The twelve novellas that Harry Stein- 
hauer has chosen for this anthology are 
Wieland’s “Love and Friendship Tested” 
(1805), Kleist’s “Michael Kohlhaas” (1810), 
E. T. A. Hoffmann’s “Mademoiselle de 
Scudéry” (1820), Chamisso’s “The Strange 
Story of Peter Schlemihl” (1813), Keller’s 
“Clothes Make the Man” (1874), C. F. 
Meyer’s “The Sufferings of a Boy” (1883), 
Fontane’s “Stine” (1888), Thomas Mann’s 
“The Buffoon” (1897), Hauptmann’s “The 
Heretic of Soana” (1918), Schnitzler’s 
“Fräulein Else” (1924), Kafka’s “A Hunger 
Artist” (1922), Bergengruen’s “Ordeal by 
Fire” (1933).

Employing the “yardstick” approach 
suggested by H. Steinhauer it is easy to 
notice that Kleist’s “Michael Kohlhaas” with 
79 pages is the longest and Kafka’s “A 
Hunger Artist” with 9 pages is the 
shortest novella of this collection. The 
average length is 46 pages. This shows 
that this “yardstick” method must be 
flexible enough to allow exceptions: “We 
need labels like novel, romance, short 
novel, novella, short story; but we must 
ever grant them the status of realia” 
(p. xxiii). Looking at the subject matter 
of the novellas one finds a great variety 
of themes and motifs such as wife swap­
ping, adultery, crime, justice, etc. The notes 
preceding each story supply the reader 
with valuable information concerning the 
novella itself and the importance of its 
author. There is no doubt that students 
of comparative literature as well as the 
general reader will find Professor Stein­ 
hauer’s book a very challenging and 
rewarding collection of Novellas.

S. Sturm-Dickson

VERA T. RECK

Boris Pił'niak: A Soviet Writer in 
Conflict with the State
Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University 

During the fabulous 1920’s in Soviet 
literature, Boris Piłnyak (Pił'niak) was one 
of those exciting writers who contributed 
significantly to making the period what 
it was—the best, the freest (relatively 
speaking), and qualitatively the most last­ 
ing in all Soviet literature. That he had 
to pay with his life for his iconoclastic 
behavior is both tragic and symptomatic 
of the society in which he had to live. The 
circumstances of his death were such that 
we still do not know time, place, and 
manner in which he died during the 
purges. For that reason, not much has been, 
or can be, written about his ultimate fate. 
The fact that he was out of limelight for 
decades also tended to obscure even what 
little we know about him. Slowly and 
inexorably, however, more and more is 
coming to light about the fate of writers 
like Piłnyak. In her extensive book, 
Boris Pił'niak: A Soviet Writer in Conflict 
with the State, Vera T. Reck attempts to 
shed light on the circumstances surround­
ing Piłnyak’s gallant, at times Quixotic 
and naive, but still heroic and deeply 
tragic struggle against the state which 
_attempts to crush all those who disagree 
with it.

The author follows Piłnyak’s attempts in 
his stories and novels to depict reality as 
it is and not as it ought to be; his utiliza­ 
tion of motifs that were tantalizing to a 
writer while at the same time dangerously 
bordering on political taboos; many 
“scandals” occurring frequently on the 
literary scene in 1920’s; and the “crimes”— 
Piłnyak’s as well as those of others—which 
etually brought about suffering and 
death. The author repeats some well­ 
known details, but she also reveals some 
hitherto unknown material, which con­ 
tributes to our understanding, not only 
of Piłnyak, but of the entire period in 
Soviet literature as well. It is unfortunate, 
though understandable, that she felt comp­ 
elled to conceal some sources of the new 
information. For the time being these new 
acts have to be accepted with the hope 
that some day they can be verified and 
complemented. Were it not for the extra­ 
ordinary conditions under which scholar-
ship concerning Soviet literature—or anything Soviet, for that matter—has to be conducted, this secretiveness on the part of the author would be considered a shortcoming. As it is, one must follow a prudent and humane course.

Boris Pil'niak: A Soviet Writer in Conflict with the State is a well-written and thoroughly researched book which caters to the specialist as well as to the general reader. Since there is practically nothing in English on Pilnyak, and very little of substance even in Russian, this book fills the vacuum. The author’s general approach, avoiding specialized and minute references unknown to the uninitiated, makes the book appealing to the general public, although its main significance is still to be found by readers familiar with, and interested in, modern Russian literature.

Since there is no comprehensive book on Pilnyak’s life and works in any language, it would have been more meaningful had the author chosen to treat Pilnyak in totality—full biography, a discussion of his other works in all their aspects, and a treatment of other aspects of his personality and opus. However, it would be unfair to blame the author for something she did not intend to do. Still, a more complete book on Pilnyak would be more useful and is still awaiting scholars of Soviet literature.

A literature specialist may find the approach too historical while there is little of purely aesthetic analysis of Pilnyak’s works. For example, in the author’s treatment of Mahogany (1929; English translation 1962 [excerpts]) there is no mention of the symbolism of the title, of the virility of the old Skudrin, etc. It is somewhat surprising that the author did not begin her discussion with Pilnyak’s first significant work, the novel The Naked Year (1922; English translations 1928 and 1975). It is here that Pilnyak’s incompatibility with the new system was clearly shown for the first time and that the seeds of subsequent conflicts with the state and the ultimate destruction of Pilnyak were sown. These and other omissions do not detract from the main purpose of the book, nevertheless the inclusion of such items would have enhanced the depth and the quality of the study. At the same time, since many Soviet writers—especially the ones who were, and still are, centers of controversy and conflict—are highly complex personalities, it is perhaps just as well that our efforts at understanding them are attempted piecemeal. In this sense, Reck’s book does its job remarkably well.

Vasa D. Mihailovich

Josef Skvorecky emigrated to Canada in 1968, the year the Russians invaded his native Czechoslovakia. In Europe, Skvorecky is a highly regarded author and translator of many books ranging from fiction to film scripts and cinema criticism. In his own Czechoslovakia he was a leading cultural figure.

Although it is not absolutely necessary to know these facts about Skvorecky, they help in understanding the particular apprehension of reality that underlies his two novellas in The Bass Saxophone. It is a sense of the absurd, a world view which blends a profound humanity with an equally powerful cynicism.

The two novellas “Emöke” and the title story “The Bass Saxophone” (as well as the excellent introductory essay called “Red Music”) are about jazz under two totalitarian regimes: the Nazis and the Soviets, both of which possess an instinctive fear of (among other things) jazz. Under the Nazis jazz was referred to as Judeo-negroid music and was forbidden. Regulations were formulated which defined and restricted the kind of music that was acceptable. In Czechoslovakia the only “true Czech music” that was permitted was the polka. Under the Soviets modern jazz and rock fare little better.

Is it really so surprising that (as abstract as it may be) music, the language which most directly speaks to the human spirit should come under scrutiny; that jazz, this affirmation of the individual creative spirit,