индивидуального авторства было нередко затруднительным. Мы указываем здесь авторов основных частей, вошедших в ту или иную главу, еще раз напоминая, что действительным автором всей книги является полный состав работавших над историей Беломорско-балтийского канала имени Сталина

Л. Авербах
Б. Агапов
С. Алымов
А. Берзинь
С. Буданцев
С. Булатов
Е. Габрилович
Н. Гарнич
Г. Гаузнер
С. Гехт
К. Горбунов
М. Горький
С. Диковский
Н. Дмитриев
К. Зелинский
М. Зощенко
Вс. Иванов
Вера Инбер
В. Катаев
М. Козаков
Г. Корабельников
Б. Лапин
А. Лебеденко
Д. Мирский
Л. Никулин
В. Перцов
Я. Рыкачев
Л. Славин
А. Тихонов
А. Толстой
К. Финн
З. Хацревин
В. Шкловский
А. Эрлих
Н. Юргин
Бруно Ясенский

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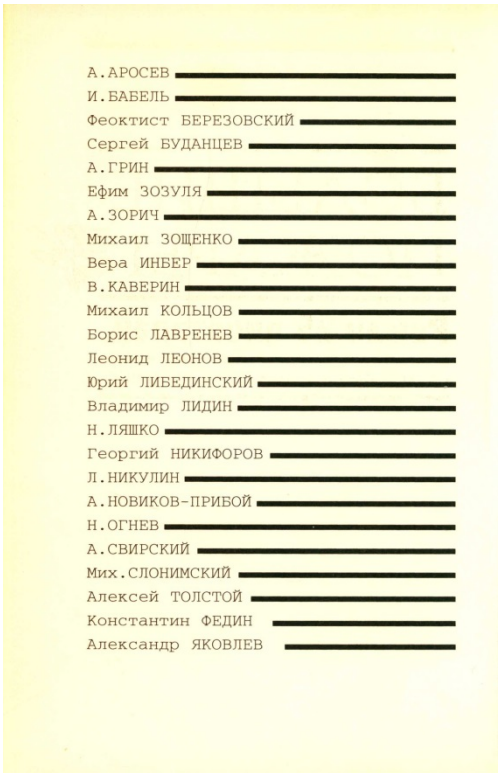

А.АРОСЕВ
И.БАБЕЛЬ
Феоктист БЕРЕЗОВСКИЙ
Сергей БУДАНЦЕВ
А.ГРИН
Ефим ЗОЗУЛЯ
А.ЗОРИЧ
Михаил ЗОЩЕНКО
Вера ИНБЕР
В.КАВЕРИН
Михаил КОЛЬЦОВ
Борис ЛАВРЕНЕВ
Леонид ЛЕОНОВ
Юрий ЛИБЕДИНСКИЙ
Владимир ЛИДИН
Н.ЛЯШКО
Георгий НИКИФОРОВ
Л.НИКУЛИН
А.НОВИКОВ-ПРИБОЙ
Н.ОГНЕВ
А.СВИРСКИЙ
Мих.СЛОНИМСКИЙ
Алексей ТОЛСТОЙ
Константин ФЕДИН
Александр ЯКОВЛЕВ

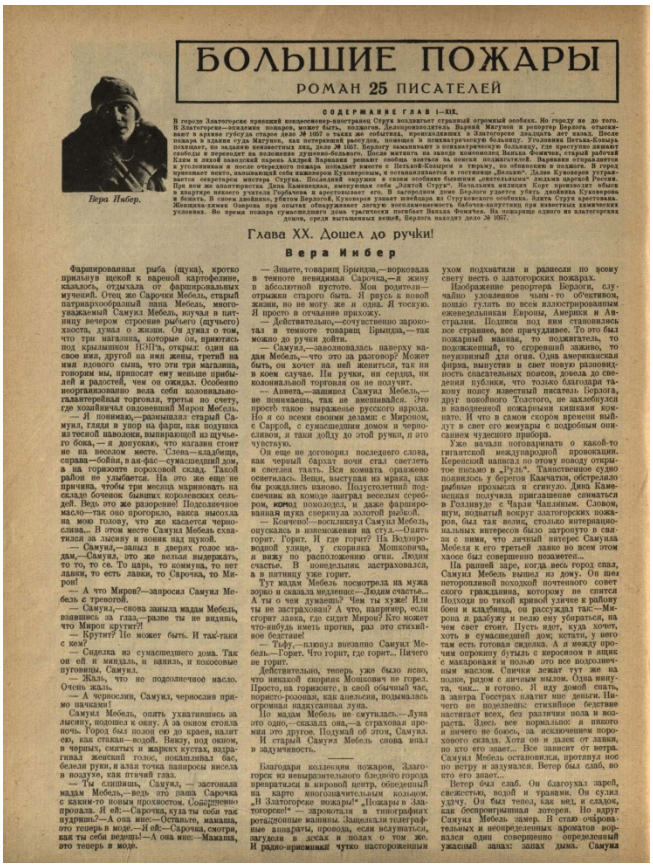
Illustration 12/13. On the left, the list of the authors of *Belomorsko-Baltiiskii kanal imeni Stalina* (1934). On the right, the list taken from the recent edition of *Bol'shie pozhary* (2009). Five authors participated in both projects: Budantsev, Inber, Nikulin, Tolstoi, and Zoshchenko.

[256] Ibid., 56.
[257] Nikolai Tarabukin, "Portret kak problema stilia," in *Iskusstvo portreta*, ed. A. Gabrichevskii (Moscow: Gosudarstvennaia Akademiia khudozhestvennykh nauk, 1928). Quoted in Oushakine, "Presence without Identification," 56-57.

In the previous chapter I compared the novels about the Civil War to family portraits of the proletarian crowd: similarly, the cover of *Ogonek* is, to my knowledge, the first family portrait of Soviet writers, the first tangible—visual, in this case —proof of the process of the collectivization of authorship. In 1927, the authors displayed in the grid are still professional writers; the final shift in the making of the Soviet collective writer would occur with the substitution of shock-workers and proletarian writers. By drawing attention to its own compositional morphology[258] and by randomly arranging the portraits, what the cover of *Bol'shie pozhary* does is therefore unmask the authorial function. On the *Ogonek* cover, there is no personal achievement that dictates a writer's position in the portrait and nothing distinguishing Babel and Zoshchenko from Sergei Budantsev or Novikov-Priboi. Their function can be embodied by anyone[259] regardless of "talent" or "copies sold," and if one or more "cells" were vacated, as was the case, they could be readily occupied by someone else without being noticed by most readers. The fact that, eventually, Veniamin Kaverin, Nikolai Liashko and N. Ognev took the place of Ivan Kasatkin, Artem Veselyi and Ilya Ehrenburg, whose portraits figure on the 1926 cover, was irrelevant for the project. And, as I said, one can assume that few readers paid attention.[260]

[258] Oushakine, "Presence without Identification," 59.
[259] Think, for instance, of the call of shock-workers into literature in the early 1930s.
[260] On a personal note, I already knew the novel well when I made the reproduction of the cover of *Ogonek.* Yet it was only as I was writing this chapter that I noticed the discrepancy between the authors portrayed and the actual authors.

Illustration 14. "Doshel do ruchki!," chapter twenty of *Bol'shie pozhary* written by Vera Inber. See *Ogonek*, no. 20 (1927): 8, https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/book/81893.



БОЛЬШИЕ ПОЖАРЫ

РОМАН 25 ПИСАТЕЛЕЙ

СОДЕРЖАНИЕ ГЛАВ I—XIX.

Вера Инбер.

В городе Златогорске пражий инопланетный инструмент Струя поджигает страшный огромный особняк. Но город не до того. В Златогорске—пожарное поверье, может быть, подлинное. Делопроизводитель Варнай Магунов и репортер Бернота отыскивают в архиве сундук старой дела № 1057 о таких же событиях, происходивших в Златогорске двадцать лет назад. После пожара в здании суда Магунов, как потерявший рассудок, помещен в психиатрическую больницу. Уголовник Петька-Кожура похищает, по заданию неизвестных лиц, дело № 1057. Бернота замалчивает в психиатрическую больницу, где преступно держат свободы и переводят на положение душевно-больного. После митинга на заводе коммунаров Варнай Фомичев, старый рабочий Ключ и юный пожарный парень Андрей Варнаков решают сообща бороться за поиски поджигателей. Варнаков отправляется в Угловинники и после очередного пожара исчезает вместе с Петькой-Кожурой в тюрьму, по обвинению в поджоге. В город приезжает некто, называющий себя инженером Кузовковым, и останавливается в гостинице „Большая". Далее Кузовкова устраивается секретарем мистера Струна. Последний окружен в своем особняке пышными „светильниками" времен царской России. При нем же златогорская Дева Каменная, выпустив себя „Золотой Струя". Начальник милиции Корт производит обыск в квартире некого учителя Горбачева и арестовывает его. В патологии дома Бернота удается убить двойника Кузовкова в бинт. В своем двойнике, убитом Бернотой, Кузовков узнает инженера из Струйкового особняка. Здесь Струя арестована. Женщина-химик Озерова при опыте обнаруживает легкую воспламеняемость бабочек-капустниц при известных химических условиях. Во время пожара сумасшедшего дома трагически погибает Варнай Фомичев. На пожарище одного из златогорских домов, среди вытащенных вещей, Бернота находит дело № 1057.

Глава XX. Дошел до ручки!

Вера Инбер

Фаршированная рыба (щука), кротко прильнув щекой к вареной картофелине, каялась, отдыхала от фаршировальных мучений. Отец же Сарочки Мебель, старый патриархообразный папа Мебель, многоуважаемый Самуил Мебель, играл в пятнашку вечером строение рыбьего (щучьего) хвоста, думал о жизни. Он думал о том, что три магазина, которые он, приютясь под крылышком НЭПа, открыл: один на свое имя, другой на имя жены, третий на имя юного сына, что эти три магазина, говорим мы, приносят ему меньше прибылей и радостей, чем он ожидал. Особенно неорганизованно вела себя колониально-галантерейная торговля, третья по счету, где хозяйничал овдовевший Мирон Мебель.

— Я понимаю,—размышлял старый Самуил, глядя в упор на фарш, как подушка из тесной наволочки, вываливающий из щучьего бока,— я допускаю, что магазин стоит не на бойком месте. Слева—кадильщик, справа—бойня, а за фас—сумасшедший дом, а за горизонте пороховой склад. Такой район не улыбается. На это же еще не причина, чтобы три месяца мариновать на складе бочонок баньюльских королевских сельдей. Ведь это же разорение! Подсолнечное масло—так оно прогоркло, какса высосала на мою голову, что же касается чернослива... В этом месте Самуил Мебель схватился за лысину и поник над щукой.

— Самуил,—запыл в дверях голос мадам,—Самуил, это же возьми выдержать, то то, то се. То царь, то комиссия, то нет ладьи, то есть ладьи, то Сарочка, то Мирон!

— А что Мирон?—запросил Самуил Мебель с тревогой.

— Самуил,—снова запыла мадам Мебель, взвившись за глаз,—разве ты не видишь, что Мирон крутит?

— Крутит? Не может быть. И так-таки с кем?

— Сиделка из сумасшедшего дома. Так он ей и вяжет, и вяжет, и колесные пуговицы, Самуил.

— Жаль, что не подсолнечное масло. Очень жаль.

— А черносли, Самуил, черносли прямо начали!

Самуил Мебель, опять ухватившись за лысину, подошел к окну. А за окном стояла ночь. Город был полон ею до краев, налит ею, как стаканы—водой. Внизу, под окном, в черных, сметых и жарких кутках, надрывался женский голос, показывал бак, белели руки, и алая точка папиросы висела в воздухе, как птичий глаз.

— Ты слышишь, Самуил,— застонала мадам Мебель,—ведь это пана Сарочка с каким-то новым проходом. Совершенно провал. И ей!—Сарочка, куда ты себя так ведешь?—А она мне:—Оставьте, мамаша, это теперь в моде.—И ей:—Сарочка, смотри, как ты себя ведешь!—А она мне:—Мамаша, это теперь в моде.

— Знаете, товарищ Брындза,—ворковала в темноте невидимка Сарочка,—я живу в абсолютной пустоте. Мои родители—отрыжки старого быта. Я рвусь к новой жизни, но не могу же я одна. Я тоскую. Я просто в отчаяние прихожу.

— Действительно,—сочувственно зарокотал в темноте товарищ Брындза,—так можно до ручки дойти.

— Самуил,—заволновалась наверху мадам Мебель,—что это за разговор? Может быть, он хочет на ней жениться, так ни в коем случае. Ни ручки, ни сердца, ни колониальной торговли он не получит.

— Аннета,—ошикал Самуил Мебель,— не понимаешь, так не вмешивайся. Это просто такое выражение русского народа. Но и со всеми своими делами: с Мироном, с Сарой, с сумасшедшим домом и черносливом, и таки дойду до этой ручки, я это чувствую.

Он еще не договорил последнего слова, как черный бархат ночи стал светлеть и светлеть таять. Вся комната оранжево осветилась. Вещи, выступая из мрака, как бы рождались наново. Полусгоревший подсвечник на комоде завтра веселых сгоревшим, комод похолодел, и даже фаршированная щука сверкнула золотой рыбкой.

— Конечно!—воскликнул Самуил Мебель, опускаясь в изнеможении на стул.—Опять горит. Горит. И где горит? На Водопроводной улице, у скорняка Мошковича, а внизу по расположению огня. Людям счастье. В понедельник застраховался, а в пятницу уже горит.

Тут мадам Мебель посмотрела на мужа зорко и сказала медленно:—Людям счастье... А ты о чем думаешь? Чем ты хуже! Или ты не застрахован? А что, вдруг-таки, если горит лавка, где сидит Мирон? Кто может что-нибудь иметь против, раз это стихийное бедствие!

— Тфу,—плюнул внезапно Самуил Мебель.—Горит. Что горит, где горит... Ничего не горит.

Действительно, теперь уже было ясно, что никакой скорняк Мошкович не горел. Просто, на горизонте, в свой обычный час, наристо-розовая, как анельки, подымалась огромная надкусанная луна.

Но мадам Мебель не смутилась.—Луна это одно,—сказала она,—а страховая премия это другое. Подумай об этом, Самуил.

И старый Самуил Мебель снова впал в задумчивость.

Благодаря коллекции пожаров, Златогорск из незаметного бедного города превратился в мировой центр, обведенный на карте многозначительным кольцом. „В Златогорске пожары!" „Пожары в Златогорске!" — заработали в типографиях ротационные машины. Защелкали телеграфные аппараты, провода, если вслушаться, загудели в досках и полах о том же. И радио-приемники чутко настороженным ухом подхватили и разнесли по всему свету весть о златогорских пожарах.

Изображение репортера Бернота, случайно уловленное чьим-то объективом, пошло гулять по всем иллюстрированным еженедельникам Европы, Америки и Австралии. Подписи под ним становились все страшнее, все причудливее. То это был пожарный мишень, то поджигатель, то подожженный, то сгоревший заживо, то неугасимый для огня. Одна американская фирма, выпустив в свет новую разновидность спасательных поясов, довела до сведения публики, что только благодаря такому поясу известный писатель Бернота, друг покойного Толстого, не задохнулся в наводненной пожарными кишками комнате. И что в самом скором времени выйдут в свет его мемуары с подробным описанием чудесного прибора.

Уже начали поговаривать о какой-то гигантской международной провокации. Керенский написал по этому поводу открытое письмо в „Руль". Таинственное судно появилось у берегов Камчатки, обстреляло рыбные промыслы и стянуло. Дина Каменецкая получила приглашение сняться в Голливуде с Чарли Чаплином. Словом, шум, водивший вокруг златогорских пожаров, был так велик, столько интернациональных интересов было затронуто в связи с ними, что личный интерес Самуила Мебеля к его третьей даже по всем этом хаосе был совершенно незаметен.

На рыжий заре, когда весь город спал, Самуил Мебель вышел из дому. Он шел неторопливой походкой почтенного совет ского гражданина, которому не спится Походил по тихой кривой улочке к району бен и кладбища, он рассуждал так:—Мерина я разбужу и велю ему убираться, на чем свет стоит. Пусть идет, куда хочет, хоть в сумасшедший дом; оттуда, у него там есть готовая сиделка. А и между прочим опрокину бутыль с керосином в ящик с макаронами и полью это все подсолнечным маслом. Спички лежат тут же на полке, рядом с янчым маком. Одна минута, чик... и готово. Я иду домой спать, а завтра Госстрах платит мне деньги. Ничего не подозревшись стихийное бедствие настигает всех, без различия пола и возраста. Здесь все нормально и никого и ничего не боюсь, за исключением порохового склада. Хотя он и далек от лавки, но кто его знает... Все зависит от ветра. Самуил Мебель остановился, протянул нос по ветру и задумался. Ветер был слаб, но кто его знает...

Ветер был слаб. Он благоухал зарей, свежестью, водой и травами. Он сулил удачу. Он был тепел, как мед, и сладок, как беспримерная эоторея. Но вдруг Самуил Мебель замер. В стаю очаровательных и неопределенных ароматов ворвался один совершенно определенный ужасный запах: запах дыма. Самуил



К. Г. ЗАВРАЖИНА
Мотористка шахты № 9

СВОЕГО ДОБИЛАСЬ!

тец возражал против того, чтобы я пошла на метро, но все-таки я решила не отставать от своих. А наших ребят, комсомольцев, как раз мобилизовали. В это время я получила путевку в санаторий и не знала, как мне поступить. Все же в конце концов решила отказаться от путевки и пошла на метро. Меня направили на 9-ю шахту. Там я была единственной девушкой. Первые дни было страшновато: кругом чужие люди, я никого не знаю, со всех сторон ругань. Мне поручили нарезать болты. Сил потребовалось очень много. Но вскоре эта работа кончилась. Я просила секретаря комсомольской ячейки отпустить меня в шахту или же отправить куда-нибудь на завод. В шахту девушек тогда не спускали, на бетономешалке работать я была не в силах, и приходилось болтаться без дела, временами дня по три. Я забивалась куда-нибудь в сушилку и прямо плакала от стыда: разве так учит нас работать тов. Сталин?

Как-то несколько дней подряд не было никакой работы. Не умели у нас правильно расставить силы на производстве, не умели тогда еще полностью использовать каждого человека. Я пошла к нашему мастеру и стала ему жаловаться, что мне нечего делать. Он не ответил и ушел. Я стала около шахты и заплакала, благо никого близко не было. Но меня заметил секретарь комсомольской ячейки.

Illustration 15. Chapter of *Rasskazy stroitelei metro* (Stories of the Metro Builders) written by sewing-machine operator K. G. Zavrazhina. See A.V. Kosarev, ed., *Rasskazy stroitelei metro* (Moskva: Izd-vo "Istoriia fabrik i zavodov," 1935).

The collectivization of authorship that *Bol'shie pozhary* foregrounds paved the way for the appearance of later works such as the volumes of *History of Factories and Plants.* Indeed, the value of the discrete chapters written by the workers who contributed to the volumes of *History and Factories and Plants* does not lie in their literary quality, but in their social significance, as the tangible proof of the creative force of the proletariat finally unleashed by the Revolution. Previously, we discussed how individuals in a larger crowd are both specific and reproducible, in the sense that the number of the people in the crowd can increase in number *ad libitum* not only without altering or disrupting the whole (the proletarian body) but also, and most importantly, reiterating its configuration. The structural relation between part and whole must remain qualitatively the same, although each member of the crowd may be unique in relation to itself and may be added or subtracted from the whole at any time without disrupting its collective function. Here, the same process occurs on the level of authorship: authors are specific, in the sense that each chapter carries the distinctive "style" of the individual author and there is no "death of the author," and yet they are reproducible because, first, each author can be substituted by another and, second, the group portrait can always accommodate more photographs (i.e., the narrative chain can be extended) without disrupting the configuration of the whole. Let us analyze now how this process of hero assassination and authorial collectivization plays out, at the structural level, in *Bol'shie pozhary.*

The events narrated in *Bol'shie pozhary* take place in Southern Russia between the first half of the 1920s and 1927:[261] in the provincial city of Zlatogorsk there is "an epidemic of fires,

[261] The events take place in 1927, *simultaneously* with their publication in *Ogonek*, thus solving once for all, at the narrative level, the issue of the "lagging behind" (*otstavanie*) of literature (we will see this in deeper detail in chapter five). However, not all writers seem to locate the events in the same year. It is certainly 1927, for instance, in Fedin's chapter: when engineer Kukoverov asks princess Abamelek-Lazareva the reason why she is reading a 1914 newspaper, the noblewoman replies: "I am saying, in the old style. It's 1914 for the old style, 1927 for the new." ("Я говорю, старым стилем. 1914 год, по

possibly arsons,"[262] and people suspect that these incidents are somehow linked because yellow butterflies appear right where the fires flare up. The court clerk, Varvii Migunov, and the reporter, Berloga, decide to investigate. They believe that the mysterious fires are connected with the numerous arsons that occurred in the city twenty years before. On their way to the court archive, where case no. 1057 about the fires of 1905 is filed, they pass by a huge mansion recently built by Struk, a Polish concessionaire who allegedly made his fortune in the United States and would soon become the main suspect. His niece, a *femme fatale* named Elita, works as his secretary. While looking for the case, Migunov spots a yellow butterfly: the archive is destroyed, and Migunov ends up in a psychiatric hospital, spending his time carving butterflies out of paper, while the case file is stolen from Berloga's dormitory room.[263] After a long series of incredible adventures, Efim Zozulia, having the privilege and misfortune of being the twenty-fourth and penultimate link of the chain,[264] decides to transgress the boundary between fiction

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старому стилю, 1927 год — по новому.") The pun, here, obviously refers to the implementation, in 1918, of the Gregorian calendar and to the 13 days difference with the Julian calendar used in tsarist Russia. Conversely, in Lavrenev's chapter, when Gorbachev('s double) is interrogated by Kort and Kukoverov in connection with his alleged acquaintance with younger Kukoverov during the devastating fires of 1905 and 1906, the suspect claims to remember him very clearly, despite the fact that "almost twenty years have passed" ("прошло почти двадцать лет"). See Fedin, *Bol'shie pozhary*, 195; Lavrenev, *Bol'shie pozhary*, 177.

[262] "…эпидемия пожаров, может быть, поджогов." The citation is taken from the short plot summary that appeared on top of every installment in *Ogonek.* In the 2009 reprinting of the novel, this summary is omitted.

[263] Berloga possibly served as the prototype for accountant Berlaga in Ilf and Petrov's *The Golden Calf*. Both characters end up in psychiatric hospitals: in *Bol'shie Pozhary*, Berloga is unjustly locked up in chapter five, written by Leonid Leonov. See the passage in *The Golden Calf*: "'Berlaga the accountant is in the madhouse.'" 'What on earth do you mean? Berlaga? Why, he's perfectly normal.'" (Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov, *The Golden Calf*, trans. John A. C. Richardson [New York: Random House, 1962], 47). See also IU. K. Shcheglov, *Romany Il'fa i Petrova: sputnik chitatelia*, 3rd ed. (Sankt-Peterburg: Izd-vo Ivana Limbakha, 2009), 387.

[264] This is what Il'ia Zverev writes in his introduction to *Smeetsia tot, kto smeetsia*, the collective novel published in *Nedelia* in 1964: "Everyone agreed to write the first chapter, but no one was enthralled by the perspective of finding himself closer to the epilogue." Later: "nobody really liked the perspective of disentangling all this. As far as entangling was concerned, well, that was a different matter" ("Все соглашались писать первую главу, и никого не радовала перспектива оказаться поближе к заключительной"; "никому не улыбалась перспектива все это распутывать. Вот накручивать – это

and reality once for all by taking the action directly to the editorial staff of *Ogonek*, the magazine in which the novel was being published.[265] For his narrative purposes, in a chapter quite rightfully titled "Poslednii geroi romana" (The Last Hero of the Novel), Zozulia hastily summons an inventor called Zhelatinov,[266] who claims to have built a special fire extinguisher able to stop the inextinguishable fires for good[267]—thus, solving the problem without really having found the cause of it and, most importantly, the culprit. Even more significantly, Zhelatinov has constructed another device that facilitates the mechanical reduction of personnel (*mekhanicheskoe sokrashchenie shtatov*),[268] thus eliminating unnecessary characters in the novel, including Elita Struk (a.k.a. Dina Kamenteskaia), Migunov, Berloga, Gorbachev, who in

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пожалуйста.") See Valentin Kataev et al, *Smeetsia tot, kto smeetsia* (Moskva: Eksmo, 2010), 10. Zverev, who authored the sixth chapter and was, therefore, in charge of an already significant amount of "disentanglement," reveals that they eventually wrote down the names on pieces of paper and draw them out of a hat. Considering the parodic character of *Smeetsia tot, kto smeetsia*, what Zverev claims suspiciously reminds of another scene in Ilf and Petrov's *The Golden Calf*, when the thirty-four "Children of Lieutenant Schmidt" decide to divide the Soviet Union into thirty-four areas and randomly assign them to each "child" by drawing pieces of paper out of a "rabbit-fur cap with earflaps." See Ilf and Petrov, *The Golden Calf*, 21.

[265] Speaking of the blurring of the divide between the fictional world of the novel and reality, in chapter six, titled "Piat' geroev proletarskogo proiskhozhdeniia" (Five Heroes of Proletarian Origins), Iurii Libendinskii introduces the editorial staff of *Krasnoe Zlatogor'e*, Zlatogorsk's newspaper already mentioned by Grin in the first chapter, thus creating a parallel with *Ogonek*, the journal in which the novel was being published. To make this parallel even more apparent, *Krasnoe Zlatogor'e*'s editor in chief Pozhidaev, during a conversation with Berens, the Chairman of the Executive Committee, brings up Mikhail Kol'tsov, his counterpart in the real world, editor of *Ogonek* and in charge of the book epilogue. See Libedinskii, *Bol'shie pozhary*, 92.

[266] Soon after Zhelatinov arrives in Moscow in the headquarters of *Ogonek*, Kort, the head of the Zlatogorsk police, together with another officer, enter the same offices claiming to be after Zhelatinov, because they suspect him to be involved with the mysterious fires. Fiction and reality now overlap, and Zozulia's chapter is being written (and published) *while* all these events are happening.

[267] Zhelatinov's fire extinguishers should rather be called "fire inhibitors," since it was enough to simply put one inside a building for it not to catch fire: "All I need to do is place my fire extinguishers inside the houses, and then let Struk and the devil himself try to set them on fire as they please. Let them do it by any means necessary. They won't catch fire! If a single fire occurs after having placed my fire extinguishers, execute me!" ("Мне нужно только расставить в домах мои огнетушители, и потом пусть Струк и сам дьявол жгут, как хотят, дома. Пускай поджигают всеми средствами — гореть не будет! Если при моем огнетушителе будет хотя бы один пожар, — расстреляйте меня!") See Zozulia, *Bol'shie pozhary*, 291.

[268] Zozulia, *Bol'shie pozhary*, 294.

the meantime had decided to grow a real beard, and even Zlatogorsk's entire fire department which, says Zozulia, for whatever reason had never been mentioned.[269] In other words, Zozulia had probably done the only thing that, at that point of the *fabula*, could have been done to guide the novel to a denouement: by forcefully stopping the fires and literally liquidating heroes, thereby voiding what those who came before him had written, he was able to resolve a huge chunk of the narrative burden introduced by his predecessors and, as a consequence, to dispose of many characters and possible developments of the plotline.[270] To use a simple paraphrase, what Zozulia does (and ask the reader to do as well) is the following: since his position as the penultimate writer forces him to direct the plot towards a more or less credible ending, he writes his chapter as if a lot of the material that was written before him had never been written; this allows him to cherry-pick the narrative material that he wants and needs. What this expedient solution lays bare is neither a matter of authorial laziness nor of sloppiness; it is not even a concern for making the plotline less far-fetched: by openly unmasking and exposing the figure of the author behind each chapter, killing off characters as he goes, Zozulia surrenders to the fact that collective creativity, at least in the case of chain novels, does not result in "impersonal creativity"[271] or in a sort of pre-Barthian death of the author. On the contrary, what Zozulia ends up revealing is that each writer leaves an indelible trace that can be, at the level of the narrative structure, erased only by authorial agency itself, thus creating a catch-22 and neutralizing any attempt at producing a seamless or faceless narrative. What this palimpsest of authorship reveals is precisely what it tries to conceal, which is the stitched-together *fabula*. Instead of sewing up an

[269] Ibid., 296.
[270] In a sense, by disposing of what many authors had written, Zozulia hauntingly foresaw what would happen, ten years later, to several participants: Isaak Babel', Georgii Nikiforov, A. Zorich (Vasilii Lokot's pen name), Aleksandr Arosev and Mikhail Kol'tsov were all repressed between 1937 and 1940. Sergei Budantsev was arrested for counterrevolutionary activities and died in a labor camp in 1940.
[271] Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Writer*, 10.

exquisite corpse, Zozulia exposes the seams of a literary chimera. The only way for Zozulia to filter all the narrative noise and put the hero back at the center of the plot in order to give a story a sense of completeness was to suppress the narrative surplus that had been bequeathed to him by his predecessors. The message was clear: readers, these characters and these authors have never existed.[272]

The problem of a large and unmanageable number of characters is a common issue in chain novels. This is true especially in the case of *Bol'shie pozhary*, with such a high volume of contributors: in twenty-five chapters, the reader is introduced to almost one hundred different characters.[273] For the reader, it is almost an impossible task to keep track of all of them. Each new hero embodies authorial agency and struggles to take the novel in the direction his creator intends. How do writers deal with this ever-growing ensemble of characters apart from tyrannically culling the population the way Zozulia did?

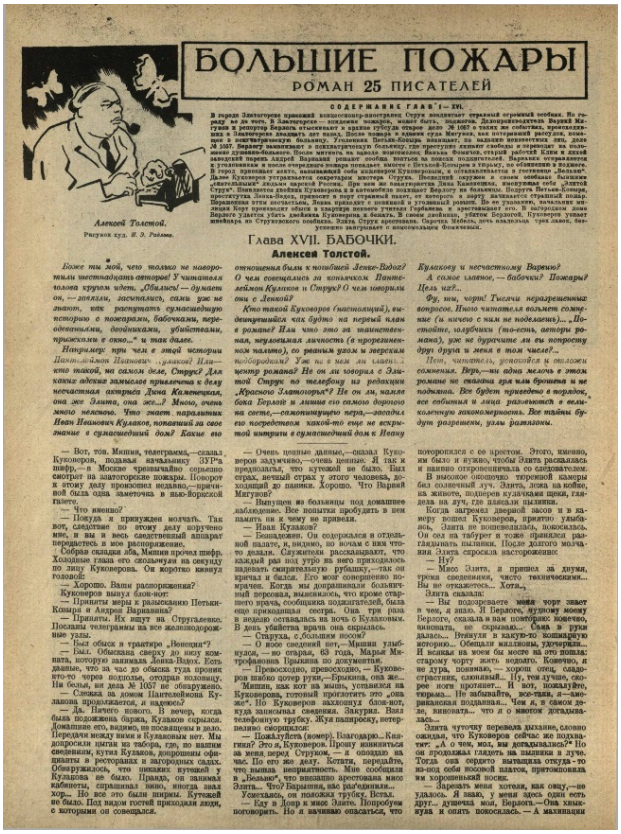
The simplest assumption is that the scatterbrained reader will forget about at least some of them;[274] but since one cannot rely on the reader's forgetfulness all the time, another option is either to ignore the existence of these unwanted, superfluous characters, kindly leaving the burden to your comrades-in-arms, or to freeze them in a sort of narrative limbo, hoping, perhaps,

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[272] What Zozulia did was problematic also because the reader of *Ogonek* had been promised that, eventually, everything would make sense in the story. See the short commentary that preceded chapter seventeen, written by Aleksei Tolstoi: "No, reader, relax and set aside all doubts. Have faith. Not a single detail has been said to no purpose or mentioned to no consequence. Everything will fall into place, all the events and characters will evolve into a wonderful pattern. All the mysteries will be solved, all the knots will be untied." ("Нет, читатель, успокойся и отложи сомнения. Верь, — ни одна мелочь в этом романе не сказана зря или брошена и не поднята. Все будет приведено в порядок, все события и лица разовьются в великолепную закономерность. Все тайны будут разрешены, узлы развязаны.") See Tolstoi, *Bol'shie pozhary*, 218.

[273] The total number of characters who populate the novel is eighty-seven (doubles count as two). I have considered only those who, albeit minimally, play an active role in the *fabula*, not the ones who are simply mentioned in the narrative.

[274] Again, let us not forget that these stories were originally serialized. The readers of *Ogonek* had to wait six months to be able to read the final installment by Kol'tsov.



БОЛЬШИЕ ПОЖАРЫ

РОМАН 25 ПИСАТЕЛЕЙ

Алексей Толстой.

Глава XVII. БАБОЧКИ.

Алексей Толстой.

Illustration 16. "Babochki," chapter seventeen of *Bol'shie pozhary* written by Aleksei Tolstoi. See *Ogonek*, no. 17 (1927): 8.
In the italicized text, the reader is promised that "All the mysteries will be solved."
https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/book/81890.

that another writer will find a way to resuscitate them—or not. Indeed, sometimes these characters pop up as if awoken from an induced hibernation later on in the story, to the point that the reader, who will invariably ask himself "Who is this?" is obliged to rewind the plot in his head, go grab old issues of the journal (granted he still has them) and refresh his memory.

