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**The Final Campaign Against Boris Pilnyak:
The Controversy over *Meat: A Novel* (1936)**

“Pilnyak is misleading and deceiving us.”
Stalin, 1926¹

“Pilnyak can depict only the backside of
our revolution.”
Stalin, 1929²

“Whatever happened to Boris Pilnyak?” If this question had been asked near the end of 1937, when the once popular writer suddenly disappeared from public view, most of his Soviet contemporaries would probably not have been able to answer the query with any degree of certainty. Pilnyak’s name had been very much in the news as he withstood two vicious campaigns of vilification launched against him in the late 1920s, when the official Soviet press vehemently attacked him for writing what they considered slanderous, if not treasonous, works of prose fiction that advanced blatantly “counter-revolutionary” and “anti-Soviet” sentiments. At the time, the generic term “Pilnyakism” [*pil’niakovshchina*] was even coined to label the decadent modernist style associated with his works, a fragmented style that threatened to undermine orthodox Soviet literature and its endorsement of socialist construction. By the early 1930s, however, Pilnyak seems to have succeeded in quieting down those zealous proletarian and Communist critics who had been hounding him so mercilessly during the early Stalin years. He published a production novel, *The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea* (*Volga vpadaet v Kaspiiskoe more*, 1930), which appeared to endorse the First Five-Year Plan by depicting the construction of a gigantic hydroelectric dam near the ancient city of Kolomna. Soon thereafter, Pilnyak was granted permission to travel abroad, visiting such capitalist

countries as Japan and the United States, he was allowed to participate in the first Plenum of the newly created Union of Soviet Writers in 1932, and he undertook trips to Five-Year Plan industrialization projects in Central Asia. Moreover, throughout the first half of the 1930s many of Pilnyak's works were being published regularly in the prestigious thick journal, *Novyi mir*. This unorthodox fellow-traveler, whose literary works had been repeatedly excoriated for their modernist stylistic features as well as their lack of political and ideological correctness by fervid advocates of proletarian literature and culture during the late 1920s, seems to have been left in relative peace and quiet in the years that immediately followed the Party's disbanding of RAPP (the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) in April 1932.

Early in 1936, however, Pilnyak's name suddenly re-emerged as one of the principal targets (in literature), along with Dmitry Shostakovich (in music), Vsevolod Meyerhold (in theatre), and Sergei Eisenstein (in film), of the Party's vigorous battle against formalism and naturalism in Soviet art.³ At a congress of writers held in Moscow in March 1936, Pilnyak's most recent work, an unpublished novel titled *Meat: A Novel (Miaso: Roman, 1936)*, was savagely excoriated for the numerous formalist and naturalist elements it was said to contain. The author himself was roundly condemned for having an irresponsible relationship toward his craft as well as disdain, if not outright contempt, for his reader. Speakers at the congress insisted that Pilnyak, as a fellow traveler who still harbored bourgeois sensibilities, lacked the commitment to study the new social relations in Soviet Russia and to develop a correct understanding of the new Soviet reality. Six months later, at a literary evening hosted by the editorial office of *Novyi mir*, Pilnyak's "sins" from a decade earlier were suddenly revived and revisited in public

view. Not only had the author failed to express sufficient remorse for having published such slanderous, anti-Soviet works as “Tale of the Unextinguished Moon” (“Povest’ nepogashennoi luny,” 1926) and *Mahogany* (*Krasnoe derevo*, 1929) a decade earlier, but he was also charged with having provided financial support for the exiled Trotskyite, Karl Radek, and his family. These criminal actions in support of the Trotsky-Zinoviev terrorist center, it was pointed out, indicated that Pilnyak’s self-characterization as a “non-Party Bolshevik” was simply not warranted. Yet another less-than-amicable discussion of the suddenly embattled writer and his allegedly anti-Soviet works of literature was held less than two months later at a meeting of the Presidium of the Writers Union in October 1936, when the author was asked to present a report on his creative activity. Those writers who were in attendance at the meeting concluded that Pilnyak was the type of non-Party writer who stubbornly refused to heed the constructive criticism and helpful advice that Soviet readers, critics, and fellow writers had been offering him. Instead he persisted in producing literary works that did not fulfill the new function of art in Soviet Russia. Indeed, Pilnyak’s latest novel was said to testify to the fact that the author was still being held captive by decadent bourgeois aesthetic views on art.

The renewed attacks upon Pilnyak that commenced in March 1936 culminated in October 1937 with the writer’s arrest at his dacha in the writers’ colony at Peredelkino. Convicted on charges spying for Japan, plotting terrorist acts upon high-ranking Party leaders (specifically, Stalin and Yezhov), and being a Trotskyite, Pilnyak was executed in April 1938 (immediately following his fifteen-minute trial) by a single bullet shot to the back of the head. Although we now know the answer to the question of what happened

to Boris Pilnyak in the late 1930s, we still do not know for certain exactly why this well-known writer was suddenly liquidated as an enemy of the people at the height of Stalin's Great Terror. This essay will argue that Pilnyak fell out of the good graces of both the Soviet authorities and the official literary establishment as a result of an ill-fated attempt on his part to write a Socialist Realist novel about the history of the meat business in modern Russia. Late in 1935 he was approached by Anastas Mikoyan, the Commissar of the Food Industry, who wanted an established Soviet writer to write a production novel about the impressive achievements of the recently modernized Soviet meat industry, one that would focus especially on the enormous, state-of-the-art meat processing plant, built in Moscow in 1933, that bore Mikoyan's name. Ivan Gronskey, the editor of *Novyi mir* (as well as a long-time patron and friend of the writer), strongly encouraged Pilnyak to accept this commission because he viewed the move as a way for the author to stay in the good graces of Soviet officials, many of whom still remembered the purportedly slanderous, if not treasonous, things Pilnyak had said about Soviet Russia in his two controversial works of fiction from the late 1920s.⁴ Pilnyak himself, according to his wife, was vehemently opposed to accepting this commission from the Food Commissar, but Mikoyan stubbornly insisted and the writer eventually relented.⁵

The result was *Meat: A Novel*, the aforementioned industrial novel about the development of slaughterhouses in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Russia that he co-authored with Sergei Belyaev, a physician and writer of science fiction, who seems to have served in this project as Pilnyak's silent partner (as an expert on human biology and animal science). The novel appeared in serialized form in the February, March, and April 1936 issues of *Novyi mir* and was scheduled to be released as

a separate volume later that same year by the publishing house Sovetskii pisatel'.⁶ That book contract was suddenly voided a few months before its scheduled appearance in print, however, reportedly because Mikoyan refused to give permission for *Meat: A Novel* to be published in book form unless certain revisions were made to the manuscript of the serialized version that had just appeared in *Novyi mir*. Mikoyan apparently wanted Pilnyak to remove some scenes that depicted Soviet reality in a less than flattering light, but the author refused.⁷ *Meat: A Novel*, as we shall see, is the work that appears to have triggered the final – and fatal – official campaign against Pilnyak, who was attacked throughout 1936 by readers, critics, and many of his literary brethren alike as an author who persisted in writing anti-Soviet works of literature. As a result, he was not able to escape the same fate that was befalling so many of those gifted artists in the Soviet Union during the Great Terror of the late 1930s who were no longer felt to be needed by, or useful to, the Stalinist regime: namely, arrest, incarceration, interrogation, and ultimately execution. Moreover, his editor Gronsky, who had purportedly saved Pilnyak's career back in 1930 when he convinced the hounded author to write his first Soviet production novel (*The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea*) and who had strongly encouraged him five years later to accept Mikoyan's "social command" to write yet another Socialist Realist novel (*Meat: A Novel*), likewise suffered painful repercussions as a result of the serial publication of this poorly received novel. Gronsky lost his job as editor of *Novyi mir* in April 1937 for his putative lack of "Bolshevik vigilance" in allowing several counter-revolutionary, anti-Soviet works by fellow travelers, such as Pilnyak, to be published in the journal and for playing the role of patron to enemies of the people in literature and the arts. Soon after Pilnyak's execution in April 1938, Gronsky was himself arrested (in June

1938) and subsequently sent to a Stalinist labor camp, where he languished until he was rehabilitated in 1954.⁸

Mikoyan's Social Command: A Novel about the Soviet Meat Industry

When Commissar Mikoyan in 1935 first came up with the idea of getting a well-known writer to produce a literary work that would glorify the achievements of the recently modernized Soviet meat industry, it was only natural that he would turn to Ivan Gronsky for help in recruiting possible candidates for this assignment. Gronsky, as Katerina Clark and Evgeny Dobrenko point out, was Stalin's "right-hand man" in literary matters during the early 1930s.⁹ This highly respected Party journalist and literary official, who had previously served as chief editor of *Izvestiia*, played a key role in the creation of the Writers Union and the organization of the first-ever Writers Congress in 1934.¹⁰ Indeed, Gronsky is reputed to have been the person – along with Stalin himself – who coined the term "Socialist Realism," which was subsequently chosen to designate the officially approved artistic method that was initiated in May 1932.¹¹ Mikoyan, who frequently attended the informal meetings between Party officials and Soviet writers that the editor of *Novyi mir* regularly hosted at his apartment in the Dom Pravitel'stva on Serafimovich Street in Moscow, was also aware that Gronsky was a friend and patron of Pilnyak, who years earlier had given the Commissar an inscribed copy of one of his latest works as a gift in honor of the birth of Mikoyan's son Sergo in June 1929.¹² In any event, Mikoyan met with Gronsky and Pilnyak at some point late in 1935 to discuss with them questions about the particular form this proposed literary work should take. Should it provide the history of the Russian meat industry in general during the late nineteenth and early

twentieth century? Or should it provide the history of one particular Soviet meat factory (preferably the Mikoyan meat packing plant built in 1933)? Or should it attempt to do both? Should it take the form of a work of fictional literature? Or should it be a semi-essayistic work that stands on the border between a sketch (*oчерk*) and a novel (*roman*)?¹³

For this new project Mikoyan seems to have had in mind the type of Soviet production novel – or Five-Year Plan novel – that emerged out of the “History of Factories and Plants” project initiated in 1931 by Maksim Gorky, who had originally conceived this proletarian project as a “Bolshevik demonstration of the most significant industrial enterprises in the U.S.S.R.”¹⁴ These “histories” were designed to show the sharp contrast between the “semi-bestial cultural conditions of everyday life” maintained by the old bourgeoisie in the capitalist factories they had constructed in tsarist Russia and the new modern, hygienic, highly efficient factories – based upon Socialist principles and featuring the latest technological advances – that had begun to be built following the October Revolution.¹⁵ Soviet writers – in many cases, entire brigades of Soviet writers – were commissioned to embark upon observation trips out to the sprawling construction sites of such gigantic industrial projects as the enormous steel mill in Magnitogorsk (1932), the Lenin Dam in Dnieprpetrovsk (1932), the Belomor-White Sea Canal in the arctic north (1933), and the Moscow Metro in the nation’s capital (1935). During their visits to these construction sites, writers were expected to document how the various industrialization initiatives undertaken as part of Stalin’s First Five-Year Plan were radically transforming not only the Russian countryside (replacing remnants of capitalist backwardness with modern technological advancements), but also the psyche of the

Russian people themselves (replacing the selfish egoism of bourgeois and peasant thinking with the selfless collectivist spirit of the proletarian-socialist mindset).

