

short story), involving people, nature . . . society and even the sphere of the supernatural or of pure imagination . . . told for the purpose of instruction and/or entertainment, and using structure and imaginative language, or any other literary device that enhances the aesthetic experience" (*Seminar*, 4, No. 2 [1970], 173).

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. Hoffman'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 never 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 swapping, 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 Steinhauer's book a very challenging and rewarding collection of Novellas.

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VERA T. RECK

*Boris Pil'niak: A Soviet Writer in Conflict with the State*

Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975. Pp. 243. \$6.00.

During the fabulous 1920's in Soviet literature, Boris Pilnyak (Pil'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 lasting 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 Pilnyak. In her extensive book, *Boris Pil'niak: A Soviet Writer in Conflict with the State*, Vera T. Reck attempts to shed light on the circumstances surrounding Pilnyak'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 Pilnyak's attempts in his stories and novels to depict reality as it is and not as it ought to be; his utilization 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"—Pilnyak's as well as those of others—which eventually brought about suffering and death. The author repeats some well-known details, but she also reveals some hitherto unknown material, which contributes to our understanding, not only of Pilnyak, but of the entire period in Soviet literature as well. It is unfortunate, though understandable, that she felt compelled to conceal some sources of the new information. For the time being these new facts have to be accepted with the hope that some day they can be verified and complemented. Were it not for the extraordinary 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 Piľniak: 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.

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## JOSEF SKVORECKY

### *The Bass Saxophone*

Translated from the Czech by Kaca Polackova-Henley  
Toronto: Anson-Cartwright, 1977.  
Pp. 186. \$4.95.

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-negroïd 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,