We have seen how literary critics would discuss (mostly dismissively) the possibility of producing literature as if it were an industrial object and to what extent a novel written this way could be the expression of a truly Socialist mode of literary production. In 1927, the country was experiencing collectivization, but literature, as a cultural practice, seems to have been untouched by this new approach. The critics who, years later, would review *Bol'shie pozhary*, from Abram Vulis to Dmitrii Bykov, would also be skeptical that a good literary work could be the product of multiple authors. It simply does not "work," they claim. Reviewing the novel in 1973 for the journal *Nauka i zhizn'*,[275] Vulis quotes Ilya Ilf to illustrate

[275] Dmitrii Bykov, in his foreword to the first edition of the novel suggests that one of the main reasons why Kol'tsov managed to convince so many writers of uneven caliber might be that, in a period of ongoing cultural and political debates on collective creativity, there was a widespread feeling that the participation in such collective endeavors might be perceived as a proof of loyalty to the Party. Dmitrii Bykov, introduction to *Bol'shie pozhary*, 9.

the process of collaborative writing: "Ilf: 'How do we write as a pair?' This is how we write: 'It was a summer (winter) day (night), when a young (elderly) man (woman) in a bright (dark) felt hat (fedora) walked (drove) on Miasnitskaia (Bolshaia Ordynka) street.' However, yes, one can reach an agreement."[276] Considering the novelistic production of the two satirists, it is not hard to believe that, eventually, "one can reach an agreement." What happens, though, when we multiply the items inside the parentheses above, when "an agreement *cannot* be reached", or, according to the unwritten rule of chain novels, "an agreement *must not* be reached"?[277] In the same review, with the same laconic tone that Pletnev had used in 1920 to talk about the collective essence of the proletariat, Vulis begins by saying that "literary creativity is, by rule, an individual process."[278] For Vulis the chapters do retain literary value taken singularly, as long as they are not montaged together: "the sum of the discrete parts in *Big Fires* does not form a cohesive literary work. Yet each part has a specific literary value."[279] After bringing up *Belomor*

[276] See Abram Vulis "Kak byli zazhzheny «Bol'shie pozhary»," *Nauka i zhizn'*, no. 9 (1973): 124. ("И. Ильф: «Как мы пишем вдвоем? Вот как мы пишем вдвоем: «Был летний (зимний) день (вечер), когда молодой (уже немолодой) человек (-ая девушка) в светлой (темной) фетровой шляпе (шляпке) проходил (проезжала) по шумной (тихой) Мясницкой улице (Большой Ордынке). Все-таки договориться можно».") As both Vulis, in his study *I. Il'f E. Petrov: ocherk tvorchestva* (1960), and Lidiia Ianovskaia in *Pochemu vy pishete smeshno* (1969) point out, the two writers, being invariably asked "How come you write as a pair?" (*Kak eto vy pishete vdvoem?*), would usually dismiss the question and joke about it, giving the interviewer answers such as the one quoted above. Only after Il'f's death in 1937, Petrov, in his short essays "Iz vospominanii ob Il'fe" (Remembering Il'f) and "Iz vospominanii ob Il'fe: k piatiletiiu so dnia smerti" (Remembering Il'f: For the Five-Year Anniversary of His Death), written in 1939 and 1942 respectively, would describe how the joint writing process actually worked. See Il'ia Il'f and Evgenii Petrov, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, ed. A. G. Dement'ev, V. P. Kataev, and K. M. Simonov, vol. 5 (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1961), 502-17; 518-24.

[277] It is obviously hard to conclusively determine whether or not the writers who contributed to these projects really stuck to this unwritten rule and did not discuss the *fabula* beforehand. Besides believing in their good faith—do we?—one can only retroactively speculate that, considering the inconsistencies in the text, there must have been no previous agreement, or, conversely, that something might have been discussed since some of these writers were friends.

[278] Vulis, "Kak byli zazhzheny «Bol'shie pozhary»," 124. ("…литературное творчество — процесс, как правило, индивидуальный.")

[279] Ibid., 127. ("Сумма кусков «Больших пожарах» не сложилась в цельное литературное произведение, однако каждый из кусков обладает определенной литературной ценностью.")

and the project *History of Factories and Plants* as a whole, Dmitrii Bykov writes in his foreword that "true intellectual work is done single-handedly."[280] The Soviet literary scholar Boris Galanov criticized the confusion in the novel and claimed: "I read the novel carefully. I really wanted to be engrossed in it. But I couldn't. It didn't work out. It's a big mess. Things are so entangled that I immediately got lost in all those crazy stories with people in incognito, doppelgangers, killings, fires, and explosions of gunpowder magazines."[281] Generally speaking, these critics paraphrased what the blacksmith Klim Velichko, one of the proletarians in Iurii Libedinskii's chapter, declares in the novel: "if you want to do it, do it by yourself."[282] Here, Velichko seems to make fun of what the hammerer (*molotoboets*) Van'ka Fomichev tells him they needed to do as a group of proletarians (finding the—possibly capitalist—culprit). Moreover, on a level external to the plot, Velichko seems also to address the remaining nineteen writers in the chain and warn them that solving the mystery as a collective will probably be a hard task:

> — People get outraged for all sort of things, — Fomichev said unwillingly. — No need to be outraged here, but it's everyone's duty to catch these arsonists, get'em yet!
> — Let's say everyone will do like you say, what'll come out of it? The larger the group of people who go after one thief, the easier it will be for him to hide. Why, I won't deny that every reasonable person should be of help here, that's clear. But if you want to do it, do it alone. Just saying. Alright, I'll assist you, and we'll find someone else too.[283]

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[280] Dmitrii Bykov, foreword to *Bol'shie pozhary*, 23. ("…настоящая интеллектуальная работа делается в одиночку.")
[281] Boris Galanov, *Chetyre goda i vsia zhizn'* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1985), 213. ("Роман читал прилежно. Очень хотел зачитаться. Но не смог. Не получалось. Масса путаницы. Столько там наверчено всякой всячины, что я сразу же заблудился в сумасшедших историях с переодеваниями, двойниками, убийствами, пожарами и взрывами пороховых погребов.")
[282] Libedinskii, *Bol'shie pozhary*, 96. ("…если хочешь делать — делай в одиночку.")
[283] Ibid., 95-96. ("— Мало ли кто над чем смущается, — неохотно сказал Фомичев. — Надо не смущаться, а всем народом поджигателей этих поймать, да под ноготь!
— Должно-то всем народом, а выйдет ли что? Чем больше народу вора гонит, тем ему легше себя скрыть. А чего же, я не отрицаю, каждый сознательный должен помочь, это ясно. Но только мой совет: если хочешь делать — делай в одиночку. Ну? .. Я тебе подсоблю, еще кого найдем.")

The main problem for these reviewers seems to be that a novel cannot be the product of a collective enterprise: *Bol'shie pozhary* does not form a unified structure; it raises questions without providing answers; it asks the reader to go down one path before abruptly asking him to go back to the previous intersection and take another road; it teems with many different characters whose role is very often uncertain, insignificant or simply incomprehensible; it proceeds at various speeds. To understand how *Bol'shie pozhary* works, one should move away from the traditional *siuzhet-fabula* dualism, from the idea that "[i]n the novel, the leading hero devours and subjectivizes all reality,"[284] and see that its structure instead shares the same characteristics (or lack thereof) of the group portrait of its authors.

In his essay "The Structure of Fiction", Shklovsky asks: "what precisely does a story need in order to be understood as something truly complete?"[285] Is it content? Is it form? Is it both? Is it possible to produce a "truly complete" novel as a collective? Can a detective story be the written as a collective? While some of the literary genres that were popular in those years are collective by definition (*stengazety,* newspapers, etc.), as a genre, detective and mystery novels provide an apparently insurmountable difficulty: after all, if chain novels presuppose no previous agreement over the plot, the mystery that has to be discovered or the case that needs to be solved is a also mystery for the writer who has to continue the story. Moreover, *Bol'shie pozhary* is a hybrid detective story, in the sense that it functions within the "what happened?" framework of a detective story and, at the same time, operates on another level and asks "What will happen?"[286]

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[284] Sergei M. Tret'iakov, "The Biography of the Object," *October*, no. 118 (Fall 2006): 59. First published in Nikolai F. Chuzhak, ed., *Literatura fakta: pervyi sbornik materialov rabotnikov LEFa* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Federatsiia," 1929), 66-70.
[285] Viktor Shklovsky, "The Structure of Fiction," in *Theory of Prose*, trans. Benjamin Sher, 4th ed. (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press: 2009), 52.
[286] See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "1874: Three Novellas, or 'What Happened?,'" chap. 8 in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

The author knows what happened and what will happen, the reader does not. The writer-reader does not know either. In *Bol'shie pozhary,* the writer is asked to be the writer without knowing himself what happened. Also, in order to function, mystery stories require a closed structure,[287] otherwise the continual injection of new material makes it impossible to catch the culprit or solve the mystery. From the standpoint of literary theory, detective and mystery stories are probably good candidates to substantiate the Formalist belief that a story can be constructed by resorting to specific devices; they are, in a sense, the manifestation of the "[t]he structuralist faith in the closed character of the signifying system and in the restorability of its links."[288] It is the writer's job to disperse several red herrings and try to deceive the reader by luring him into taking the wrong path. Like Shklovsky said: "[i]n a mystery novel . . . the gun that hangs on the wall does not fire. Another gun shoots instead."[289] A detective story in which the "right gun" is quickly identified by the reader stops being what it is. What happens to the narrative if it is the author, who in chain novels is first of all a reader, to grab the wrong gun? He will either create paths that open up the closed structure (for instance, by adding new characters) and thus, in the best case scenario, delay the possibility of finding clues, catching the criminal, and solving the mystery or he will create other paths that might lead, like in Dmitrii Galkovskii's novel,[290] to an endless dead-end (*beskonechnyi tupik*), since a chain novel can, potentially, be stretched *ad infinitum.* In fact, whereas in the previous chapter we saw how the "collapse of representation" that Bobrinskaia identifies in painting occurs at the biographical level in novelistic discourse with

[287] For the difference between open and closed structures, see Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta* (Milano: Bompiani, 1962). For the English translation, see Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).
[288] Serguei A. Oushakine, "Crimes of Substitution: Detection in Late Soviet Society," *Public Culture* 15, no. 3 (September 2003): 443.
[289] Viktor Shkovsky, "Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery Story," in *Theory of Prose*, 110.
[290] Dmitrii Galkovskii. *Beskonechnyi tupik* (Moskva: Samizdat, 1997).

what I call "the death of the hero," i.e., the shift away from the biographical hero and towards his narrative function, in *Bol'shie pozhary* the same phenomenon occurs not as much by defacing the protagonists as by an overabundance of markedly superfluous biographical material. In other words, the death of hero takes place by iteration, by the decentralization of the narration and the creation of multiple nodes of enunciation. These multiple nodes of enunciation will not find resolution by apprehending the culprit. While *Bol'shie pozhary* can be indeed investigated within the framework of avant-garde practices, for our purposes, it is important to show how it displays a formal structure that would be adopted in later Soviet collective novels and ideologically filled with Socialist content. Whereas in *Chapaev*, the narrative value of the hero does not lie in his biographical representation and psychological completeness but in his social and ideological function as organizer of the crowd and the death of the hero occurs through a collapse of representation, in *Bol'shie pozhary* it occurs by iteration in non-identical and therefore utterly non-essential configurations.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari deconstruct the arborescent model of the "root-book" by putting forward the idea of "the book as assemblage with the outside, against the book as image of the world. A rhizome-book, not a dichotomous, pivotal, or fascicular book."[291] It is the idea of a book that mingles with reality. They also define a rhizome as "an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states."[292] Just as Diad'ev, one of the characters in Ilf and Petrov's novel *The Twelve Chairs* claims in the passage used as an epigraph to this chapter, *Bol'shie pozhary* is a book without a center and without a Writer.

[291] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 23.
[292] Ibid., 21.

Fire is a rhizome. It propagates as a rhizome. There is neither a starting point nor an ending point, only a middle. The novel is made of ruptures, of plotlines leading nowhere, of an enormous and useless number of characters, of love stories that do not shine. The novel is like a huge fire spreading with no foreseeable direction. It has neither a (spatial) beginning nor an end. It goes where it can incorporate new material. As a novel, *Bol'shie pozhary* is not a mere reflection of the world but evolves and expands symbiotically with reality, as we have seen in Zozulia's chapter: "the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world."[293] Form in *Bol'shie Pozhary* propagates along with content, i.e., fires. It is a novel with an identity crisis, an open structure that claims to be closed. Yet, since the divide between fictional and real spaces is obliterated, the novel forms a rhizome with the world as well. Shklovsky once argued that "a literary work is pure form. It is neither thing nor material, but a relationship of materials. And, like every relationship, this one has little to do with length or width or any other dimension. It's the arithmetic significance of its numerator and denominator (i.e. their relationship) that is important."[294] In *Bol'shie pozhary*, chapters have different lengths, and even the pace of writing is various. The ratio between the numerator and denominator keeps changing, and the reader is obliged to keep adjusting his expectations accordingly.[295]

In terms of language, if it is true that we use it to structure the world, the novelistic world of *Bol'shie pozhary* is fluid and constantly changing because its language structures it differently in every chapter. *Bol'shie pozhary* deterritorializes language.[296] In terms of genre, the novel is a

[293] Ibid., 11.
[294] Viktor Shklovsky, "Literature without a Plot: Rozanov," in *Theory of Prose*, 189.
[295] Discrete chapters of *Bol'shie pozhary* would be later reprinted in magazines: for instance, the aforementioned article by Vulis in *Nauka i zhizn'* is accompanied by the chapter written by Mikhail Zoshchenko.
[296] I invite future readers of the novel to draw a map of Zlatogorsk using the descriptions and details provided by each writer.

mix of red Pinkertonism,[297] parody, satire, detective story, science-fiction, all framed by the ideology of art-into-life. The title itself, *Bol'shie pozhary*, can be interpreted as a parody: the twenty-five installments are serialized in *Ogonek*, and twenty-five small fires make a big fire. According to the mechanisms of detective novels, *Bol'shie pozhary* cannot succeed at locating the origin of its fires because the pieces of evidence do not evolve into a pattern—there are too many leads to follow. If, in detective stories, "the multiplicity of evidences can destroy them if they are moving in different directions,"[298] the reproducibility of authorship and the accumulation of biographical material also occur at the level of the evidence presented in the plot. As a detective story, *Bol'shie pozhary* functions according to a standard of evidence that is much harsher than "beyond a reasonable doubt": even if the text reasonably and undoubtedly pushes the reader in one direction, no truth value can be assigned to anything that the text itself does not validate *at a future moment*. In other words, even if all the evidence gathered in the text up to a certain point of the *fabula* reasonably incriminates a specific character, he cannot be apprehended and he is not the culprit *unless* the next author validates this lead. Reading these novels is like having to solve a case with new contradictory evidence constantly being discovered and old evidence sloppily being handled by multiple bumbling officers. In this sense,

[297] "Red Pinkertonism" was the NEP spinoff of "Pinkertonism." Nat Pinkerton's stories were very popular in Russia in the early 20th century. These dime novels, a mix of what today we would call "true crime" and pulp fiction, were avidly read as soon as they would come out serialized in magazines. The Pinkerton fad, truncated by the Revolution, would resume in the NEP years ideologically loaded. The devices are the same—violent deaths, chases, doppelgangers, and coup-de-theatres—but now there is a strong polarization Capitalism vs Socialism. The villain comes from the West. For an account of this literary phenomenon at the beginning of the century, especially in connection with early cinematography, see Kornei Chukovskii, "Nat Pinkerton i sovremennaia literatura," in Kornei Chukovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh*, ed. E. Ivanova and E. Chukovskaia, vol. 7 (Moskva: Terraz-knizhnyi klub, 2003), 23-62. The essay was originally published in 1908. For more recent studies, see Robert Russell, "Red Pinkertonism: An Aspect of Soviet Literature of the 1920s," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 60, no. 3 (July 1982): 390-412, and Boris Dralyuk, *Western Crime Fiction Goes East: The Russian Pinkerton Craze 1907-1934* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

[298] Viktor Shklovsky, "On the Functions of Plot," in *Bowstring*, 244.

chain novels create a paradox: while, on the one hand, instead of erasing authorial agency, they end up highlighting it because—as Zozulia showed us, it takes an author to kill an author—on the other, they are mechanisms *totally* independent of their authors because, regardless of authorial intentionality, only "the sum of all the discrete parts," as Vulis wrote, can assign truth value to the evidence. To put it differently, what Grin (or any other author) had in mind when he wrote the first (or any other) chapter is redundant. To go back to the metaphor of the gun, one can argue that in chain novels, one can never prove that the reader (or writer-reader) actually grabbed the wrong gun. After the first few chapters, it becomes clear to the reader that no possible lead can help find the culprit and that no denouement will be possible. From this perspective, Zozulia, by killing off characters, did nothing but try to remodel the rhizomatic structure according to arborescent conventions.

Like a detective Odyssey, *Bol'shie pozhary* is a "history of impediments,"[299] and these "impediments" are the authors themselves. In recounting how Aleksandr Luria showed Sergei Eisenstein a child's drawing and pointed out the ridiculous size of the matches compared to the stove, Shklovsky comments: "Objects (their details) are magnified, isolated according to their semantic weight and according to their meaning in a given situation. The 'semantic center' is enlarged."[300] A "semantic center" helps organize the material hierarchically, giving it a defined structure: in *Bol'shie pozhary* this "semantic center" is continually shifted by the authors. The novel does not have a unified structure but is an assemblage of semantic centers with each author holding a different match in his or her hands. And this is the reason why *Bol'shie pozhary* cannot be extinguished: because every new writer in the chain is another arsonist.

[299] Ibid., 276.
[300] Viktor Shklovsky, "On Conventions," in *Bowstring: On the Dissimilarity of the Similar*, trans. Shushan Avagyan (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2011), 108.

What happens after that Zozulia has stopped the fires for good and killed off the heroes? Mikhail Kol'tsov, editor-in-chief of *Ogonek*, undertook the task of writing the epilogue, thus stressing once more the blurred divide between the fictional world of *Bol'shie pozhary* and reality. First of all, he erases the last tangible traces of Western contamination in Zlatogorsk by getting rid of Struk's mansion. Then, without many characters left or crimes to solve, he does what none of the other writers had done: he resorts to flash-back.[301] After revealing the cause of the last fire in town, the one that destroyed the mansion—no mystery here, just a jealous man in love with Elita—Kol'tsov freely navigates the enlarged space of a novel whose fiction is no longer clearly separated from reality. A commission is sent from Moscow to Zlatogorsk in order to conclusively establish the causes of the fires. The investigators start receiving complaints from people who point their finger at the writers for having caused such turmoil in their town: Grin is accused of having initiated everything, although the writer proves his innocence by documenting that his story was actually set abroad, not in the Soviet Union;[302] Nikulin is accused by women of having brought to town a maneater like Elita; Babel of having called a baron, a princess, and a former general, all non-proletarian and counter-revolutionary elements; but most of all people resented Slominskii for having left the town without the editor-in-chief of the local newspaper and the Chairman of the Executive Committee.

We are back to the group portrait.

At this point the Chairman of the commission loses his patience and asks the citizens of Zlatogorsk how it is possible that they do not understand that these writers, with their

[301] As a literary device, a flashback is precisely something that complicates sequential reading. When a writer resorts to flashback, he simply opens up a portion of the text. In a sense, here Kol'tsov opens up the structure right after Zozulia had tried to close it.

[302] In *Motylek mednoi igly*, the unfinished novel used by Grin as a draft for the first chapter of *Bol'shie pozhary*, Zlatogorsk is simply a "city" (город).

"inventions," are trying to warn them against the "big fires" that are still threatening the Revolution and of those, even bigger, awaiting the country in the near future.[303]

By the end of his chapter, Kol'tsov has introduced three new characters.

[303] Hence the last sentence of the novel: "Do you want to know the continuation of this story? Read it in the newspapers, look for it in real life! Stay alert! Don't sleep! Big fires have been left behind, great fires await ahead." ("Продолжение событий — читайте в газетах, ищите в жизни! Не отрывайтесь от нее! Не спите! «Большие пожары» позади, великие пожары — впереди.") See Kol'tsov, *Bol'shie pozhary*, 310.

CHAPTER 4

PARODIC *FAKTURA*

Parodying is the creation of a *decrowning double*.

Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*.[304]

Zelenye Iabloki and the Decrowning of the Author

In 1927, a collective novel titled *Zelenye iabloki* (Green Apples) came out from Kosmos,[305] a publishing house located in Khar'kov[306] that two years earlier, in 1925, had issued the first edition of *Parnas dybom* (Parnassus on End), a popular collection of poetic parodies.[307] The novel, an intricate story of mystery, love, and doppelgangers, is presented to the reader as the collective effort of eighteen writers from several countries,[308] translated "from the American"

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[304] "Пародирование – это создание развенчивающего двойника."
Quoted in Abram Vulis, *Sovetskii satiricheskii roman: evoliutsiia zhanra v 20-30-e gody* (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka" uzbekskoi SSR, 1965), 139. The English translation is taken from Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. and ed. Caryl Emerson, 12th ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 127.

[305] In 1927, the catalog of publications of Kosmos was fairly eclectic, listing works by Nadezhda Teffi and Ivan Bunin, among others. It also included many books in translation of European writers who, in those years, were popular in their respective countries, such as Guido da Verona in Italy, Karin Michaëlis in Denmark, and William John Locke in England. The fact that Kosmos published literature in translation was important, as we will see, for *Zelenye iabloki* to "work" as a novel.

[306] In 1927 Kharkov was the capital of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and, together with Moscow and Leningrad, one of the main centers in the Soviet Union. See, for instance, the already mentioned scene of the thirty-four children of Lieutenant Schmidt, in which "[n]one of them wanted sophisticated Moscow, Leningrad, or Kharkov." See Ilf and Petrov, *The Golden Calf*, 21.

[307] *Parnas Dybom* was a collection of poems that stylized famous Russian and non-Russian poets, both past (Homer, Dante, Pushkin) and contemporary (Belyi, Maiakovskii, Severianin). For a short analysis of the volume, see Craig Brandist, "The Theory and Practice of 'Scientific Parody' in early Soviet Russia," in *Reflective Laughter: Aspects of Humour in Russian Culture*, ed. Lesley Milne (London: Anthem Press, 2004), 149-50.

[308] Here is the list of the eighteen writers and their countries of origin (their real name is provided in between square brackets): Michael Arlen [Dikran Kouyoumdjian] (1895 – 1956), England; Victor Bridges [Victor George de Freyne] (1878 –1972), England; Frank Heller [Gunnar Serner] (1886 – 1947), Sweden; Mark Twain [Samuel Clemens] (1835 – 1910), United States; Georg Hermann [Georg Hermann Borchardt] (1871 – 1943), Germany; Robert Louis Stevenson (1850 – 1894) Scotland; Jules Romains [Louis Henri Jean Farigoule] (1885 – 1972), France; Norbert Jacques (1880 – 1954), Luxembourg; Reginald W. Kauffman (1877 – 1959), United States; Victor Margueritte (1866 – 1942),

(!) by Nikolai Borisov.[309] In the final section of the book, titled "Vmesto poslesloviia" (In Lieu of an Afterword)[310] the reader finds the epistolary correspondence between Kornelius Krok, the mysterious coauthor of the novel and spokesperson of the group, and Doran Squire (*Skvair*), the American publisher who, after thanking Krok for the unprecedented worldwide success of *Zelenye iabloki*,[311] wonders whether either he or one of the other authors would be willing to write an afterword for the 626th (!) edition of the novel. Squire also asks Krok three questions:

a) How is it possible that dead writers such as Robert Louis Stevenson, Mark Twain and Jack London are listed as co-authors alongside writers who are still alive?

b) How did this collaboration among writers from several different countries actually work?

c) How does one explain the fact that the readers have found striking similarities between discrete chapters of *Zelenye iabloki* and sections taken from other literary works written by the same authors?

France; Edgar Wallace (1875 – 1932), England; Robert W. Service (1874 – 1958), England/Canada; Maurice Magre (1877 – 1941), France; Stefan Zweig (1881 – 1942), Austria; H. G. Wells (1866 – 1946), England; Jack London (1876 – 1916), United States; Jakob Wassermann (1873 – 1934), Germany; and Kornelius Krok (no biographical data available.)

[309] Nikolai Andreevich Borisov (1889 – 1937) was a Ukrainian novelists, playwright, and screenwriter who published the vast majority of his works in Russian. On his biography, see Abram Vulis, ed., *Povelitel' zheleza: russkaia avantiurnaia satira* (Tashkent: Glavnaia redaktsiia izdatel'sko-poligraficheskogo kontserna "Shark," 1993), 414 and, in Ukrainian, Nina Bernads'ka, "Pro vytoky kinoromanu," *Problemy suchasnogo literaturozvanstva*, no. 22 (2016): 11-22. http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/prsl_2016_22_3 (last accessed on January 13, 2019). Moreover, as it is often the case with writers who belong to the capacious genre of *fantastika*, his page on Ukrainian Wikipedia is a detailed (albeit mostly unchecked) source of information. https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Борисов_Микола_Андрійович (last accessed on January 13, 2019).

[310] Michael Arlen et al., *Zelenye iabloki* (Riga: Izdatel'stvo "Literatura," 1929), 179. Citations are taken from the edition that came out in Riga in 1929, which is more easily accessible than the first, Khar'kov edition. In abbreviated citations, I will use "Arlen et al., *Zelenye iabloki*" instead of referring to the individual author that originally penned the quoted sentence.

[311] According to Squire, the novel had first been published in English in 1925 and had already sold about 2,000,000 copies by the time it had been translated into Russian by Borisov two years later.

In fact, the "extraordinary stylistic cohesion of the novel" (*udivitel'noe edinstvo stilia romana*)[312] makes one suspect that the real author is actually one person instead of the eighteen listed contributors. And if, as Squire suspects, the only author is Krok himself, serious issues of plagiarism would most probably arise of which he, being the publisher, should be informed.

What follows is a back-and-forth from which it becomes clearer and clearer that, although the discrete chapters that make up the novel were, technically speaking, written by the authors listed on the frontispiece of the book,[313] the act of writing occurred in a very peculiar way.

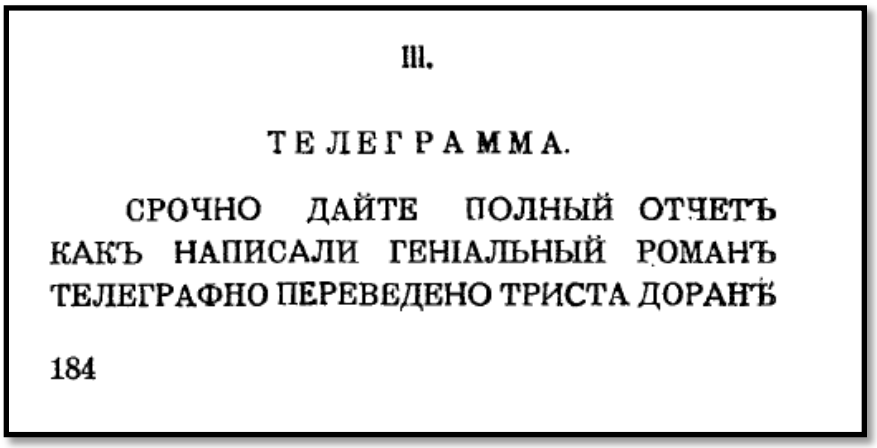
Krok, who signs his first reply to Squire's letter with the words "Ready to commit a new crime" (*Gotovyi k novomu prestupleniiu*),[314] admits that he, now a "celebrated writer" (*proslavlennyi avtor*)[315] thanks to the enormous popularity of the book, "had never written a single line in his life" (*ne napisavshii v zhizni ni edinoi strochki*)[316] prior to this novel. Yet, despite this confession of amateurism, he is adamant that the novel is "authentic" (*podlinnyi*)[317] and that there can be no concerns regarding plagiarism since each author is the real author of the words ascribed to him. *Zelenye iabloki*, whose title was supposedly randomly chosen by Krok himself, is meant to be, in a Futurist vein, a "slap" (*poshchechina*) to both publishers, who have shunned authentic literature in order to mass produce cheap novels in which all that counts is the

[312] Arlen et al., *Zelenye iabloki*, 182.
[313] While I was able to retrieve the first edition of the novel, the cover was unfortunately missing. For this reason, I could not determine whether or not the names of the eighteen authors are listed on the front-cover like in the 1929 Latvian edition. Moreover, it is worth noticing that the Riga edition says "628th edition" (*628-oe izdanie*). Since the first, Khar'kov edition is presented to the reader as the 626th, one can argue that there has to be a 627th edition that came out before 1929.
[314] Arlen et al., *Zelenye iabloki*, 184.
[315] Ibid., 182.
[316] Ibid.
[317] Ibid.

twisted plot and the "happy ending," and to readers, who are simply consumers of the bad literature that continually floods the market:

> This novel is a slap to you, publishers, who have confined literature to prison. To you, who pass off a fig leaflet as a literary work, to you, who clip apart everyone the same way and level everything. The novel is also a slap to the public at large, which gobbles down whatever it is fed and which does not ask for reality but simply looks for the sham marriage at the end of a novel.[318]

Worried by this revelation, Squire urges Krok to be more specific and disclose immediately how he can claim to have written the "ingenious novel" (*genial'nyi roman*)[319] and, at the same time, insist that the novel is authentic. In the last letter of the exchange, Krok eventually unravels his ruse: while languishing in prison, he "was given a bunch of novels without beginning nor end" (*dali ... grudu romanov, bez nachala i kontsa*)[320] and, consequently, with neither titles nor authors.



III.

ТЕЛЕГРАММА.

СРОЧНО ДАЙТЕ ПОЛНЫЙ ОТЧЕТЪ КАКЪ НАПИСАЛИ ГЕНІАЛЬНЫЙ РОМАНЪ ТЕЛЕГРАФНО ПЕРЕВЕДЕНО ТРИСТА ДОРАНЪ

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Illustration 17. Wire sent from Doran to Krok in which the former urges the latter to confess his scheme. Arlen et al., *Zelenye iabloki* (Riga: Izdatel'stvo "Literatura," 1929).

Because of the missing parts, reading them as single pieces of literature turned out to be a frustrating and impossible endeavor. What Krok noticed, though, as he tried to make sense of

[318] Ibid., 183. ("Этотъ романъ—пощечина и вамъ, издателямъ, засадившимъ литературу въ тюрьму. Вамъ, требующимъ фиговаго листка для художественнаго произведенія, вамъ, подстригающимъ подъ машинку всѣхъ и нивелирующимъ все. Романъ—пощечина также и обществу, 'кушающему, что даютъ', не желающему дѣйствительности и ищущему только брачнаго ложа въ концѣ романа.")
[319] Ibid., 184.
[320] Ibid., 185.

these incomplete stories, was that they were all very similar both in terms of structure and narrative style. For this reason, he decided to come up with his own story along the same lines of the fragmentary plots he had just read. Lacking the physical means (i.e., paper and pen) to create this "original" story, he ingeniously came up with a way to "write" his book without actually writing it: instead, he ripped pages from the novels at his disposal, cherry-picked the passages that interested him and put them together following the order demanded by his plot, adding just a few lines here and there. Moreover, in order to have a manageable number of characters,[321] the major change that he makes in the source texts concerns the names of the characters that populate them. In other words, Krok assigns his three protagonists the names of the characters of the first two novels that he uses:

> …I ripped pages from several different books and put them together following the order dictated by my plot. Upon my word, only here and there I linked discrete chapters with a few dozen phrases and, apart from that, I renamed heroes and heroines after the characters that appear in the first pages of the novel.[322]

The result, which according to Krok represented a perfect specimen of contemporary Western literature, was created using "just scissors and glue" (*Tol'ko nozhnitsy i klei!*).[323] For the sake of exactitude, he eventually also provides Squire with the list of the novels he used in his collage, together with the names of their authors.[324] This is why Krok insisted that there had been no plagiarism. Indeed, the authors of the discrete chapters in the novel are the writers listed on

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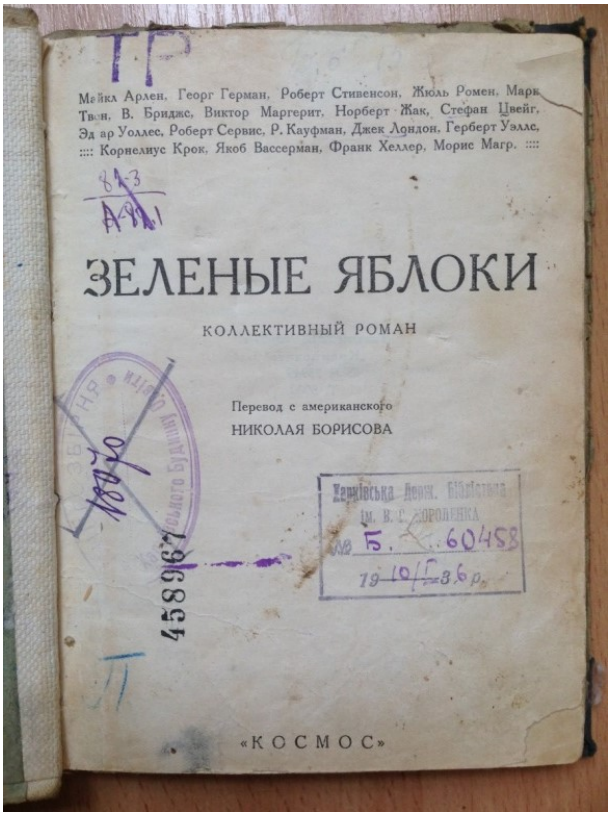
[321] See what we have said in the previous chapter on *Bol'shie pozhary* in terms of proliferation of characters as one of the distinctive features in chain novels.
[322] Ibid., 186. ("…я вырывалъ страницы изъ разныхъ книгъ и соединялъ ихъ въ порядкѣ развертыванія моего сюжета. Клянусь честью, что только въ нѣкоторыхъ мѣстахъ я связалъ отдѣльныя главы нѣсколькими десятками строчекъ и, кромѣ того, перекрестилъ героевъ и героинь, давъ имъ имена по первымъ страницамъ романа.")
[323] Ibid.
[324] Although Krok provides Squire with the list of the novels that he used, he does not specify the exact pages, making the task of identifying them and putting together the novel in the same way Krok did, extremely laborious, also considering that Krok, in most cases, cherry-picked paragraphs and sentences from several chapters of the same novel.

the cover of *Zelenye iabloki.* Unfortunately, the story gets more complicated. Kornelius Krok did not exist. Borisov concocted everything.