Not surprisingly, the most successful novels in this Soviet production genre (successful in terms of their artistic merits) proved to be those works – such as Leonid Leonov’s *The River Sot* (*Sot’*, 1930), Pilnyak’s *The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea* (1930), and Ilya Ehrenburg’s *The Second Day* (*Vtoroi den’*, 1933) – that were penned by fellow travelers who possessed genuine literary talent, rather than by proletarian zealots who did not.¹⁶ It seemed prudent on Commissar Mikoyan’s part, therefore, to turn to Gronsky for assistance in recruiting bona fide writers to participate in this meat-industry project. Unlike many of his counterparts at the time, especially those literary officials who continued to harass and persecute non-Party writers as anti-Soviet class enemies even after the disbanding of RAPP, the editor of *Novyi mir* was well known for his efforts to try to win established literary masters over to the cause of socialist construction as well as to the creation of a Socialist Realist brand of literature that would depict these new industrial achievements in a highly memorable and aesthetically satisfying way. Indeed, Gronsky conceptualized Socialist Realism as the type of art that would combine high artistic quality with a progressive ideological orientation toward Marxism: in his words, “Socialist Realism in the domain of pictorial art are the works of Rembrandt, Rubens and Repin put in service to the cause of the proletarian class, to the cause of Socialism.”¹⁷ It seemed prudent on Gronsky’s part, in turn, to recruit Pilnyak, a prominent (perhaps even paradigmatic) non-Party fellow traveler and an acknowledged literary master, to be the writer who would pen this Socialist Realist ode to the Mikoyan meat processing plant. After all, Pilnyak had already written one successful Soviet production novel (*The Volga*

Flows to the Caspian Sea) and had already participated in observation trips to Soviet construction sites, traveling to the famous shipbuilding town of Sormovo in 1928 to acquaint himself with the life of the metal workers who labored there and later to Tadzhikistan in 1930 to witness first-hand how this recently annexed Central Asian republic was being miraculously transformed from a backward, sterile desert wasteland into a productive contributor to Soviet Russia's modernization and industrialization drive.¹⁸ Surely Pilnyak could be counted upon to visit the nearby Mikoyan meat processing plant in Moscow, observe its efficient operations, sleuth in its archives (for data about the history of the meat business in pre-revolutionary Russia), and then compose a Socialist Realist novel that would glorify this gigantic, new Soviet factory with its state-of-the-art technology.

Pilnyak's first Soviet production novel, *The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea*, which depicts the construction of a gigantic Soviet dam on Russia's most famous river, is generally regarded as the author's attempt to redeem himself in the eyes of the Stalinist regime by making amends for the much maligned novella *Mahogany* (nearly all of whose content is incorporated into the longer work). But as Vera Reck observes, even Pilnyak's initial venture into composing a Five-Year Plan novel did not fully meet the requirements of the genre, for in his novel "human affairs on the personal level moved to center stage, while the construction of the 'monolith' near Kolomna receded into the background."¹⁹ As another scholar explains, Pilnyak includes in his novel most, if not all, of the genre features expected in a typical production novel: for example, almost all of the story's action takes place on the construction site itself, evil conspirators ("wreckers") plot together to sabotage the project, technological processes in the construction project are

described in some detail, and so on. But all of this, Mikhail Falchikov observes, lies on the periphery of the narrative, not at its very center. “The essence of the novel,” he writes, “consists in how at the construction site the lives of four engineers – and their families, wives, and lovers – are intertwined.”²⁰ It is largely as a result of the author’s unorthodox treatment of what would quickly become an orthodox theme in this essential new genre of Socialist Realist literature that scholars have generally come to characterize Pilnyak’s first production novel as “a contradictory and tortured narrative that deviates from later representations of the genre in nearly every way possible.”²¹ More importantly, Pilnyak’s contemporaries, especially those belligerent members of RAPP who were convinced that the author was an inveterately counter-revolutionary and anti-Soviet fellow traveler, harshly condemned *The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea* as a false, insincere endorsement of socialist construction that at its core advances the anti-Marxist belief that biological instincts are superior to social forces in shaping human behavior.²²

Five years later, Pilnyak writes a second production novel that succeeds even less in creating the appearance of endorsing a gigantic project of socialist construction. Once again, the author provides numerous features of the genre that readers had come to expect in an industrial novel and populated it with stock characters from Socialist Realist fiction: for example, a young proletarian hero (Misha Rogozhin), whose austere, ascetic lifestyle reflects his selfless devotion to the socialist cause; a villainous foreign capitalist (James Hillfauter), who conspires to sabotage the efforts to modernize the Soviet meat industry; and several home-grown bourgeois specialists descended from prerevolutionary times (the meat traders Zaitsev, Lavdovsky, and Batriukov the Younger), who seek to revive and extend the pernicious capitalist influence that these “Red merchants” had exerted

during NEP and thus to undermine socialist construction during the First Five-Year Plan.²³ But whereas *The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea* at least included a relatively coherent plot, *Meat: A Novel* provides instead a highly chaotic and fragmented narrative, interrupted repeatedly by extended digressions, in which the author discusses at great length peripheral topics ranging from gluttony, chemistry, and endocrinology to the workings of municipal government, organ therapy, and economics. Worse yet, the author does not even bother to depict the construction of the modern Moscow meat packing plant that Commissar Mikoyan wanted the novel to glorify; he merely speaks about its much greater efficiency and productive output in comparison to what had preceded it in tsarist times. Moreover, the brief depiction of operations at the Mikoyan meat packing plant, and of the young Soviet people who work there, appears only near the very end of Pilnyak's novel. The vast majority of *Meat: A Novel* is devoted to detailing the growth of the meat business and the development of slaughterhouse operations in the late tsarist period, not their transformation in the early Soviet period.

The 1936 Campaign Against Formalism and Naturalism

As was noted at the outset of this article, the failure of *Meat: A Novel* to satisfy Commissar Mikoyan's expectations for a conventional Socialist Realist novel about the achievements of the Soviet meat industry coincided with the start of the campaign against formalism and naturalism in Soviet art early in 1936. That campaign was launched on January 28, 1936 with the publication of an editorial article in *Pravda*, titled "Muddle Instead of Music: About the Opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*" ("Sumbur

vmesto muzyki: Ob opere *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda*").²⁴ The anonymous author of this article reproaches Dmitry Shostakovich for the "expressly discordant and muddled torrent of sounds" (which, in places, turns into a veritable "cacophony") emitted in his latest opera. The young composer is castigated for providing a "leftist muddle" and a "leftist monstrosity" in place of the "natural" and "human" music that a Socialist Realist musical score should contain. The article's author also bemoans the "petit-bourgeois formalist spasms" and "highly coarse naturalism" that are evident in the opera's depiction of love scenes, all of which, he exclaims in disgust, are "coarse, primitive, and vulgar." Sheila Fitzpatrick examines the *Pravda* attack on Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* in the context of a Soviet "anti-formalism" that, she claims, stretches from militant Communist and proletarian organizations (such as RAPM and RAPP), which terrorized putatively "bourgeois" Soviet writers and artists in the late 1920s, to the *zhdanovshchina* of the late 1940s. She writes that during this time frame the "formalist" label was applied to art that was "stylized, modernist, and pessimistic," and that took its inspiration from the West. "The antithesis of formalism – that is, the art that *Pravda* endorsed and sought to encourage," she adds, "was realistic, traditional, and optimistic, and took its inspiration from folk art."²⁵ Where "formalism" was a code word for an unhealthy, even perverse, modernism that was deeply influenced by the decadent art being produced in the bourgeois West (a capitalist culture said to be in sharp decline), "naturalism" denoted a vulgarity, tastelessness, and pornography that was roundly condemned as morally unacceptable in accord with what Fitzpatrick calls the "new puritanism" – the "spirit of puritan vigilantism" – that was deeply embedded in Stalinist culture of the late 1930s.²⁶

As one high-ranking Soviet official made clear at the time, the campaign against formalism and naturalism that was launched by the *Pravda* article of January 1936 was not restricted to Soviet music alone. Platon Kerzhentsev, the head of the newly created Committee on the Arts, insisted that this campaign should apply to “all fields of art without exception.”²⁷ Fitzpatrick, in fact, argues that the real target in this anti-formalism campaign was not the composer Shostakovich, whose musical work had not been greatly influenced by Western modernism and who was “back in official favor by the beginning of 1938,” but instead the avant-garde theater director, Vsevolod Meyerhold.²⁸ His modernist aesthetic combined precisely those “formalist” and “naturalist” features that were so virulently attacked not just in the *Lady Macbeth* article, but also in the several *Pravda* articles on this topic that followed immediately in its wake.²⁹ Indeed, the term “Meyerholdism” (*meierkhol’dshchina*) is itself invoked in the original *Pravda* article that attacked Shostakovich’s opera. The filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, as Maksimenkov has shown, was another hidden target of the 1936 campaign against formalism and naturalism in the arts.³⁰ One of the main targets of the Soviet anti-formalist campaign – if not *the* main target – in the field of literature, meanwhile, was Boris Pilnyak. At the All-Moscow Meeting of Writers, “About Formalism and Naturalism in Literature,” held during March 10-31, 1936, two speakers targeted Pilnyak specifically as an edifying example of a Soviet writer whose latest works suffered in a particularly debilitating way from the modernist virus invading from the decadent, bourgeois West, a virus that was said to be infecting the literary output of certain Soviet writers. The first attack on Pilnyak at the conference came from Vladimir Stavsky, the head of the Soviet Writers Union at the time, who complained about the opaque nature of Pilnyak’s 1935 novel, *The Ripening of*

the Fruit (Sozrevanie plodov).³¹ Not only did Stavsky find it extremely difficult to understand exactly what it was that Pilnyak was attempting to say in this particularly dense literary text, one that presents its material in an “encoded” way. He also found that there were numerous places in this work (these, evidently, were places that Stavsky *did* manage to decipher) that were both “fallacious” and “controversial” (464). “All of this,” Stavsky adds, “is the result of his [Pilnyak’s] irresponsible attitude toward his work as well as his scorn and disdain for his reader” (465).

The second speaker to attack Pilnyak at this meeting was Lev Subotsky, the editor of *Literaturnaia gazeta*, who focused his attention mainly on the author’s latest work, *Meat: A Novel*.³² The final installment of this serialized version of the novel had not even appeared yet in *Novyi mir* when Subotsky stood up at the conference on March 23, 1936 to speak out strongly against it. That did not stop him, however, from characterizing Pilnyak’s new novel as “a unique combination of formalism with an extraordinarily coarse, superficial, empirical naturalism” (487). In addition, *Meat: A Novel*, according to Subotsky, does not even deserve to be called a novel. “Why is this work called a novel?” he asks.

You read the first page, then you turn to the second, and everywhere you find a banal, official-sounding pile of facts and events that crop up during the entire history of the city of Moscow and other major cities in our country. The novel speaks here about facts and processes connected with the rise of the meat business. The first page, the second page, the third page. You think to yourself: when are any people finally going to make their appearance? But then it seems like a new character has appeared. Some merchant is named. You’d like to see –

beyond the first name, the patronymic, and the surname – a real, live human being. But that’s not the case. It turns out that he has been given a name because he submitted to the city council an application for permission to organize a slaughterhouse on one of the city streets. This is how the narrative exposition proceeds. (493)

“In essence,” Subotsky concludes, “this is a scientific treatise on the theme of how the slaughterhouse business arose in Moscow and other cities: in Tiflis, Baku, and so on. This is not simply a strictly scientific, objective exposition, however. No, it is embellished with all manner of secondary features and background details, so that externally it resembles a work of fiction” (493). After making a disparaging allusion to James Joyce (who at this point in time epitomized in Russia the modernist artist from the decadent, bourgeois West), Subotsky reiterates the charge that *Meat: A Novel* combines “formalistic adornment, formalistic refinement” with “coarse naturalism” (493). “This combination of formalism with coarse naturalism,” he points out, “is as characteristic of our current literature as it is of Shostakovich’s music” (493). Finally, Subotsky offers his opinion as to why Pilnyak’s latest work is riddled with such formalistic and naturalistic shortcomings. To his mind, the trouble stems from the author’s inability to set about to study the “new social relations” in the Soviet Union. The study of this new reality proceeds not from traveling “mechanically” to factories or collective farms all across the U.S.S.R. Instead “the writer, by accumulating the rich life experience of an observer of, and a participant in, the enormous turn around in life that is taking place in our country, would be able to comprehend and interpret this transformation” (493). A contemporary

writer like Pilnyak needs to develop what Subotsky calls a “correct understanding” of this new Soviet reality (493).