I already mentioned that, if one had to trust the conversation between Squire and Krok, the novel came out for the first time in English in 1925. *Zelenye iabloki* is therefore presented to the 1927 reader as the Russian translation of a novel originally published in English. If the reader takes this at face value, he is left with the impression that Krok is the sole assembler of the novel and that the novel was translated into Russian by Nikolai Borisov, who, by the time *Zelenye iabloki* came out, had already published two other novels for publishing houses located in Khar'kov: the *kino-roman Ukraziia* for Kosmos in 1926,[325] and *Slovo za naganom* (Let the Revolver Do the Talking) for Knygospilka in 1927.[326]

[325] In 1925, *Ukraziia* was turned into a film directed by Petr Chardynin. Borisov participated in the project as screenwriter together with Georgii Stabovoi.

[326] *Ukraziia* first came out in Moscow from Molodaia Gvardiia in 1925. It is hard to determine to what extent Borisov was a known figure in 1927 Khar'kov and whether or not he was able to trick his readers. No review of *Zelenye iabloki* was published in the most popular literary journals that circulated in the city in 1927 and 1928: *Gart, Molodniak*, *Chervonyi shliakh* (all in Ukrainian), and *Krasnoe slovo* (in Russian). The reason might be that, being an *avantiurnyi roman*, it did not draw the attention of politically-oriented publications. In fact, the only reviews of Borisov's works that I was able to find are about a novella titled *Vive la Commune!* published in Ukrainian in 1928. Another possible reason for the lack of reviews might be that these journals, with the exception of *Krasnoe slovo*, were mainly interested in books written by Ukrainian writers in Ukrainian. Borisov was indeed Ukrainian (he was born in Cherkassy) but he published almost exclusively in Russian. Moreover, he might not have known Ukrainian: even though there is no indication that *Vive la Commune!* is a translation, two later novels—the *kino-roman Kvint* (1931) and *Mertvyi bar''er* (1933)—published in Ukrainian, are presented to the reader as translations by T. Pol's'ka and Evgen Pluzhnyk. However, I could not find any evidence of the existence of these novels in Russian. One publication that might have reviewed *Zelenye iabloki* is *Chervonyi perets*, published in Khar'kov between 1927 and 1934 as a supplement to the newspaper *Visti*. I was not able to retrieve copies of it.



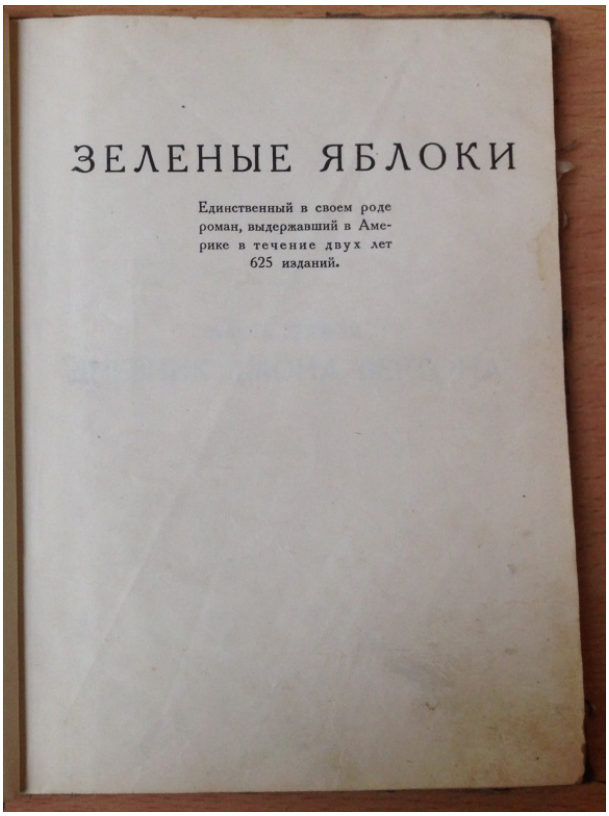


Illustration 18/19. First edition of *Zelenie iabloki* (Khar'kov: Kosmos, 1927). The list of writers on the title page does not follow the order in which their chapters appear in the novel. Nikolai Borisov's name appears underneath the title as the translator (Перевод с американского Николая Борисова). On the right, the claim that, in America, the novel had 625 editions in two years.

Nikolai Borisov, the *deus ex machina* behind the whole project who unassumingly features only in the frontispiece of the novel as "the translator" and who disguised himself behind the pseudonym of Kornelius Krok,[327] did with literature what filmmaker Esfir Shub did

[327] It seems plausible that, for his alter ego, Borisov got his inspiration from Cornelius Crocus (c. 1500-1550), who was a Dutch playwright and educationalist. http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198601753.001.0001/acref-9780198601753-e-1012 (last accessed on January 13, 2019). Since Borisov apparently knew some English, Krok might also be a pun on the word "crook." As a character, Kornelius Krok will reappear in a later work by Borisov titled *Chetvergi mistera Droida* (Mr. Droid's Thursdays) of 1929. "Cornelius" is also the name of the protagonist in Norbert Jacques's *Ingenieur Mars*, the novel used by Borisov in part two, chapter four. Considering Krok's criticism of the mass book market, "Doran Squire" is most probably a parody of the publishing house "Doran," a colossus in the American publishing industry at the time. In 1927, when *Zelenye iabloki* came out, Doran merged with Doubleday, thus forming Doubleday, Doran & Co. and consolidating its leadership in the English-speaking world publishing industry. (See John Tebbel, *Between Covers: The Rise and Transformation of Book Publishing in America* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1987], 221-22). Moreover, some of the books used by Borisov to assemble *Zelenye iabloki* originally came out from Doran. It is difficult to

in the same year in *Padenie dinastii Romanovykh* (The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty), what Aleksandr Rodchenko and Gustav Kliutsis did with photomontages, and what Max Ernst would do with the illustrations to his three novel collages, *La Femme 100 têtes* (The Hundred Headless Woman) of 1929,[328] *Rêve d'une petite fille qui voulut entrer au carmel* (A Little Girl Dreams of Taking the Veil) of 1930, and *Une Semaine de bonté* (A Week of Kindness) of 1934:[329] while Shub was able to create a new film simply by editing already existing archival footage and, consequently, without actually shooting any new material, Borisov, as I have shown, cut chunks from previously published English, Swedish, German, and French novels that had been translated into Russian and were probably readily available on the Khar'kov book market of 1927,[330] simply changing the names of characters to achieve consistency and denote the same

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determine whether or not Borisov had also a specific target in mind among Soviet publishers. The only major literary figure of the time with the name "Squire" was Sir Jonathan C. Squire, whose works were also published by Doran. See, for instance, his collection of poetry titled *Collected Parodies* (New York: Doran, 1921).

[328] The choice of using the word "headless" instead of "headed" in the title seems to have been a conscious choice by the English translator or by the publishing house. As Dorothea Tanning points out in her dedication to Max Ernst, "*The Hundred Headless Woman* has a hundred heads and no head at all, and we are certain that nothing could be more fitting." See Max Ernst, *The Hundred Headless Woman*, trans. Dorothea Tanning (New York: George Braziller, 1981), 12.

[329] While in both *La Femme 100 têtes* and *rêve d'une petite fille qui voulut entrer au carmel* Ernst mainly created new illustrations, in *Une Semaine de Bonté*, which came out in five booklets, Max Ernst "used complete existing illustrations as base-pictures, altering them with pasted-on additions." These, often lurid, illustrations accompanied late nineteenth century French popular fiction, often serialized in periodicals. See the publisher's note to Max Ernst, *Une Semaine De Bonté: A Surrealistic Novel in Collage*, trans. Stanley Appelbaum (New York: Dover Publications, 1976), vi. For a study of Ernst's "novels collage," see the four articles in part two of Julia Drost, Ursula Moureau-Martini, and Nicolas Devigne, eds., *Max Ernst, l'imagier des poètes* (Paris: Presses de l'université Paris-Sorbonne, 2008), 85-157. In 1961, Jean Desvilles turned the novel into an 18-minute film titled *Kindness Week*. In the film, the narrative rhythm is achieved through the animation of the original collage engravings, the superimposition of several illustrations, the addition of a musical score, and minimal commentary of the images themselves. While the film, in a sense, inevitably reduces potential interpretations by leaving out many of the 182 illustrations, it also complicates these interpretations by adding extra-layers of meaning (e.g., interaction images and music). Even in this case, nothing was actually "shot" by Desvilles.

[330] Many of the novels had just been translated into Russian and were therefore still *novinki.* See the appendix at the end of this chapter. While I was able to verify that Borisov used indeed some of the existing translations, I could not ascertain this for every single novel that he used. My assumption, however, is that Borisov, also considering the purpose of his endeavor, did not translate anything *ad hoc* but used instead only existing translations.

individuals, before eventually stitching these lightly edited chapters together by means of scissors and glue to create a new narrative line. The final product, which I would call a "novel montage" and which is reminiscent of the "cut-up technique" introduced by Tristan Tzara in 1920 and used by the Dadaists, contains almost nothing that has been written by Borisov the "author," despite the fact that Krok-Borisov himself, after having listed the books used for his assemblage, ends his confession with the claim of full authorship over the work because he is the one who came up with an original plot: "That's it, that's the array of spices that ended up in my novel. I stress once again 'my' because this novel is ultimately mine and made following a plot invented by me." [331] And this is precisely the point: Krok claims authorship even though he admits to using already existing novels: "I was honest, I didn't publish this work under my name, as hundreds of authors do."[332] The author now has become an assembler of ready-made literature. In her 2010 article on *khalturovedenie* (literary hackwork), Mariia Malikova points out that, despite Borisov's claims of authorship, he should be considered *Zelenye iabloki*'s "performer" (*ispolnitel'*), with the ready-made "score" constituted by readily available novels that could be dissected, cross-contaminated and reassembled at (the performer's) will: "Nikolai Andreevich Borisov, designated on the cover as the translator 'from the American', was not so much the author of this meta-literary parody as its performer."[333] Obviously, Krok-Borisov's claim of authorship should not necessarily be taken at face value; but, to the Soviet public of the

[331] Arlen et al., *Zelenye iabloki*, 187. ("Вотъ и все, вотъ всѣ спеціи, нашедшіе себѣ мѣсто въ моемъ романѣ. Я еще разъ подчеркиваю въ моемъ, потому что все же этотъ романъ мой и сдѣланъ по мною задуманному сюжету.")
[332] Ibid., 184. ("…я честно поступилъ, я не выдавалъ эту работу за свою, ка это дѣлаютъ сотни авторовъ.")
[333] Maria Malikova, "Khalturovedenie: sovetskii perevodnoi roman perioda NEPa" *NLO*, no. 103 (2010), http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2010/103/mm7.html (last accessed on January 13, 2019). ("Николай Андреевич Борисов, обозначенный на обложке переводчиком 'с американского', был не столько автором этой металитературной пародии, сколько ее исполнителем.")

1920s, which avidly consumed dime novels and *kino-romany* (cinematic novels),[334] the perpetuation of captivating, trite plots inevitably culminating in a "happy ending" was a sufficient (and necessary!) reason to acquire the status of a "writer." Malikova's reluctance to call Borisov "an author" seems more indicative of the special status of literature as an institution and artistic practice: if we assign authorship to Shub, Rodchenko, Kliutsis, and Ernst for their works, why is Borisov a "performer"?

As genre, *Zelenye iabloki* also parodies the short-lived phenomenon of the *psevdo-perevodnye romany* (novel in pseudo-translation) of the NEP period. Between 1924 and 1928, Soviet writers published a series of short novels using fake Western—and therefore more exotic and marketable—names.[335] These novels, which were sold as if they were Russian translations of Western novels, are described by Malikova as follows…

> …a witty parody of the current state of affairs in NEP literature, of the vogue among the mass readership for foreign adventure fiction, published in an enormous number of copies, often in botched Russian translations but also a satire of the topic of this foreign pulp fiction—contemporary bourgeois society. This satire would be camouflaged by foreign pseudonyms and, because the real authors were fellow travelers, was a compromised one, not militant enough.[336]

[334] As a popular literary genre of the late NEP period, the *kino-roman* is still largely understudied. The term refers to novels that employ narrative devices used in cinema. For an example in contemporary Russian literature, see for instance the ten volumes that Boris Akunin published between 2007 and 2011 for his series "Смерть на брудершафт" (Brüderschaft with Death).

[335] I am referring, for instance, to *Kto smeetsia poslednim* (1925) by Zhorzh Delarm (Iurii Slezkin), *Krasavitsa s ostrova Liuliu* (1926) by P'er Dium'el (Sergei Zaiaitskii), *Atlantida pod vodoi* (1927) by Rene Kadu (Ovadii Savich and Vladimir Korvin-Piotrovskii), *Blef, poddel'nyi roman* (1927) by Ris Uil'ki Li (Boris Lipatov) and, obviously, *Mess-Mend* by Dzhim Dollar (Marietta Shaginian). See Malikova, "Khalturovedenie"; Vulis, *Sovetskii satiricheskii roman*, 145-49.

[336] Malikova, "Khalturovedenie." ("…остроумная пародия на злободневное явление нэповской литературной ситуации — популярность у массового читателя иностранной приключенческой беллетристики, выпускавшейся огромными тиражами в часто халтурных русских переводах, а также как сатира на объект иностранной бульварной книги — современное буржуазное общество, закамуфлированная иностранным псевдонимом и, по причине попутнической сути реального автора, компромиссная, недостаточно боевитая.")



Illustration 20/21. Cover and title page of the "628th edition" of the novel (1929) published in Riga by "Literatura" and printed using the old orthography (Latvia was not part of the Soviet Union). The number of this edition is also written on the banner held by the first man of the left. In the title page, "translation from American" ("Перевод с американского") of the Khar'kov edition has become "translation from English" ("Переводъ съ англійскаго").

Without expanding on issues related to fellow travelers and their authorial intention of conveying a toned-down satire of bourgeois society, it will be enough to point out that this "witty parody" of the cheap Western literature so popular at the time was precisely what Krok-Borisov wanted to achieve, as he explicitly tells Squire in the afterword to the novel: "…while reading all these novels, I was struck by the fact that, in terms of style and their way of describing the heroes, they were absolutely indistinguishable from one another. No originality whatsoever in the language, not even in the construction of plot. All these novels were produced with the same

imprint, they are the outcome of one template."[337] In *Zelenye iabloki*, though, the parodic effect, which functions on multiple levels,[338] is achieved by means of narrative fidelity rather than deformation. Parody, being a "distorting mirror,"[339] works not by rejecting but rather distorting, to a greater or lesser extent, the object it wants to parody, depending on the goal that the author wants to achieve. The distance between the parodying text and the parodied object can range from minimal modification to grotesque representation. In the case of *Zelenye iabloki*, however, the parodic effect is achieved constructively through the montage of discrete parts that have been faithfully reproduced from the parodied objects while removed from their original function. Parody can be understood as a "dress turned inside out, with all the stitches and threads of the lining exposed."[340] In the same way that in *Bol'shie pozhary* Zozulia exposes the seams of a literary chimera instead of sewing up the *fabula*, Borisov reveals the parts that he used to assemble his Frankenstein's monster by creating a series of impediments that slow down the process of reading and lay bare its structure. By turning diachronically written novels into a synchronically assembled novel, Borisov exposes the systemic *faktura* of them.[341]

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[337] Arlen, et al., *Zelenye iabloki*, 185. ("…читая всѣ эти романы, я былъ пораженъ тѣмъ обстоятельствомъ, что ни по силю [*sic*], ни по манерѣ описанія героевъ, они совершенно не отличались одинъ отъ другого. Никакой оригинальности въ формѣ языка, ни даже въ построеніи сюжета. Всѣ романы вышли изъ-подъ одного штампа. Одинъ шаблонъ.")

[338] At the level of reception, *Zelenyi iabloki* "functions" for two main reasons: it is indeed entertaining and funny as any *avantiurnyi roman* should be, and it creates suspense. Here, though, suspense and surprise are often achieved not by means of plot construction or devices such as cliffhangers. An example might be useful to illustrate this point: in part two, chapter ten, one of the protagonists, out of the blue, is about to dress as a praetorian guard ("…онъ самъ . . . будетъ одѣтъ преторіанцемъ.") The reason for this is that the scene is taken from Maurice Magre's *Priscilla of Alexandria.* Arlen, et al., *Zelenie iabloki*, 122.

[339] Vulis, *Povelitel' zheleza*, 14. ("кривое зеркало")

[340] R. Pletnev, foreword to Aleksandr Blok et al., *Parnas dybom*, ed. Cyril S. Jauksch-Orlovski, 3rd ed. (1928, repr. n.d.), I. ("…платье вывернутое наизнанку со всеми его швами и нитками подкладкой и рубцами наружу.")

[341] I am paraphrasing Oushakine, "Presence without Identification," 65.

For instance, in part three chapter three, a debt of "ten dollars" is mentioned. This misplaced detail must have certainly arrested the attention of the attentive reader, since the story, up to that point, seemed to be taking place in England.[342] Borisov might have easily edited the original novel and changed dollars into pounds, considering how he performed similar operations elsewhere for the sake of continuity. And yet he did not. It also seems difficult to believe that it was a simple oversight, first judging how careful he was overall and, most importantly, because the blunder occurs in the chapter originally written by Jack *London.* Besides illustrating how this constructive parody works on many, often subtle levels, this is important, because Borisov left those dollars there as a stumbling block in the process of reading, as a rupture within the new narrative line. By doing so, he diverts the attention of his readers to the structure, he reminds them that what they are reading is actually "another" novel and yet, at the same time, he is asking them to stay within *Zelenye iabloki*'s narrative boundaries.

In the 1925 publication of the essay "Parodiinyi roman" (The Novel as Parody) on Laurence Sterne's *Tristam Shandy*, Viktor Shklovsky pointed out that parody, by transforming and reinventing old devices, contributes to the creation of new forms.[343] In his much later book on plot construction, *Energiia zabluzhdeniia* (Energy of Delusion), published in 1981, Shklovsky tries to show how "nothing in literature begins from a beginning,"[344] how writers engage in a continual reinvention of canonized or exhausted devices and plots. In *Zelenye iabloki* the parodic effect is achieved not by distorting the source texts, but by faithfully reproducing them and, consequently, by estranging the widely popular devices of the mystery and detective story used

[342] Only a few of the original novels are set in London, and yet the readers of *Zelenye iabloki* are not aware of this.
[343] English translation: Viktor Shklovsky, "The Novel as Parody: Sterne's *Tristam Shandy*," in *Theory of Prose*, trans. Benjamin Sher, 4th ed. (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2009), 147-70.
[344] Viktor Shklovsky, preface to *Energy of Delusion: A Book on Plot*, trans. Shushan Avagyan, 2nd ed. (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2011), 15.

in them. To quote Shklovsky: "When a new machine is invented, its separate parts have been invented a long time ago—they existed long before."[345] Using previously written books, what Borisov did was not much different from what every other writer does, but the issue here is that he took this to the extreme because not only does he "invent a new machine" using separate parts that had been invented before him, but also, and most importantly, because he takes these parts and simply glues them together, simultaneously claiming authorship over them. In *Zelenye iabloki*, what counts is not the consistency of the plot and the story *per se,* even though Borisov manages to achieve a certain degree of plot credibility, but the laying bare of the *process of creativity* behind it, in which the "artifact [is] intentionally removed from the domain of automatized perception."[346] Borisov exposes *the process of creativity* through montage and does not bother to hide the traces of this operation but rather insists that they remain visible. If, on the one hand, one can certainly claim that: "[e]very invention is like a montage: sometimes the traces of this montage get swept away,"[347] Borisov makes sure that these traces are not swept away and that the reader is able to follow them. In *Zelenye iabloki*, the reinvention of plot is achieved through the contrast and opposition of previously written works, and authorial agency restricts itself to the process of editing of these parts, the same way film editors work with filmic material. In fact, while, strictly speaking, montage is a device that was introduced and developed in film-making in the early 1910s, the term was soon appropriated by literary scholars, and especially by the Formalists. Despite the fact that montage, in a much wider and less productive sense, has always been a constitutive device of plot construction (division into chapters, flashbacks, etc.), here it acquires a new meaning. The implications of what Borisov did in

[345] Ibid.
[346] Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Device," in *Theory of Prose*, 12.
[347] Shklovsky, *Energy of Delusion*, 16.

Zelenye iabloki are much deeper in terms of both authorship and literariness. First, he reveals the similarity between supposedly dissimilar artistic practices (film and literature); second, he undercuts the issue of artistic originality and contributes to the "dethroning of the 'creative personality'"; third, and most importantly for our purposes, he relegates authorial agency and creativity to the process of editing ready-made material.

Borisov, the "self-proclaimed" author of the novel, performs his authorial role as editor or, if we want to push the construction metaphor further, as a constructor who uses devices, images, heroes, etc. as ready-made bricks in the process of making a new creation. This evolution of the authorial role is crucial, because it reveals an intermediate stage in the path leading to the establishment of the collective author and also allows us to trace a linkage between apparently very different works such as *Zelenye iabloki*, on the one hand, and *Istoriia fabrik i zavodov* on the other, in which Gorky and Averbakh would perform, despite having a very different agenda, a very similar role. Moreover, *Zelenye iabloki* proves that, if a text cannot be reduced to a single source of creativity (or authorial agency), then the proliferation of sites of such text-writing would result in texts with multiple centers of gravity and multiple sites of enunciation. To this end, it is useful to critically engage the specific choices that Borisov made in the process of montage or in the "process of creativity," in order to see how he dealt with these multiple sites of utterance and how he tried to eliminate some of these traces to achieve a certain degree of novelistic cohesion and, at the same time, a certain degree of disruption necessary to his parodic discourse.

In terms of the heroes who populate the novel, in *Zelenye iabloki*, we are dealing with a situation that is almost the opposite of *Bol'shie pozhary*'s character extravaganza. The process of the death of the hero that we have seen in novels and novellas about the Civil War, occurs here in

a different way, in the sense that each protagonist becomes the locus at which multiple distinct biographies converge and are clumped together. As Vulis points out in his short analysis of the novel, in *Zelenye iabloki* "we have to do with literature in which the hero exists only for the plot, in which the plot itself becomes the hero."[348] While, in *Bol'shie pozhary*, the death of the hero is achieved through the continual accumulation of new characters, here it is achieved through the accumulation of biographical material within the same narrative *loci*: the figures of the three protagonists. Therefore, what stitches the chapters together is not even action anymore—although, again, Borisov surprisingly manages to create a more or less "coherent" story—but simply the "names" of the protagonists: John Burton, Gerald March, and Iris Strom. In other words, in terms of reception, we know that we are reading the same novel simply because the names of three people keep reoccurring: "the heroes of the chunks of text written by different authors and glued together are given the same name and function as the linking protagonist of the novel collage, so that unity is achieved not through psychological coherence or permanency of narrative role but almost exclusively through naming."[349] In Burton, March, and Strom most of the biographical material of the original novels collapses.[350]

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[348] Vulis, *Sovetskii satiricheskii roman*, 145. ("…мы имеем дело с литературой, когда герой существует только для сюжета, когда сюжет становится героем.")

[349] Malikova, "Khalturovedenie." ("…герои из склеенных между собой фрагментов текстов разных авторов получают одно имя и функционируют как сквозной персонаж коллажного романа, так что его единство обеспечивается не психологической связностью или постоянством сюжетной роли, но почти исключительно именем.")

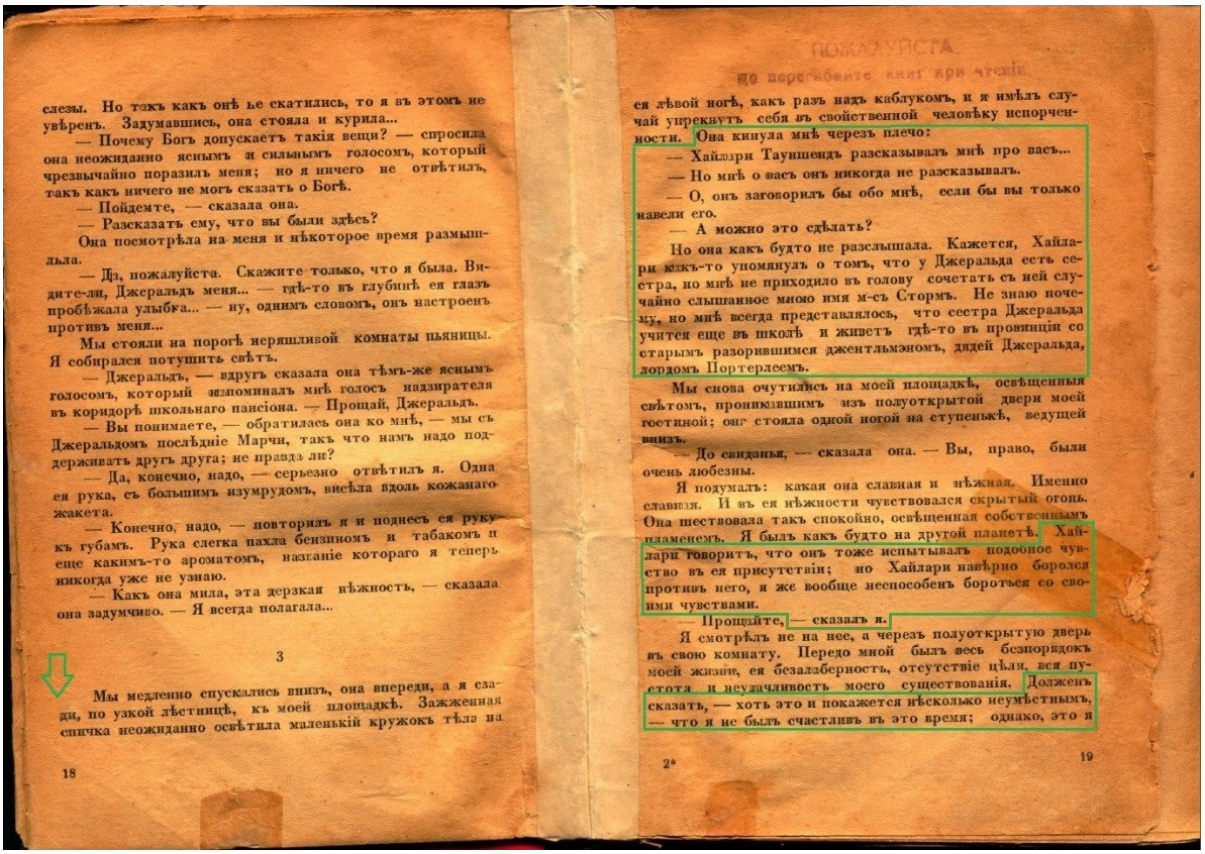
[350] March, Burton, and Strom are the names of the heroes of the first two books used by Borisov in his process of montage: Gerald March and Iris Storm are the protagonists of Michael Arlen's story *The Green Hat*, which Borisov uses for the first and second chapter. John Burton is the protagonist of Victor Bridges's novel *The Man from Nowhere*, used for chapter three, four, and five. The only change that Borisov makes concerns the last name of the female protagonist (from Storm to Strom). Moreover, despite Krok's claim that the title has no connection with the story, two things should be mentioned: the name of the first story that Borisov used is *Green Hat* by Michael Arlen; second, for *Zelenye iabloki*'s epilogue, Borisov picked a chapter from Robert W. Service's novel *The Roughneck* (*Skitalets* in Russian translation) titled "Zelenyi nesgoraemyi shkaf" (The Green Fire-Proof Safe). Borisov thus creates a parallelism between the first and the last chapter of the book. It is also worth pointing out that the original chapter is called "The Green Safe," with the word "несгораемый" (fireproof) added by the Russian

In order to understand how Borisov worked with the texts, let us look at one concrete example and briefly compare the beginning of chapter two in *Zelenye iabloki* with the novel that served as its ready-made source: chapter three of *Zelenaia shliapa* (The Green Hat) by Michael Arlen. In illustration 22/23, I have framed in green the parts that Borisov decided to expunge. Let us ask why he did so. First of all, Borisov got rid of Hilary Townshend (translated into Russian as "Khailari"), a character he did not need. In both *Zelenaia shliapa* and *Zelenye iabloki* the story of the meeting between Gerald March and Iris Storm (Strom) is narrated by a third character who happens to live in the apartment right above March's. In *The Green Hat*, though, Iris already knows of the existence of this third person, because Hilary told her about him, whereas the narrator does not know Iris, even though he remembers hearing about March having a sister. Besides the very concrete result of eliminating a narrative burden—and at the same time proving that, from a narrative perspective, how a plot can be resilient to the elimination of one hero—is the *automatic* reconfiguration of the relations among the protagonists in the new text. In this example, by discarding Hilary as a character, Borisov is able to introduce a difference in the relationship between Iris and the narrator: whereas, in *Zelenaia shliapa*, Iris already knows him, in *Zelenye iabloki*, the two are turned into perfect strangers.

While, on the one hand, *Zelenye iabloki* seems to substantiate Shklovsky's early theory of the novel by laying bare the devices used in detective stories and creating "intentional disorder"[351] through parodization, on the other, if Borisov is not, *stricto sensu*, the author, then who is?

translator. In the original novel the safe is indeed fireproof, but this feature is not indicated in the title: "It was the smallest they made, but a good little safe, laminated, reënforced, practically drill-proof. Even with thermite or the oxy-acetylene flame it would be a tough proposition." Echoes of *Bol'shie pozhary* might be coincidental. See Robert W. Service, *The Roughneck* (New York: Barse & Hopkins, 1924), 72.

[351] Shklovsky, "The Novel as Parody," 148.



слезы. Но такъ какъ онѣ не скатились, то я въ этомъ не увѣренъ. Задумавшись, она стояла и курила...

— Почему Богъ допускаетъ такія вещи? — спросила она неожиданно яснымъ и сильнымъ голосомъ, который чрезвычайно поразилъ меня; но я ничего не отвѣтилъ, такъ какъ ничего не могъ сказать о Богѣ.

— Пойдемте, — сказала она.

— Разсказать ему, что вы были здѣсь?

Она посмотрѣла на меня и нѣкоторое время размышляла.

— Да, пожалуйста. Скажите только, что я была. Видите-ли, Джеральдъ меня... — гдѣ-то въ глубинѣ ея глазъ пробѣжала улыбка... — ну, однимъ словомъ, онъ настроенъ противъ меня...

Мы стояли на порогѣ неряшливой комнаты пьяницы. Я собирался потушить свѣтъ.

— Джеральдъ, — вдругъ сказала она тѣмъ-же яснымъ голосомъ, который напоминалъ мнѣ голосъ надзирателя въ коридорѣ школьнаго пансіона. — Прощай, Джеральдъ.

— Вы понимаете, — обратилась она ко мнѣ, — мы съ Джеральдомъ послѣдніе Марчи, такъ что намъ надо поддерживать другъ друга; не правда ли?

— Да, конечно, надо, — серьезно отвѣтилъ я. Одна ея рука, съ большимъ изумрудомъ, висѣла вдоль кожанаго жакета.

— Конечно, надо, — повторилъ я и поднесъ ея руку къ губамъ. Рука слегка пахла бензиномъ и табакомъ и еще какимъ-то ароматомъ, названіе котораго я теперь никогда уже не узнаю.

— Какъ она мила, эта дерзкая нѣжность, — сказала она задумчиво. — Я всегда полагала...

3

Мы медленно спускались внизъ, она впереди, а я сзади, по узкой лѣстницѣ, къ моей площадкѣ. Зажженная спичка неожиданно освѣтила маленькій кружокъ тѣла на

ПОЖАЛУЙСТА

не перегибайте книг при чтении

ея лѣвой ногѣ, какъ разъ надъ каблукомъ, и я имѣлъ случай упрекнуть себя въ свойственной человѣку испорченности. Она кинула мнѣ черезъ плечо:

— Хайлари Тауншендъ разсказывалъ мнѣ про васъ...