Subotsky’s complaint about Pilnyak’s latest novel not resembling a bona fide novel, but reading instead like a scientific treatise, was echoed two months later when a pair of scathing reviews of *Meat: A Novel* appeared in the Soviet press. The first review, “Meat and Variations” (“Miaso i variatsii”), written by Zelik Shteinman, appeared in the May 12, 1936 issue of *Literaturnyi Leningrad*.³³ The critic begins his assessment of Pilnyak’s latest novel by observing sardonically that the author of *Meat: A Novel*, when he was choosing, from among the numerous shining names in the firmament of world literature, an appropriate model for this work – a literary forebear who could not be accused of “naturalism or, worse yet, of militant formalism” – played it safe by selecting not a famous novelist at all, but rather the well-known cookbook author Elena Molokhovets (“non-Party” Molokhovets, as the critic calls her).³⁴ “This lady is the author of only one book,” Shteinman writes, “but on the other hand one cannot accuse her book of either formalism or naturalism.” Moreover, the methodology Molokhovets uses in that book is both “simple” and “friendly,” he observes as he launches, tongue in cheek, into an extended culinary metaphor to describe the “recipe” Pilnyak followed when he went about concocting (“cooking up”) his latest book:

You take a pound of ordinary meat and you prepare it for cooking by dressing it up. First you wrap it up in pages torn out of an encyclopedic dictionary. The next morning it is covered with a layer of statistics, chemistry, medicine, and geography. All of this is then finely chopped up and interlayered with petals of tried and tested *belle lettres*, before it is left to set for a short time in a desk

drawer. Then, after it has finished setting sufficiently, it is poured into a sauce made from a selection of choice citations. Cranberries from a collective farm and some sweet pseudo-Stakhanovite water are added for taste. All of this concoction, after it has been adequately heated up, is then served up to the reader. A splendid dish! It was tested in the very best of homes, particularly in the home of the famous gourmand, Comrade Gronsky, the editor of *Novyi mir*, who recently published the novel *Meat* by B. Pilnyak and S. Belyaev. It is true, however, that one can call this work a novel only out of especial respect for the literary services and contributions that Comrade Gronsky has rendered.

Turning quite serious for a moment, Shteinman confesses that this latest work to bear the signature of the famous Soviet writer Boris Pilnyak produces a sad impression. “You see clearly,” he notes, “how the celebrated author stands in danger of becoming transformed into a literary artisan who is indifferent to his legacy in the history of our young artistic tradition and who, like a Saltykovian enthusiast, is governed by only one consideration: ‘Cook it up? We’ll cook it up!’ And it gets cooked up. Thus he cooked up *The Ripening of the Fruit*. Thus he cooked up (together with Belyaev) *Meat* in a completely parodic way.” “And, meanwhile, as they say, the years are passing,” Shteinman concludes sadly. “Isn’t it time, as they say, to give some thought to one’s soul?”

A second review, titled “Contract Literature” (“Podriadnaia literatura”) by Aron Erlikh, appeared in the May 24, 1936 issue of *Izvestiia*.³⁵ Like Shteinman, Erlikh questions whether *Meat: A Novel* may rightly be called a novel at all, characterizing it instead as a “hybrid experiment” that combines a “dubious report” with some “foolish and stupid” *belle lettres*. Indeed, Erlikh notes, the overly trusting editor of *Novyi mir* was

sorely deceived and duped when he agreed to publish this work with the subtitle *roman* in his prestigious journal. Erlikh then echoes Shteinman's concern about the surprisingly poor artistic quality of a work that was written by an established artist who possesses genuine literary talent. "Boris Pilnyak is the author of several successful literary works," Erlikh observes, "thus the country rightfully expects and requires from him remarkable works that are capable of arousing and inspiring the reader." "The appearance in print of a novel such as *Meat* can evoke only consternation and alarm," Erlikh continues, "because it is a work that amuses and entertains the reader with a facile, connect-the-dots type of fiction that has obviously been hastily written." Shteinman, as we have seen, had characterized Pilnyak as a *belle lettres* version of the great culinarian Molokhovets: that is, a writer who mixes together sundry narrative ingredients as he "cooks up" his latest work of fiction. Erlikh sees him instead as a pitiful and pathetic writer, much like the central character Geinim in Chekhov's short story, "The Writer" ("Pisatel'," 1885). The protagonist in that tale, a writer who is reduced to composing and editing advertisements for the wealthy owner of a tea shop, feels deeply ashamed of the way he has compromised his integrity as a literary artist by prostituting his writing talent. "I am deceiving Russia," Geinim sadly admits at story's end. "I am deceiving all of Russia, deceiving the fatherland, and all for a lousy crust of bread! My God!"³⁶ To Erlikh's mind, as his comparison clearly implies, the author of *Meat: A Novel* should be feeling the same shame and embarrassment as does Chekhov's morally compromised writer. Asking rhetorically what could have possibly driven a writer of Pilnyak's stature to take part in this banal literary endeavor, Erlikh opines, "Perhaps this is a case of literature by mandate? Perhaps this is a case of contract literature?"³⁷

Pilnyak's *Meat: A Novel* as "Hack Work"

Pilnyak's *Meat: A Novel* was very much a case of "contract literature," of course, since the author was in fact contracted by Commissar Mikoyan to compose this production novel. But it was not supposed to read so obviously like a work of literature that the author himself did not wish to write. The two highly negative reviews of *Meat: A Novel* that appeared in print during May 1936, immediately following completion of the serialization of the novel in *Novyi mir*, suggest that both critics – Shteinman and Erlikh – were well aware that Pilnyak had put forth a very lackadaisical effort in composing this ostensibly Socialist Realist work. But *Meat: A Novel* also received a poor reception from a group of average Soviet readers two months later when Arkady Iurisov, the manager of the Mikoyan meat processing plant in Moscow, invited the author Pilnyak, along with two of his editors at *Novyi mir* (Gronsky and Vlasov), to attend a meeting at his office with selected members of the factory's managerial staff to discuss the novel. Pilnyak fully expected to hear complaints about how the novel handled some technical issues or perhaps described some of the industrial processes at the plant inaccurately. The managers who attended the meeting, however, voiced their displeasure mainly over putative artistic and stylistic shortcomings that they found in the text. Like Shteinman and Erlikh, some of the managers insisted that this work should not be called a novel at all, since it lacks a clear opening and dénouement as well as a coherent plot. The officials at the Mikoyan plant also complained that *Meat: A Novel* portrays characters schematically, does not portray recognizable character types in anything but a highly

generalized way, does not feature a main hero or heroine, describes pre-revolutionary slaughterhouses and their personnel much more extensively than it does the modern meat packing plants now being constructed in the Soviet Union (along with the Stakhanovite laborers who work at them), and, worst of all, is dreadfully boring to read.³⁸ Both Gronskey and Vlasov spoke up strongly in Pilnyak's defense, commending him for the initiative he had shown in accepting Commissar Mikoyan's social mandate to write a novel about the Soviet meat industry. Nonetheless, *Meat: A Novel* was, as one scholar has put it, virtually "ripped to shreds" by the slaughterhouse officials who attended the meeting at the Mikoyan meat packing plant.³⁹

The June 2, 1936 issue of the Food Industry's weekly newspaper, *Za pishchevuiu industriiu*, which appeared a week after the aforementioned discussion took place at the Mikoyan meat processing plant, devoted an entire page to this meeting, printing reader responses to the novel submitted by workers at the plant under the general heading, "The Reader on the Novel *Meat*" ("Chitatel' o romane *Miaso*"). The newspaper also printed Pilnyak's rebuttal to the criticism that he and his novel had received there. The title of Pilnyak's response, "How the Novel *Meat* Was Created" ("Kak sozdavalsia roman *Miaso*"), seems to allude to the famous feuilleton by the comic writers Ilf and Petrov, "How the Soviet Robinson Was Created" ("Kak sozdavalsia Robinzon," 1935), which satirizes the Soviet editorial practice of interfering with artistic freedom and authorial intention. Pilnyak's rebuttal itself emphasizes that no other work of Soviet literature, besides *Meat: A Novel*, has been devoted to depicting the country's enormously successful meat industry, that the novel's co-authors had energetically sought out copious historical material about this topic in the archives of the Mikoyan meat packing plant, and

that they were simply using conventional terminology when they labeled their literary work a “novel.”⁴⁰ Pilnyak’s attempt to defend *Meat: A Novel* proved of no avail, however. Like the literary critics Shteinman and Erlikh, the managerial staff and the workers at the Mikoyan meat packing plant were Soviet readers who held certain fixed expectations about what constituted a well-constructed novel (in particular, a well-constructed Socialist Realist novel), and *Meat: A Novel* simply did not meet or satisfy their genre expectations. At the start of the anti-formalism campaign in January 1936, as we have seen, Shostakovich’s *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* was vilified as a “muddle” rather than “music” – as a rejection and negation of the simplicity, realism, humanity, and comprehensibility that had come to be expected of a well-constructed Soviet opera. Now, just a few months later, Pilnyak’s *Meat: A Novel* was being vilified for its alleged rejection and negation of what was expected of a well-constructed Soviet production novel.