— Но мнѣ о васъ онъ никогда не разсказывалъ.

— О, онъ заговорилъ бы обо мнѣ, если бы вы только навели его.

— А можно это сдѣлать?

Но она какъ будто не разслышала. Кажется, Хайлари какъ-то упомянулъ о томъ, что у Джеральда есть сестра, но мнѣ не приходило въ голову сочетать съ ней случайно слышанное мною имя м-съ Стормъ. Не знаю почему, но мнѣ всегда представлялось, что сестра Джеральда учится еще въ школѣ и живетъ гдѣ-то въ провинціи со старымъ разорившимся джентльменомъ, дядей Джеральда, лордомъ Портерлеемъ.

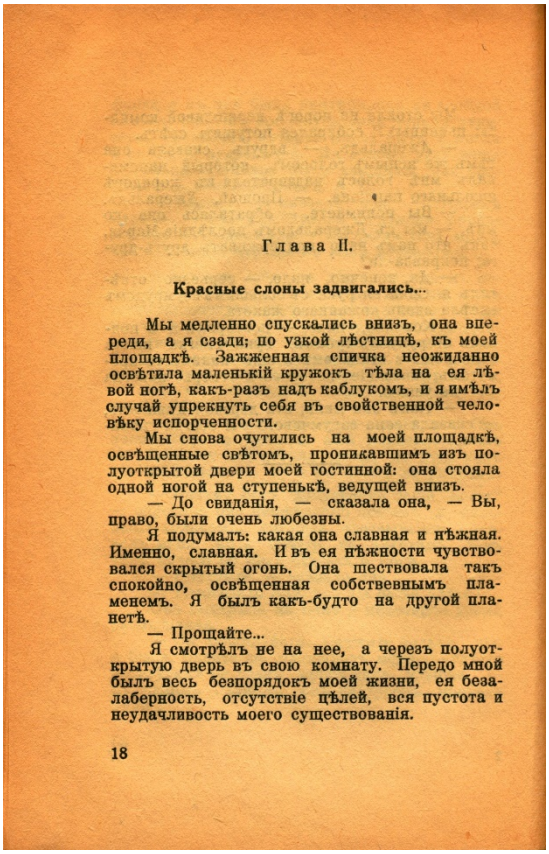
Мы снова очутились на моей площадкѣ, освѣщенныя свѣтомъ, проникавшимъ изъ полуоткрытой двери моей гостиной; она стояла одной ногой на ступенькѣ, ведущей внизъ.

— До свиданья, — сказала она. — Вы, право, были очень любезны.

Я подумалъ: какая она славная и нѣжная. Именно славная. И въ ея нѣжности чувствовался скрытый огонь. Она шествовала такъ спокойно, освѣщенная собственнымъ пламенемъ. Я былъ какъ будто на другой планетѣ. Хайлари говоритъ, что онъ тоже испытывалъ подобное чувство въ ея присутствіи; но Хайлари навѣрно боролся противъ него, я же вообще неспособенъ бороться со своими чувствами.

— Прощайте, — сказалъ я.

Я смотрѣлъ не на нее, а черезъ полуоткрытую дверь въ свою комнату. Передо мной былъ весь безпорядокъ моей жизни, ея безалаберность, отсутствіе цѣли, вся пустота и неудачливость моего существованія. Долженъ сказать, — хоть это и покажется нѣсколько неумѣстнымъ, — что я не былъ счастливъ въ это время; однако, это я



Глава II.

Красные слоны задвигались...

Мы медленно спускались внизъ, она впереди, а я сзади; по узкой лѣстницѣ, къ моей площадкѣ. Зажженная спичка неожиданно освѣтила маленькій кружокъ тѣла на ея лѣвой ногѣ, какъ-разъ надъ каблукомъ, и я имѣлъ случай упрекнуть себя въ свойственной человѣку испорченности.

Мы снова очутились на моей площадкѣ, освѣщенные свѣтомъ, проникавшимъ изъ полуоткрытой двери моей гостинной: она стояла одной ногой на ступенькѣ, ведущей внизъ.

— До свиданія, — сказала она, — Вы, право, были очень любезны.

Я подумалъ: какая она славная и нѣжная. Именно, славная. И въ ея нѣжности чувствовался скрытый огонь. Она шествовала такъ спокойно, освѣщенная собственнымъ пламенемъ. Я былъ какъ-будто на другой планетѣ.

— Прощайте...

Я смотрѣлъ не на нее, а черезъ полуоткрытую дверь въ свою комнату. Передо мной былъ весь безпорядокъ моей жизни, ея безалаберность, отсутствіе цѣлей, вся пустота и неудачливость моего существованія.

18

Illustration 22/23. On the left, chapter two of *Zelenye iabloki* (Riga: “Literatura,” 1929). On top, Maikl Arlen, *Vladychitsa liubvi (zelenaia shliapa)* (Riga: Knigoizdatel’stvo “Gramatu draugs,” 1931). The parts framed in green were eliminated by Borisov.

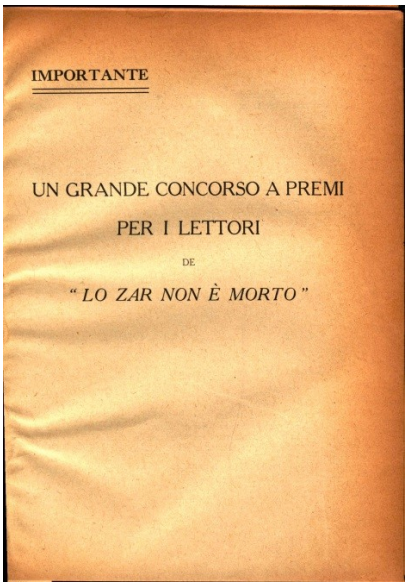
Can Michael Arlen or Mark Twain be considered the "real" authors of the novel considering that, in all likelihood, none of the participants, and certainly not those who were dead at the time of its publication knew (and probably never would) that, in 1927, in Khar'kov, a novel was being published in their name? Can a novel be considered a "literary work" when the issue of authorship is so fluid? In fact, whose "work" is it? Yet the novel exists, it can be read and, despite its swirling, at times incongruous plot, it makes some sense, even though what matters here is not the artifact, but rather the artistic practice, what Shklovsky calls "the process of creativity."

This issue of authorial agency transcending the individual also resonates with our previous discussion of the crowd, in that the (authorial) self becomes both reproducible in relation to the whole and unique (or specific) in relation to itself. It is reproducible because Borisov's point was precisely to prove how the plot can be extended *ad libitum* by adding more and more novels without disrupting the cohesion of the whole, since its idea lies beyond the sum of its parts. This is very much in line with the Formalist credo that literature operates by reiterating and manipulating recurring motifs (Shklovsky) or functions (Propp). In Kornelius Krok's words, "reading all these novels, I was struck by the fact that, in terms of style and their way of describing the heroes, they were absolutely indistinguishable from one another."[352] Authorship becomes reproducible (remember Squire's words about the "extraordinary stylistic cohesion of the novel") in the most literal sense. What Borisov does in *Zelenye iabloki* goes beyond simple issues of literary epigonism (*epigonstvo*); he shows how already existing literary works, like film footage, can be (physically!) deconstructed and reassembled to form a Soviet exquisite corpse. Therefore, the "new" novel transcends literary emulation while appropriating

[352] Arlen et al., *Zelenye iabloki*, 185.

and reinventing other works and, in doing so, is still able to demonstrate structural and stylistic cohesion. Nonetheless, it is also specific, because traces of authorial agency remain as a constructive principle, thus leaving the reader with a palimpsest of authorship in which the traces of those who have preceded a given author in the narration will never be obliterated. A question now should be raised: Is it actually possible to completely efface these authorial traces, or did Borisov leave them there on purpose as yet another element of parody?

In terms of collective creativity, in this positive-sum game in which a literary work is produced by no actual authorial agency in the traditional sense, *Zelenye iabloki* is a demonstration of how a novel can be constructed, as long as the same devices are used to order its discrete parts. This issue of reproducibility and specificity was crucial in a chain novel such as *Bol'shie pozhary*. Yet, in *Zelenye iabloki*, this dynamic is different. At the structural level, what the novel manages to achieve is to show the reproducibility of any literary work via the collectivization of authorship: neither the specificity of the authors nor of the characters seems to matter anymore. In *Bol'shie pozhary*, the death of the hero is achieved by means of unstructured iteration: the impossibility of accounting for all of the different characters, the sudden disappearance of some and the (re)appearance of others. Conversely, in *Zelenye iabloki* the three protagonists function in the opposite way, as the narrative shells of the plethora of different characters that Borisov conflated in them. In this sense, the narrative function of the protagonists of *Zelenye iabloki* can be compared to the heroes of Socialist Realist novels, who are the narrative embodiment of the proletarian body taken as a whole.



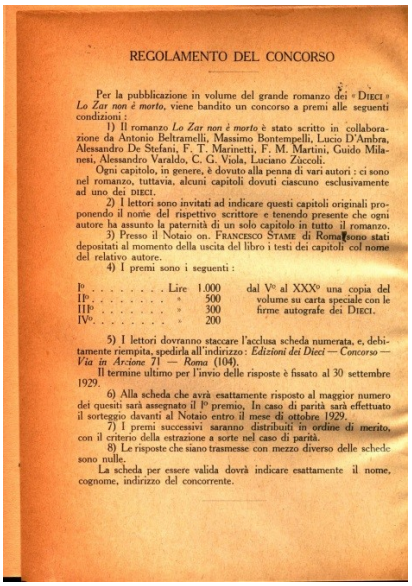
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UN GRANDE CONCORSO A PREMI

PER I LETTORI

DE

" LO ZAR NON È MORTO "



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Per la pubblicazione in volume del grande romanzo dei « DIECI » *Lo Zar non è morto*, viene bandito un concorso a premi alle seguenti condizioni:

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Ogni capitolo, in genere, è dovuto alla penna di vari autori: ci sono nel romanzo, tuttavia, alcuni capitoli dovuti ciascuno esclusivamente ad uno dei DIECI.

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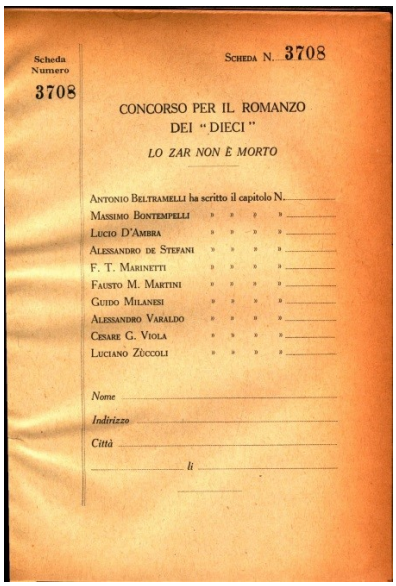
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Illustration 24/25/26. The prize contest that appeared as an appendix to *Lo Zar non è morto* (Roma: Edizioni dei Dieci-Sapientia, 1929). In illustration 25, the rules of the contest are laid out: the first prize was 1,000 Lire, which translates to today's $1,000. The participants in the contest ranking from fifth to thirtieth would have received an autographed copy of the book printed on "special paper" (*carta speciale*). Autographed copies of the novel do exist.

In the novel *Lo zar non è morto* by the collective of Italian Futurist writers "I Dieci," Tommaso Marinetti, the leader of the group, decided to promote the endeavor by announcing a prize contest in the very last pages of the book. Here, the reader would have found a form to fill in. Even though we do not know how the writing process of the novel actually proceeded, what we know is that, of the fifty-nine total chapters, only ten were penned single-handedly, one by each author of the group. In order to win a prize, the reader had to guess what chapters in the book had not been written as a collective and by whom, then detach the form and send it to the provided address.[353] Marinetti was asking the readers to make assumptions judging from the narrative style of the ten participants.

[353] We do not know whether or not there were winners or how many readers participated in the context. Judging from the fact that in many of the existing copies of the book the form was not detached, it is not far-fetched to assume that the response from the readership was not overwhelming. See Daniele Comberiati. "I romanzi collettivi de «I Dieci» negli anni venti: fra la fine dell'avanguardia futurista e l'anticipazione del postmoderno." *Les Lettres Romanes* 65, no. 3/4 (2011): 449-72.

Would the reader of *Zelenye iabloki* (have) likewise be(en) able to distinguish H. G. Wells from London, Stevenson from Romains, Kauffman from Zweig without Krok's confession and the list of books he provides?

Borisov had decrowned the author.

The job was up for grabs.

In the section below, I am listing the books "montaged" by Borisov together with their Russian translation and name of the translator. The year of the books' first edition is given in parentheses after the original title, followed by the Russian translation most probably used in *Zelenye iabloki.* For most of these novels, only one translation existed by the time Borisov assembled his novel. I indicate with <?> the cases in which I was not able to determine either the title of the source novel (Edgar Wallace's) or the name of the Russian translator (in Robert Louis Stevenson's story).

PART ONE:

- Ch. 1, 2: Michael Arlen's *The Green Hat* (1924) – *Zelenaia shliapa* (1926). Translated from English by M. IA. Ratner.
- Ch. 3, 4, 5: Victor Bridges's *The Man from Nowhere* (1913) – *Chelovek niotkuda* (1926). Translated from English by Iulia IA. Moshkovskaia.
- Ch. 5: Frank Heller's *Du dåre, i denna natt* (1922) – *Bezumnyi, v etu noch'* (1926). Translated from Swedish by Elena N. Blagoveshchenskaia.
- Ch. 6: Mark Twain's *The £1,000,000 Bank-Note* (1893) – *Bankovyi bilet v 1000000 funtov* (1902). Translated from English by IA. Berman.

PART TWO:

- Ch. 1: Georg Hermann's *Henriette Jacoby* (1908) – *Genrietta Iakobi* (1925). Translated from German by Aleksandr A. Gizetti.
- Ch. 2: Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Suicide Club* (1878) – *Klub samoubiits* (1888). Translated from English by <?>.
- Ch. 2, 3: Jules Romains's *Donogoo-Tonka ou les miracles de la science* (1920) – *Donogoo Tonka ili chudesa nauki*. Translated from French by O. I. Poddiachaia.
- Ch. 4: Norbert Jacques's *Ingenieur Mars* (1923) – *Inzhener Mars* (1924). Translated from German by E. Russat.
- Ch. 5, 7: Reginald Wright Kauffman's *Daughters of Ishmael* (1911) – *Dshcheri Izmaila* (1925). Translated from English by D. E. Leikhtenberg.
- Ch. 6: Victor Margueritte's *Prostituée* (1907) – *Prostitutka* (1908). Translated from French by S. G. Zaimovskii.
- Ch. 6: Frank Heller's *I hasardens huvudstad* (1914) – *V stolitse azarta* (1926). Translated from Swedish by V. V. Kharlamova and N. M. Lederpe.
- Ch. 8, 11: Edgar Wallace's <?> – *Tainstvennyi sosed millionera Marshalta* [*sic*] (1927), translated from English by A. G. Sviiazheninova. The first Russian edition came out in Khar'kov.
- Ch. 9: Frank Heller's *Doktor Z.* (1927) – *Doktor Ts.* (1927). Translated from Swedish by E. Blagoveshchenskaia and S. Kublitskaia-Piottuch.
- Ch. 9: Robert W. Service's *The Roughneck* (1923) – *Skitalets* (1926). Translated from English by M. M. Birinskii.
- Ch. 10: Maurice Magre's *Priscilla d'Alexandrie* (1925) – *Pristsilla iz Aleksandrii* (1927). Translated from French by I. D. Markuson.

PART THREE:

- Ch. 1: Stefan Zweig's *Die Hochzeit von Lyon* (1927) – *Lionskaia legenda* (1927). Translated from German by V. Zorgenfrei.
- Ch. 2: H. G. Wells's *Christina Alberta's Father* (1925) – *Otets Kristiny Al'berty* (1926). Translated from English by V. A. Aleksandrov.
- Ch. 3: Jack London's *Hearts of Three* (1919-1920) – *Serdtsa trekh* (1922). Translated from English by Anatolii A. D'Aktil'.
- Ch. 4: Robert W. Service's *The Roughneck* (1923) – *Skitalets* (1926). Translated from English by M. M. Birinskii.
- Ch. 4: Jakob Wassermann's *Die Masken des Erwin Reiners* (1910) – *Maski Ervina Reinera* (1912). Translated from German by M. Rozenfel'd.

Apart from scattered words and phrases added throughout the entire novel, Kornelius Krok participated as original author with short paragraphs in part one, chapter five; part two, chapter five and six; and part three, chapter four.

CHAPTER 5

THE BIOGRAPHY OF THE MACHINE

(Things don't like me.)

. . .

(Things like him.)

Yuri Olesha, *Envy*.[354]

Bad Machine/Good Machine

In 1927, the same year that both *Bol'shie pozhary* and *Zelenye iabloki* came out, the English translation of the latest work by cultural historian René Fülöp-Miller was published under the title *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism*.[355] The volume is a grim first-hand testimony[356] of some of the cultural and social changes that either occurred or were still underway in the Soviet Union. In the first chapter, titled "The Collective Man," Fülöp-Miller expands on the metaphor of personification of Bolshevism that he used in the title of his study to sketch a bombastic ("the impersonal mass is lord in Russia")[357] and terrifying portrait of a new Soviet entity—"the collective man"—who, in Fülöp-Miller's opinion, is "the most important new

[354] Yuri Olesha, *Envy and Other Works*, trans. Andrew R. MacAndrew (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1967), 3. Original Russian: "(Меня не любят вещи.) . . . (Вещи его любят)." See Iurii Olesha, *Zavist'* (Moskva: Zemlia i Fabrika, 1928; repr., Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1977), 8-9.

[355] The book had come out in German the year before (1926) under the title *Geist und Gesicht des Bolschewismus: Darstellung und Kritik des kulturellen Lebens in Sowjet-Rußland* (Zürich: Amalthea-Verlag, 1926).

[356] Fülöp-Miller is adamant about his agenda in the introduction, in which he warns against considering Bolshevism a mere political issue, and for this reason his intention is to "show it in its true light as a momentous problem of civilization as a whole" the acceptance or rejection of which "is the rejection or acceptance of the whole of European culture." Yet, he claims, "I must also acknowledge that the authorities put no check on my activities, although my attitude was entirely unbiassed, open, and critical." See René Fülöp-Miller, *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism*: *An Examination of Cultural Life in Soviet Russia*, trans. F.S. Flint and D.F. Tait (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, Ltd., 1927), xv; xiii; xv.

[357] Fülöp-Miller, *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism*, 1.

phenomenon which Bolshevism has produced."[358] This is how the Austrian historian describes this powerful creature:

> Whether, like some **monstrous creature** of fable, it rolls through the streets of the great cities, now growling happily, now **roaring with rage**, or whether it lies down comfortably on one of the wide squares to enjoy, **like an animal**, the sun, life, and its own exuberant strength the many thousand isolated **personalities** of which it is composed **disappear**, and we no longer recognize the simple worker in his workaday blouse, the soldier, the typist, the student, or the navvy. A mighty and powerful organism has **absorbed** them all into itself, and a single **rumbling voice**, **incomprehensible and terrifying** as the roar of the elements, has **swallowed up** all their individual cries, their joyful or angry words.[359]

This "nameless beast"[360] embodies many of the negative features that, as we have seen in chapter two, were associated with the crowd, especially in the studies published in last decade of the nineteenth century: a monstrous creature roaring with rage, a terrifying monster with a rumbling voice that erases individuality.

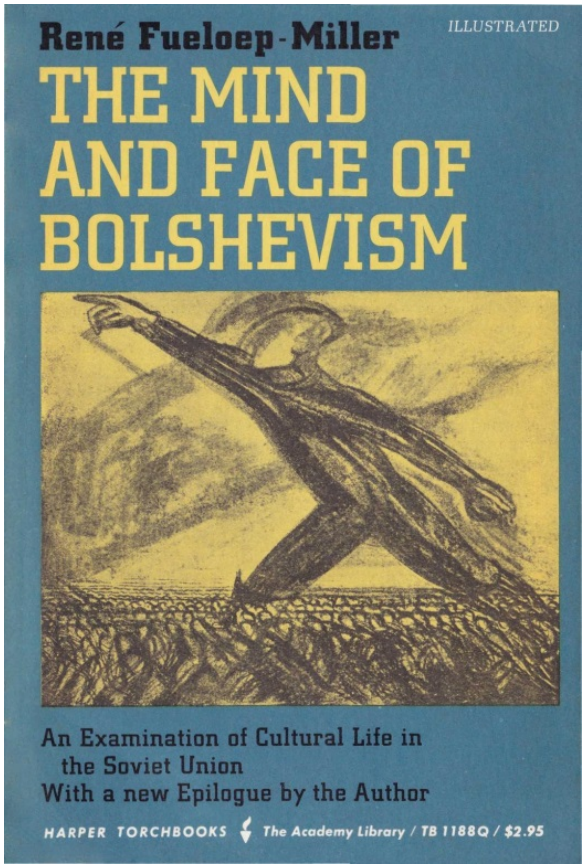


Illustration 27. The cover of the Harper & Row edition published in 1965 (the first, 1927 English edition features the same picture on the front cover). The faceless creature showing the way to a crowd of identical, faceless individuals well conveys Fülöp-Miller's description of the "collective man."

[358] Ibid.
[359] Ibid.
[360] Ibid.

With its apparent agitational stance against Bolshevism and its numerous hyperbolic descriptions of the collective man such as "[t]he mere sight of him spreads terror and fear,"[361] "it is only in his rage that the collective man shows his strength,"[362] or grand statements like, "The Russian has never been able to perceive the ultimate development of humanity except in a collective form,"[363] etc., the analysis offered by Fülöp-Miller does not move beyond the traditional view of sociologists and psychologists such as Sighele, Le Bon or, more recently, Freud,[364] who, had described the entity of the crowd as a soulless collective that annihilates the individual and inevitably produces a destructive force. This idea of the collective plays a crucial role, as we have seen, in novels and novellas about the Civil War as the initial, primordial (in a social sense) stage of the crowd before being organized by the writer/commander, and even more acutely in works predating the Revolution such as Gorky's *Mother*. We might recall the scene in which Andrei and Pavel, after having been released from prison, participate in the May 1st parade, and the crowd of the workers is described in terms reminiscent of Fülöp-Miller's monstrous creature: "Suddenly the head of the crowd, as it were, bumped against something; its body swung backward with an alarming, low hum."[365] Such descriptions of the crowd as a single entity with one head and one body were unusual in the Soviet novelistic production of the 1920s. One should keep in mind that Gorky's novel predated the Revolution by eleven years and was published twenty-one years before *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism*, the year after the aborted

[361] Ibid., 3
[362] Ibid.
[363] Ibid., 7.
[364] Sigmund Freud's take on crowds in *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse* (1921) does not differ from Le Bon's or Sighele's works in a substantial way, except for a more sophisticated theoretical framework that puts libido, rather than imitation or infection, at the center of his analysis. See the article by Daniel Pick, "Freud's 'Group Psychology' and the History of the Crowd," 39-61. For the English translation of the book, see *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922).
[365] Gorky, *Mother*, 224.

Revolution of 1905, when the understanding of the crowd as a negative entity largely overlapped with Serov's painting and with the portrayal it was given in Western sociology. Conversely, in the 1920s, and from the Soviet standpoint, Fülöp-Miller's description of the collective man as a terrifying entity came "too late."


THE MASS (*Frontispiece*)

Illustration 28. "The mass" as depicted in the frontispiece in the English edition of Fülöp-Miller's book *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism* (1927).

The concern for "arriving too late" (*ne uspevat'*), of "lagging behind" (*otstavat'*), of being unable to keep up with the pace of the construction of Socialism, is one of the main social discourses in the years of the first Five-Year Plan. Speed, efficiency, and organization were considered constitutive and unavoidable requirements to modernize Soviet society and, for this reason, started to be linked to literary production. Is Socialist literature lagging behind? Can it keep up with the construction of Socialism? These questions became central, especially when massive industrialization kicked in by the late 1920s.[366] In fact, Fülöp-Miller's collective man displays a new feature when compared to the crowds portrayed in sociology or psychology; I am

[366] See, for instance, Boris Kushner, "Prichiny otstavaniia," *Krasnaia nov'*, no. 11 (1930): 131-41 and Aleksandr Fadeev, "Zametki ob otstavanii," *Na literaturnom postu*, no. 2 (1931): 1-3.

referring to its mechanical aspect, the fact that this entity is not monstrous because it unleashes the most primitive human instincts which, by means of infection or imitation, feed on each other and eventually gain the upper hand over any positive qualities of the individual, but rather because it is viewed as a creature that functions like a collective automaton in which "the mechanized individual is reduced to a mere component part in the mass which has become the machine."[367] Therefore, for Fülöp-Miller, what is at stake here is not the barbaric impulses of the Bolshevik body, but the "destruction of all personal values"[368] and the transformation of the human being into a cog in the machine. For our purposes, it is important to trace the intersection of crowd, machine, and collective creativity.

In this chapter, I will focus on novelistic narration in which the machine, the object, is put at the center of the narration and functions as the organizer of the collective.[369] This, I will argue, represents a crucial shift in both form and content in the novelistic production of the 1920s and a further step towards the collective novels of the 1930s, in which the dynamic between collective and machine would be investigated in the volumes of *History of Factories and Plants.* The dynamic of man vs machine would take several forms in the novelistic discourse of the 1920s: in Evgenii Zamiatin's *We* (published in an English translation in 1924, the first uncensored Russian language edition would come out in New York in 1952) it takes the form of a future dystopian society; in Mikhail Bulgakov's *Heart of a Dog* (1925) it becomes a satirical depiction of the new Soviet Man; in Aleksandr Beliaev's *Professor Dowell's Head*, published in the same year, it warns against the risks of a major scientific breakthrough in the wrong

[367] Caption to an illustration in Fülöp-Miller, *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism*, 14.
[368] Ibid., 10.
[369] I tend to disagree with the rationale of Mary A. Nicholas's study on production novels titled *Writers at Work!* (Lewisburg, PA.: Bucknell University Press, 2010). The problem with Nicholas's theoretical framework is that, being construction understood both practically and metaphorically, it becomes too capacious.

(capitalist) hands. I will not expand on issues that have been largely investigated in scholarship such as the creation of the Soviet new man, the artist as engineer, biomechanics, Gastev and the "metallization of the revolutionary body,"[370] Lysenkoism, the Socialist object,[371] the dichotomy of man vs machine,[372] etc. What I will do, though, is show how the mid-1920s mark a divide in literary discourse: while up to that moment, war was the predominant topic and was, as we have seen, the organizational principle of the collective in novels and novellas of the 1920s, thereafter the industrial object becomes the central *topos*.[373] I will also show how, in these literary works, its function evolved from being the embodiment of capitalist exploitation, a simple metaphor of modernity and industrialization, to the quintessence of Socialist production and, therefore, the organizer of the collective. Just as the practice of war, personified by the commander, would unite the chaotic crowd fighting the Whites and raise their awareness of a shared proletarian consciousness, in these novels this role is occupied by the practice of industrial production, personified by the machine. As a consequence, the story and the characters no longer revolve around the hero, but around the machine. My larger point is that, in the same way the novels about the Civil War portray the biography of the crowd, these novels and novellas narrate the biography of the machine.

This organizational agency of the machine appears very early in post-Revolutionary literature. In 1918, commander Aleksandr Todorskii, future Soviet general, then editor of

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[370] Rolf Hellebust, "Aleksei Gastev and the Metallization of the Revolutionary Body." Slavic Review 56.3 (1997): 500-18. By the same author, see also *Flesh to Metal: Soviet Literature and the Alchemy of Revolution*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).
[371] Christina Kiaer. *Imagine no Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005).
[372] Richard Stites, "Man the Machine," chap. 7 in *Revolutionary Dreams* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
[373] See, for instance, Robert Busch, "Gladkov's *Cement*: The Making of a Classic," *SEEJ* 22.3 (1978): 348-61. Quoted in Brintlinger, *Chapaev and His Comrades*, 35.

Izvestiia ves'egonskogo soveta, a small newspaper printed in Ves'egonsk, a town on the Volga River about 150 miles north of Tver', receives the order from the local Gubernia Committee to submit an annual report to celebrate the first anniversary of the October Revolution. At first overwhelmed by the enormity of the task since he does not consider himself a writer,[374] he was told to just write something and submit it. The report, which he titles *God s vintovkoi i plugom* (A Year with Rifle and Plough) lays out, in many aspects, the thematic guidelines for both war and industrial novels. It is a rather lengthy description split in two halves ("with rifle" and "with plough") first of the fights of the hungry proletariat and peasants in the Vesyegonsky Uyezd against the local *kulaks* who tried to push back in 1918, and then of how the economy was revitalized, modernized, and mechanized by the new ruling class.[375]

Todorskii's work is important for several reasons:

a. It puts forward the idea that it is not necessary to be a professional writer in order to create literature. The book is not a dry account of facts but is written in a hybrid style that alternates between descriptions of nature, letters, resolutions and notes written by other people, data, biographical profiles, one poem (*The Bell Tower of Ves'egonsk – Ves'egonskaia kolokol'nia*), and inventories.

[374] In a foreword to the book written years later, Todorskii remembers telling Gregorii Stepanov, head of district executive committee: "I beg of you, I am not knowledgeable about this kind of literature and I will not be able to carry out this task without a reference sample." ("Помилуйте, я не сведущ в такого рода литературе и не смогу выполнить без образца.") The problem was that there was no "reference sample" of this kind of literature in 1919. For the foreword, see Aleksandr Todorskii, *God s vintovkoi i plugom* (Moskva: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1958), http://www.socialcompas.com/2017/11/19/god-s-vintovkoj-i-plugom/ (last accessed on January 13, 2019). For all the other citations, I will quote from Aleksandr Todorskii, *God s vintovkoi i plugom*, in Aleksandr Todorskii and Iurii Arbatov, *Bol'shoe v malom* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1961), 7-70.

[375] Lenin personally praised Todorskii's book in his article "Malen'kaia kartinka dlia vyiasneniia bol'shikh voprosov" (A Little Picture in Illustration of Big Problems), which appeared on the front-page of *Pravda*, no. 258, November 7, 1926. The article was written at the end of 1918 or beginning of 1919. See Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, "A Little Picture in Illustration of Big Problems," in *Collected Works*, 2nd ed., vol. 28 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 386-89. https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/cw/pdf/lenin-cw-vol-28.pdf (last accessed on January 13, 2019).



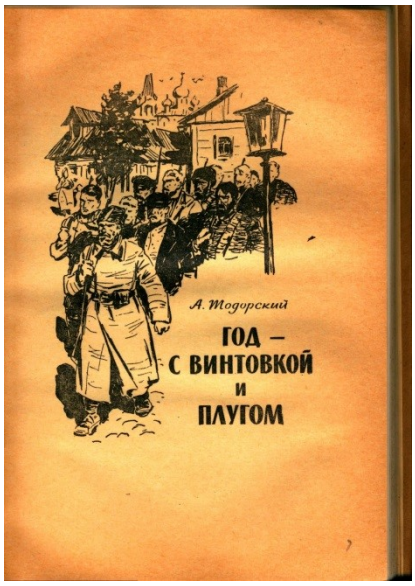




Illustration 29/30/31. Aleksandr Todorskii, *God s vintovkoi i plugom*, in Aleksandr Todorskii and Iurii Arbatov, *Bol'shoe v malom* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1961), 7-70.

b. As Todorskii claims in the aforementioned foreword written for the 1958 reprinting of his sketch, many people contributed to the volume: "Only the doors of the main office . . . could say exactly how many people by name participated in the preparation of this report."[376] The book can therefore be considered one of the first collectively produced Socialist literary works.

c. The biography of the object, in this case of the city, is the central motif of the narration. Todorskii situates *God s vintovkoi i plugom* within a long-standing tradition in Russian literature (e.g., Pushkin's *The History of the Village of Goryukhino* or Saltykov-Shchedrin's *The History of a Town*). Todorskii's book begins: "The old town of Ves'egonsk does not quite know its own biography."[377]

[376] Todorskii, *God s vintovkoi i plugom* (1958). ("Только двери редакции ... могли бы в точности и поименно сказать о числе людей, участвовавших в подготовке отчета.")
[377] Todorskii, *God s vintovkoi i plugom* (1961), 9. ("Старый Весьегонск не совсем точно знает свою биографию.")

d. In the same way that the crowd is described as a single entity (a destructive, mechanized creature for Fülöp-Miller, the proletarian body in the Soviet context), the biography of a city implies its personification. In later production novels, the object would acquire the same anthropomorphic characteristics. This is how the opening line continues:

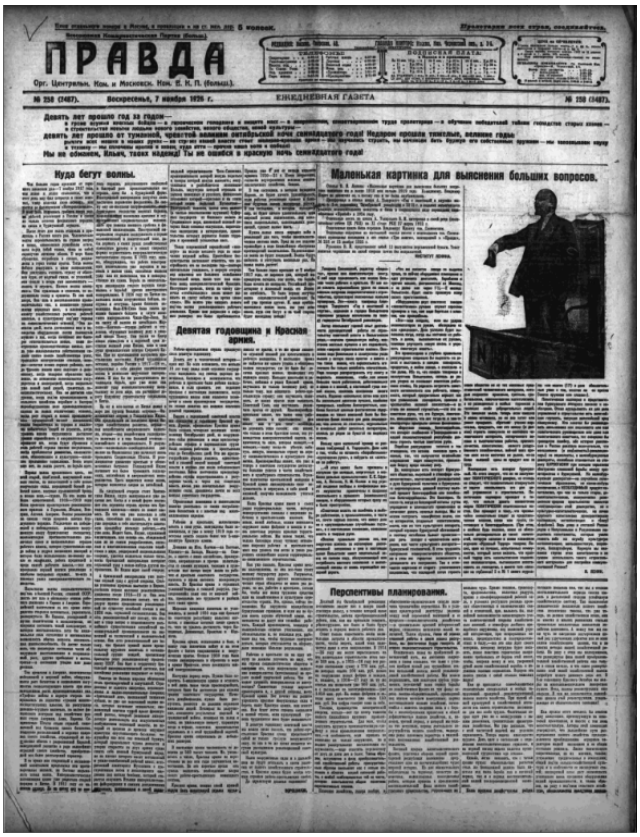
> Its memory cannot capture the fragments of its childhood, and if one had to ask when it was born and how its life was in its first years, it would not be able to answer.
>
> This old man has forgotten his first steps, and, after all, it would be unpleasant to revive them in his memory, since his childhood was certainly not "golden."
>
> We won't shake the dust from the pages of the past or dig into the first days from the birth of the old man, but we will tell what we know now.[378]

"Shaking the dust from the pages of the past" would be precisely one of the aims of the early 1930s, especially, as we will see, in the volumes of *History of Factories and Plants*. The year 1918 is too early to ponder over history, especially since the struggle to transform society was still underway.

e. Stylistically, the volume shows how the "crowd of many thousands"[379] is organized by the fight against the *kulaks* first and then by the (re)construction of the railway, telephone, electric grid, printing press, factories, and roads.

God s vintovkoi i s plugom is a condensed path from the rural Russia of the early 1920s ravaged by war to the industrial frenzy that would be first described in production novels and then in *History of Factories and Plants*. Moreover, Todorskii is the prototype of the new proletarian author, who fought in the Civil War first and then contributed, practically, to the

[378] Ibid. ("Память его никак не может уловить отрывки из детства, и если спросить, когда он родился и как жил первое время,— он не сумеет сказать. Забыл старик свои первые шаги, да и нерадостно было бы восстанавливать их в памяти, так как детство его нельзя назвать «золотым». Не будем тревожить пыльные страницы прошлого и докапываться до первых дней рождения старика, а расскажем о том, что знаем сейчас.")
[379] Ibid., 24. ("…многотысячн[ая] толп[а] народа…")



ПРАВДА

Орг. Центральн. Ком. и Московск. Ком. Р. К. П. (больш.).

ЕЖЕДНЕВНАЯ ГАЗЕТА

№ 258 (1487). Воскресенье, 7 ноября 1926 г. № 258 (1487).

Девять лет прошло год за годом—

Девять лет прошло от туманной, чреватой великими событиями осени 1917 года.

Мы не обманем, Ильич, твоих надежд! Ты не ошибся в красную ночь семнадцатого года!

Куда бегут волны.

Девятая годовщина и Красная армия.

Маленькая картинка для выяснения больших вопросов.

Перспективы планирования.

Illustration 32. In the top right corner of the front page, the article "Malen'kaia kartina dlia vyiasneniia bol'shikh voprosov" in which Lenin praised Todorskii's sketch. *Pravda*, November 7, 1926.

construction of Socialism. To use a metaphor, the history of Ves'egonsk is the epitome of this shift from the old way of living to a mechanized country, or from *zavod'* ("…Ves'egonsk was a quiet haven…")[380] to *zavod* ("at the present time, Ves'egonsk already has a sawmill working at full speed…").[381]

In terms of literary production, which, as a cultural practice, was often considered by its very nature a reflection *post facto* over events occurring in real life, the main obstacle to keeping up with this process of transformation can be unpacked as follows: since we are living in a time of profound changes that occur at a rapid tempo, how can a work of literature, if it aims at being an edifying tool for the construction of Socialism, capture and convey things in their becoming without having become obsolete by the time of its publication? This dilemma was summarized by Sergei Tret'iakov in "Novyi Lev Tolstoi," the opening essay of the first issue of *Novyi Lef* in 1927,[382] in which the Russian factographer advances a polemic

[380] Ibid., 10. ("…Весьегонск был тихой заводью…")
[381] Ibid., 56. ("…уже в настоящее время Весьегонск имеет лесопильный завод на полном ходу.")
[382] As Kristin Romberg correctly points out in her translation of the essay, "The title of Tret'iakov's essay puns on the title of the new journal: Novyi Lev [New Leo] is indistinguishable from Novyi lef [New Lef] in spoken Russian." See Kristin Romberg, footnote 2 in the foreword to Sergei Tret'iakov, "The New Leo Tolstoy," *Soviet Factography*, trans. Kristin Romberg, no. 116 (Fall 2006): 45-50. The article first appeared in *Novyi Lef*, no. 1 (1927): 34-38.

against the search for the new "Red Tolstoy," that is to say, "a 'describer' of the broadest sort, plus a teacher of life":[383]

> It is ridiculous to wait for a "red Tolstoy" as a "teacher of life" with such a slow Tolstoyian approach at a time when social maneuvering must be maximally flexible and when directives change in response to the day's events. Today, almost from the moment you go on the attack, you are already running for cover; one minute you're basing your work on one sociobiological type, and the next minute this type is declared unsuitable and antirevolutionary. Yesterday you had to be able to explode like a bomb, expending all available energy in a single superhuman effort. Today you must know how to meter yourself out sparingly for the thirty years of Revolutionary workdays that lie ahead.[384]

Tret'iakov believed that the era of the individual writer was over and that the novel as a literary genre was unsuitable to the process of Socialist construction. Only the newspaper could follow the ever-changing state of things: "We have no reason to wait for Tolstoys. We have our epic literature. Our epic literature is the newspaper."[385] Tret'iakov saw in the collective body of proletarian writers the Leo Tolstoy of the present time: "[t]he entire anonymous newspaper mass, from the worker-correspondent to the writer of the lead article, is the collective Tolstoys of our time."[386] For our purposes, what is important to keep in mind is that, regardless of the solution, there was a shared concern not only for what kind of literature could best express the current Socialist state of affairs, but how "to rationalize aesthetic creation on the model of industrial production."[387] This goes back to the Marxist credo that the mode of economic production determines everything else, literary forms included: "Every epoch has its own written forms, which derive from its economic nature."[388] Officially, the brigades of professional writers who would travel to construction sites in order to "witness" the new reality in its becoming and,

[383] Sergei Tret'iakov, "The New Leo Tolstoy," 47.
[384] Ibid., 48.
[385] Ibid., 49.
[386] Ibid., 50.
[387] Romberg, foreword to Tret'iakov, "The New Leo Tolstoy," 46.
[388] Tret'iakov, "The New Leo Tolstoy," 49.

around the same time, the call of shock-workers into literature, would be the first tentative answers to connect in a more concrete way economic production on one side to literary production on the other. The ultimate solution, though, to the insoluble problem of *otstavanie* would be given by Socialist Realism, which would settle things once for all: in fact, Socialist Realist writers do not depict reality as it is (thus interjecting into literature the risk of being behind the times) but as it *should* be; they are not teachers of life but rather prophets. In other words, literature too, like the protagonist in Valentin Kataev's classic novel *Time, Forward!* (1932), which is considered an early example of Socialist Realist narrative, itself predating the official introduction of the doctrine two years later, would be always ahead of time.[389]

One of the most debated issues in post-Revolutionary years was to what extent the writer should merge with reality or, to put it differently, in what way the figure of the writer and that of the worker should overlap to faithfully portray the process of construction of Socialism. That a new, closer relation had to be established was a given; the problem, however, was to determine how much these two figures had to coincide and overcome concrete issues that hindered their convergence, including the issue of illiteracy among the masses. In "Uchit' pisatelei" (To Teach Writers),[390] Osip Brik warns against the idea of a professional writer forcing his way into the proletarian milieu to write about it if eventually he will portray how workers and peasants live using old literary forms. New forms and new literary devices are needed to create Socialist literature. Viktor Shklovsky, in "O pisatele" (On the Writer), maintains that "a professional—i.e., a person with a profession—describes things to which he can relate,"[391] and therefore the writer,

[389] "The clock was accurate, but Margulies did not depend on it. He was not asleep. He always rose at six and was always ahead of time." See Valentin Kataev, *Time, Forward!*, trans. Charles Malamuth (1961; repr. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 3.
[390] Osip Brik, "Uchit' pisatelei," *Novyi Lef*, no. 10 (1927): 33-37.
[391] Viktor Shklovskii, "O pisatele" *Novyi Lef*, no. 1 (1927): 29. ("…профессиональный человек — человек, имеющий профессию, — описывает вещи так, какое он имеет к ним отношение.")

and especially the aspiring writer, must have a second profession "in order to write literary things" (*chtoby pisat' literaturnye veshchi*).[392] To paraphrase Shklovsky, in order to write about the Civil War, one must have gone to war; in order to write about production, one must be a worker. This idea of having something "to which one can relate" in order to be able to write about it, is also the underlying narrative in what Sergei Tret'iakov describes in "O tom zhe (pisatel' na kolkhoze)" (On the Same Topic: A Writer in a Kolkhoz) as he narrates his experience in a kolkhoz. In the short essay, Tret'iakov recounts the diffidence he was met with by the workers because of the way he would describe specific things, which obviously differed from the way the members of the commune (*kommunary*) thought about the same issues.[393] Tret'iakov claims that the two main problems related to sending writers to kolkhozes are that they are not given any tasks (*delovye porucheniia*)[394] and that they lack specific guidelines on what to write about and how. Reporters, he says, end up looking "like hikers with a knapsack" (*kak progulochniki s kotomkoi*).[395] Tret'iakov complains about the fact that, while, before, Civil War served the primary source material for writers, now literary practice experienced a "severe deficiency of raw material" (*rezkii syr'evoi krizis*)[396] and that "there is not enough material to write about" (*ne khvataet materiala o chem pisat'*).[397]

Shklovsky would reiterate the same idea in the opening pages of *Tekhnika pisatel'skogo remesla* (Moskva: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1930).

[392] Shklovskii, "O pisatele," 30.

[393] Tret'iakov would later recount his experience in fuller detail in *Vyzov: kolzhoznye ocherki* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Federatsiia," 1930).

[394] Sergei Tret'iakov "O tom zhe (Pisatel' na kolkhoze)," in Chuzhak, *Literatura fakta*, 196.

[395] Ibid.

[396] Ibid., 195.

[397] Ibid.



Illustration 33. The call of shock-workers, a.k.a. the red Tolstoys, into literature. This satirical vignette appeared in *Na literaturnom postu*, no. 3 (1931).

The metaphor of life as *syr'e*, or "raw material," for literature and the s earch for adequate "new forms" was far from exclusive to debates among LEF-ists. On the contrary, it was a widespread trope since the early 1920s. How was the concern of "lagging behind" and the shift from a capitalist market economy to the new Socialist object portrayed in literature? How is this search for new raw material and new forms expressed? How is the relation of the collective with the machine described in literature, and how does the juxtaposition of the old, "bad" machine vs the the "good" Socialist machine as the organizer of social life play out in novels and novellas?

The opening paragraph of *Prokliatye zazhigalki* (Damned Lighters), a novella written by Nikolai Nikandrov[398] and published in issues no. 6 and no. 7 of the journal *Krasnaia nov'* in

[398] Nikolai Nikandrovich Nikandrov (real name: Shevtsov) (1878-1964) was a Russian prose writer. An active member of Petersburg revolutionary circles, after his meeting with Lev Tolstoi in 1898 he became a teacher in a rural school, while continuing to participate in Revolutionary activities. Eventually, he was arrested and was locked in the Sevastopol prison, where he met Aleksandr Grin, who pushed him to pursue a literary career after hearing some of his stories. See M. V. Mikhailova, "Nikandrov," in *Russkie*

1923,[399] is exemplary in this sense: "The price of bread was quickly rising… The price of cigarette lighters was quickly going down... Those who yesterday managed to make eight items today had to make at least to ten to feed their families... Those who could not do it, those who were lagging behind, were dying of hunger right in the streets..."[400] Nikandrov's novella is set during the early NEP years, when Russia was in dire need of revitalizing its economy after having gone through years of economic and social turmoil caused by World War I, the Revolution, and the Civil War, with only 13% of pre-war industry still operating.[401] Nikandrov introduces from the outset the main narrative conflict of his story: the economic struggle, the fast pace of life, the need for sufficient time to keep up with this pace (*uspet'*), and the problem of lagging behind (*otstavanie*). The story revolves around the production of lighters, which symbolizes the capitalist mode of production that alienates the worker and that, instead of organizing the collective, creates estranged labor. As an object, lighters became a trope in literary works of the first half of the 1920s. In a speech given a few months after the introduction of the NEP, Lenin defines the production of lighters as "inevitable" considering the present state of industry: "The restoration of capitalism would mean the restoration of a proletarian class engaged in the production of socially useful material values in big factories employing machinery, and not in profiteering, not in making cigarette-lighters for sale, and in other 'work'

pisateli 20 veka: biograficheskii slovar', ed. P. A. Nikolaev (Moskva: Nauchnoe izdatel'stvo «Bol'shaia rossiiskaia entsiklopedia»; Izdatel'stvo «Randevu-AM», 2000), 495-96.

[399] *Krasnaia nov'*, no. 6 (1923): 48-79 and no. 7 (1923): 36-72. However, I will quote from Nikolai Nikandrov, *Prokliatye zazhigalki* (Khar'kov: Proletarii, 1926). On a personal note, for the title I would resort to British English here and translate it as *Bloody Lighters*.

[400] Nikandrov, *Prokliatye zazhigalki*, 3. ("Хлеб быстро дорожал... Зажигалки быстро дешевели... Кто вчера делал, например, восемь зажигалок, тот сегодня, чтобы прокормить семейство, должен был успеть сделать, по крайней мере, десять штук... Кто не успевал, кто отставал, тот умирал голодной смертью на панели...")

[401] Marc Slonim, *Soviet Russian Literature: Writers and Problems (1917-1977)*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 41.

which is not very useful, but which is inevitable when our industry is in a state of ruin."[402] The NEP was Lenin's gambit: how can one talk about the proletariat when the industry has been destroyed, the country is "torn and dislocated,"[403] and the remaining proletariat "has become declassed, i.e., dislodged from its class groove"?[404] The production of lighters was a necessary step for the "restoration of a proletarian class." Let us return to Nikandrov's novella: *Prokliatye zazhigalki* is the story of Afanasii, a metal turner, and his son Danila, who helps his father to make lighters in his home workshop (*masterskaia*) but also takes classes to become a painter. The other two members of the family are Mar'ia, Afanasii's wife, who goes every day to the market to try to sell the lighters that her husband and her son make, and Grunia, the daughter, an impalpable presence whose narrative role is justified only for reasons of gender symmetry and who is scolded by her mother for coming home late from the "'lusions" (*liuziony*)—Mar'ia's word for "illusions," i.e., the movies. The novella, despite to a large extent repeating a simple variation on the long-standing "father and son" generational clash narrative, already contains several Soviet motifs that would later be investigated and expanded upon: the crumbling of the family as the smallest organizational unit of society ("They would all quarrel at the same time: mother and daughter in one room, father and son in the other");[405] the juxtaposition of art as industrial production vs art as inspiration (Danila attends art school and his talent is so clear to everyone that people call him the "second Repin" [*vtoroi Repin*]); the absence of a love story

[402] Vladimir I. Lenin, "The New Economic Policy and the Tasks of the Political Education Departments: Report to the Second All-Russia Congress of Political Education Departments, October 17, 1921," in *Collected Works*, 4th ed., vol. 33 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), 66. https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/cw/pdf/lenin-cw-vol-33.pdf (last accessed on January 13, 2019).
[403] Vladimir I. Lenin, "Speech in Closing the Congress, March 16 (1921)," in *Collected Works*, 4th ed., vol. 32, 264. https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/cw/pdf/lenin-cw-vol-32.pdf (last accessed on January 13, 2019).
[404] Lenin, "The New Economic Policy and the Tasks of the Political Education Departments," 65.
[405] Nikandrov, *Prokliatye zazhigalki*, 21. ("Бранились одновременно: в одной комнате мать с дочерью, в другой — отец с сыном.")

(the only love story occurs in a dream that Danila has);[406] and the family *byt* unfolding amidst machines and objects. What is the function of lighters in the story, besides serving as its bizarre title? As a matter of fact, even though the narrative line revolves around family dynamics, the rhythm of Afanasii's family life is dictated by this object: "And regardless of whether or not they were drinking tea, eating bread, nibbling the edges of the colored pastilles, they would not forget about the lighters, not even for one second..."[407] *Prokliatye zazhigalki* is a story that portrays the wrong, "bourgeois" dynamic between man and object that later production novels and the volumes of *History of Factories and Plants* would convey in its "good," Socialist version.[408] What Nikandrov describes is how the *byt* of the individual organized by this object and mode of production can lead to perdition. Here, the importance of *toropit'sia* (to bustle), is not dictated by what in the late 1920s would become the *entuziazm* for Socialism construction, but by necessity;

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[406] Danila dreams of a beautiful and smart (*umnen'kaia*) girl who wants him to paint her portrait. Danila, incredulous that such a woman would ask him that, believes that "All his strength lay in her. She was the source of his inspiration. Without her his art would not exist. He ought to marry her." ("Вся его сила в ней. Она — источник для его вдохновения. Не будет ее — не будет его работ. Он должен жениться на ней.") Nikandrov, *Prokliatye zazhigalki*, 26.

[407] Ibid., 34. ("И это ни на секунду не давало им забывать о зажигалках, пили ли они чай, ели ли хлеб, откусывали ли краешек яркого монпансье...")

[408] In this story we find several of the negative characteristics that we have seen being associated with the crowd. For instance, the crowd of people at the market (толчок) appears to Afanasii as a monster (*chudovishche*) with tentacles:

> While descending from higher ground, the market appeared to Afanasii as a black, gigantic, indistinct, and monstrous creature, a flat vermin that extended its long black tentacles into every single side street. The tentacles would continually be drawn into the body of the monster before being stretched out from it again. And Afanasii felt that it was precisely this monster that was feeding upon his labor, upon his strength, and that one day it would devour him.
>
> (С горы, откуда шел Афанасий, толчок представлялся ему в виде громадного черного, расплывчатого живого чудовища, плоского гада, протянувшего во все переулки свои противные черные щупальцы. Щупальцы все время шевелились, втягивались в туловище чудовища и вытягивались из него. И Афанасий почувствовал, что именно это чудовище пожирает его труд, его силы, и однажды сожрет его самого.)

See also the scene in which Afanasii sees a line of saleswomen, "a wall of women" ("стен[а] женщин") who look identical. Nikandrov, *Prokliatye zazhigalki*, 83; 79.

in other words, Afanasii and Danila have to manage to make at least ten lighters per day if they do not want to condemn their family to die of starvation (*golodnaia smert'*). Afanasii, whose behavior becomes more and more erratic as the plot progresses, is obsessed with making more and more lighters and the need to amass copper, categorically refusing to listen to Danila's insistent request to return together to the factory, claiming that "No, working with lighters is still better, it's more independent, it's like being your own master!"[409]

This perceived necessity of "being your own master," together with the fetishistic obsession that Afanasii develops for the object and the raw material, is what will eventually lead him to madness: the story ends with some of his former colleagues at the factory convening in his house to see him off. Afanasii is being taken to a bedlam (*dom umalishennykh*). Among these workers the reader is introduced to Filippov, Mar'ia's brother and Afanasii's brother-in-law, whose narrative role is to convey the edifying moral of the story: "To put it simply, lighters are a widespread lunacy among metal workers, they are an illness, an epidemic that not even the state is capable of fighting!"[410] He himself, he says, was led to perdition by this sick relationship with the object:

> Do you really think that Afanasii is the only one to have lost his sanity because of these lighters? Every one of us! And me before everyone else! I haven't been sleeping for two years! And here, in this very room, there are at least ten old and, I would say, experienced artisans. Look at them, listen to their conversations, aren't they crazy too?!"[411]

[409] Ibid., 14 ("Нет, на зажигалках работать все-таки лучше, самостоятельней, вроде как сам себе хозяин!")
[410] Ibid., 136. ("Зажигалки — это просто всеобщее помешательство рабочих-металлистов, болезнь, эпидемия, побороть которую не в силах само государство!")
[411] Ibid., 137. ("Вы думаете, один Афанасий на зажигалках сошел с ума? Все! Я первый! У меня у первого вот уже два года нет сна! А вот в этой комнате перед нами сидят, по крайней мере, десять старых, можно сказать, заслуженных мастеровых, посмотрите на них, послушайте, о чем они говорят: разве это не сумасшедшие?").

The interaction between man and machine is a complex one. In 1923, the same year when Nikandrov's novella came out, Viktor Shklovsky published the epistolary novel *Zoo, ili pis'ma ne o liubvi* while he was in exile in Berlin. In the second edition, which came out in Leningrad a year later (1924),[412] he adds an introductory letter whose topic is to show how "things remake a person" (*veshchi peredelyvaiut cheloveka*),[413] that is to say to show how machines, objects, things, have agency: "Things do to a person what the person does with them."[414] Up until the early 1920s, this intersection between man and machine had been largely metaphorical. In Gorky's *Mother*, for instance, in a conversation with Mother, Andrei claims that Pavel won't agree to getting married "('Pavel is a rare man!' the Little Russian uttered in a low voice. 'He is a man of iron!'"),[415] making Pavel the prototype of the future Soviet new man, a hybrid of man and machine that for the common cause of Socialism rejects one of the foundations of bourgeois society: the family. Likewise, in *The Iron Flood*, Kozhukh is introduced as "a short, stocky man, with square, hard-set jaws. He seemed to be made of lead,"[416] while later on, when the process of industrialization becomes the priority for the Soviet state, machines rather than commanders acquire more and more agency as the organizers of those who had just come back from war. The crowds that in *Chapaev, The Iron Flood,* and *The Rout* were turned into a collective proletarian body by war, now gravitate around the machine. What does this mean for literary production? In its portrayals of itself, the literature of the time seemed to be moving towards the conflation of intellectual and physical (practical) labor.

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[412] Viktor Shklovskii, *Zoo, ili pis'ma ne o liubvi*, 2nd ed. (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo "Atenei," 1924).
[413] Viktor Shklovskii, *Zoo, ili pis'ma ne o liubvi*, in *Sobranie sochinenii,* vol. 1 (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1973), 173. The existing English translation, based on the first, 1923 edition, does not include this letter. See Viktor Shklovsky, *Zoo, or Letters not about Love*, 2nd ed. (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2011).
[414] Shklovskii, *Zoo*, 175. ("Вещи делают с человеком то, что он из них делает.")
[415] Gorky, *Mother,* 122.
[416] Serafimovich, *The Iron Flood*, 15.

From a theoretical standpoint, the dynamic between art and labor that Nikandrov describes in his novella reflects the standard understanding of bourgeois production within a Marxist framework: the fetishization of the object, the perceived distance between industrial labor and artistic creation, the inability of bourgeois art to organize everyday life. Boris Arvatov was among those who most insightfully expressed these ideas in his writings. In 1930 Arvatov penned a short foreword for his collection of essays titled *Ob Agit i Proz Iskusstve* (On Agitational and Industrial Art) in which he lays out ten theses on bourgeois art. He claims that, despite that fact that he had reached these conclusions in mid-1923, the same year that *Prokliatye zazhigalki* came out, he only had the chance to put them on paper some seven years later. His first thesis states that:

> The production of artistic values in bourgeois society is built on specialization and the market; these products are therefore characterized by marked insularity and, to a large extent, by contraposition to actual reality; they are passive, designed for a consumeristic approach based on individual taste; aesthetic fetishism (e.g., "beauty") is inherent to them, oriented towards autonomy, etc.[417]

Arvatov believed that there is no "principled differentiation between 'labour' and 'creation'"[418] and that the perceived differentiation "exists only to the extent that it is called forth by the class division of a society, where the initiatory-organizational functions are assumed by the bourgeoisie, and its agent the intelligentsia (so called 'creation'), while the implementational and partly organizational functions are placed on the shoulders of the exploited classes (so called

[417] Boris Arvatov, "Avto-predislovie," in *Ob agit i proz iskusstve* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Federatsiia," 1930), 6. ("Производство художественных ценностей в буржуазном обществе строится на специализации и рынке; продукты этого производства характеризуются поэтому подчеркнутой обособленностью и в значительной мере противопоставленностью реальной действительности; они пассивны, рассчитаны на потребительски-вкусовой подход; им свойственен эстетический фетишизм [«красота» и пр.], установка по самодовлеемость и т. п.")

[418] Boris Arvatov, "Art in the System of Proletarian Culture," in *Art and Production*, trans. Shushan Avagyan (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 98. This essay first appeared under the title "Iskusstvo v sisteme proletarskoi kul'ture," in *Iskusstvo i proizvodstvo* (Moskva: Proletkul't, 1926), 94-130.

'labour')."[419] By conflating artistic creation and production, Arvatov thought that "production is a source of human creativity that, when liberated from the oppressive labor and class conditions of capitalism and re-imagined in socialist culture"[420] would be able to organize everyday life. Therefore, the creatively produced object is understood as an organizational unit of Socialist society. The production of lighters in *Prokliatye zazhigalki* displays all the negative characteristics of bourgeois production listed above: specialization, insularity, and passivity, orientation towards consumer taste, aesthetic fetishism, and autonomy. Nikandrov's lighters are not yet "Socialist objects." For this reason, in Nikandrov's story, there cannot be redemption, and the object does not organize but rather sets apart: the novella ends with Danila, who has now taken on the responsibility of taking care of the family, abandoning his dreams of becoming a painter and, just like his father, getting up when it is still dark outside to make lighters, thus following, in all aspects, Afanasii's footsteps: "— One has lost his mind, — thought Danila, putting his foot where his father used to put it, on the treadle of the machinery. — And now it will be the other one's turn. Damned lighters!"[421] In *Prokliatye Zazhigalki* many of the motifs that would characterize production novels are already present, only in reversed terms:[422] in other words, *Prokliatye zazhigalki* can be considered a sort of anti-production novel in which Nikandrov shows how the wrong mode of production impacts and destroys the everyday life of Afanasii's family.

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[419] Boris Arvatov, "Art in the System of Proletarian Culture," 98-99.
[420] Christina Kiaer, "Boris Arvatov's Socialist Objects," *October*, no. 81 (1997): 108.
[421] Nikandrov, *Prokliatye zazhigalki*, 140. ("— Один спятил, — подумал Данила, ставя ногу на отцовское место, на подножку станка: — Теперь другой будет сходить с ума. Проклятые зажигалки!")
[422] The metaphor of the machine-like man is used by Nikandrov in particularly inventive ways: "— Hello Afonia! — He put out his rust-bluish iron hand towards Afanasii ("Здравствуй, Афоня! — протянул он Афанасию свою железную, ржаво-синеватую руку…"); or later: "[the metal workers] washed their metallized bluish faces and arms…"[рабочие-металлисты] умыли свои синевато-прометалличенные лица, руки…" Nikandrov, *Prokliatye zazhigalki*, 128; 135.

Lighters are also the unassuming object that links Nikandrov's novel to Nikolai Liashko's *Domennaia pech'* (The Blast Furnace), which came out two years later, in 1925.[423] Liashko's novel is one of the first literary works in which the machine, in this case the factory, becomes the gravitational center around which all the characters revolve. *Domennaia pech'* narrates the story of Vasilii Korotkov who, after coming back from the Civil War, takes on the task of rebuilding the local iron factory. Liashko, who was a member of the literary group "Kuznitsa" (The Smithy), was one of the first writers to portray a country devastated by war, the first steps of Socialist industrialization, and the impact that this construction had on the old *byt*, including for those who did not leave for the front. Compared to *Prokliatye zazhigalki*, however, here the initial valuation is reversed: while in Nikandrov's novella the successful work at the factory serves as the background to the failing private production of lighters, in *Domennaia pech'*, the struggle to reconstruct the local factory destroyed during the Civil War is counterposed with the apparent success of private enterprise. In this novel, Liashko juxtaposes a Socialist mode of production, symbolized by the factory, to the old form, embodied, again, by the production of lighters. In chapter five, Korotkov goes to Gushchin's, an old friend of his, a highly skilled locksmith with whom he had worked before the Revolution. Korotkov complains about the dreadful state of the factory ("how can you call this a factory, it's a burial vault!"),[424] while Gushchin tells him how he managed to survive in the town and feed his family during the war. When Korotkov asks him if his children work with him at the factory, Gushchin and his wife start laughing ("They looked at one another and laughed, and you don't know about what.")[425] Then Gushchin takes Korotkov to the small veranda and shows him his "private factory": "- And

[423] I will quote from Nikolai Liashko, *Domennaia pech'*, in *Domennaia pech': povest' i rasskazy* (Moskva: "Sovetskaia Rossiia," 1983). Liashko penned chapter sixteen of *Bol'shie pozhary*.
[424] Ibid., 18. ("Прямо не завод, а склеп.")
[425] Ibid., 19. ("Переглянулись они и смеются, а чему, не поймешь").

this, - he says – is my private factory. You could say: Gushchin & Co. ..."[426] The novella portrays the same living situation that Nikandrov describes in *Prokliatye zazhigalki,* just from the opposite perspective. After being shown by Gushchin how his private enterprise works, Korotkov still seems very skeptical and critical of this business, and therefore tries to convince his friend to join forces and work together to rebuild the factory: "We need to set the factory in motion, I say, then all scum will fly to bits."[427] Gushchin's answer is exemplary since he asks Korotkov to stop joking and tells him that he does not believe in the possibility of reconstructing the factory:

> — Stop joking, Vasia, I'm in no mood for joking.
> — Joking? — I say. — I am serious. Or you don't believe in our strength?
> — Me? No, I don't, — he says. — Since you believe, go set the factory in motion, and I'll watch you get stuck. And then, do me a favor, don't taunt me. You are no smarter than me. Go, go to your factory committee, to the Party cell. They'll pour cold water on your plans and screw'em up with a nice little talk...[428]

This is where Nikandrov stopped. Instead of two friends and former coworkers as in *Domennaia pech'*, in *Prokliatye zazhigalki*, we have father and son, Afanasii and Danila, who argue about the opportunity to return to the factory, with Danila trying to persuade his father that it is the right thing to do and Afanasii stubbornly hoping that the market will eventually make their business flourish. Liashko constructs his novella, in a sense, with Nikandrov's story as a backdrop, as an impediment for Korotkov to achieve his goal. In fact, in the chapter that follows, Korotkov visits the factory club (*zavodskoi klub*) and is not happy with what he finds there: "What discipline, when the factory is quiet as a mouse, and lighters, goats, and machineries to

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[426] Ibid. ("— А вот это, — говорит, — мой собственный завод. Можно сказать: фирма Гущин и К°...")
[427] Ibid., 20. ("— Завод, — говорю, — надо пускать, тогда вся нечисть разлетится.")
[428] Ibid., 21. ("— Брось, Вася, шутки, не до шуток. — Какие тут шутки? — говорю. — Я серьезно. Или ты в наши силы не веришь? — Я? Нет, не верю, — говорит. — Ты веришь, вот и пускай завод, а я погляжу, как ты в лужу будешь садиться. И, сделай милость, не кори меня. Я не глупее тебя. Ты лучше пойди в завком, в ячейку. Там тебя водичкой окатят и разговорцем подвинтят...")

make *samogon* are a distraction to everyone."[429] Despite all the difficulties, Korotkov's narrative role is to facilitate this shift from the old form of production to the new form of production: the factory. When he goes back to Gushchin's, he finds him tending his own garden (*s leikoi na ogorode kolduet*)[430] and scolds him for not going to the factory instead: "— Stop joking, —I say, — otherwise the kitchen-garden, the little veranda, flowers, and lighters will leave bloody scars on our backs. Let's go and fix the furnace."[431]

After the end of the Civil War, Soviet industry had to be rebuilt, many plants and factories had been shut down, turned into empty shells, and in many regions, industry had to be built from scratch. Sergei Tret'iakov's essay "Biografiia veshchi" (The Biography of the Thing) can be helpful to frame the role played by the "thing" in literary works starting from the second half of the 1920s: "Thus: not the individual person moving through a system of objects, but the object proceeding through the system of people . . . We urgently need books about our economic resources, about objects made by people, and about people that make objects."[432] The role played by people like Chapaev and Kozhukh is now occupied by the industrial object. It is the object that transforms the chaotic crowd, the "horde of bedraggled, naked, barefoot soldiers," as Serafimovich describes it in *The Iron Flood*,[433] into the conscious collective body of the proletariat. Now the soldier, after coming back from the Civil War, has to learn how to become a worker, and it is the machine itself that facilitates this transformation. As Gleb Chumalov's wife Dasha tells him in *Cement*, one of the first and most popular novels in which industrial

[429] Ibid., ("Какая тут дисциплина, раз завод тише рыбы, а зажигалка, коза и самогонные аппараты всех на сторону тянут.")
[430] Ibid., 36.
[431] Ibid. ("— Брось, — говорю, — шуточки, а то огород, верандочка, цветочки и зажигалочки у нас на спинах кровавыми рубцами взойдут. Пойдем ремонт домны налаживать.")
[432] Tret'iakov, "The Biography of the Object," 62.
[433] Serafimovich, *The Iron Flood*, 168.

production is put at the very center of the narration: "You're a good soldier, but in ordinary life you're a bad Communist!"[434] The soldier who fought in the Civil War, the man who could react to the external stimuli of his commander, now has to learn how to build, to construct, to produce. In both Fedor Gladkov's *Cement* and Nikolai Liashko's *Domennaia pech'*, despite the fact that we are dealing with the production of cement, on the one hand, and iron on the other, the plotlines are strikingly similar: two war veterans, mechanic Gleb Chumalov in *Cement* and metal worker Vasilii Korotkov in *Domennaia pech'* who, after coming back from the Civil War[435] are in charge of the reorganization of production at the local cement/iron factory. While they eventually succeed in their missions, the reader witnesses, at the same time, the foundering of their private lives. Chumalov and Korotkov are unable to reconcile their lives as husbands with their lives as Communists, as workers. *Domennaia pech'* ends with no actual resolution of this conflict. We do not really know what will happen between Korotkov and his wife. But the blast furnace has been reconstructed and *that* is the "happy ending" of these novels. Korotkov and Chumalov are not war heroes, they are not Chapaev or Kozhukh. For instance, Korotkov is a terrible speaker, and at one point he even admits it openly when he says: "Just don't ask me to give speeches at meetings."[436] There is a passage in which he is actually asked to give a speech in front of the other workers. He takes this task very seriously, like any good Communist should, and decides to write what he wants to say, spending hours at the workers' club jotting down ideas with his wife who, in the meantime, ridicules him. But he knows that, regardless of what he says, the time for speeches is over. That's why he says: "words won't help you make you better than

[434] Fedor Gladkov, *Cement*, trans. A. S. Arthur and C. Ashleigh (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 74. *Cement* first appeared in *Krasnaia nov'*, no. 1-6 (1925).
[435] Liashko sets the first two chapters of *Domennaia pech'* during the Civil War, describing Korotkov's life as a soldier.
[436] Liashko, *Domennaia pech'*, 57. ("Меня не проси только на собраниях речи говорить.")

you actually are."[437] All the charisma of people like Chapaev, Kozhukh, or Levinson has dissolved. And when Korotkov eventually takes the scene, he makes a fool of himself, people laugh at him. There is still a difference, though, between *Cement* and *Domennaia pech'*: although, as we have seen, Korotkov is a terrible speaker, words still have "a spellbinding effect on him."[438] On the other hand, the characters in *Cement* often insist on the ephemerality of words and the need for action: "You can't do anything here with big words. These are machines, and machines are not words; they're hands and eyes."[439] The only words that count now are those written in books, the ones that Dasha studies at night to become a good Communist. Even though the novel ends with Gleb's stirring words in front of a crowd of workers, Gleb himself asserts the primacy of action ("Why speak, when everything was clear without words?"; "'. . . it's not a matter of words, Comrades . . . not a wagging of tongues. . . . Keep your heads firm on your shoulders and get the work well in hand.'").[440] The axial position occupied by the man made of lead in *The Iron Flood*, is now occupied by the blast furnace, which is a machine that produces iron and lead. The central narrative of *The Iron Flood* is that the chaotic crowd is transformed into an "iron flood" by the main hero. Now it is the industrial object that produces, literally, a flood of iron.