The term “hack work” [*khaltura*] begins to appear with increasing frequency during the 1936 campaign against Pilnyak as a way to vilify the author and his final novel. On June 27, 1936, just a few weeks after the aforementioned meeting held at the Mikoyan meat packing plant, the leaders of the Soviet Writers Union held a discussion of *Meat: A Novel*. The nearly unanimous verdict they reached confirmed the harsh judgment that literary critics and officials in the Soviet meat industry had already made: namely, that Pilnyak’s production novel was indeed a “hack work” of literature [*khaltura*].⁴¹ Four months later, on October 28, 1936, yet another discussion of Pilnyak (and of the allegedly poor artistic quality of his latest novel) was held at a meeting of the Presidium of the Writers Union, where Pilnyak was asked to read a report on his creative

activity [*tvorcheskii otchet*].⁴² As was noted earlier, this meeting with the leaders of the Writers Union featured devastating attacks upon – and fatal accusations against – the embattled author by his literary brethren.⁴³ Aleksei Angarov, the official in charge of Cultural-Educational Work for the Central Committee at the time, notes in his account of the meeting that neither Pilnyak’s report nor his recent literary activity provides evidence that this unrepentant fellow traveler had provided any genuine self-criticism or undergone any meaningful “reconstruction” [*perestroika*] of his commitment to the construction of socialism. Indeed, Angarov asserts that Pilnyak’s latest novel testifies to the fact that the author is still being held captive by essentially bourgeois aesthetic views on art. “In *Meat*, coarse naturalism is combined with the verbal eccentricities that are typical for Pilnyak, making this novel dark and difficult in its exposition,” Angarov notes in his report to Stalin and the leadership of the Central Committee. “The novel *Meat*, which appeared at the conclusion of a discussion about Socialist Realism, also speaks to the fact that Pilnyak has not paid heed to the demands that are being placed upon a Soviet writer.”⁴⁴ Those present at the meeting concluded that Pilnyak was the type of non-Party writer who simply refused to heed the constructive criticism and friendly advice that readers and critics were offering him; instead he stubbornly persisted in producing literary works that did not fulfill the new “disciplinary” function of art in Soviet Russia.⁴⁵

Some of the “friendly advice” that Pilnyak had been offered (but that he had stubbornly refused to heed) appears to have come from Mikoyan himself. As was noted earlier, years after the writer’s death, Pilnyak’s widow would claim that it was Mikoyan who insisted that certain sections of the manuscript version of *Meat: A Novel* that had been serialized in *Novyi mir* needed to be substantially modified before the novel would

be allowed to be published in book form by Sovetskii pisatel'. But Pilnyak was unwilling to meet Mikoyan's demand, and the novel was never published as a separate edition.⁴⁶ Stalin and two other members of the Party's Central Committee (Kaganovich and Andreev) were sent an executive report on the October 1936 meeting of the Writer's Union Presidium, as well as Pilnyak's report on his creative work. At this point, the writer's fate seems to have been sealed. As Pilnyak himself recognized in his report, all of his works – “from *The Naked Year* to *Meat*” – were now being labeled “unsuitable” and “inappropriate” for Soviet literature.⁴⁷ The lead article in the November 11, 1936 issue of *Literaturnaia gazeta*, titled “On Creative Assistance” (“O tvorcheskoi pomoshchi”), not only emphasized the importance of developing ways to ensure that the Party provided effective guidance for the creative activity of Soviet writers; it also singled out Pilnyak, in particular, as a writer who has been sorely in need of such guidance, because he “systematically deviates from the general themes of our reality in his literary works and reveals a lack of understanding of that reality.”⁴⁸ The article voiced the Party's and, ostensibly, the People's final judgment: “Boris Pilnyak has lost respect for his literary work; therefore, both critics and readers have lost respect for the literary work of Boris Pilnyak.”⁴⁹

Two months later, *Meat: A Novel* was included in a list of “unacceptable” works – works with ideological and/or artistic deviations – that was posted on the front page of *Literaturnaia gazeta*.⁵⁰ Being not only attacked openly now by critics and readers but also abandoned by the Party and his fellow writers, Pilnyak was arrested several months later (on October 28, 1937) and then summarily convicted and executed as an “enemy of the people” six months after his arrest (on April 18, 1938).⁵¹ As a writer who had stirred

up considerable controversy in the past with his modernist aesthetics, his publication of allegedly counter-revolutionary and anti-Soviet texts at home and abroad, his several trips to capitalist countries, and his penchant for fancy cars, generous cash subsidies, and other bourgeois creature comforts, Pilnyak had managed to make a number of enemies over the years. The debacle over *Meat: A Novel* – specifically, his failure to respond earnestly enough to Commissar Mikoyan’s “social mandate” and thus to produce a genuine Socialist Realist production novel about the modernized Soviet meat industry – appears to have been the proverbial last straw. Pilnyak, as a result, became yet another writer who fell victim to the Stalinist terror of the late 1930s.

Pilnyak as Parodist: A Writer Who Misleads and Deceives

Pilnyak’s final novel, as we have seen, appears to contain many of the obligatory features both of Socialist Realist literature in general and of the Soviet production novel in particular, but the author does not develop them in the expected way. Indeed, Boris Borisovich Andronikashvili-Pilnyak has asserted that his father’s ill-fated final novel constitutes “a combination of a parody of the so-called production novel and of historical research.”⁵² Pilnyak, he claims, was coaxed by Commissar Mikoyan and editor Gronsky to write the kind of novel that he did not really desire to write and to write it according to an aesthetics that was foreign to his own poetics and style. As a consequence, the author composed *Meat: A Novel* “his own way” [*po-svoemu*]: that is, largely as a tongue-in-cheek pastiche.⁵³ If, as one commentator put it in 1934, the goal of Socialist Realism was “to reflect in literature the new world, the new person, and create a new style,”⁵⁴ then

Pilnyak, despite the commission assigned to him to produce a pro-Soviet propaganda novel about the meat industry, failed miserably on all three counts, largely because his heart simply was not in it. If, as Evgeny Dobrenko has recently asserted, the creative work produced by those shock workers who answered RAPP's call for a "Magnitostroi of literature" in the early years of Stalin's First Five-Year Plan constitutes "trash" in the form of unconscious parodies of "high" literature, then the creative work provided in Pilnyak's *Meat: A Novel* may be said to constitute *khaltura* in the form of a conscious parody of Socialist Realist "low" literature in general and of the Soviet production novel in particular.

Such an interpretation would help to explain the odd-sounding Memorandum of March 7, 1936, signed jointly by Pilnyak and Belyaev on "the day of the successful, pleasant, and final completion of the collective novel MEAT."⁵⁵ This strangely worded document purports to serve as an affidavit of sorts, affirming, among other things, that the novel was co-written by the two men (it delineates what contribution each made to the composition of the work), that profits from the sale of the novel would be split evenly [*fifti-fifti*] between the two, and that the novel was intended for a wide array of readers, ranging from the "feudal-bourgeois" at one end of the spectrum to the "proletarian" at the other. "Written in a humorous style," Nicholas observes, the Memorandum states "in mock-heroic style that the novel is 'scientific, highly historical, widely philosophical, and deeply technical, and at the same time, truly social and socialist.'"⁵⁶ Stalin, who as early as 1926 suspected that Pilnyak was "misleading" and "deceiving" the Soviet authorities and Party leaders, appears in 1936 to have caught the joke – both in the novel and in the memorandum – and grew tired of protecting a famous writer who had long been trying

his patience. For him, Pilnyak was no longer funny, no longer needed or useful, and thus could now be liquidated.⁵⁷

The same toying with the conventions of a literary genre and with the postulates of Socialist Realism can be found in another work that Pilnyak co-authored in the spring and summer of 1936, just a month after the final part of *Meat: A Novel* was serialized in *Novyi mir*. The work, a little-known film script, titled *Every Spring the Earth Blossoms Anew* (*Kazhduiu vesniu po novomu tsvetet zemlia*), likewise failed to pass muster with the Soviet literary and artistic authorities, but this time it was because Pilnyak overcompensated and went too far in the opposite direction. The film script was rejected by the Mosfilm studio and even by *Novyi mir* because Pilnyak, in the words of one modern scholar, “takes the postulates of Socialist Realism into consideration far too zealously” and plays with them ironically in the script.⁵⁸ This film about the sowing campaign on a state-owned farm (sovkhoz), Dagmar Kassek notes, is filled with so many hackneyed Socialist Realist phrases that it becomes difficult to take the clichés seriously and not to suspect that the author is being ironic. This is especially the case when the director of the state-run farm, a “new Soviet man” and ascetic puritan named Boitsov, launches into a panegyric hymn devoted to Stalin. Pilnyak’s film script may well appear on its surface to be pro-Soviet, but at its heart it is merely playing with the conventions of Socialist Realist literature and giving a grotesque quality to this Stalinist idyll.⁵⁹ The two rejected manuscripts that Pilnyak co-authored in the first half of 1936 – *Meat: A Novel* and *Every Spring the Earth Blossoms Anew* – reflect the extreme difficulty he was experiencing in writing earnestly a Socialist Realist brand of literature for which he was ill-suited, both in terms of his disposition as a person and his poetics as an artist.

When Stalin said in 1926 that “Pilnyak is misleading and deceiving us,” he was referring, of course, to the way the popular young writer was trying to talk his way out of any responsibility for the publication of “Tale of the Unextinguished Moon” in the May issue of *Novyi mir* that year. Pilnyak’s story provided a fictional account of the death of Mikhail Frunze, a Bolshevik leader during the October Revolution and a decorated commander during the ensuing Civil War, who died while undergoing surgery for a chronic ulcer in October 1925. “Tale of the Unextinguished Moon,” which hints strongly that Stalin was responsible for Frunze’s death, was quickly removed from that May 1926 issue of *Novyi mir* and was denounced as a “vicious slander” against the Party. Pilnyak wrote an official letter of apology, expressing regret for his “tactlessness” in submitting the story for publication, but noted that it was the literary critic, Aleksandr Voronsky, who had encouraged him to write it in the first place. Pilnyak pointed out, moreover, that Viacheslav Polonsky, the editor of *Novyi mir* at the time, had read the tale in advance and approved it for publication in the thick journal.⁶⁰ To Stalin’s mind, Pilnyak in his “apology” was misleading and deceiving mainly the “Great Leader” himself and the top members of the Party membership, who were seeking at the time to exert increasing control over literature and the arts in the fledgling Soviet Union. Ten years later, in 1936, when an older, but once again hounded, Pilnyak turned to parody in a desperate effort to preserve some of his artistic integrity while appeasing the regime and its cultural and artistic guard dogs, it was not only Stalin and the Party’s top leaders who were being misled and deceived. So, too, were Pilnyak’s two chief patrons – Mikoyan and Gronsky – both of whom were counting on this gifted but mercurial artist to validate the trust they had placed in him to carry out conscientiously the “social mandate” he had accepted at

their prompting. This was particularly true in the case of Gronsky, the literary official who had initially urged Pilnyak to accept Mikoyan's commission, had agreed to publish *Meat: A Novel* in serialized form in the journal he edited, and had put his reputation on the line when he defended the author during the discussion of the novel that took place at the Mikoyan meat processing plant. Pilnyak's parodic playing with the conventions of the genre of the Soviet production novel and the postulates of Socialist Realism in his final novel had a significant impact upon this patron who was arguably his strongest supporter inside Soviet officialdom.

Immediately after the three installments of *Meat: A Novel* appeared in the February, March, and April 1936 issues of *Novyi mir*, Gronsky was taken seriously to task by various literary officials for his putative lack of "vigilance" in allowing "hack work" or "trash" of this kind to appear in print. On the heels of the highly publicized court proceedings against the "Trotskyite-Zinoviev Terrorist Center" held in Moscow during August 19-24, 1936, the embattled Gronsky decided to hold an "evening" (an open meeting of active Soviet writers) at the editorial offices of *Novyi mir* on September 1, 1936.⁶¹ In his remarks that evening, Gronsky sounds very much as if he had come to the meeting prepared to bury his friend, not to praise him. Pilnyak, who was in attendance at the meeting, admitted earlier that evening that he had once given financial support to the exiled Trotskyite Karl Radek. He also provided some mild self-criticism concerning a few other political sins he had committed in the late 1920s (mainly the publication of "Tale of the Unextinguished Moon" and *Mahogany*), but his words of ostensible remorse did not satisfy the zealous activists who were in attendance at the event. They felt that he was trying to minimize the seriousness of his misdeeds, if not to

justify them. The writer Bruno Yasensky, for instance, took issue with Pilnyak's self-characterization as a "non-Party Bolshevik" (247). The author's actions and behavior show that he does not deserve that respectable moniker, Yasensky objected, nor does he merit the high level of distinction that Stalin accorded to Soviet writers by calling them "engineers of human souls" (248). When it comes Gronsky's turn to speak at the podium, he readily admits that the Trotskyite-Zinoviev terrorist center has indeed already infiltrated some Soviet literary organizations and publishing houses. He also grants that Comrade Pilnyak did a commendable thing by coming to their meeting and giving a speech in which he acknowledged and described his relationship to the Trotskyite-Zinoviev traitors. "All of this is fine and good, but it is much too late," Gronsky adds. "I personally spoke with you about this issue, Boris Andreevich, not just dozens of times, but probably hundreds of times," Gronsky exclaims in evident exasperation, addressing Pilnyak directly now, "and I spoke with you about it as sharply and as harshly as I could. Moreover, I warned you from the tribune at the Plenum of the Organizing Committee of the Writers Union back in 1932" (250). Both "Tale of the Unextinguished Moon" and *Mahogany*, Gronsky continues, were written at the direct bequest of Trotskyites and they were aimed – "like Trotskyite missiles" – against the October Revolution, against the Party, against Soviet power, and against the People (250). If Pilnyak wishes to bear the title of "non-Party Bolshevik," then he needs to do more than simply say it: he needs to write literary works that will show clearly that he is truly worthy of that name.