Socialist construction and Socialist literature were to proceed in symbiosis. As Andrei Zhdanov would later put it during the first Congress of Soviet Writers: "The key to the success of Soviet literature is to be sought for in the success of socialist construction."[441] While, on the

[437] Ibid., 61. ("…словами не сделаешь себя лучше, чем есть.")
[438] Hellebust, *Flesh to Metal*, 84.
[439] Gladkov, *Cement*, 17.
[440] Ibid., 310.
[441] Andrei A. Zhdanov, "Soviet Literature—The Richest in Ideas. The most Advanced Literature," in H. G. Scott, ed., *Problems of Soviet Literature: Reports and Speeches at the First Soviet Writers' Congress* (New York: International Publishers, 1935), 17.

metaphorical level, this conflation is most famously embodied by the adage that writers are the "engineers of human souls" (*inzhenery chelovecheskikh dush*—the expression was supposedly coined by Yuri Olesha before being pronounced by Stalin), *History of Factories and Plants* is the last and most important project in which this idea was actively pursued. In the next chapter, we will see how the collective body of the proletariat, revolving around the machine, is ultimately organized by literary practice.

CHAPTER 6

THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE LIVING

Had he been our contemporary, Shakespeare would have satisfactorily written even about locksmiths.

Andrei Platonov, "The Literature Factory."[442]

The Biography of the Collective

In 1962, Polish writer Sławomir Mrożek[443] published "Ad Astra."[444] It is the story of a novelist who walks into a "milk bar"[445] to have a glass of milk. A young man draws his attention after ordering a glass of milk and sixty rolls. The young man starts scribbling incessantly on paper napkins while nibbling at one roll, then leaves with the remaining fifty-nine under his arm. The writer, intrigued by what he has just witnessed, retrieves what the mysterious man has jotted down and left on the table and soon realizes that what he is reading is unmistakably the work of a genius.

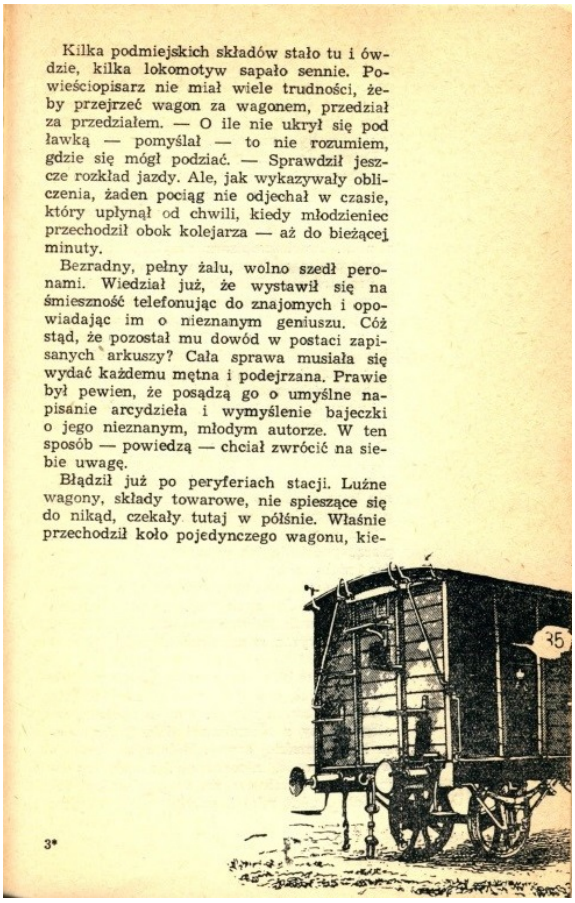
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[442] "Шекспир удовлетворительно писал бы и о слесарях, если бы был нашим современником." Andrei Platonov, "Fabrika literatury: o korennom uluchshenii sposobov literaturnogo tvorchestva," in *Fabrika literatury: literaturnaia kritika, publitsistika*, ed. N. V. Kornienko (Moskva: Vremia, 2011), 46-47. In the idea of collective creativity introduced by Andrei Platonov in *Fabrika literatury*, according to which the semi-finished product (*polufabrikat*) of everyday life extracted by the collective effort of multiple literary correspondents (*litkory*) had to be polished and transformed into a finished product by the writer-assembler (*literaturnyi monter*), one can find many of the ideas that we have explored in this dissertation. Platonov wrote the essay in the summer of 1926. It would be published for the first time in *Oktiabr'*, no. 10 (1991): 196-200.

[443] Sławomir Mrożek (1930-2013) was a Polish playwright, prose writer (short-stories), and cartoonist. "Ad Astra" first appeared in the collection of short stories *Deszcz* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1962), 30-54. I will quote from English translation of the story in Slawomir Mrozek, "Ad Astra (a Story)," *Encounter*, March 1968: 26-35.

[444] I would like to thank Father Antipa for acquainting me with this story during our conversation at Mercy House in Brooklyn, NY.

[445] *Bar mleczny* – a Polish cafeteria.



Kilka podmiejskich składów stało tu i ówdzie, kilka lokomotyw sapało sennie. Powieściopisarz nie miał wiele trudności, żeby przejrzeć wagon za wagonem, przedział za przedziałem. — O ile nie ukrył się pod ławką — pomyślał — to nie rozumiem, gdzie się mógł podziać. — Sprawdził jeszcze rozkład jazdy. Ale, jak wykazywały obliczenia, żaden pociąg nie odjechał w czasie, który upłynął od chwili, kiedy młodzieniec przechodził obok kolejarza — aż do bieżącej minuty.

Bezradny, pełny żalu, wolno szedł peronami. Wiedział już, że wystawił się na śmieszność telefonując do znajomych i opowiadając im o nieznanym geniuszu. Cóż stąd, że pozostał mu dowód w postaci zapisanych arkuszy? Cała sprawa musiała się wydać każdemu mętna i podejrzana. Prawie był pewien, że posądzą go o umyślne napisanie arcydzieła i wymyślenie bajeczki o jego nieznanym, młodym autorze. W ten sposób — powiedzą — chciał zwrócić na siebie uwagę.

Błądził już po peryferiach stacji. Luźne wagony, składy towarowe, nie spieszące się do nikąd, czekały tutaj w półśnie. Właśnie przechodził koło pojedynczego wagonu, kie-

Illustration 34. Sławomir Mrożek, "Ad Astra," in *Deszcz* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1962), 35.

Eventually, the search for the mysterious genius will lead the novelist to the train station where he hears a sound similar to the hum of a beehive coming from inside a sealed truck. He soon discovers that the hum is produced by sixty young people who, rustling like millions of ants, are crammed inside the truck, writing. Among them, the novelist recognizes the man that he saw at the bar. The young people all look similar, though; they all wear modest, neat suits. The noble expression on their faces bears the imprint of genius. Shocked by what he has just witnessed, the novelist runs away reflecting upon the fact that "the individual is nothing to a collective."[446] What follows is the description of how the collective of mysterious writers quickly takes over every sector of the book market, publishing one masterpiece after another. The books cause a sensation, and even "peasants left their ploughs to read."[447] The "old" writers, understanding that the very existence of their profession is in peril, decide to "join [] forces, keep together, forget [] personal interests."[448] In order to do so, they "set up an armed camp"[449] outside town where they would collectively write "splendid works."[450]

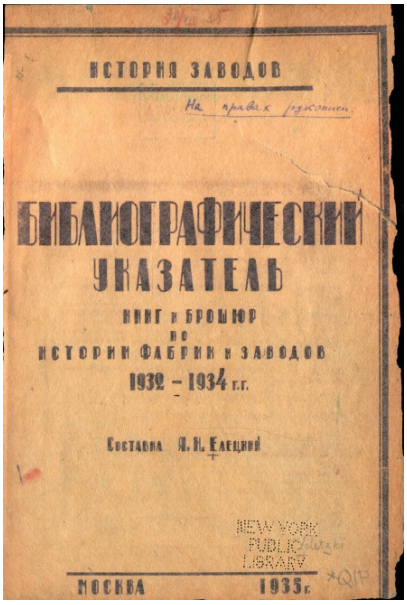
[446] Ibid., 29.
[447] Ibid., 31.
[448] Ibid., 34.
[449] Ibid.
[450] Ibid.

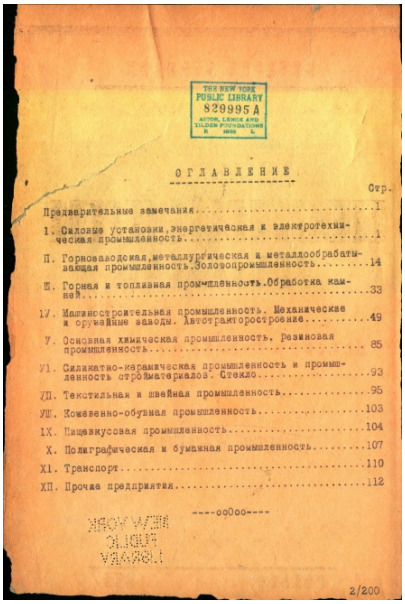
Mrożek's story lends itself to multiple interpretations and is indeed a parodic illustration of many of the issues concerning collective creativity that we have addressed in this dissertation: the juxtaposition of the individual vs the collective, the process of writing occurring in real time with real life, the mechanization of the literary process, the impossibility for the *kustar'-odinochka* to keep up with the pace of the collective, the identical individuals lacking a biography, the Symbolist echoes in "The Absolute," which is how one of the writers defines "the Word" of the young geniuses. In the story, all these motifs are held together by what the novelist exclaims after discovering the sixty writers inside the sealed truck: "the individual is nothing to a collective." This statement represents, in hyperbolic terms, the core argument of all debates around collective creativity from the outset, from Gorky's article "The Destruction of the Individual Self" to Pletnev's claim that "The proletariat is, at its very essence, collective." Can this provocative claim also be made of *History of Factories and Plants* (*HFP* hereafter), the largest collective literary project ever initiated in the Soviet Union, both in terms of duration and volumes published?[451] Yes, and no.

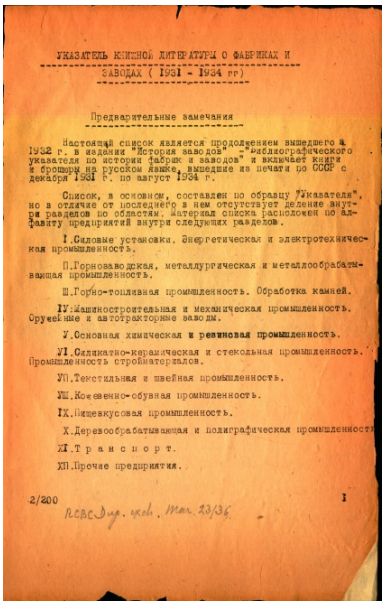
Despite the fact that the official title mentions only factories and plants, the books that came out for the series narrate the histories of various industrial sites and constructions. Most of the books, apart from a few differences, are structured by montaging discrete chapters written

[451] The project lasted for eight years, from 1931 to 1938, and, strictly speaking, only twelve volumes were completed. See Zhuravlev, *Fenomen "Istorii fabrik i zavodov,"* 153. In 1958, the project would be officially recuperated and more books would come out, with volumes being published even in the late 1980s. See, for instance, V. V. Pilipenko et al., *Morskie polpredy Oktiabria* (Odessa: "Maiak," 1988). In this chapter, though, I will focus on the early 1930s "version" of *HFP*. Besides Zhuravlev's account, which is still the most complete study on this phenomenon, for a short overview of the history of the project, see Liudmila M. Zak, "Istoriia fabrik i zavodov," in *Sovetskaia istoricheskaia entsiklopediia*, edited by E. M. Zhukov, vol. 6 (Moskva: Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia, 1965), 590-591. Zak, though, claims that about thirty volumes were published between 1931 and 1938. It might be that Zak confuses the number of volumes that was planned (about thirty), with those that were actually completed. Moreover, besides the twelve volumes, large number of booklets and brochures was published. See IA. N. Eletskii, ed., *Bibliograficheskii ukazatel' knig i broshiur po istorii fabrik i zavodov 1932 – 1934 g.g.* (Moskva: Istoriia zavodov, 1935). The handbook lists 1,052 items.

mostly by one or, sometimes, two authors, who are the same people working in the industrial sites that they describe.[452]






УКАЗАТЕЛЬ КНИЖНОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ О ФАБРИКАХ И ЗАВОДАХ (1931 – 1934 гг)

Предварительные замечания

Настоящий список является продолжением вышедшего в 1932 г. в издании "История заводов" – "Библиографического указателя по истории фабрик и заводов" и включает книги и брошюры на русском языке, вышедшие из печати по СССР с декабря 1931 г. по август 1934 г.

Список, в основном, составлен по образцу "Указателя", но в отличие от последнего в нем отсутствует деление внутри разделов по областям. Материал списка расположен по алфавиту предприятий внутри следующих разделов.

I.Силовые установки. Энергетическая и электротехническая промышленность.

II.Горнозаводская, металлургическая и металлообрабатывающая промышленность.

III.Горно-топливная промышленность. Обработка камней.

IV.Машиностроительная и механическая промышленность. Оружейные и автотракторные заводы.

V.Основная химическая и резиновая промышленность.

VI.Силикатно-керамическая и стекольная промышленность. Промышленность стройматериалов.

VII.Текстильная и швейная промышленность.

VIII.Кожевенно-обувная промышленность.

IX.Пищевкусовая промышленность.

X.Деревообрабатывающая и полиграфическая промышленность

XI.Транспорт.

XII.Прочие предприятия.

2/200

Illustration 35/36/37. IA. N. Eletskii, ed., *Bibliograficheskii ukazatel' knig i broshiur po istorii fabrik i zavodov 1932 – 1934 g.g.* (Moskva: Istoriia zavodov, 1935).

Without trying to claim that the volumes published for *HFP* represent the last stage of a linear evolutionary process in early Soviet collective literature, they nonetheless represent, as literary objects, the culmination of more than ten years of debates, appropriating and reframing all the discourses that we have seen so far. Given the size of the series, I will limit my investigation to those issues strictly concerning collective creativity, without expanding, for instance, on the genealogy and history of the project itself.[453] Neither will I talk extensively

[452] Not all the books of the series, however are structured like this. For instance, in the book on the construction of the Belomor Canal, the only one of the series penned by professional writers, there is no indication of authorship as far as discrete chapters are concerned.

[453] See L. M. Zak and S. S. Zimina, eds., *A. M. Gor'kii i sozdanie istorii fabrik i zavodov: Sbornik dokumentov i materialov v pomoshch' rabotaiushchim nad istoriei fabrik i zavodov* (Moskva: Izd-vo sotsial'no-ekon. lit-ry, 1959). http://biblio.imli.ru/index.php/ruslit/516-gorkij-a-m/682-a-m-gorkij-i-sozdanie-istorii-fabrik-i-zavodov-1959. Besides the already mentioned volume by Zhuravlev (1997), see also (in Russian) Tomáš Lipták, "Die Entstehung des sozialistischen Realismus: Maksim Gorkij und die Laienschriftsteller in den 1930er Jahren," (PhD diss., Universität Konstanz, 2012), 70-99. The dissertation

about the editing[454] done prior to the publication of the volumes (undeniable a major theoretical issue), although I will briefly situate it within the larger framework that I provide here. What I rather intend to do is to investigate what previous scholars, who have focused on the political and social significance of the project, only marginally did, with the exception of one study on the construction of the Belomor Canal,[455] which is to look at these volumes as literary works and see, from a narratological and aesthetic standpoint, how they function in terms of collective creativity. I will also show why I believe they should be considered novels and how the issues with which I have been concerned in previous chapters are reflected here. Finally, I would like to consider this project against the narratives of Socialist Realism.

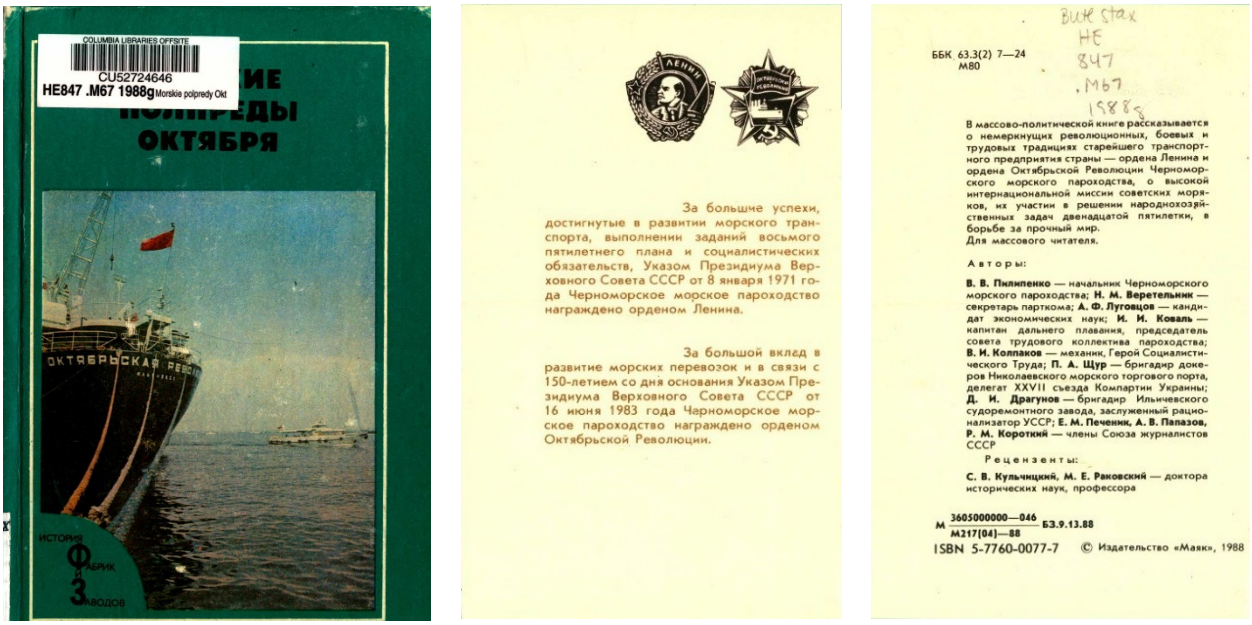


Illustration 38/39/40. *Morskie polpredy Oktiabria* (Odessa: Maiak, 1988) was one of the last volumes published for *History of Factories and Plants*.

includes a section on collective creativity. https://d-nb.info/ 1026415438/34 (links last accessed on January 11, 2019).

[454] For an analysis of how the editing process worked, see Lipták, "Die Entstehung des sozialistischen Realismus," 87, and Zhuravlev, *Fenomen "Istorii fabrik i zavodov,"* 153-81.

[455] See Ruder, *Making History for Stalin*, 1998, and Draskoczy, *Belomor*, 2014.

HFP was announced in 1931, when an article titled *Istoriia fabrik i zavodov* by Gorky, who strongly championed the project and was the major Party figure who stood behind it until 1934, appeared in the third issue of *Literaturnaia ucheba* and, on September 7, in both *Pravda* and *Izvestiia.*[456] The official birth date of the project is October 10, when the Central Committee officially passed a resolution to that effect.[457] A special section of *OGIZ* responsible for issuing the volumes was created on the same day.[458] In the article, Gorky claims that the project stems from the necessity to provide the reader with a complete picture of Socialist construction, which the sketch (*ocherk*), as a genre, could not convey. The volumes were supposed to be an account of the country in construction, written by those who were constructing it and, most importantly, it had to be accessible to everybody. The larger scope of the project, according to Gorky, should have been understood as follows:

> …it is necessary to **be acquainted with all the factories and plants,** all the projects and sites where the state is being constructed. We have to know in detail, far and wide, everything that has been bequeathed to us from the past, everything that has been created in fourteen years, and what is being created at the present time. We need to know the role of each of the most representative factories, each sector of production, — of the factory as the motor of industry, as a school of technicians and school of revolutionaries, of the factory as a teacher of Revolutionary and class **self-consciousness** of the workers, and as organizer and participant in the Civil War. It is necessary to know the factory in its actual meaning as **organizer of Socialist consciousness and Socialist production**.[459]

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[456] Maksim Gor'kii, "Istoriia fabrik i zavodov," in *Sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh*, vol. 26 (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1953), 141-46. *HFP* can be considered the flagship project of the many histories that were published or, in most cases, were planned in the early 1930s. For an overview of the other histories, e.g., *Istoriia o grazhdanskoi voiny* (*History on the Civil War*), especially as precursors of Socialist Realism, see Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Writer*, 368-70. Some of these projects, such as, for instance, *Istoriia mist i sil Ukrains'koi RSR* (History of Cities and Villages of the Ukrainian SSR) would come out much later. In this case, the twenty-six volumes of the series would be published between 1968 and 1974.

[457] See Maksim Gor'kii, Leopol'd Averbakh, and I. Kublanov, eds., *Rabochie pishut istoriiu zavodov* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Istoriia zavodov," 1933), 7. The resolution was published on the front-page of *Pravda* the day after, on October 11, 1931.

[458] ОГИЗ — Объединение государственных книжно-журнальных издательств (Union of the State Book and Magazine Publishers).

[459] Ibid., 143. ("…**нам нужно знать в лицо все наши заводы и фабрики**, все предприятия, все работы по строительству государства. Надо подробно, всесторонне знать всё, что нами унаследовано от прошлого, и всё, что создано за четырнадцать лет, создаётся в настоящем.

Above, I highlight words that will provide the three guidelines for this chapter: the personification of the object, the factory as the locus of class consciousness for the soldier-cum-producer, and the factory as organizer.[460] While we have already tackled the issues of the biography of the object and the factory as organizer in previous chapters, the concept of self-consciousness is a step forward down the larger path that we have outlined (from chaotic crowds to the proletarian body) and, I believe, is what, in terms of collective creativity, differentiate these books from the literary works that we have analyzed so far and what links them to the poetics of Socialist Realism. This process of coming into self-consciousness, moreover, is facilitated by literary practice.

According to the *Sekretariat glavnoi redaktsii «Istorii Zavodov»* (Secretariat of the Chief Editorial Board of "History of Plants"), the volumes were meant to be a propagandistic tool of Leninism aimed at educating the author-workers (*rabochie avtory*), who would contribute to the endeavor. In this sense, the books were supposed to be the written testimony of how old, decaying factories functioning according to the old capitalist system were turned into Socialist objects. They were also meant to show the progress made in the construction of Socialism and, specifically, of the work done during the first Five-Year Plan. This tangible proof would therefore stimulate workers and be an incentive in pushing the construction forward. On a narrative level, this goal would be achieved by the creation of new literary forms, which would stem from "the ability to edit and arrange into a cohesive whole the discrete chapters that have

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Надобно знать роль каждого наиболее типичного завода, каждой области производства, — завода как двигателя промышленности, как школы техников и школы революционеров, завода как воспитателя классового, революционного **самосознания** рабочих и как **организатора**, участника гражданской войны. Надо знать завод в его современном значении как **организатора социалистического сознания и социалистического производства**.")

[460] For an investigation of the factory as "community organizer," see chapter 8 in Kenneth M. Straus, *Factory and Community in Stalin's Russia* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 212-44.

already been written and the books that are still being written."[461] The underlying idea is that during the process of montaging, "a new type of literary work" (*novyi tip literaturnogo proizvedeniia*)[462] would take shape. In this chapter, I will look at how this process of "self-consciousness" occurs and what new literary forms we encounter as a result of this massive collection of stories written by workers. In order to do so, I will analyze and quote from five volumes that came out for the series:

a. *Liudi stalingradskogo traktornogo* (1933), the story of the tractor factory in Stalingrad and of the people who built it and worked in it;
b. *Belomorsko-Baltiiskii kanal imeni Stalina: istoriia stroitel'stva 1931-1934 g.g.*, the account of the construction of the Belomor Canal published in 1934;
c. *Rasskazy stroitelei metro*, the volume published in 1935 for *HFP* that, together with *Kak my stroili metro*, published in the same year, focuses on the stories of a small fraction of the 70,000 workers who built the Moscow subway;
d. *Byli gory Vysokoi*, which also came out in 1935 and which acquaints the reader with the history of the iron mines on Mount Vysokaya in the Urals and of the Socialist leadership that eventually took it over.

I will also quote from *Bolshevtsy*, a book that came out in 1936 in which there are neither factories nor plants but that describes the labor-commune (*trudkommuna*) for troubled youth established in Bolshevo, not far from Moscow, to better illustrate the concepts of re-forging (*perekovka*) and self-consciousness (*samosoznanie*).[463] The number of authors in these books,

[461] Foreword to Gor'kii and Averbakh, *Rabochie pishut istoriiu zavodov*, 4. ("Новые формы связаны прежде всего с умением наладить массовое редактирование написанных глав и пишущихся книг в целом.")
[462] Ibid., 3.
[463] In *Bolshevtsy,* like in *Belomor*, the authors are listed at the beginning of the book. Yet there is no indication, in the chapters, of who wrote what.

forewords and afterwords aside, varies from a minimum of nineteen in *Bolshevtsy* to one hundred in *Byli gory Vysokoi*.[464] Each of these five books puts at the center of the narration a different (industrial) object: a tractor factory in *Liudi stalingradskogo traktornogo*, a canal in *Belomorkanal*, the Moscow metro in *Rasskazy stroitelei metro*, a mine in *Byli gory Vysokoi* and a labor-commune in *Bolshevtsy*. They are also evenly spread in terms of dates of publication, from 1933 to 1936, with two volumes published in 1935. This diversity, I believe, will offer a holistic picture of the project and will make even more apparent and relevant what, from a narrative and aesthetic standpoint this series tried to achieve in terms of collective creativity.

But let us now return to the ideas we established in chapter two, in which the biography of the hero gave way to the heroic function and war became the organizing principle of the chaotic crowd into the proletarian body, in order to see how the same issues are reflected in these volumes.

That the pen should be understood as a weapon (*oruzhie*) in the hands of the proletariat was one of the most common tropes in all the debates on proletarian art since 1917, regardless of literary or political affiliation. The crux of the matter was to actually flesh out how this weapon should have been used.[465] Words such as fight (*bor'ba*), militant (*boevoi*), discipline

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[464] The number of the authors of the other three volumes is: *Liudi stalingrandskogo traktornogo* (32), *Belomorkanal* (36), and *Rasskazy stroitelei metro* (81).

[465] Remember, for instance, Vladimir Maiakovskii's poem *Domoi!* (Back home!) of 1925:

I want
the pen to be on par
with the bayonet.

(Я хочу,
чтоб к штыку
приравняли перо.)

See Vladimir Mayakovsky, *The Bedbug and Selected Poetry*, trans. Max Hayward and George Reavey, ed. Patricia Blake (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), 187.

(*distsiplina*), front (*front*), from the political and social spheres, penetrated the lexicon used in the stories by these author-workers. This military subtext is important because, besides the fact that many of these words were common terms in the political arena (*bor'ba za kommunizm*), on both narrative and ideological levels, it links those who had fought in the Civil War and were part of the unorganized crowd that we have observed in chapter two to the people that, to paraphrase what Dasha tells Gleb in *Cement*, went from being good soldiers to becoming good Communists. In Mrożek's story, the same subtext is evident in the scene in which the old writers try to fight back the mysterious newcomers. At one point, the narrator provides a description of the way in which the "murderously gifted authors"[466] are organized: "They were divided into four units, called scriptoons, each fifteen men strong. The scriptoons in turn were divided into three writoons consisting of five men. All the young men lived in barracks and went out only in organized units solely for the purpose of delivering the next load of masterpieces."[467] In *Rasskazy stroitelei metro*,[468] the idiolect used by IU. D. Gotseridze, a supervisor in one of the tunnels (*nachal'niki shakhti*), could be almost seamlessly transposed to the narration of a war story rather than the construction of a metro, with its emphasis on terms such as "fight" (*bor'ba*), "commander" (*komandir*) and "front" (*front*). Gotseridze also describes how "discipline here is just like at the front."[469] In *Liudi stalingradskogo traktornogo*[470] (People of the Stalingrad Tractor Factory) several authors share their experience of the Civil War, showing the path that

[466] Mrozek, "Ad Astra (a Story)," 32.
[467] Ibid., 33.
[468] A. V. Kosarev, ed., *Rasskazy stroitelei metro* (Moskva: Izd-vo "Istoriia fabrik i zavodov," 1935).
[469] Ibid., 88. ("Дисциплина у нас была прямо, как на фронте.") Both *Rasskazy stroitelei metro* and *Kak my stroili metro* can be found on the website of the Moscow metro at http://www.metro.ru/library/rasskazy_stroitelei_metro/ (last accessed on January 13, 2019).
[470] L. Mekhlis, ed., *Liudi stalingrandskogo traktornogo* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo "Istoriia zavodov," 1933).