"You are a stubborn and insistent person, but you will get there, if we help you," Gronsky tells Pilnyak, softening his tone considerably near the end of his speech. "And we are obligated to help you because you are a Soviet writer, because you are entering

into Soviet literature; and we are obligated to care about Soviet literature and about every worker in Soviet literature” (250). Shifting his attention back to the other members of the audience, Gronsky implores them not to brush Pilnyak off and chase him away as a lost cause: “This is a major writer, this is a great literary master, and we should help him to travel along the same path together with us” (250). After all, Gronsky reminds his listeners, helping fellow writers is the duty of all those comrades – critics, editors, and publishers alike – who work in the field of Communist literature. The problem for most of the members of the audience, of course, is that Pilnyak was not simply a fellow writer, but an inveterate “fellow traveler,” a *poputchik* who had made no effort to hide his utter disdain for the members of RAPP and other proletarian zealots who had harassed him mercilessly several years earlier. As we saw in the *Literaturnaia gazeta* article, “On Creative Assistance,” Pilnyak in 1936 was being singled out as a writer who may well be sorely in need of helpful guidance as far as his creative activity is concerned. But he is also a writer who stubbornly refuses even to try to understand the new social reality that socialist construction was creating in their country. The RAPP ethos of harassing fellow travelers (rather than trying to re-educate and rehabilitate them, as Gronsky, among others, advocated), an ethos that seems to have been revived following Gorky’s death in 1935, regained dominance during the anti-Pilnyak campaign of 1936. Despite Gronsky’s best efforts at defending his friend, Pilnyak was now seen as a hopelessly unredeemable bourgeois writer whose modernist aesthetics was completely out of place in the new socialist world of the U.S.S.R.

Pilnyak and Gronsky Are “Sold Out”

At the September 1, 1936 “evening” at *Novyi mir*, Gronsky tried – unsuccessfully, as it turned out – to defend and save not only his friend Pilnyak, but also himself, in his capacity as the writer’s chief patron. Following the advice that Pilnyak had been given (to be more self-critical and to acknowledge more openly his offenses), Gronsky took editors and publishers severely to task for the low level of “Bolshevik vigilance” and the high level of “putrid liberalism” they had maintained lately. Both of these political shortcomings enabled Trotskyites and Zinovievites to infiltrate a number of Soviet literary organizations and print organs. Indeed, Gronsky in his remarks castigates himself and his editorial staff at *Novyi mir* for having allowed enemies of the people and opponents of Soviet power to publish in their journal. Gronsky proceeds to provide two salient examples of an editorial lack of vigilance at *Novyi mir*:

This year we published a literary work that was weak with regard to artistic quality, Comrade Pilnyak’s *Meat*, and a literary work that contained political errors, Comrade Zarudin’s *In the People’s Forest (V narodnom lesu)*. We should have critiqued these literary works. Criticism would have helped these works themselves as well as the writers and the editorial staff. It would also lead to an improvement in the level of quality of the journal . . . We should make *Novyi mir* the best journal in our country. (251)

In his introductory remarks at this literary evening, Gronsky had made a statement that seems to reveal to whom this *mea culpa* near evening’s end was specifically directed. “At the last Presidium of the Union of Soviet Writers,” Gronsky had told his audience,

Comrade Stavsky correctly observed that we need to bring order at last to our literary organizations, that these organizations should know their contributors,

that they should know how to manage their organization. This same work needs to be done at our literary journals. We need to bring order to our journals. We need to study the management of our journals in the most attentive and thoughtful way. We need to throw out all those people who are in one way or another connected with enemies of the people. There is no place for hostile elements in our journals. I should mention that here at *Novyi mir* we have already become engaged in that work. (243)

Unfortunately, Gronskey's impassioned defense of *Novyi mir* as a literary journal whose editor was already taking strong measures to stop the threat of further infiltration of Trotskyist-Zinovievan elements into its pages turned out to be no more effective than his plea that evening that Pilnyak be provided with creative assistance from his literary brethren. In both instances, it appears, Comrade Stavsky had already sealed their fates.

In one of the secret NKVD documents that have been made public in the post-Soviet period, we learn that a special report was filed in January 1937 on the mood among Soviet writers at the height of the anti-formalism campaign. One of the writers whose views were recorded in that report was the poet Ilya Selvinsky, who is quoted as saying: "I used to believe Stavsky, but now I see that he is simply an agent provocateur. He sold Pilnyak out after he confessed and repented for his sins. And now he is selling out [Vsevolod] Ivanov."⁶² Vladimir Stavsky, a minor writer, mass journalist, and literary functionary who later gained notoriety for denouncing such luminaries as Boris Pasternak, Osip Mandelstam, and Mikhail Sholokhov during the Great Terror, had served as secretary of RAPP, then as a member of the Organizing Committee of the Writers' Union, and subsequently of its Presidium, before becoming its head in 1936.⁶³ His

especial animus toward Pilnyak is evident in the remarks he made three years earlier upon the publication of the author's travelogue, *Stones and Roots* (*Kamni i korni*, 1933), which he called "an unprecedented case of unbridled impudence in Soviet literature."⁶⁴ What particularly angered Stavsky about Pilnyak's travel account of his visit to Japan was the author's sardonic suggestion that Soviet literature ought to carry out a re-registration of writers that would reduce the number of its members by some 80 percent (those aspirants who showed artistic promise would be placed in a class of students who would study and work, while those who were hopeless cases would be stripped of the title of "writer"). This proposed re-registration of writers would also involve the creation of an Institute of Literature: a "literary-exploratory, artistic-equipping" institute, as Pilnyak put it. Only those students who graduated from this institute and received a diploma could carry the title of "writer" and would be allowed to publish. In *Stones and Roots*, Pilnyak also derided what he called "writers-tourists" who, "while seated in the stagecoaches, sleepers, and railway cars of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Bunin, travel from Moscow as tourists to the Dneprostroi of socialism, but they never arrive anywhere."⁶⁵ Some of these writers-tourists, the author adds, would "smear their heels with the grease of loyalty."⁶⁶ After reading *Stones and Roots*, an angry Stavsky, who presumed that he was to be included among those Soviet "writers-tourists," shot back that Pilnyak epitomized the archaic type of the "writer-priest" from tsarist times, who stands in opposition to the new Soviet types of writer: the *obshchestvennik* (the socially engaged writer who is active in public life) and the *rabotnik* (the writer who works in the organizations of mass literature of the proletarian movement).⁶⁷ Stavsky insisted that

Soviet literature had no place for an artistic anachronism such as the fellow traveler Pilnyak.

Stavsky also reproached Gronsky, in his capacity as the editor of *Novyi mir*, for continuing to publish his friend Pilnyak's works at a time when other journals had already stopped doing so. At the August 25, 1936 meeting of the Presidium of the Writers Union, the meeting to which Gronsky made reference in his remarks at the "evening" at *Novyi mir* that was held just one week later, Stavsky had emphasized the need to increase "revolutionary vigilance" in the midst of the current Trotsky-Zinoviev terrorism, singling out *Novyi mir* as a journal that had committed a flagrant political mistake by publishing the "double-dealing, putrid, and formalistic" articles of the "scoundrel and terrorist" Richard Pikel' and an egregious artistic mistake by publishing the works of "hack writers" [*khalturshchiki*] such as Pilnyak.⁶⁸ Gronsky, as we have seen, openly acknowledged these mistakes at the *Novyi mir* event in hopes that his honest self-criticism and his fervent pledge to remedy immediately the journal's editorial miscues would suffice to save him his job. But his days as editor were numbered, as evidenced by the scathing report on the editorial board of *Novyi mir* that Stavsky's colleague, Aleksei Angarov, delivered to the Secretaries of the Central Committee (Stalin, Kaganovich, Andreev, and Zhdanov) on March 27, 1937. Angarov accuses Gronsky, among other things, of systematically sheltering enemies of the Party in his journal:

The contributors to the journal who received special attention from Gronsky include: Pilnyak, Zarudin, and Ivan Kataev, each of whom provided material support to Trotskyites who had been sent into exile; Pikel' and Makarov, both of

them counter-revolutionaries and Trotskyites; and Pavel Vasiliev, an enemy of the people whose works Gronsky continued to publish and whom he supported with financial subsidies right up to the bitter end. All of these people constituted the fundamental backbone of the journal and all of them were close personal friends of the editor Gronsky.⁶⁹

Under Gronsky's leadership, according to Angarov, *Novyi mir* has been a journal that gives expression to the opportunistic attitudes of individualistic writers and serves as a breeding ground for political illiteracy and filthy vulgarity. Angarov asserts that Gronsky and his colleague Rozhkov have been monopolizing the literary criticism provided in the journal, filling its pages with all sorts of "harmful rubbish" and spreading "openly foreign theories" (619). "All of this anti-Marxist nonsense is being propagandized in issue after issue of the journal *Novyi mir*," Angarov concludes his report. "The Cultural Section of the Central Committee deems it necessary that Gronsky be removed from his post immediately" (619).

The April 1937 issue of *Novyi mir* was the final one that Ivan Gronsky edited: Stavsky replaced him as the journal's editor before the May 1937 issue appeared in print. The very next issue of *Novyi mir* (June 1937) contained an editorial article, "In Favor of Bolshevik Vigilance in Literature" ("Za bol'shevistskuiu bditel'nost' v literature"), that was apparently written either by Stavsky himself or by one of the new members of his editorial staff. As its title suggests, the article addresses the need for heightened vigilance on the part of editors and publishers to guard against the infiltration of Trotskyite-Zinovievist terrorists, as well as enemies of the people, into the print organs. In addition to providing a historical retrospective on Trotsky, Bukharin, Voronsky, Averbakh, and

other “anti-Party” subversives from the 1920s and 1930s, the article analyzes how and why some enemies of the people have succeeded in introducing their pernicious ideas into Soviet literature. This misfortune has occurred, the anonymous author explains,

because in the field of literature many of those who lead the workers, rather than demonstrating truly Bolshevik vigilance, are instead displaying the idiotic disease of unconcern and political myopia. They have not been able to unmask and expose in time these enemies who have been active in their units, right under their very noses. As a result of suffering from this idiotic disease, these leaders have not trained their literary cadres in the spirit of the irreconcilable Bolshevik battle against any and all manifestations of hostile tendencies in the field of literature.

They have not taught them how to recognize enemies. They have not taught them the history of the battle against anti-Party tendencies in art and literature.⁷⁰

The former editor of *Novyi mir* is then singled out for having displayed the idiotic diseases of “lack of concern” (*bespechnost*) and “extreme absent-mindedness” (*rotozeistvo*), both of which have been exploited by enemies of the people. Gronsky is criticized for having lost his vigilance, for playing the role of a Maecenas in his patronage of anti-Soviet writers, and for becoming a screen for hostile groups: more specifically, he turned over pages of his journal to an enemy of the people (Richard Pikel’), he patronized a terrorist poet (Pavel Vasiliev), and he published the novel of a fascist agent (Ivan Makarov), who painted a slanderous picture of socialist construction (206).

Fates of the Main Players in the Final Campaign Against Pilnyak

Vladimir Stavsky thus appears to have been the person responsible for “selling out” two of the main players in Commissar Mikoyan ill-fated initiative mandating that a Socialist Realist novel be written about the achievements of the Soviet meat industry. As we now know, Boris Pilnyak, the primary author of *Meat: A Novel*, was arrested on October 28, 1937; he was tried, convicted, and executed for various criminal offenses – all within the time span of a half hour – on April 21, 1938. The final campaign of vilification that was launched against Pilnyak in 1936 was so vituperative that it led some people to express surprise, when meeting the writer in 1937, that he was still alive. While awaiting arrest during that final year of his life, Pilnyak hid many of his manuscripts, notebooks, and correspondence, burying them either under a stack of firewood at his Moscow home on Yamskoe Pole or in the garden of his Peredelkino dacha. During the six-month incarceration in prison that followed his arrest, Pilnyak reportedly confessed to every crime his interrogators demanded, hoping to avoid torture and possibly even execution. His last words, filled with naïve hope for the future, were:

I very much want to work. After being held in prison for so long a time, I have become quite a different person and look on life with new eyes. I want to live, to work hard. I want to have paper in front of me on which I can write something of benefit to the Soviet people.⁷¹

Following his death, Pilnyak’s works were removed from all Soviet libraries and his name disappeared from all Soviet textbooks.⁷² Although he was officially rehabilitated in 1956, Pilnyak’s works did not begin to be widely published again in the Soviet Union until 1988 during the Gorbachev period of glasnost.

Pilnyak's patron and friend, the editor Ivan Gronsky, was likewise arrested near the end of the Great Terror of 1936-1938, and he, too, suffered for the sins that the famous Soviet author had allegedly committed. After being removed from his post as editor of *Novyi mir* in May 1937, Gronsky worked for a while as a Professor of the History of Russian Literature at the Moscow Pedagogical Institute.⁷³ Although he had written a letter to Stalin, Kaganovich, Andreev, and Yezhov at the time, pleading with these Politburo leaders to put an end to the false accusations and active persecution that he and his editorial colleague Rozhkov were suffering, Gronsky continued to be hounded by Vladimir Stavsky, the man who had replaced him.⁷⁴ In November 1937, for instance, Stavsky complained to Lev Mekhlis, head of the Press Section of the Central Committee, about how the former editors of *Novyi mir* had given over pages of their journal to recently executed enemies of the people (Pikel', Vasiliev, and Makarov, among others) as well as published Pilnyak's *Meat: A Novel*, which contained, in his words, a number of "anti-Soviet opinions."⁷⁵ Stavsky's accusations against Gronsky had now progressed from a lack of vigilance [*bditel'nost'*] and an absence of concern [*bespechnost'*] to the more serious charge of "wrecking" and "sabotage" [*vreditel'nost'*]. On the night of June 30, 1938, Gronsky was summoned to the NKVD office on Lubyanka Square, where he was placed under arrest. He spent a year in confinement there before being transferred to Lefortovo prison, where his interrogators tried (unsuccessfully) to beat out of him a confession to having committed the various anti-Soviet activities he was charged with.⁷⁶ He was sentenced, nonetheless, to fifteen years of incarceration, with an additional five years of deprivation of all rights. After Stalin's death in 1953, Gronsky returned, fully rehabilitated, to Moscow, where he lived for another thirty years, most of them spent as a

research assistant at the Gorky Institute of World Literature. In a May 1978 interview that he granted to Professor Vera Reck, who at the time was preparing her book-length study of Pilnyak's conflicts with the Soviet authorities during the early Stalin years, Gronsky stated that he had tried to help the troubled writer throughout the 1930s by clarifying for him what the new Soviet reality consisted in. He characterized Pilnyak as a writer who was undeniably talented, but one whose talent "dominated over his intelligence."⁷⁷ In the interview, Gronsky said absolutely nothing at all about Pilnyak's *Meat: A Novel* or about the doleful consequences of his friend writing that ill-fated novel. He did insist, however, that the earlier "Tale of the Unextinguished Moon" was indeed a work of "ideological sabotage," directed against the Party, that had been suggested to Pilnyak by a trio of prominent Trotskyites at the time: namely, Aleksandr Voronsky, Karl Radek, and Viacheslav Polonsky.⁷⁸

As far as Commissar Mikoyan himself is concerned, he does not appear to have suffered any repercussions at all from the failed social mandate to have a Socialist Realist novel written about the modernization of the Soviet meat industry. He soon moved on from his post as head of the Food Industry during the 1930s and enjoyed a long and illustrious career as a high-ranking Soviet official and statesman.⁷⁹ He is one of the few Bolshevik leaders from the revolutionary period who avoided being liquidated during the Stalin years. Moreover, Pilnyak's failure to produce a successful Socialist Realist novel about the Soviet meat industry did not stop Mikoyan from searching for some artistic form – and not necessarily a literary form – that would glorify the modernization and industrialization efforts in support of food production that were undertaken as part of Stalin's first two Five-Year Plans. He appears to have found one in the grandiose project

that Sergo Ordzhonikidze, the Commissar of Heavy Industry at the time, had initiated in 1935 and that was scheduled to open in autumn 1937: namely, *The Industry of Socialism* (*Industriia sotsializma*) art exhibition on the Frunze Embankment in Moscow. Mikoyan organized a special branch of this art exhibition, a smaller subsection called *The Food Industry* (*Pishchevaia industriia*), which was held separately in a pavilion at Gorky Park.⁸⁰ As Susan Reid notes, Mikoyan's commissariat also celebrated the food minister's achievements in provisioning the country during the 1930s by subsequently publishing a book (attributed to Mikoyan), *The Food Industry of the Soviet Union* (*Pishchevaia industriia Sovetskogo Soiuz*, 1941), which contained various speeches and reports the former People's Commissar had made.⁸¹ Two years earlier, Mikoyan's staff, upon his initiative, had published another book, the wonderfully illustrated and thoroughly utopian *Book About Tasty and Healthy Food* (*Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche*, 1939), which, as several scholars have recently argued, should itself be considered a Socialist Realist novel about the Soviet food industry.⁸² When it became clear that neither Pilnyak nor any other contemporary Soviet writer could produce the kind of Socialist Realist work of propaganda about the food industry that Commissar Mikoyan had envisioned (and commissioned), he apparently decided to have his staff produce it themselves.⁸³

Vladimir Stavsky, the opportunistic literary *apparatchik* who "sold out" both Pilnyak and Gronsky during the anti-formalism campaign and the Trotskyite-Zinovievite scare of 1936-1938, likewise fared remarkably well as a survivor of the Great Terror. After assuming Gronsky's vacated post as editor of *Novyi mir* in April 1937, Stavsky maintained this position until the outbreak of World War II in 1941, when he began to serve on the front as a war correspondent for *Pravda*. He died near the town of Nevel' on

November 14, 1943 of wounds incurred during combat.⁸⁴ Stavsky's political success during the late 1930s, a time when both Pilnyak (a talented writer) and Gronsky (a respected editor) suffered tragic blows to their careers as well as their lives, speaks to the (mis)workings of Stalinism in the cultural and artistic realms during the Great Terror. By all accounts, Stavsky, the consummate "yes-man" and bureaucratic functionary, failed miserably to provide any true leadership as the head of the Writers Union.⁸⁵ Many of his contemporaries complained, for instance, about the RAPP-type "clannishness" that continued to plague this literary organization and about the rift that was developing between Communist and non-Party writers.⁸⁶ Some literary artists, who shared the view expressed by Nikolai Bukharin in the report he delivered at the 1934 Congress of Writers, saw the rupture to be one between officially approved mediocrities, such as Stavsky himself, who were praised to the skies, and the "free-independent masters," such as Boris Pasternak, Boris Pilnyak, Konstantin Fedin, and others, who were living separately and peacefully in Peredelkino.⁸⁷ Indeed, the newly created writers colony located there was fast becoming a welcome alternative to the Writers Union in Moscow: that is to say, Peredelkino was serving as an authentic community of literary artists that nurtured creative interests and encouraged genuine collegiality rather than stirred up the "pseudo-social commotion" and extra-literary politics that were issuing forth out of the official channels.⁸⁸ As Angarov complained in one of his reports to Stalin and the Party leadership in May 1937, the Writers Union under Stavsky's leadership was turning into "a governmental, bureaucratic institution, built on the basis of an administrative apparatus" and a place that writers visited not for any artistic assistance or creative guidance but rather for practical, logistical matters, such as receiving funding,

apartments, and authorizations to receive medical treatment at sanatoriums.⁸⁹ Stavsky, in short, had turned the Writers Union into the real-life equivalent of the fictional MASSOLIT organization, located in the Griboedov House in Moscow, that Mikhail Bulgakov satirizes so memorably in his novel, *Master and Margarita* (*Master i Margarita*, 1967), rather than into the site of creative activity it was originally designed to become.

What accounts then for the remarkable survivability of this untalented writer and incompetent (as well as ineffective) administrator during a time when so many of his peers in the field of literature were being purged? Leonid Maksimenkov may well provide the answer in his recent study of the Party's Department of Agitation and Propaganda and the newly created Committee on Artistic Matters of the Council of People's Commissars during the anti-formalism campaign of 1936-1938. "Stavsky was a new type of leader of the Union of Soviet Writers," Maksimenkov explains.

Whenever there was any doubt or any difficult issue that needed to be addressed, he turned to the NKVD. Without hesitation, he would make political accusations against writers, charging them with offenses that, according to the criminal law code, threatened them with the supreme penalty of capital punishment.⁹⁰

As Stalin was seeking to have the Party increasingly control not only the production of literature and the other arts, but also the production of the "engineers of human souls" who would create this Socialist Realist art, he needed the kind of loyal, dogmatic, and "mentally limited policeman" that Stavsky epitomized.⁹¹ With an ardor to please his political bosses in the Party, a utilitarian philosophy of art that harmonized seamlessly with the regime's policy of "social mandates," and an unwavering faith in the Great

Leader's immutable wisdom, Stavsky represented the ideal Stalinist functionary: he was mediocre and unimaginative, but obedient and reliable. His appointment to positions of power and influence in the literary world in the late 1930s also reflected the movement away from having *bona fide* literary artists – be they Boris Pilnyak, Evgeny Zamyatin or Maksim Gorky – head up literary organizations. Instead, what Max Eastman once called “artists in uniform” now took their place as leaders. As a minion of Stalin's henchman, Andrei Zhdanov, Stavsky would serve the Party much more loyally than any of these genuine men of letters. One of Leonid Leonov's worst fears during the 1930s – that “it will end up that we are not writers, but lackeys” – was surely realized in the life and fate of Vladimir Stavsky.⁹² Both Boris Pilnyak and Ivan Gronskey, were they still alive today, would surely testify to that.

NOTES

¹ Stalin makes this comment in his in-house reply to Boris Pilnyak's letter of October 10, 1926 to the Party's Central Committee. In his letter, the writer had sought to make explanations and excuses for what were perceived as slanderous accusations against Stalin and the Party in his controversial (and banned) story, "Tale of the Unextinguished Moon" ("Povest' nepogashennoi luny," 1926). Pilnyak's story strongly suggested that Stalin was responsible for the death of Commissar Mikhail Frunze. See Benedikt Sarnov, *Stalin i pisateli: Kniga tret'ia* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2009), p. 29.