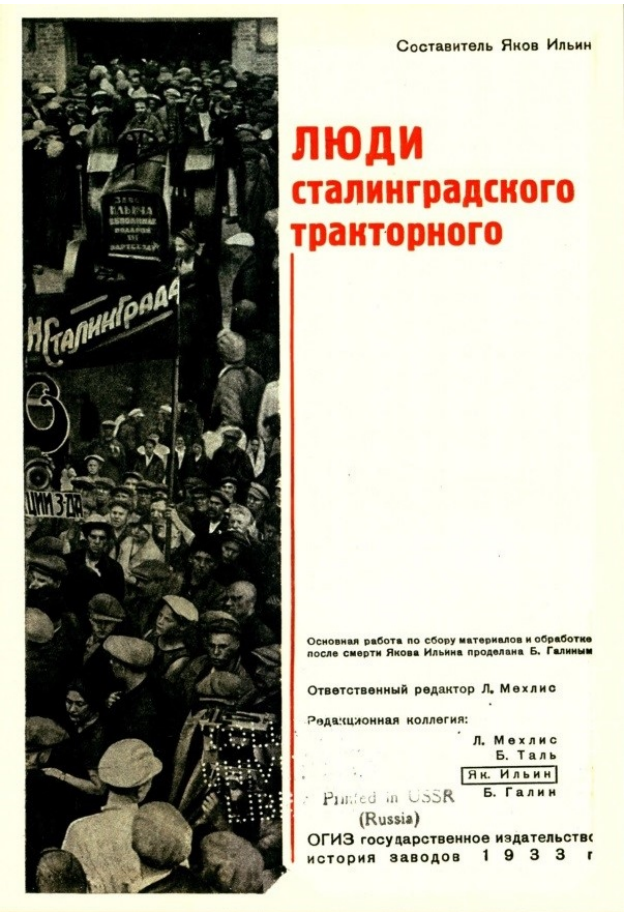


Illustration 41. Front-cover of L. Mekhlis, ed., *Liudi stalingradskogo traktornogo* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo istoriia zavodov, 1933).

led them from being soldiers to becoming workers. In *Bolshevtsy,*[471] the second of four parts, is titled "Oktiabr' i grazhdanskaia voina" (October and the Civil War) and is devoted to the description of the lives of the miners after 1917 and to the way war impacted their *byt*. In *Belomor*, in the chapter titled "What will happen when spring comes?," at one point, the "central staff of competition" makes the following announcement: "We announce a labor assault. The best workers are to be sent into the breach. Each section is to send a special picked phalanx of 75° to the watershed. We shall attack the watershed with shock tactics. The assault begins January 7. It will be directed by a special staff."[472] The underlying rationale

[471] M. Gor'kii, K. Gorbunov, and M. Luzgin, eds., *Bolshevtsy: ocherki po istorii bolshevskoi imeni G. G. Iagoda trudkommuny NKVD* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo "Istoriia zavodov," 1936).

[472] It is unclear how the English translation of the volume came to be. A comparison of the two editions (Russian and English) shows that the English version is much shorter (even though it is divided into more chapters) and that, despite what Amabel Williams-Ellis claims ("The account of the last dramatic push when personal histories drop away, and the Canal itself becomes the hero." In Maxim Gorky, L. Auerbach, S. G. Firin, and Amabel Williams-Ellis, eds. *Belomor: An Account of the Construction of the New Canal between the White Sea and the Baltic Sea* [New York: H. Smith and R. Haas, 1935]), it is more about the story of the people who built the canal rather than the story of the canal itself. In fact, in the English translation of *Belomor* there are almost no technical details, the reader does not know almost anything about how the canal is actually being built. Conversely, the Russian edition even features an appendix with plans of the dam and a detailed map of the canal. For these reasons, the English translation of the volume seems to resist one of the main discourses at play in *HFP*: the biography of the machine. This might suggest how this discourse was specific to the Soviet context. For a backstory of the translation and why the introduction was signed by Amabel Williams-Ellis, the sister of the British

and the message to the reader is clear: look, we are the same people that fought during the Civil War, the same who were part of the chaotic crowds organized by commander Chapaev and those who came back home only to find the factories in the deplorable state narrated by early production novels, and we are those who now contribute to revitalizing the factories and are here because, having acquired a proletarian consciousness, we are able to narrate our own story. What we have seen unfolding on the macro-level throughout the 1920s, we are seeing now at the micro-level of the discrete narratives. There is, however, a major difference: the return of biography. We will get back to this issue of individual "biography" later in this chapter to show how it stands against the collapse of the biography that we have outlined in previous chapters. This subtext was also a reminder for the readers and workers who were too young to have lived through the Revolutionary years and fought during the Civil War of whence their monumental endeavor stemmed. And this, conversely, is connected to the epic subtext of these books. This narrative shift from the chaotic crowd to the proletarian body is expressed, in a nutshell, by the opening lines of a chapter penned by S. M. Tsmyg, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Daesh' traktor* (Onward to the Tractor!), published in Stalingrad:

> When the factory was under construction, I worked at the Stalingrad town paper *Fight*. I visited the factory a few times. The first time I saw an enormous field **filled up with raw material** and fenced in with barbed wire. From the makeshift entrance, a **crowd** of about twelve thousand people would come out. They would move down the road like an endless flood in rows of eight or ten people each. Old Tsaritsyn had probably never seen such a large mass of people.

socialist, John Strachey, see Nicholas and Ruder, *In Search of the Collective Author*, 227-29. However, unlike what Nicholas and Ruder say, May O'Challagan, who seems to have played an important role in the translation since she is the only person thanked in the short publisher's note, is not a "mystery woman" but rather one of the founders of the Communist party of Great Britain. See endnote eighty-eight in Julia L. Mickenberg, *American Girls in Red Russia* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 161. It is also telling that the Russian edition of the book at Princeton University is located in the Engineering Library, in a section where other technical volumes about how to build a canal are located.

When, after a few months, I went to the construction site for the second time, I already found finished buildings.[473]

This paragraph contains several motifs that we have seen so far: literature as a weapon symbolized by the newspaper *Bor'ba* (Fight), the raw material waiting to be organized, the crowd of workers at the beginning of the process of construction resembling an endless human flow, the juxtaposition of the old (Tsaritsyn) and the new (Stalingrad). The underlying rationale of most volumes published by *HFP* was that the individual, having acquired a proletarian consciousness and been "organized" first by war and then by industrial work, could now write something that would be, at the same time, a manifestation of individual creativity and of the collective consciousness of the class.

Literature had become a new organizing principle.

From a literary standpoint, the volumes of *HFP* are indeed of a peculiar novelistic form in which the machine, the industrial object, not the bourgeois hero, is the cornerstone of the narrative around which all the other characters revolve; moreover, these books, made up of discrete chapters, each written by a different author-worker, display a constant tension between the tendency towards narrative unity and the willingness to highlight the individual. In other words, these books are the culmination of a long debate on how best to express the dynamic collective vs the individual in a literary work. The importance of reaching narrative unity (*tsel'nost'*) vis-à-vis a mere collection of stories (*sbornik* or *khrestomatiia*) was stressed over and over by the people who championed this project, such as Gorky and Averbakh, who would

[473] Mekhlis, *Liudi stalingradskogo traktornogo*, 405. ("Когда завод строился, я работал в сталинградской городской газете «**Борьба**». На заводе бывал несколько раз. В первый раз я увидел огромную площадку, **заваленную материалами**, огороженную колючей проволокой. Из временных ворот вышла **толпа**, в ней было тысяч двенадцать. Люди двигались по шоссе **нескончаемым потоком**, по восемь-десять человек в ряду. Это была такая масса народа, какой никогда, пожалуй, не видел старый Царицын. Приехав на стройку во второй раз, через несколько месяцев, я застал уже готовые корпуса.")

without fail point out, in their forewords, that the participation in these project does not mean imply the depersonalization or defacement (*obezlichivanie* — a term in use in the early 1930s) of the worker-authors. And, after its disappearance in the novels of the 1920s, this overwhelming presence of biographical material (not of the bourgeois hero anymore, but of the workers) becomes one of the dominants of this new literary genre and one of its links with Socialist Realism's focus on the Socialist hero.[474] What the books of *HFP* do in Socialist terms is recast the dynamic between what the Formalists called biographical and literary personality (*biograficheskaia lichnost'* vs *literaturnaia lichnost'*), by making the two overlap completely.

Let us return for a moment to Kiš's story from our introduction: *The Encyclopedia of the Dead* gives a name to the nameless or, in the case of literary practice, gives a voice to the voiceless. In *HFP*, the voiceless and nameless proletariat, those who were voiceless and nameless because their stories would not fit in bourgeois literature, in these volumes are eventually given voice, a face (often with their photographs displayed at the beginning of the chapter that they have written), and a name. This concern is well expressed in the aforementioned article by M. Vostrogin titled "Rekonstruktsiia literatury": "how many most wonderful lives have been lived but passed by 'unnoticed' and were not described."[475] *HFP* do not make the stone stonier, as Shkovsky would put it, but they would perform a similar operation: they would make the "unnoticed" noticeable. Therefore, it would be a gross mistake to claim that one of the goals of collective creativity was to eliminate the individual, the professional writer. In *HFP*, we are distant from the "anonymous newspaper mass" of

[474] It is not a coincidence that Jochen Hellbeck, in *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), situates an insurgence of diaristic writing at the beginning of the 1930s. These were the years of the comeback of biography in literature.
[475] Vostrogin, "Rekonstruktsiia literatury." 17. ("Сколько великолепнейших жизней прожито, но «не замечено» и не описано.")

Tret'iakov's red Tolstoys. In terms of individuality, it actually aimed at highlighting it. What it wanted to eliminate, however, is the old figure of the bourgeois writer, the observer, the one outside, the *zhivopisets* of the process of Socialist construction, and to educate a new group of proletarian writers that would symbolize the erasure between practical (be it a soldier going to war, a worker working in a factory, or both) and intellectual work. This is exemplified by a comment on Mikhail Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don* made by Mikhail Platoshkin, a proletarian writer who in 1924 had published a long novella titled *Novobytnoe*, which can be loosely translated as "On the New Way of Life."[476] After having been asked whether or not he liked Sholokhov's book, Platoshkin says: "It's odd, I worked in a factory, and that's what I write about… and this I don't get it, I just don't get it!"[477] The roles are now reversed, and the problem of the bourgeois writer not knowing enough about proletarian life (*novobytnoe*) is solved by having a proletarian writer who does not know anything about the Don River and Cossacks. Therefore, the rationale of *HFP* and the end goal of collective creativity in this project is not so much to eliminate the professional writer as to give voice to those excluded from bourgeois literature, because "in the literature of the bourgeoisie there is no space for them"[478]—to transform the cover portrait of the twenty-five writers of *Bol'shie pozhary* into the portrait of the hundreds of people who narrate their own stories: "here in front of us there are the portraits of the workers, the masters, the engineers, the heads of one factory."[479] The goal is to create not only what Gorky defined as "an encyclopedia of our construction in its gradual development"

[476] M. Platoshkin, "Novobytnoe," *Oktiabr'*, no. 3 (1924): 6-85 and no. 4 (1924): 31-87.
[477] In Viktor Petelin ed., *Mikhail Sholokhov v vospominaniiakh, dnevnikakh, pis'makh i stat'iakh sovremennikov*, vol. 1 (Moskva: Sholokhovskii tsentr MGOPU im. M.A. Sholokhova, 2005), 245. ("Что-то не так, я на заводе работал, про то и пишу... а тут не пойму, что-то не пойму!").
[478] Mekhlis, *Liudi Stalingradskogo traktornogo*, 8. ("В литературе буржуазии им нет места…")
[479] Ibid. ("Но вот перед нами портреты рабочих, мастеров, инженеров, руководителей одного завода.") Of all the volumes analyzed, only *Bolshevtsy* does not feature the photographs of the authors or of the main characters taken individually, but it depicts aspects of collective life in the commune.

(*entsiklopediia nashego stroitel'stva v dinamike*),[480] but, just as importantly, what I defined as "an encyclopedia of the living."

It is here that we see a major shift from the collapse of the biographical hero to the biography of the proletarian hero. This is one of the main links that connects *HFP* to the Socialist Realist hero. Not only that: now biography is autobiography, i.e., the various authors are now also the ones who narrate their own stories. The destruction of the biographical fictional hero was a necessary step to create a novelistic tabula rasa and facilitate the introduction of the autobiography of the worker. This need to write, to narrate one's own biography and that of the factory or plant where one works sharing the same worldview as the other workers, carries with it at least two important consequences: first, writing one's own personal story inevitably means narrating everyone else's story, as Gorky and Averbakh point out in the introduction to *Byli gory Vysokoi*: "Telling about themselves, the authors tell about others all the time . . . They are cells of a single living organism."[481] The obvious underlying assumption here is the straightforward Marxist belief that being a proletarian means sharing the same worldview with all the other proletarians: "The point of view of the embattled proletariat transforms the subjectivity of the authors into the objectivity of their narratives."[482] The same thought is expressed by IA. Il'in and

[480] Gor'kii, "Istoriia fabrik i zavodov," 144.
[481] Gor'kii and Mirskii, *Bily gory Vysokoi*, 6. ("Рассказывая о себе, авторы все время рассказывают и о других . . . Они – клеточки целого и живого организма.")
This notion of a number of cells thinking in unison and creating a single living organism is one of the crucial aspects that distinguishes the idea of creativity put forward in *HFP* from the ones characterizing post-Revolutionary years. When the Socialist Realist organism comes to life, the single cell has already proved to be authentically Socialist, cleansed from any possible dangerous contaminations and therefore able to produce literature on its own. The metaphor of the people forming a living organism is certainly not new. Johann Herder, for instance, extensively uses it in *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind) (1784–91). On Herder's impact on Russian identity and the Russian novel, see Lina Steiner, *For Humanity's Sake: The Bildungsroman in Russian Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), especially 4-6 and 24-25.
[482] Ibid. ("Точка зрения борющегося пролетариата превращает субъективность авторов в объективность их повествования.")

B. Galin in their foreword to *Liudi stalingradskogo traktornogo*. They write: "It is only one factory, with only a few dozen people in it, but doesn't one sense in their diverse biographies a single, country-wide line of development and the blossoming of human personality in a society in which one person does not inimically exploit another?"[483] In other words, since all the workers have experienced the same life events (pre-Revolutionary exploitation, Revolution, Civil War, the reconstruction of industry), they share the same worldview, and despite the superficial "diversity" of their biographies, their stories form a "biography *common to everyone*."[484] Reading the stories of these workers, first-person narrative is the preferred mode of enunciation: "Take me, for example" (*Vot ia naprimer*), says tool-setter (*naladchitsa*) KH. A. Khloptunova in her chapter, titled "Hochu znat' zhizn' metalla!" (I Want to Know the Life of Metal!), in *Liudi stalingradskogo traktornogo*.[485] The evolution of novelistic narration from the early 1920s to the early 1930s can be paraphrased precisely by these four words written by Khloptunova: "Take me, for example," and I will tell you my story. I am the writer now.

How are these discrete biographies structured in the book?

Despite the claims that "the subjectivism of the authors does not contradict the objectivity of the book,"[486] the Party was perfectly aware of the risks embedded in collective creativity understood as a montage of hundreds of different accounts. An executive order dated April 10, 1932, states that "it is essential that the goal in each history of a factory be to elucidate the most

[483] IA. Il'in and B. Galin, foreword to *Liudi stalingradskogo traktornogo*, 8. ("Всего лишь один завод, всего лишь десятки людей этого завода, но разве с самых разнообразных биографиях этих людей не ощущается одна, общая всей стране линия роста и расцвета человеческой личности в обществе, где нет подлой эксплоатации человека человеком?").
[484] Evgeny Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Reader: Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 23.
[485] Mekhlis, *Liudi stalingradskogo traktornogo*, 152.
[486] Gor'kii and Mirskii, *Byli gory Vysokoi*, 6. ("…субъективизм авторов не приходит в противоречие объективностью книги.")

important and crucial moments of its development, not to formally recount the chronology of discrete events, but rather to recount the connected, complete history of the factory, not present a random and arbitrary montage of materials that would turn the book into a variegated chrestomathy."[487] That the project is not a "variegated chrestomathy" of heterogeneous material is a point that is frequently stressed: in their foreword to *Byli gory Vysokoi,* Gorky and Averbakh remind the reader that "this is not a mosaic of memoirs, it is not a chrestomathy of fragments."[488] Gorky had multiple times underscored the importance of displaying formal unity (*edinstvo*) and coherence (*sviaznost'*) in the volumes in order to produce a monolithic whole without sacrificing the specificity of each individual story.[489] How is it possible to reach, on the aesthetical and narrative level too, what Gorky defines a "monolithic whole" and, at the same time, preserving the specificity and heterogeneity of the stories assembled as montage of multiple fragments?

The stories of *HFP* develop on two different planes, thus producing, concurrently, open-ended and closed structures. In the chapters on *Bol'shie pozhary* and *Zelenye iabloki*, I have shown how these two novelistic genres, a chain novel and what I have defined a "novel montage," lend themselves to the incorporation of new material, and this accumulation of raw material makes apparent the specificity and reproducibility of its discrete elements. This process occurs in different ways: in *Bol'shie pozhary* it takes a rhizomatic form, with each chapter of the

[487] Gor'kii and Averbakh, *Rabochie pishut istoriiu zavodov*, 17. ("…необходимо добиваться в каждой истории завода освещения основных, наиболее существенных моментов его развития, а не формального изложения хронологии и отдельных событий; связанного, законченного изложения истории завода, а не случайного и произвольного монтажа материалов, превращающего книгу в пеструю хрестоматию.")
[488] Gor'kii and Mirskii, *Byli gory Vysokoi*, 5. ("…это не мозаика воспоминаний, не хрестоматия отрывков.")
[489] Maksim Gor'kii, "O rabote po 'Istorii fabrik i zavodov,'" in *Sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh*, vol. 26 (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1953), 278. ("…единство, связность, монолитное целое.") The article first appeared in *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* on the same day, on April 1, 1932.



Illustration 42. Pavel Filonov, *Udarniki* [shock-workers], 1935, oil on canvas, 82 x 72 cm, State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg, http://rusmuseumvrm.ru/data/collections/painting/19_20/filonov_p.n._udarniki_mastera_analiticheskogo_iskusstva._19341935._zh-9610/index.php.

book introducing new characters and different plotlines that offer multiple entry points into the storyline with minimal overlapping with the previous chapters and often culminating in dead-ends; in *Zelenye iabloki*, the structure is opened up by the montage of ready-made novelistic material (*razvalennye materialy*, in Tsmyg's words) held together by mere novelistic convention (by the act of renaming all the new characters like the three characters in the first two chapters of the novel). At the biographical level, two different dynamics are at play in these two novels: in *Bol'shie pozhary,* the death of the hero occurs by the reiteration of biographical material, i.e., by piling up more and more characters alongside the evolution of the plot, thus creating multiple nodes of enunciation with no main protagonist; on the other hand, in *Zelenye iabloki*, the three protagonists incorporate all the biographical material of the heroes used to create them. In other words, in every chapter of *Zelenye iabloki*, the three protagonists are different because the source from which they are taken changes, but they are *perceived* as being the same, with the name as the single unifying link of all the biographies. In *HFP* both processes are at work: on one level,

the stories of the 70,000 workers who built the Moscow subway, those of the convicts who dug the White Sea-Baltic Canal, of the workers who built and worked in the tractor factory in Stalingrad, those of the miners who extracted iron on Mount Vysokaya, those of the juveniles and petty criminals who built the Bolshevo commune are, potentially, reproducible *ad libitum*. They comprise open-ended narratives which, without changing the picture of the whole, can be continually added. And this is possible because they all share "a common biography," they all went through the same process of organization in order to become good Communist citizens. The volumes of *HFP* can be read either rhizomatically, by cherry-picking chapters in random order and thus privileging on the individual stories of the authors, or sequentially, thus reintroducing and focusing on the biography of the machine and the process of construction. In these books, there is no main hero but rather clusters of biographical material that allow for multiple sources of utterance without a center. To go back to the terms that I have been using in this dissertation, the characters that populate them are both specific, since every biography is *factually* different, and reproducible, since they all experienced the same historical process and, in the factory, went through the same process of re-forging. What creates a homogeneous narrative, a "monolithic whole" is, from this perspective, the recurring patterns in each single story: work forges (*vykovyvaet*) each character and, in the case of convicts, re-forges (*perekovyvaet*). The plotline of each individual story follows the same trajectory: a worker does not believe that they will be able to finish the construction of the subway in time;[490] a convict does not believe that they will be

[490] As far as women are concerned, their stories have in common one additional element: they want to work, but at first they are not allowed to for various reasons (too many volunteers, the work is too heavy, etc.) Then, when they start working, they are considered unfit to perform specific tasks. The last stage occurs, obviously, when they prove to be as capable as their male colleagues. Despite preserving several stereotypical traits typically associated with gender (only female workers, for instance, talk about love,) in these volumes the gender divide, as far as practical work is concerned, tends to be overcome. At one point, Kraevskii, head of one of the brigades, scolds the female workers: "— You, fool, will forget, — he says — how to give birth!" ("— Как родить, — говорит, — дуры, забудете!") On the other hand, the

able to build the canal; a troubled juvenile does not believe that there will be any rebirth (*pererozhdenie*) in the commune. By the end of each chapter, all of them have understood that their skepticism was unfounded and that now, having become true Soviet citizens, they are ready to carry this increased knowledge outside the construction site or the commune and into the world. The subway becomes a "wonderful and edifying school" (*prekrasnaia i pouchitel'naia shkola*)[491] or, as the engineer, Gertner, states: "It was not me who educated the metro but, rather, the metro that re-educated me."[492] In the foreword to *Liudi stalingradskogo traktornogo*, Gorky expresses the same thought: "The *People of the Stalingrad Tractor Factory* shows how the factory, regardless of different languages, nurtures a unity of feeling and thought"[493] This unity of thought is apparent and often openly expressed in many of the stories. In *Rasskazy stroitelei metro*, E. T. Abakumov, the deputy director of Metrostroy, the construction company that built the metro, says the same thing: "I was not expecting that, in my official capacity, a large group of technicians and engineers thinking in unison would take shape around me."[494] Yet this process of *vykovyvanie* (i.e., "hammering out" or "molding," a term and that was often used in these years in a metaphorical sense), *perekovyvanie* (reforging), and *pererozhdenie* (rebirth) is more complex than in the novels about the Civil War and the early years of industrialization.

Before *HFP*, the overarching idea in these novels was that the worker needed an external organizing principle: a commander in times of war, an industrial object in the early years of

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only worker who dares scold Kaganovich is Dusia Ermakova, a member of the Komsomol, who, when Kaganovich is surprised by the fact that she can use a mallet, candidly replies: "What were you thinking, comrade Koganovich, that I came here to broom the floors?" ("А что вы думаете, товарищ Каганович? Что я пришла сюда метелкой подметать?") See Mekhlis, *Rasskazy stroitelei metro*, 110; 258.

[491] Ibid., 48.

[492] Ibid., 16. ("Не я учил метро. Метро меня переучивал.")

[493] Mekhlis, *Liudi stalingradskogo traktornogo*, 3. ("«Люди Сталинградского тракторного» показывают, как завод, при различии языков, воспитывает единство чувства и мысли.")

[494] Kosarev, *Rasskazy stroitelei metro*, 49. ("Я не учитывал того, что за время моей работы вокруг меня сложилась большая инженерно-техническая группа, мыслившая одинаково со мной.")

reconstruction, a professional writer to narrate the story. In "Ob ocherke i ocherkiste" (On Essay and Essayist),[495] Vladimir Stavskii, future (*de facto*) chairman of the Union of Writers after Gorky's death in 1936, claims that the confluence of practical and intellectual work will foster the "molding of the Revolutionary, dialectical materialistic worldview,"[496] or, to paraphrase, will enable the worker to acquire proletarian consciousness. In the stories of *HFP*, though, there is another important layer to consider if one wants to fully understand the crucial shift in the narratives of early Stalinism that occurred in the first half of the 1930s. While Stavskii's process of *vykovyvanie* can be reduced to the process of "acquiring proletarian consciousness," these books display a strong presence of the workers' agency, what the American engineer Rollo Ward calls self-improvement, or self-perfecting (*samousovershenstvovanie*).[497] In other words, these novels introduce, for the first time, the element of individual responsibility within the collective, which is crucial to understanding how collective creativity and Socialist Realism are connected. The construction of the metro (or, interchangeably, the construction of the canal, of a factory, or the story of an iron mine) becomes a metaphor for both the construction of Socialism under the supervision of the Party and for the forging (external agency) and self-perfecting (individual agency) of the individual. This also allows us to ideologically situate the process of the editing of these volumes: on the narrative level, the author-worker has acquired the proletarian consciousness necessary to narrate his own story (self-improvement), but, at the same time, he needs to be edited by the writer (forging). What in the early novels was war and the commander, the machine and the industrial object, now is the Party. Organization (*organizatsiia*) has now become Party organization (*partorganizatsiia*). Kaganovich is the new Chapaev. Each story is

[495] Vladimir Stavskii, "Ob ocherke i ocherkiste," *Na literaturnom postu*, no. 4 (1931): 13-17.
[496] Ibid., 14.
[497] Mekhlis, *Liudi stalingrandskogo traktornogo*, 165.

then a condensed Socialist *Bildungsroman*, a short biographical novel, and the whole narrative can be compared to a parable for the (re)birth of the authentic Soviet citizen.[498] As Gorky says about *Bolshevtsy*: "The book tells the story of how an anti-social, deeply anarchized human being has been transformed into a class-conscious proletarian, a Revolutionary, and a Communist."[499] This connection between the world described in the books (where the heroes become Soviet citizens) and the outside world (where they will have to prove that their (re)forging and/or rebirth has been successfully accomplished) or, in other words, the fact that the narrative does not end within the framework of the book itself, is often highlighted. When the construction of the canal is completed, the narrator, who represents a link between the two worlds, pompously reminds the reader that "[t]he hands of thieves, bandits and counter-revolutionaries had opened out a new way, not only for the ships but for themselves."[500]

On another level of analysis, one should keep in mind that the project is called *History of Factories and Plants* and not *History of the People Who Work in Factories and Plants* and that, therefore, the heroes are not only those who build, but also what is being built. The volumes of *HFP* appropriate and reinterpret the LEF-ist concern with the "fact" and the Constructivist focus on the object and incorporate them into the narrative for their own purposes. In this sense, the

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[498] These stories are punctuated by religious overtones. Mikhail Karasik quotes Malevich in *Paradnaia kniga Strany Sovetov*: "The substance of the New Testament has rung. Church bells, the Old Testament, have fallen silent. And indeed, they are no longer needed, a new ritual has developed, and the mournful organ of factories and plants has taken charge of the Religious ritual." ("Материя Нового Завета зазвучала. Умолкли церковные колокола – Старый Завет. И действительно, больше их не надо, образовался новый обряд, новый траурный орган фабрик и заводов принял на себя Религиозный обряд.") See Mikhail Karasik, Aleksei Morozov, and Aleksandr Snopkov, *Paradnaia kniga Strany Sovetov* (Moskva: Izd-vo "Kontakt-kul'tura," 2007), 10. *HFP* is the new Bible, plants and factories are the new churches.

[499] Gor'kii, Gorbunov, and Luzgin, *Bolshevtsy*, 9. ("Книга рассказывает о том, как человека антисоциального, глубоко анархизированного – превращали в сознательного пролетария, революционера и коммуниста.") While the terms "to anarchize" (анархизировать) and "anarchized" (анархизированный) are unusual in the Russian language, they were often used by Gor'kii.

[500] Gorky, Auerbach, Firin, and Williams-Ellis, *Belomor*, 301.

books display extremely closed structures; they obey the necessity of being a "monolithic whole," because the trajectory of the plotline must necessarily end when the construction is completed or when the factories are transformed into Socialist entities. If the object occupies the center of the narrative and becomes what holds together the entire structure, the narrative can therefore accommodate a larger number of characters without the risk of self-disruption or chrestomathy. Let us recall what Tret'iakov writes in 'The Biography of the Object":

> The biography of the object has an extraordinary capacity to incorporate human material. People approach the object at a cross-section of the conveyer belt. Every segment introduces a new group of people. Quantitatively, it can track the development of a large number of people without disrupting the narrative's proportions. They come into contact with the object through their social aspects and production skills. The moment of consumption occupies only the final part of the entire conveyer belt. People's individual and distinctive characteristics are no longer relevant here. The tics and epilepsies of the individual unperceived. Instead, social neuroses and the professional diseases of a given group are foregrounded.[501]

The canal, the subway, the factory, the mine: they all are the personified protagonists of the books, and the author-workers simply "approach" them. It is not only about (re)forging but about becoming a collective, about understanding higher social and political goals; not only at work but also in life. In this sense, the object teaches them how to live. We are back, eventually, to the dynamics that I have described in the previous chapter, with the novels becoming the literary *loci* where the biography of the machine unfolds. Therefore, here too, there is a dual agency: of the worker who builds the machine and of the machine that organizes the production of the collective that approaches it: "Look at that, it's alive!,"[502] KH. Khloptunova writes upon recounting how the workers reacted to seeing the "impressive machine-tool" (*udivitel'nyi stanok*)[503] of the American "Gleason" (*Glisson*). In both *Rasskazy stroitelei metro* and *Kak my*

[501] Tret'iakov, "The Biography of the Object," 61.
[502] Mekhlis, *Liudi stalingradskogo traktornogo*, 153. ("Смотри ты! Прямо живой.")
[503] Ibid.

stroili metro, the various phases of the construction are compared to the different life stages of a human being: "It was still almost the early infancy of the metro construction."[504] Therefore, from this perspective too, these volumes can be considered *Bildungsromane* in which we see the growth of the industrial object attended to by the workers: "in front of our eyes, with our help, the enormous factory is growing."[505] In *Belomor*, the canal is often addressed as a living entity. When canal is almost ready to welcome the first steamers, for instance, this is how one of the many dams appears to the astonished eyes of one of the workers:

> He sees the dam. It lies before him, resting its elbow on the shores of the lake as some wonderful, magnificent beauty might rest her chin on her hand and think lazy little thoughts. In a little while she will drop her head on her pillow and fall fast, fast asleep, but now she is thinking of someone—of some hero—a builder, a thinker, an Udarnik [*sic*]. Her cheeks are burning, she has sloping shoulders.[506]

This passage shows once more how the construction is now at the very center of the narrative, it has its own (or rather, *her* own) agency when it lovingly thinks about its suitors. The almost complete absence of "ordinary" love in these books and the blurring of gender boundaries are perhaps justified: there is a higher love story going on, a love story between the worker and the construction, and to love the construction, the embodied metaphor of the process of construction of Communism, stands for an oath of allegiance to the Socialist cause. In *Liudi stalingradskogo traktornogo*, Vasilii Ivanov, superintendent (*nachal'nik*) and former director of the factory, in his chapter aptly titled "Mechta" (Dream), describes his first encounter with the factory in a language that can only be compared to love at first sight, its black chimneys like the hair of a woman:

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[504] Kosarev, *Rasskazy stroitelei metro*, 83. ("Это был еще почти младенческий период жизни Метростроя.")
[505] Mekhlis, *Liudi stalingradskogo traktornogo*, 153. ("...на наших глазах, с нашей помощью огромный завод вырастает.")
[506] Ibid., 284.

> I saw the factory for the first time on the morning of February 2, 1929. It was hanging on one of the walls of the large hall of Gipromez [the State Institute for the Design of Metallurgic Factories]: it was the mock-up plan of the Stalingrad tractor factory. It was all there, in plain sight, as it would stand in front of my eyes in real life one year later. The factory spread out along three lines: the foundry; behind it the smithy; on the first line parallel to them, there is the machine-assembly shop, and, on the third line, the tool shop. The blank vertical wall of the foundry rose above them all. The short black chimneys of the cogeneration plant were set against the sky, which was turning blue.[507]

Participation in such collective projects and the certainty that a new type of writer would emerge from it, represents a necessary step in becoming an authentic Socialist writer. In this sense, the authors of *HFP* are no different from Guliaev, Nakatnikov, Umnov, and all the juveniles who went, of their own accord, to the former Kraft estate in Bolshevo. The collective life in the commune made them new men and the *vypusk* testified to their reforging, but they would still have to prove, as individuals outside the commune, to have undergone a complete rehabilitation: "True, being discharged did not mean full rehabilitation yet . . . and we must control whether or not this boy has been tempered enough, whether or not his willingness to live a new life, his determination to stand against temptation is strong."[508] The wishful thinking that, in my opinion, was embedded in this project, was that the Soviet citizen of the future, already living under Communism, would no longer be at potential risk, because his willingness would have ultimately proved itself stronger than any temptation.

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[507] Mekhlis, *Liudi stalingradskogo traktornogo*, 17. ("Я увидел завод впервые утром 2 февраля 1929 года. Он висел на стене в просторном зале Гипромеза—перспективный план Сталинградского тракторного завода. Он виден был весь, как на ладони, и таким, каким год спустя он предстал предо мною в жизни. Тремя линиями лежал завод: литейный цех, а вслед за ним кузница—это на первой линии параллельно им механосборочный и на третьей линии—инструментальный. Глухая, отвесная стена литейной поднималась выше всех. Черные короткие трубы теплоэлектроцентрали упирались в голубеющее небо.")

[508] Gor'kii, Gorbunov, and Luzgin, *Bolshevtsy*, 307-08. ("Правда, выпуск еще не означал полной реабилитации . . . И мы должны проверить, достаточно ли закален наш парень, достаточно ли крепка его воля к новой жизни, его решимость противостоять искушениям.")

Before moving on to the last section of this chapter, in which I will show how the volumes that comprise *HFP* aimed at the creation of a Socialist Epos, let us return for a moment to chapter five. There, besides discussing the biography of the machine and how, after the end of the Civil War, the industrial object became the organizer of the mass of soldiers coming back home, I also mentioned two other important issues of these years: first, the concern for the lagging behind (*otstavanie*) of literature compared to the fast pace of construction of Socialism and, second, the extent to which the figure of the worker and that of the writer should overlap. How are these two discourses reflected in the volumes of *HFP*?