² This remark appears in Stalin's response to the members of RAPP ("Otvét Stalina pisateliam-kommunistam RAPPa," February 28, 1929) quoted in Sarnov, *Stalin i pisateli*, p. 292.

³ Katerina Clark and Evgeny Dobrenko discuss the anti-formalism campaign of 1936 in considerable detail in *Soviet Culture and Power: A History in Documents, 1917-1953* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 229-248.

⁴ According to Max Eastman, Gronsky boasted privately that he had saved Pilnyak's life in 1929 when he explained to him how to rehabilitate his career by incorporating parts of *Mahogany* into a production novel glorifying Socialist construction. See *Artists in Uniform* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1934), p. 121.

⁵ See the commentary by the author's granddaughter in Boris Pil'niak, *Mne vypala gor'kaia slava . . . Pis'ma 1915-1937*, compiled by K. B. Andronikashvili-Pil'niak (Moscow: Agraf, 2002), p. 378.

⁶ “Miaso: Roman,” *Novyi mir*, no. 2 (1936): 5-38, no. 3 (1936): 21-43, no. 4 (1936): 92-126.

⁷ Mikoyan was apparently attempting to “censor” Pilnyak’s second production novel in much the same way that Nikolai Yezhov, the future NKVD chief (1936-1938), who was still just a minor official in the Secretariat of the Central Committee at the time, had tried to censor his first one back in 1931. According to Victor Serge, the Central Committee’s Cultural Section had assigned Yezhov to co-author *The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea* along with Pilnyak, who reportedly complained to Serge, “He [Yezhov] has given me a list of fifty passages to change outright!” See *Memoirs of a Revolutionary: 1901-1941*, trans. Peter Sedgwick (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 269.

⁸ Gronsky describes his arrest, interrogation, and prison experience in *Iz proshlogo . . . Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Izvestiia, 1991). See especially pp. 162-192.

⁹ Clark and Dobrenko, *Soviet Culture and Power*, p. 162.

¹⁰ Clark and Dobrenko, *Soviet Culture and Power*, p. 165.

¹¹ For a discussion of how Stalin and Gronsky came up with the term “Socialist Realism,” see Gronsky, *Iz proshlogo*, pp. 335-336.

¹² Mikoyan mentions receiving this gift from Pilnyak in his memoirs, *Tak bylo: Razmyshleniia o minuvshem* (Moscow: Vagrius, 1999), p. 283. Pilnyak’s inscription reads: “Dear Anastas Ivanovich, hurray – for twelve sons!”

¹³ Gronsky later identifies these two central issues of “genre” and “form” when he talks to the officials at the Mikoyan meat packing plant in May 1936 about the conversation he and Pilnyak had held earlier with Mikoyan. See Irina Glushchenko, “Ne miasom ediny,” *Muzhskaiia rabota*, no. 36 (2011): 87.

¹⁴ See *Rabochie pishut istoriiu zavodov. Sbornik statei*, ed. M. Gor’kii and L. Averbakh (Moscow: OGIZ izdatel’stvo “Istoriia zavodov,” 1933), p. 8. Gronskey, incidentally, served on the editorial board for this proletarian literary project.

¹⁵ *Rabochie pishut istoriiu zavodov*, pp. 11, 130.

¹⁶ Harriet Borland, who points out that the more interesting these Five-Year Plan novels were, the less they complied with the “social command,” writes: “Almost engulfing these peaks was a vast flood of tendentious, sometimes illiterate and usually dull, descriptive scribbles by the literary *udarniks* [shock workers], who possessed all the ideology but little of the ability necessary to produce a work of art.” See *Soviet Literary Theory and Practice During the First Five-Year Plan 1928-32* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1950), p. 115.

¹⁷ Gronskey, *Iz proshlogo*, p. 141.

¹⁸ Pilnyak’s observational visits resulted in such publications as the sketch, “Red Sormovo” (“Krasnoe Sormovo,” 1928), and the travelogue, *Tadzhikistan: The Seventh Soviet Republic: Sketches and Material for a Novel (Tadzhikistan: Sed’maia sovetskaia: Ocherki i materialy k romanu*, 1931).

¹⁹ Vera T. Reck, *Boris Pil’niak: A Soviet Writer in Conflict with the State* (Montreal and London: McGill – Queen’s University Press, 1975), p. 168.

²⁰ Mikhail Falchikov, “Boris Pil’niak glazami zapadnogo slavista,” in *Boris Pil’niak: opyt segodniashnego prochteniia* (Moscow: Nasledie, 1995), p. 36.

²¹ Mary A. Nicholas, *Writers at Work: Russian Production Novels and the Construction of Soviet Culture* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2010), p. 154.

²² See, for example, the review of *The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea* in *Krasnaia nov'*, no. 4 (April 1931): 186.

²³ For a more detailed analysis of the plot, themes, and characters in Pilnyak's novel, see my article, "The Mikoyan Mini-Hamburger, or How the Socialist Realist Novel About the Soviet Meat Industry Was Created," *Gastronomica: The Journal of Critical Food Studies*, 16, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 31-44.

²⁴ "Sumbur vmesto muzyki: Ob opere *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda*," *Pravda*, January 28, 1936, p. 3.

²⁵ Sheila Fitzpatrick, "The Lady Macbeth Affair: Shostakovich and the Soviet Puritans," in Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 198.

²⁶ Fitzpatrick, "The Lady Macbeth Affair," pp. 189, 197, 200.

²⁷ Iurii Elagin, *Temnyi genii: Vsevolod Meierkhol'd* (New York: Izdatel'stvo im. Chekhova, 1955), p. 363.

²⁸ Fitzpatrick, "The Lady Macbeth Affair," p. 208. Leonid Maksimenkov devotes a chapter of his book on the campaign against formalism and naturalism to the attacks on Meyerhold. See "Delo Meierkhol'da" in *Sumbur vmesto muzyki: Stalinskaia kul'turnaia revoliutsiia 1936-1938* (Moscow: Iuridicheskaia kniga, 1997), pp. 270-282.

²⁹ Many of the essays against formalism and naturalism that followed in the wake of "Sumbur vmesto muzyki" were later published in a separate volume, *Protiv formalizma i naturalizma v iskusstve. Sbornik statei*, ed. P. I. Lebedev (Moscow: OGIZ, 1937). Some of them were translated into English and appeared in an issue of the journal *International Literature*, no. 6 (1936).

³⁰ See the chapter, “Delo Sergeia Eizensteina (1937 god)” in Maksimenkov, *Sumbur vmesto muzyki*, pp. 241-253.

³¹ “Vystuplenie V. P. Stavskogo na obshchemoskovskom sobranii pisatelei *O formalizme i naturalizme v literature* 10 marta 1936 g.,” in *Mezhdu molotom i nakoval’nei. Soiuz sovetskikh pisatelei SSSR. Dokumenty i komentarii*, ed. T. M. Gorjaeva (Moscow: Rossiiskaia politicheskaia entsiklopediia, 2011), vol. 1, pp. 460-475.

³² “Vystuplenie L. M. Subotskogo na obshchemoskovskom sobranii pisatelei *O formalizme i naturalizme v literature* 23 marta 1936 g.,” in *Mezhdu molotom i nakoval’nei*, vol. 1, pp. 485-497.

³³ Sh. Zel., “Miaso i variatsii,” *Literaturnyi Leningrad*, no. 22 (167) May 12, 1936: 2.

³⁴ Widely considered the Russian equivalent of Fannie Farmer, Elena Molokhovets (1831-1918) is best known for her classic cookbook and manual of household management, *A Gift to Young Housewives, or The Means for Reducing Expenses in Household Management (Podarok molodym khoziaikam, ili sredstvo k umen’sheniiu raskhodov v domashnem khoziaistve*, 1861), which served for many years as a veritable “bible” for middle-class and upper-class homemakers in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Russia.

³⁵ A. Erlikh, “Podriadnaia literatura,” *Izvestiia*, no. 30, May 24, 1936: 5.

³⁶ See A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem* (Moscow: Nauka, 1976), vol. 4, pp. 209-212.

³⁷ Max Eastman, in his 1934 essay, “The Humiliation of Boris Pilnyak,” likewise makes the claim that Pil’niak was capitulating to the Party’s demand that he sell his pen to the

Soviet regime. See *Artists in Uniform: A Study of Literature and Bureaucratism* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), pp. 104-125.

³⁸ In *Boris Pilnyak: Scythian at a Typewriter* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1985), Gary Browning has written that the critical reaction to Pilnyak's *Meat: A Novel* was "uniformly negative, mainly because to everyone except workers of the industry it was hopelessly boring" (68). The comments made during the meeting held at the Mikoyan meat packing plant indicate, however, that even workers in the meat industry found Pilnyak's slaughterhouse novel hopelessly boring to read.

³⁹ Irina Glushchenko, *Obshchepit: Mikoian i sovetskaia kukhnia*, p. 115. The discussion of *Meat: A Novel* that took place in the director's office at the Mikoyan meat processing plant was published, in abridged form, in the June 3, 1936 issue of the plant's newspaper, *Za miasnuiu industriiu*, under the title, "Roman Beliaeva i Pil'niaka *Miaso* na obsuzhdenii nashikh chitatelei." I am relying here on Glushchenko's account of that meeting in "Ne miasom edinyam," 84-87.

⁴⁰ B. A. Pil'niak, *Pis'ma: V dvukh tomakh*, ed. N. V. Kornienko (Moscow: IMLI RAN, 2010), vol. 2, p. 601.

⁴¹ See Pil'niak, *Pis'ma*, 2:602. A stenographic account of this Writers Union discussion is archived at RGALI (f. 631, op. 2, ed., khr. 160, l. 35).

⁴² For a transcript of Pilnyak's report on his creative activity, see "'Voznikaiut oshchushcheniia nenuzhnosti moei raboty.' O tvorcheskom otchete Borisa Pil'niaka," *Istochnik*, no. 6 (1997): 145-150.

⁴³ It should be kept in mind that for several years Pilnyak himself had headed the Writers Union in Moscow. Indeed, Vladimir Mayakovsky referred to the Writers Union

sarcastically (and disdainfully) during that time as the “Union of Pilnyaks” (*soiuz pil’niakov*). Sarnov, *Stalin i pisateli*, p. 329.

⁴⁴ See “Zapiska zamestitelia zaveduiushchego otdelom kul’t-prosvetraboty TsK VKP(b) A. I. Angarova sekretariam TsK VKP(b) I. V. Stalinu, L. M. Kaganovichu i A. A. Andreevu o tvorcheskom otchete B. Pil’niaka na zasedanii prezidiuma SSP,” in *Mezhdu molotom i nakoval’nei*, p. 572.

⁴⁵ Pil’niak, *Pis’ma*, 2:608. A stenographic account of this Writers Union discussion is likewise archived at RGALI (f. 631, op. 2, ed., khr. 75).

⁴⁶ The book contract with *Sovetskii pisatel’* was nearly voided in November 1935 – a few months before the first of the three parts of the novel had even begun to appear in serialized form in *Novyi mir* – but Gronsky intervened on Pilnyak’s behalf. The publishers agreed not to void Pilnyak’s contract and the plans for publishing *Meat: A Novel* were renewed. See Pil’niak, *Pis’ma*, 2:593.

⁴⁷ ““Voznikaiut oshchushcheniia nenuzhnosti moei raboty,”” p. 150.

⁴⁸ “O tvorcheskoi pomoshchi,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, November 11, 1936: 1. “All of Pilnyak’s mistakes and woes, just like those of several other writers, were pointed out to them very clearly,” the article’s anonymous author notes. “Friendly and comradely creative assistance was given to these writers to help them examine their artistic positions from a political perspective, find their theme, and start to work not ‘seasonally,’ not running on empty, but in profound and organic accord with their artistic interests and aspirations” (1).