In *Rasskazy stroitelei metro*, the—metaphorical—arrival of the "traditional" writer on the construction site is described as follows: "Here comes the inspired chronicler, he glances at the smooth vaults, but he won't see anything. He's late, he's late, the chronicler!"[509] The image of the "inspired chronicler" glancing at the smooth cement surface of the vaults perfectly summarizes the contrast between what constituted the old concept of authorship—the "chronicler" is unfit to describe the Socialist world, because he is not an active part of its construction and inevitably "*opozdaet*,"—and the figure of the author-worker, who is simultaneously constructor and historiographer of this new reality, who "would simultaneously write the history of his valorous struggle, of his glorious construction."[510] Of course, this was related to the very concrete and widespread feeling that there existed an irresolvable tension between sitting at home, struggling with "the creative effort of writing," trying to describe an ever-changing society, and the completely different, much faster pace at which society itself was

[509] Mekhlis, *Rasskazy stroitelei metro*, 7. ("Придет вдохновенный летописец, заглянет на гладкие своды – ничего не увидит. Опоздал, опоздал летописец!")
[510] Ibid., 8. ("…одновременно писал [] историю своей доблестной борьбы, своей славной стройки.")

moving for the single author.[511] In their introduction to *Byli gory Vysokoi*, after a three-page list of the hundred authors who contributed to the volume, Maksim Gorky and Leopol'd Averbakh firmly state that "its author is not the detached chronicler, but the militant constructor."[512]

Now that it is the workers who narrate their own stories, in *HFP*, the process of writing and the process of the construction of Socialism seem to have finally merged, proceeding now *at the same pace*. Literature has become an almost real-time testimony to the construction of the new State. In Mrożek's story, the contrast between the old way of writing embodied by the novelist on the one hand, and the militia of "scriptoons" and "writoons" on the other, is striking: while the "old" writers strive towards perfection driven by talent and inspiration, the young geniuses write incessantly ("they never stop," declares an old railway man when the novelist asks him what is going on inside the sealed truck),[513] and they seem unfazed by issues of inspiration and talent. Their works turn out to be, by default, the personification of perfection. What these writers need is not substantial compensation or public recognition—they are indistinguishable from one another—but a glass of milk and a roll. The other important characteristic of the mysterious newcomers is that they outpace everybody else. When the novelist tries to get his poems published, he is stopped on his way to the publishing house by a poet who explains to him the meaninglessness of running there: "'No point in going there,' the poet warned him sadly. 'They're already there. Our turn has come. I'm told that yesterday their

[511] In *Rasskazy stroitelei metro*, Gotseridze declares that "you will not be able to see much sitting behind a desk" ("из-за письменного стола много не увидишь"). See Kosarev, *Rasskazy stroitelei metro*, 88. Along the same lines, Semen Gekht, in "Ia nauchilsia znakomit'sia so svoimi geroiami," writes that "sitting at home, behind a writing-table . . . there is not enough depth" ("…сидя у себя дома, за своим письменным столом . . . не хватает глубины.") Semen G. Gekht, "Ia nauchilsia znakomit'sia so svoimi geroiami," *Rost*, no. 5 (March 1934): 22.
[512] Gor'kii, Gorbunov, and Luzgin, *Bolshevtsy*, 9. ("Ее автор – не бесстрастный летописец, а боевой строитель.")
[513] Mrozek, *Ad Astra*, 29.

poetry section went into action.'"[514] When the novelist decides to go to the theater to see if he can manage to have a play published, the outcome is identical: "They turned toward the theater, but they were too late."[515]

The idea of writing as a planned and strictly organized endeavor that bypasses individual talent or inspiration and renders it, if not superfluous, at least marginal (to put it differently, the "individual is nothing to a collective"); the fact that a single will always be outpaced by the collective; the inevitability of the single author of always being "too late"; the division between manual and intellectual labor; all of these can be considered, as we have seen, widespread discourses around literature in the 1920s and the 1930s. The reader of *HFP* is frequently reminded of the way the heroes who populate and pen these accounts are able to grow up and mature incredibly fast—become full-fledged citizens—precisely because of their contribution to the Socialist cause both with their manual/intellectual work and written testimony ("people would mature incredibly fast," as Gotseridze points out),[516] which can be interpreted within the larger framework of "forging" and "reforging" (*perekovka*), together with the fact that, against all odds and initial doubts, all the construction projects undertaken in *HFP* are miraculously finished on time or even beforehand.[517] In fact, both volumes dedicated to the construction of the Moscow metro came out in the same year in which the metro was inaugurated (May 15, 1935), thus reinforcing this illusion of contemporaneity. However, in order for the books to come out in

[514] Ibid., 31.
[515] Ibid.
[516] Kosarev, *Rasskazy stroitelei metro*, 90. ("…люди необычайно быстро росли.")
[517] H. G. Wells traveled to Moscow in 1934 to interview Stalin, and supposedly visited the construction site of the Moscow metro: as engineer Gertner writes in the chapter titled "O smelosti" (On Courage), the British writer tells them that what they are trying to accomplish is an impossible goal, even more so in such a short period of time: "H. G. Wells came to us and told us that we would not complete anything, that we would not finish the construction of the metro, that we are crazy." ("К нам приехал Герберт Уэллс и сказал нам, что мы ничего не сделаем, что мы метро не построим, что мы сумасшедшие.") Kosarev, *Rasskazy stroitelei metro*, 113.

the same year, the stories do not narrate the very moment when the metro was inaugurated but stop short, when the metro is still under construction.[518]

In his article "Istoriia fabrik i zavodov," Gorky admits that "There are almost no literary works that are accessible to the public at large, something that thoroughly acquaints the reader step-by-step with the grandiose process of construction."[519] Gorky's complaint fits into the long-standing polemic regarding the social significance of literature. At the time, the role of literature was, quite banally, to attest to the "grandiose process of construction" in Socialist Russia. Instead of what Brik, Tret'iakov, Shklovsky, or Libedinskii had argued just a few years earlier, what the books published by *HFP* do—with the sole exception of *Belomor*, which is written by professional writers—is to show that the roles have been reversed: it is not the writer who needs to understand the proletarian by either visiting factories or by "familiarizing oneselves with agronomical, technical, and organizational issues in agriculture,"[520] but it is the workers who now have developed the need to write: "The literary craft proved to be necessary to them in connection with the real matter of history, the history of their practice in the factory."[521]

Another consequence of this massive call to arms (or rather, to pens) was to allow the Party to circumvent, at least on paper, one the main impediments to the creation of authentic Socialist literature: that is, the problem that, in order for the writer and the worker to coincide,

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[518] This is openly stated, although not directly, at the very beginning of the book, in the epigraph penned by the editorial staff: "The stories were written during the hectic days of the last months of construction, sometimes literally while on the go, – this is the reason why the stories stop short." ("Рассказы писались в горячие дни последних месяцев стройки, подчас буквально на ходу, – этим объясняется то, что рассказы не доведены до самого дня пуска метро.")
[519] Gor'kii, "Istoriia fabrik i zavodov," 141. ("Общедоступной литературы, которая последовательно и широко знакомила бы с грандиозным процессом строительства, у нас почти нет.")
[520] Tret'iakov, *O tom zhe*, 199. ("…ввести себя в курс агрономических, технических и организационных вопросов сельского хозяйства.")
[521] Gor'kii and Mirskii, *Byli gory Vysokoi*, 7. ("Литературное ремесло оказалось для них необходимым в связи с реальным делом истории – истории их заводской практики.") Again, the overarching idea is that, in order to write proletarian literature, one has to actively participate in the process of construction of Socialism.

the worker at least had to learn how to read and write. All the debates during the 1920s on the most effective ways of accelerating literacy among peasants and the working class are stripped down to one simple solution: it is not through higher rates of literacy that Socialist literature can be produced; on the contrary, it is precisely by engaging in such projects that literacy is achieved: "Our path differed from the usual literary-mass movement. We went not from literacy to literary engagement, but rather from literary practice, from producing books to literacy."[522] It goes without saying that the editors of these works had to face enormous problems. The impossibility of editing the vast amount of "raw material" produced and which still lie untouched in the archives might have been one of the reasons why the project would not ultimately fulfill its expectations. Iurii Zlygostev, one of the authors of *Byli gory Vysokoi*, talks about these problems in his account of the whole endeavor titled "Kak pisalis' 'Byli gory Vysokoi'" (How the Tales of Mount Vysokaia Were Written) and published in *Literaturnaia gazeta* on March 20, 1935. He openly mentions the fact that "there was not a single writer among us" (*sredi nas ne bylo pisatelia*) and that there were no claims of genuine artistic merits.[523] In the end, the rationale was encapsulated in the platitude: "Write like you speak" (*Pishi, kak govorish*).[524] This element of orality, however, is yet another crucial component to the idea of epos embedded in *HFP.*

As part of the larger framework of the obsession with history that characterizes these years,[525] *HFP* is one of the first wide-ranging literary projects with specific structural and

[522] Ibid., 17. ("Наш путь был отличен от обычного в массовом литературном движении. Мы шли не от грамотности к литературному интересу, а от занятий литературой, создания книги к грамотности.")
[523] Iurii Zlygostev, "Kak pisalis' 'Byli gory Vysokoi'," 213.
[524] Ibid.
[525] In the foreword to the volume *Rabochie pishut istoriiu zavodov*, this connection between history and literature is explained in detail. See Gor'kii and Averbakh, *Rabochie pishut istoriiu zavodov*, 5. See also S. V. Zhuravlev, "Istochniki nachinaniiakh A. M. Gor'kogo 1930-kh gg. «Istoriia gorodov» i «Istoriia derevni»," in *Istoricheskoe kraevedenie: po materialam II Vsesoiuznoi konferentsii po istoricheskomu*

ideological guidelines provided by the Party,[526] and, in this sense, it represents zero-point of Soviet literary history. Literary history begins with epos. *HFP* is the epos of Soviet literature. The morphology of the volumes is a hybrid of epic and novelistic genres with assimilated and reinterpreted elements of post-Revolutionary discourses such as montage, the focus on the biography of the object (or, alternatively, of the fact) and the blurring of the boundary between art and life.[527] The texts in this series strive to obliterate the boundary between internal aesthetic contents and the external structures of life to which they correspond in such a way that they tend to overlap, because the figure of the writer and that of the worker eventually merge, and the social and political aspects of the writing become more important than any artistic or scientific merit.

The debate around individual creativity and its disintegration, on the one hand, and collectivity on the other, can be traced back, as we have seen, to the first decade of the twentieth century. In "The Destruction of the Individual Self," Gorky enumerates the various developmental stages of the creative personality (*tvorcheskaia lichnost'*). In this essay, Gorky writes that "the nation, creating the personality of epos, would endow it with all the power of the collective psyche… Myth and epos, as well as language, the main actor of an epoch, are the manifestations of the collective creativity of an entire nation, not the individual mode of thinking of one person."[528] The belief that "collective creativity" is the expression of the people is

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kraevedeniiu, ed. S. O. Shmidt et al. (Penza: Departament kul'tury Penzenskoi obl. Administratsii, 1993), 267-79.

[526] In the same foreword, the section titled "Instruktsiia glavnoi redaktsii" (Guidelines from the Editorial Board) gives the authors concrete guidelines to successfully compile the volumes.

[527] The first works on the history of Russian factories and plants go back to pre-Revolutionary years, although only in the 1920s one can find a consistent number of accounts. For a detailed chronology, see Zhuravlev, "*Fenomen istorii fabrik i zavodov*," chapter 1.

[528] Gor'kii, "Narushenie lichnosti," 26. ("…народ, создавая эпическую личность, наделял ее всей мощью коллективной психики… В мифе и эпосе, как и в языке, главном деятеле эпохи, сказывается коллективное творчество всего народа, а не личное мышление одного человека.")

precisely the rationale behind this project. The new epos of *HFP* is the product of the new (Soviet) man, the proletarian who by recounting his personal story, he recounts the story of everyone else, the "new man" that Gorky himself invoked in "O pisateliakh-samouchkakh" (On Self-Taught Writers), first published in *Sovremennyi mir*, no. 2 (1911), where he declares that "it is from the mass of Russian people that a new type of man comes to life."[529] This "new type of man"—the idea that the Revolution gave birth to new people ("During the Revolution new people emerged"),[530] who, in Mrożek's satirical story, are embodied by the gifted Stakhanovite writers who all look the same and wear the same clothes—is quintessentially the author of *HFP.*

In his study, *Fenomen "Istorii fabrik i zavodov,"* S. V. Zhuravlev correctly argues that Gorky, in recounting the "grandiose process of construction" of Socialism, did not want to start from an abstract historical perspective but from a very concrete description of the history of labor collectives. The idea was that workers knew the factories where they worked better than anybody else; therefore, it was their task to write their histories, combining scientific rigor with strict documentary style. Moreover, and here we go back to Gorky's complaint, such histories should be written in a language accessible to the wider public. In other words, the starting point of the new history had to be documented both as epic testimony for future generations and as tangible proof of the ongoing (and rapid) achievements of Socialism for the people who were actually building it. As Zhuravlev puts it "From where should one start a new history but from the history of the working class?"[531]

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[529] Gor'kii, "O pisateliakh-samouchkakh," in *Sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh*, vol. 24 (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1953), 127. ("…из самой массы русского народа возникает к жизни новый тип человека.")
[530] Kosarev, *Rasskazy stroitelei metro*, 56. ("Во время революция выросли новые люди.")
[531] Zhuravlev, *Istoriia fabrik i zavodov*, 3. ("С чего начинать новую историю, как не с истории рабочего класса?")

The feeling—and willingness—of being part of a new historical age and the related eagerness to create a new Russian epos is a common narrative in post-Revolutionary years as well as an underlying discourse in the volumes of the series: in "Novyi Lev Tolstoy," Tret'iakov already asks, "Where are our Red Homers?" (*Gde nashi krasnye Gomery*?)[532] A few years later, Leopol'd Averbakh defines the project as a "gigantic task of creating a new heroic epos," writing about the necessity to produce both scientific and artistic texts in "Mozhet li byt' istoriia zavodov nauchnoi i khudozhestvennoi?"[533] Averbakh and Gorky would expand on this idea in 1935, in *Byli gory Vysokoi*: "Here is why a new epos is coming to life: this time not based on mythology but rather on the free, happy, and scientific practice of millions of people, the builders of Socialism, of this new poetic reality of the future of mankind."[534] In the first chapter of the book, titled "O Rudnike" (On the Mine), Mirskii says that "the book is of significant interest from the point of view of folklore; besides, it represents a valuable contribution to the artistic epos of the working class."[535] Like in Mrożek's story, in which the *kollektiv* quickly conquers every possible literary niche, leaving no space for publication to the "old-school" writers, this "artistic epos of the working class" will not restrict itself to the history of factories and plants but, as the first achievements of Socialism are reached and properly documented, will serve as the inspiration and the basis for all future literary masterpieces, the same way epic has always functioned as an inexhaustible reference point for literature. In *Rasskazy stroitelei metro*, this is openly stated in the opening pages, where it is said that the poets will dedicate their best poems to the Komsomol

[532] Tret'iakov, "The New Leo Tolstoy," 47.
[533] Leopol'd Averbakh, "Mozhet li byt' istoriia zavodov nauchnoi i khudozhestvennoi?," 45. (…гигантск[ая] задач[а] создания нового героического эпоса.")
[534] Gor'kii and Mirskii, *Byli gory Vysokoi*, 10. ("Вот почему рождается новый эпос – на этот раз не на основе мифологии, а на основе свободной, счастливой и научной практики миллионов людей – строителей социализма, этой новой поэтической действительности и будущего человечества.")
[535] Ibid., 17. ("…книга представляет значительный фольклорный интерес, она помимо всего прочего служит ценным вкладом в рабочий художественный эпос.")

members who contributed to the construction of the metro: "Enthusiastic books will be written about the member of the Komsomol present on the construction site of the Moscow metro, to them the poet should address his best poems."[536]

Paraphrasing what Mikhail Bakhtin declares in his essay, *Epic and Novel* ("[i]n the past, everything is good"),[537] one can say about *HFP* that "in the present, everything is good." Gorky's insistence on the importance of depicting the positive aspects of the new reality[538] perfectly fits into this framework. In a historical narrative in which a past of Tsarist exploitation has to be denounced and obliterated by the heroic deeds of the present and, at the same time, in which there is a constant stress on the transience of the present because of an impending Communist society, one of the main functions of the chronicles of *HFP* is, as we have seen, to serve as zero-point of Soviet literary history and, therefore, of historical and literary memory for the Soviet citizen of the future. For this reason, the volumes work in two directions: on the hand, the troubled pre-historical years of the individual before the Revolution has a functional significance for the contemporary citizen who, becoming a fully formed Soviet citizen *within* the book, embodies the epic hero for subsequent generations. The chronotope of *HFP* novels balances the present of the construction site and the absolute Communist future which, like the past in Bakhtin's vision of the epic, is distant and separated by an "absolute epic distance." The

[536] Mekhlis, *Rasskazy stroitelei metro,* 13. ("О комсомольцах на стройке московского метро будут написаны восторженные книги, о них должны писать поэты свои лучшие поэмы.")
[537] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 15.
[538] In "O pisateliakh-samouchkakh," Gorky contrasts the pessimism of the intelligentsia with the liveliness of those who have to endure dire straits and promotes a proactive and positive attitude towards life, fellow human beings, and nature, which is inherent in the Russian people and which goes against the fatalism and mysticism of Mongol blood. Gor'kii, "O pisateliakh-samouchkakh," 126. Moreover, in his two 1927-1928 letters "Rabsel'koram" (To Worker-Rural Correspondents) and "Eshche rabsel'koram" (Again to Worker-Peasant Correspondents), Gorky criticizes the creeping pessimism among *rabkory* (worker correspondents) and *sel'kory* (rural correspondents). Specifically, in "Eshche rabsel'koram" he labels them as "dirt cleaners" (уборщики нечистот). Maksim Gor'kii, *Sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh*, vol. 24 (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1953), 313.

gambit of Communism, or utopia, to use a common expression, is to make people believe that this epic distance can actually be traveled. The description of the epic hero that Bakhtin gives can also be fruitfully applied to the author-workers and author-convicts that populate these volumes:

> There is not the slightest gap between his authentic essence and its external manifestation. All his potential, all his possibilities are realized utterly in his external social position, in the whole of his fate and even in his external appearance; outside of his predetermined fate and predetermined position there is nothing. He has already become everything that he could become, and he could become only that which he has already become. He is entirely externalized in the most elementary, almost literal sense: everything in him is exposed and loudly expressed: his internal world and all his external characteristics, his appearance and his actions all lie on a single plane. His view of himself coincides completely with others' views of him—the view of his society (his community), the epic singer and the audience also coincide.[539]

Unveiling the authentic essence of every character, by means of (re-)forging, showing that "everyone is good" is what these volumes do, and this authentic essence obviously coincides with the Soviet essence, with becoming an authentic Soviet citizen. Gorky never stopped repeating in his writings and speeches that, by nature, man is not a scoundrel (*chelovek ne negodiai*) and that, drawing from the Marxist idea of historical determinism, it is the social environment and the political system to be blamed for people's shortcomings. Displaying impeccable Socialist optimism and *entuziazm*, one of the educators in *Bolshevtsy*, the book that came out in 1936 and that describes the labor-commune (*trudkommuna*) for troubled youth established in Bolshevo, not far from Moscow, despite her everyday struggles with the boys, says: "Nonetheless, I am convinced that in every person there is a good principle. One needs only to awaken it, and then humanity and love will come."[540] The (re)forging of the individual is his "predetermined fate" as soon as he enters the Bolshevo community or participates in the

[539] Bakhtin, *Epic and Novel*, 34.
[540] Gor'kii, Gorbunov, and Luzgin, *Bolshevtsy*, 75. ("А все-таки я уверена – в каждом человеке есть доброе начало, надо только его разбудить, тогда придут человечность и любовь.")

construction of the White Sea-Baltic Canal; his becoming part of a larger *kollektiv*, understanding higher social and political goals, is the "predetermined fate" and "predetermined position" in which he participates in the building of the Moscow metro or working in a Socialist factory. Party leader Starostin sums up this point in *Rasskazy stroitelei metro* as follows:

> During the construction of the Moscow metro, engineers, technicians, workers, and planners attended not only a school to create a gigantic construction, unknown so far in our country; they attended an extraordinary school of social and Party training, which elevated their understanding of the tasks of socialist construction to the level of the State.[541]

In this passage, the construction of the metro becomes a metaphor for the construction of Socialism, which is a "so far unknown gigantic structure." As a consequence, in *HFP* epic singer and audience coincide. There is no observation from the outside, no surplus of vision in a Bakhtinian sense. On the contrary, analyzed from this perspective, the ultimate goal of Socialist literature becomes the conflation of the I-for-myself, I-for-others and other-for-me concepts introduced in *Avtor i geroi*.[542] In chapter twenty-nine of *Belomor*, after the construction of the canal has been completed, a father and his son visit the finished object. The child asks his father how deep the canal is and if a whale or a house would fit in it. His father answers that they would.[543] Then:

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[541] Kosarev, *Rasskazy stroitelei metro*, 35. ("На строительстве московского метрополитена инженеры, техники, рабочие, проектировщики прошли не только школу по созданию неизвестного до сих пор в нашей стране гигантского сооружения – они прошли и исключительную школу партийно-общественной выучки, поднявшую их на высоту государственного понимания задач социалистического строительства.")

[542] Mikhail Bakhtin. "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," in *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, trans. Vadim Liapunov, 4-256 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).

[543] The canal never acquired the strategic importance it was supposed to have in terms enhancing commerce and transportation of goods. The reason was precisely that, unlike what the father tells his son, it was too shallow to accommodate larger cargos.

> The son falls into silence. He is "imagining" as all children do. The canal rises before him, blue as blue; thousands of axes flash; songs thunder in the air; music is everywhere—music that one cannot understand.
>
> . . .
>
> Years will pass. The boy will grow and learn. He will go for a pleasure trip along the canal. The Karelian lakes will rise up before him, and the locks and the dams. There will be hotels there and electric stations, factories and farms; and the barracks where once the wonderful builders lived will seem miraculous to him.[544]

The Soviet citizens of the Communist future were intended to read these volumes in the same way this child was looking at the dam.

[544] Gorky, Auerbach, Firin, and Williams-Ellis, *Belomor*, 302-03.

CONCLUSION

Let us make our way back to Gorky's final speech at the first Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, in which, in front of his colleagues and the "distinguished masters of European literature,"[545] the writer affirms that collective creativity could produce "unprecedently interesting books"[546] and therefore should become the literary method of the proletariat. In "The Destruction of the Individual Self," published twenty-five years before in the collection *Essays on the Philosophy of Collectivism*, Gorky declared that "Myth and epos, as well as language, the main actor of an epoch, are the manifestations of the collective creativity of an entire nation, not the individual mode of thinking of one person."[547] As I showed in the previous chapter, *History of Factories and Plants* represented this striving towards the creation of a national Soviet epos, the zero-point of Soviet literature, the era of conception that people of an absolute Communist future would look to as the mythical beginning of the Soviet nation. The task of writing about this process of construction had to be undertaken on by the workers who were laying its literal foundations. This was possible because the workers, having become true Soviet citizens, were able to narrate their story in a voice that was specific and yet simultaneously reproducible and representative of the entire nation. At the same time, literature itself became the umpteenth organizing principle of the proletariat. This idea of *vsenarodnoe iskusstvo* is indeed the ultimate goal of this vision of collective creativity.

In this dissertation, I showed how the concept of collective creativity was fluid from the outset and how it was variously interpreted throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. All these approaches, however, gravitated towards mutually exclusive camps. On the one hand, there was

[545] Luppol, Rozental', and Tret'iakov, *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s''ezd sovetskikh pisatelei*, 677.
[546] Ibid.
[547] Gor'kii, "Narushenie lichnosti," 26.

the idea of collective creativity understood as construction and industrial practice (i.e., literature as a conveyor belt, montage, collage, etc.). These ideas were put forward and explored by Proletkult, Constructivists, and the factographers of LEF; this is also where avant-garde poetics more strongly resonated on the ideological and political level. In 1934, this understanding was still in the air, as Ilya Erenburg testified at the same Congress:

> . . . But one could hardly make a lyrical poem or novel collectively. I hear conversations such as: the writer was an isolated craftsman, he must be replaced by a collective. I simply don't understand this. A living writer in our country is inevitably and unchangingly tied to the collective by thousands of threads. He does not think of himself nor of his heroes outside the collective. He depicts the world and people, however, through his own individual experience. The richer and better his individuality is, the livelier his heroes and the more monumental is the collective that he depicts. The creation of works of art is an individual matter, or more precisely, an intimate one. I am convinced that the literary brigades will figure in the history of our literature as a picturesque but short-lived detail of its younger years.[548]

Yet, as the debates show, by the early 1930s, the understanding of collective creativity had shifted towards ideas such as collective engagement and "production discussions" under the supervision of a higher authority. In this sense, the creation of the Union of Writers simply put an official stamp on a pre-existing idea. In Vostrogin's article "Rekonstruktsiia literatury," in which he claims that literature is destined to become a more powerful organizer of the masses than the newspaper, he lays out a vision of collective creativity that pushes for the creation of "literary workshops" (*literaturnye masterskie*) operating according to the principle of the scientific division of labor. He also describes how this process would unfold during over the course of meetings (*zasedaniia*) under the supervision of what he calls a "literary director" (*literaturnyi rezhisser*), whose role would be occupied by the most solid (*sil'nyi*) writer. Eventually, he claims, this would become the only mode of literary production. Despite the fact

[548] Quoted in Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Writer*, 375.

that his article, as we have seen, was harshly criticized, it is not hard to perceive how the mechanisms of the Union of Writers are similar in many aspects, in that it functioned as the sole literary workshop of the country under the direct supervision of the Party. For this reason, the creation of the Union of Writers is the logical outcome of the debates around collective creativity. Although exploring early narratives of Socialist Realism in their own right lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, I would thus like to offer some possible explanations as to why, under the leadership of the Union of Writers, a project such as *History of Factories and Plants* soon died out.

After 1931, unbridled collectivization became suspect. There was a call for the individualization of responsibility, for "art as accountability."[549] The focus now was not on the creation of the collective body of the proletariat—the goal, as we have seen, had been achieved—but on the calculation of individual input into the collective output. A production novel such as Valentin Kataev's *Time, Forward!* (1932) is exemplary in this sense. After 1935, we enter the second Five-Year Plan: these are the years of the highly individualistic Stakhanovite movement and of the cult of personality. In this sense, Socialist Realist writers can be compared to the Stakhanovs of literary practice. The idea of "beating time" outlined in *Time, Forward!*, or of fulfilling a Five Year-Plan in four years are concrete manifestations of the idea of "Socialist competition" (*sotsialisticheskoe sorevnovanie*), which, starting from the 1930s, would become one of the defining narratives of the Soviet Union and is already outlined in the volumes of *History of Factories and Plants.*

From the point of view of literary evolution, one may argue that Iurii Tynianov's credo—"the evolution of literature, as of other cultural systems, does not coincide either in tempo or in

[549] Ibid., 376.

character with the systems with which it is interrelated,"[550]— offers another possible interpretation as to why, in the end, the creation of collectively written literary works was not advanced further. The idea that literature should keep up with the accelerated pace of the Socialist construction was indeed powerful, but it did not automatically imply that the new elements could be instantaneously elevated to literary facts. On the contrary, Tynianov argues: "The evolution of the structural function occurs rapidly; the evolution of the literary function occurs over epochs."[551] While these projects pushed towards a major and rapid shift of the dominants by which a literary work was produced and received by author and reader, they also demonstrated a discrepancy between the rapid shift of the structural function of formal elements and their capacity to ossify with equal speed into literary facts. These works advanced new literary facts and demanded to be interpreted accordingly. From this point view, Socialist Realism can be understood as the recuperation not of old formal elements but of their old functions.

It is no accident that *History of Factories and Plants* was discontinued in 1938. The executive order that officially initiated the project and that was published in *Pravda* on October 11, 1931 listed thirty members in the editorial board (*redkollegiia*). By the end of 1939, half of them had been repressed.[552]

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[550] Iuryi Tynianov, "On Literary Evolution," in *Readings in Russian Poetics*, ed. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska, 72.
[551] Ibid.
[552] On this topic, see Lipták, "Die Entstehung des sozialistischen Realismus," 80. See also the letter written by Kaganovich to Stalin on September 6, 1931, in which Kaganovich introduces Stalin to Gorky's project. In this letter, Kaganovich includes (and criticizes) the editorial board suggested by Gorky. This list differs in significant ways from the official one that would appear in *Pravda* one month later. Stalin would answer on September 21, suggesting some changes. About Artemii Khalatov, for instance, he writes: "Khalatov is neither a writer nor an editor, and he is not familiar with factories." ("Халатов не писатель, не редактор и заводов не знает.") Khalatov would be repressed in 1938. See O. V. Khlevniuk et al., eds., *Stalin i Kaganovich: perepiska 1931-1936 gg.* (Moskva: ROSSPPEN, 2001), 85; 112. Kaganovich's letter (not Stalin's, though) can be found online at http://www.hist.msu.ru/Labour/DOCS/kagan31.htm (last accessed on January 13, 2019).



ОБ ИЗДАНИИ

„Истории заводов".

Постановление ЦК ВКП(б) от 10 октября 1931 года.

1. Одобрить предложение т. М. Горького и приступить к изданию серии сборников «Истории Заводов».

Сборники эти должны дать картину развития старых и возникновения новых заводов, их роль в экономике страны; положение рабочих до революции, формы и методы эксплоатации на старых заводах, борьбу рабочих с предпринимателями, бытовые условия, возникновение революционных организаций и роль каждого завода в революционном движении, роль завода и изменение отношений на заводе после революции, изменение типа рабочего, ударничество, соцсоревнование и подъем производства за последние годы.

К составлению «Истории Заводов» должны быть привлечены как сами рабочие, так и хозяйственники и инженерно-технический персонал.

2. Утвердить редколлегию «Истории Заводов» в составе тт.: Горький, Катаянович Л., Постышев, Андреев А. А., Енукидзе, Стецкий, Бухарин, Пятаков, Шверник, Косарев, Цихон, Богушевский, Вс. Иванов, Авербах, Гронский, Гастев, Панкратова, Мехлис, Попов Н., Жига, Либединский, Колоттилов, Терехов, Самойлов, Сулимов, Чумандрин, Зайцев, Писарев А., Кривов, Цинерович, Сейфуллина.

3. Издание «Истории Заводов» возложить на ОГИЗ.

ЦК ВКП(б).

№ 2

ИЗ ПОСТАНОВЛЕНИЯ ЦК ВКП(б)
ОБ ИЗДАНИИ «ИСТОРИИ ЗАВОДОВ»

10 октября 1931 г.

1. Одобрить предложение тов. М. Горького и приступить к изданию серии сборников «История заводов».

Сборники эти должны дать картину развития старых и возникновения новых заводов, их роль в экономике страны, положение рабочих до революции, формы и методы эксплуатации на старых заводах, борьбу рабочих с предпринимателями, бытовые условия, возникновение революционных организаций и роль каждого завода в революционном движении, роль завода и изменение отношений на заводе после революции, изменение типа рабочего, ударничество, соцсоревнование и подъем производства за последние годы.

К составлению «Истории заводов» должны быть привлечены как сами рабочие, так и хозяйственники и инженерно-технический персонал.

Впервые опубликовано в газете «Правда» № 281, 11 октября 1931 г., стр. 1.

Печатается по тексту газеты.

Постановлением утверждался также персональный состав редколлегии (позже называемый Главной редакцией или Политредакцией), куда входили А. М. Горький, П. П. Постышев, А. А. Андреев, Д. Е. Сулимов, Н. М. Шверник, Н. Н. Попов, А. И. Стецкий, Л. З. Мехлис, А. В. Косарев, А. М. Панкратова, Ф. Самойлов, И. Гронский, Вс. Иванов, Ю. Либединский, Л. Сейфуллина, М. Чумандрин, И. Жига и другие.

Издание «Истории заводов» было возложено на ОГИЗ.

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Illustration 43/44. Above, the executive order published on the front-page of *Pravda* on October 11, 1931. On the right, the same order reproduced in L. M. Zak and S. S. Zimina, eds., *A. M. Gor'kii i sozdanie istorii fabrik i zavodov* (Moskva: Izd-vo sotsial'no-ekon. litry, 1959). The list of names is slightly different (Zak and Zimina add, for instance, Ivan Zhiga, who was also in the original list by Gorky); some are left out and indicated as "and others" (*i drugie*). Most of those who are left out were repressed between 1937 and 1939.

Moreover, Gorky died in June of 1936. If, as it seems,[553] he was the most ardent and active promoter of the project, the dismissal of *HFP* also appears to be a logical consequence of his death. Yet it seems to me that, as I have tried to show in this dissertation, the primary goal of collective creativity was to portray, as well as to effectuate, the transformation of the crowd into

[553] In her speech at the First Congress of Soviet Writers, Lidiia Seifullina, who was a member of the editorial board of *HFP*, declared that "in the last years, [e]ditors have lost interest in educating and finding new writers, with the sole exception of Maksim Gorky." ("У редактора в последние годы пропал интерес к воспитанию и нахождению новых писателей. Их отыскивает только Максим Горький.") See Luppol, Rozental', and Tret'iakov, *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s''ezd sovetskikh pisatelei*, 237.

the collective proletarian body. Having achieved this goal in practice, its original raison d'etre had been surpassed.

The bourgeois hero had died.

The collective body of the proletariat had been made.

The coryphaei of literature[554] had taken a step forward.

Now it was time to make the Socialist hero.[555]

[554] "Kollektivizatsiia pisatel'skogo truda." *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, June 9, 1930, 3.
[555] See Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

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