⁴⁹ *Literaturnaia gazeta*, November 11, 1936: 1.

⁵⁰ See “Glavnaia zadacha,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, February 26, 1937: 1.

⁵¹ Pilnyak's arrest at Peredelkino is described by Zinaida Pasternak, the poet's second wife, in her memoirs. See Z. N. Pasternak, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow: GRIT Dom-muzei, 1993), 292-293. Pilnyak's son, Boris Borisovich Andronikashvili-Pilnyak, who was only three years old at the time, describes his father's arrest a bit differently. See his essay, "Pil'niak, 37-i god," in Boris Pil'niak, *Rasplesnutoe vremia* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990), 583-603.

⁵² Pil'niak, *Pis'ma*, 2:600.

⁵³ Pil'niak, *Pis'ma*, 2:600. While speaking about the terrible things that some Soviet contemporaries were allegedly saying about Pilnyak, Eastman had, in effect, predicted that this writer might well claim one day that he was only being tongue in cheek when apologizing publicly for his sins against the Stalinist regime. "He is so glib with apologies, and watery with tears of contrition," Eastman wrote about Pilnyak, "that his enemies will tell you he is playing for the day of the counter-revolution. 'Didn't you see I was mocking them all the time?' he will say." See *Artists in Uniform*, 108.

⁵⁴ M. Dzhavikashvili, cited by A. G. Dementiev, "Voprosy sotsialisticheskogo realizma na pervom vsesoiuznom s'ezde sovetskikh pisatelei," in *Iz istorii sovetskogo iskusstvovedeniia i esteticheskoi mysli 1930kh godov*, ed. V. Vanslov and L. F. Deniskova (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1977), p. 26.

⁵⁵ A copy of this brief memorandum can be found in Pil'niak, *Pis'ma*, 2:599.

⁵⁶ Nicholas, *Writers at Work*, 195. "The emphasis the writers put on the collective nature of their endeavor is obviously humorous," she adds, "particularly since they include a passage detailing their intentions to sell the novel 'on the basis of fifti-fifti'." The use of an American term ("fifty-fifty") and its phonetic transcription into Russian [*fifti-fifti*] is a

stylistic device that Pilnyak had used throughout his travelogue, *Okay: An American Novel* (*Okei: Amerikanskii roman*, 1931), where the reader often encounters such lexical items as “brekfest” [брекфест], “orandzh-dzhius” [орандж-джюс], “prokhibishen” [прохибишен], “blek-end-uait” [блэк-энд-уайт], “tenk iu,” [тэнк ю], “siuit-khart” [сюит-харт], etc. The Russian author obviously was fascinated with the sound of some of the English-language words and expressions he heard while visiting the U.S. and listening to Americans speak.

⁵⁷ Nicholas claims that Pilnyak’s life was in mortal danger from the moment he accused Stalin of complicity in Commander Frunze’s death in his controversial story, “Tale of the Unextinguished Moon” (1926). See *Writers at Work*, 158.

⁵⁸ Dagmar Kassek, “Maloizvestnyi stsenarii Borisa Pil’niaka ili igra v sotsrealizm,” in *Boris Pil’niak: Opyt segodniashnego prochteniia (Po materialam nauchnoi konferentsii, posviashchennoi 100-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia pisatel’ia)* (Moscow: Nasledie, 1995), 45-46.

⁵⁹ Kassek, “Maloizvestnyi stsenarii Borisa Pil’niaka ili igra v sotsrealizm,” 50.

⁶⁰ B. A. Pil’niak, “Pis’mo v redaktsiiu,” *Novyi mir*, no. 1 (1927): 256.

⁶¹ Petr Saratovskii, “Na vechere v *Novom mire*,” *Novyi mir*, No. 9 (1936): 242-252.

⁶² See “Spetspravka sekretno-politicheskogo otdela GUGB NKVD SSSR o nastroeniakh sredi pisatelei” in *Vlast’ i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsia: Dokumenty TsK RKP(b) – VKP(b), VChK – OGPU – NKVD o kul’turnoi politike. 1917-1953 gg.*, ed. A. N. Iakovlev (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 1999), pp. 347-348.

⁶³ “Stavsky entered history as the ‘executioner of Soviet literature’ because he authorized the arrests of numerous members of the Writers’ Union,” write the editors of *Intimacy*

and Terror, ed. Véronique Garros, Natalia Korenevskaya, and Thomas Lahusen, trans.

Carol A. Flath (New York: The New Press, 1995), p. 219.

⁶⁴ “Zapiska V. P. Stavskogo v Kul’tprosvetotdel TsK VKP(b) i komfraktsiiu Orgkomiteta SSP o novoi povesti B. Pil’niaka,” in *Mezhdu molotom i nakoval’nei*, p. 225-226.

⁶⁵ “Zapiska V. P. Stavskogo,” p. 226.

⁶⁶ “Zapiska V. P. Stavskogo,” p. 226.

⁶⁷ “Iz stenogrammy Vtorogo vsesoiuznogo soveshchaniia gorodskikh i mestnykh komitetov Soiuza sovetskikh pisatelei,” in *Mezhdu molotom i nakoval’nei*, p. 233.

⁶⁸ “Na Prezidiume SSP. Korrespondentsiia,” in *Mezhdu molotom i nakoval’nei*, pp. 546, 547.

⁶⁹ “Zapiska Otdela kul’tprosvetraboty TsK VKP(b) sekretariam TsK VKP(b) o neobkhodimosti sniatia s raboty I. M. Gronskogo,” in *Mezhdu molotom i nakoval’nei*, p. 619.

⁷⁰ “Za bol’shevitskuiu bditel’nost’ v literature,” *Novyi mir*, no. 6 (1937): 195.

⁷¹ Sarnov, *Stalin i pisateli*, p. 508

⁷² Sarnov, *Stalin i pisateli*, p. 322.

⁷³ After losing his job at *Novyi mir*, Gronsky worked for a short while as the main editor at the publishing house of the Academy of Architecture and as a professor of the history of Russian literature at the Moscow Pedagogical Institute. See Gronsky, *Iz proshlogo*, p. 12.

⁷⁴ “Schast’e literatury.” *Gosudarstvo i pisateli. 1925-1938 gg. Dokumenty*, comp. D. L. Babichenko (Moscow: Rossiiskaia politicheskaiia entsiklopediia, 1997), p. 275.

⁷⁵ “Schast’e literatury,” p. 239.

⁷⁶ As Gronsky reveals in a letter he later wrote to his wife while in a labor camp, he was charged with belonging to an illegal, anti-Soviet organization of rightists and with having committed the crime of “wrecking” (sabotage) in literature. See Gronsky, *Iz proshlogo*, 173.

⁷⁷ Gronsky, *Iz proshlogo*, p. 228.

⁷⁸ Gronsky, *Iz proshlogo*, p. 228.

⁷⁹ Like Gronsky, Mikoyan in his memoirs never mentions *Meat: A Novel* or his recruitment effort (through the editor Gronsky) to get Pilnyak to accept his “social mandate” to write that novel. Gronsky, in fact, mentions that when he met Mikoyan thirty years later, at an event in Moscow in 1967 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the newspaper *Izvestiia*, the former Food Commissar received him “rather coldly,” even though, as Gronsky sadly notes, “I was friends with him back in the 1930s.” Pilnyak’s daughter (Natalia Borisovna Sokolova), on the other hand, paid Gronsky a friendly visit at his home in 1974. See Gronsky, *Iz proshlogo*, pp. 209, 217.

⁸⁰ See Susan Reid, “Socialist Realism in the Stalinist Terror: The *Industry of Socialism* Art Exhibition, 1935-41,” *Russian Review* 60 (April 2001): 153-184.

⁸¹ Reid, “Socialist Realism in the Stalinist Terror,” 174, fn. 77.

⁸² For discussions of *The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food* as a work of Socialist Realism, see the following: Evgenii Dobrenko, “Gastronomicheskii kommunizm: vkusnoe vs. zdorovoe,” *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* no. 2 (2009): 155-173; Edward Geist, “Cooking Bolshevik: Anastas Mikoian and the Making of the *Book about Delicious and Healthy Food*,” *Russian Review* 71, 2 (2012): 295-313; Irina Glushchenko, “Kulinarnaia Bibliia,” in her *Obshchepit: Mikoian i sovetskaia kukhnia*, pp. 137-179; Jukka Gronow and Sergey

Zhuravlev, “*The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food: The Establishment of Soviet Haute Cuisine*,” in *Educated Tastes: Food, Drink and Connoisseur Culture*, ed. Jeremy Strong (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 24-57; and Ronald D. LeBlanc, “The Mikoyan Mini-Hamburger,” pp. 38-40.

⁸³ Pavel Smirnov, who succeeded Mikoyan as head of the Food Industry, tried to revive his predecessor’s “social mandate.” In July 1939, Commissar Smirnov met with a group of loyal young writers and tried to recruit them to produce collectively a Socialist Realist novel that would glorify some of the achievements of the Soviet meat industry during the 1930s under the leadership of Stalin and Mikoyan. And a few months later, in October 1939, he met individually with Aleksei Tolstoy, the patriarch of Soviet literature at the time, seeking to convince him to head up this team of young writers in the collaborative project. Tolstoy, however, stubbornly begged off on Smirnov’s proposal, which was never realized. Glushchenko describes both of these meetings in *Obshchepit: Mikoian i sovetskaia kukhnia*, pp. 125-135.

⁸⁴ For an account of Stavsky’s life and career (by a Soviet-era apologist), see N. Velengurin, *Vladimir Stavsky: Kritiko-biograficheskii ocherk* (Krasnodar: Krasnodarskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1958).

⁸⁵ Many of Stavsky’s fellow writers voiced serious concerns not only about his management style, but also about his personality and character. Aleksandr Fadeev, for instance, called him a hypocrite and a back-stabber, while Vsevolod Ivanov considered him a sycophant who subscribed to a utilitarian philosophy of art. See Maksimenkov, *Sumbur vmesto muzyki*, pp. 7-8.

⁸⁶ Fadeev, for example, is reported as saying in February 1937: “There is no real contact between non-Party [writers] and Comm[unists] in the Soviet Writers Union.” See “Iz zapisnoi knizhki V. P. Stavskogo (kratkie zapisi na sobraniakh partgruppy SSP),” in *Mezhdumolotom i nakoval’nei*, p. 603.

⁸⁷ “Spravka sekretno-politicheskogo otdela GUGB NKVD SSSR ‘Ob otnoshenii pisatelei k proshedshemu S’ezdu pisatelei i k novomu rukovodstvu Soiuz Pisatelei,” in *Vlast’ i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsia*, p. 241.

⁸⁸ “Spetsppravka sekretno-politicheskogo otdela GUGB NKVD SSSR o nastroeniakh sredi pisatelei,” in *Vlast’ i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsia*, p. 349.

⁸⁹ “Dokladnaia zapiska otdela kul’turno-prosvetitel’noi raboty TsK VKP(b) sekretariam TsK VKP(b) o rukovodstve SSP SSSR,” in *Vlast’ i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsia*, pp. 370-372.

⁹⁰ Maksimenkov, *Sumbur vmesto muzyki*, p. 216.

⁹¹ Maksimenkov, *Sumbur vmesto muzyki*, p. 145.

⁹² “Spetsppravka sekretno-politicheskogo otdela GUGB NKVD SSSR o nastroeniakh sredi pisatelei,” in *Vlast’ i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsia*, p. 347.