

Introduction

Art is the great theme of art. In Vassily Aksenov's Ожог (The Burn) art plays a central role thematically and conceptually. The novel is, of course, about many other things. Religion and Dissidence in particular play equally important roles. The imagery and thematics involved with these three areas combine and interlink extraordinarily well; each one, indeed, cannot be discussed without recourse to the other two. These three themes come together in one scene in particular: Samsik Sabler's concert "The Battle between the Gods and the Giants". This scene is, I believe, central to the novel, and its relation to the work as a whole will be the starting point for this thesis.

Sabler's concert is, I believe, a focus of the book around which many other themes and images are centered. Over the course of this sizable novel, Aksenov incorporates and interweaves a myriad of other themes and actions. It is this ambitiousness that accounts for the novel's greatness, and can at times be its greatest liability. However, a complete appreciation of the work, it is my contention, is impossible without a basic understanding of how these three themes are woven together.

Much of the criticism of Ожог comments on one aspect, or even several, of this relationship, but none of the scholars, due mostly to the restrictions of their respective concentration within the novel, explicates this facet of the work completely.¹ It is this gap that the present study is intended to fill.

¹ Of the criticism, Nina Efimova in her dissertation Religious Motifs in Vasilii Aksenov's Works (1991) (and also her slightly abridged Russian translation of it, Интертекст в религиозных и демонических мотивах В.П. Аксенова (1993)) and Stephan Kessler's Erzähltechniken und Informationsvergabe in Vasilij Aksenovs Ožog, Zolotaja naša železka und Poiski žanra do the best jobs.

The Burn is a montage of two main plot lines following the same character during two times in his life. The first tells the story of Tolya von Steinbock, who has rejoined his mother in Magadan after she has served 10 years in the camps as an enemy of the people. This section is based on Aksenov's own childhood and the story of his mother, Eugenia Ginzburg, which is told in her book Крутой маршрут (translated as Journey into the Whirlwind and Within the Whirlwind).² The second is not solely about Tolya as an adult, but five different adult versions of him, each with a distinct personality, yet united by many similar features and experiences. Each of the five faces an ethical struggle between being successful and fighting the totalitarian regime which unjustly imprisoned his mother.

Tolya encounters many of the problems faced by typical adolescents in the *Bildungsroman* part of the novel. He tries to fit in, impress girls, get good grades and make the basketball team. Yet he is faced with the problem of reconciling his public life, with its patriotic conditioning and Soviet propaganda, and his private life, with his mother who is an "enemy of the people" and his step-father, Martin, who serves as a Catholic priest in the camp.

In a pattern that will continue throughout the novel, Tolya oscillates between embracing the outer world and his own inner world. His initial ambivalence is overcome, and he writes patriotic essays and makes it into the Komsomol. He even falls in love with the daughter of one of the Magadan bigwigs. After his mother is re-arrested, in one of the most touching scenes in Russian literature, he renounces his Komsomol membership and

² The text's relationship with Ginzburg's memoirs is an important one, but is beyond the scope of this study, and has already been well described in Priscilla Meyer's "Aksenov and Stalinism:

sees Soviet authority for what it is - a repressive regime that has needlessly and cruelly sacrificed the lives of many innocent people including his mother. He is ultimately, if not categorically consoled by the religious instruction of Martin.

It is in Magadan that Tolya meets Sanya Gurchenko. He is a young, Romantic figure who corresponds with Tolya's movie hero The Ringo Kid. Sanya serves two major functions in the novel. The first is that he is associated with an underground society which attempts to take over a ship and sail to America. This group is infiltrated by the NKVD and is arrested. Tolya, on his way to visit his mother, witnesses Sanya's being beaten while under interrogation. In this capacity Sanya fits in with the political aspects of the novel. Sanya is also a student of Martin's, and after he escapes from prison, he becomes Father Alexander and works as a Catholic theologian in Rome. It is Sanya's "Third Model" which serves as the main connection between art and religion in the novel.

The chronologically later part of the novel is more complicated. Tolya in Magadan dreams of success in several different areas: literature, science, art, etc... In the late 60's we find him as a successful writer, scientist, musician, sculpture *and* doctor. There are five separate characters, all of whom seem to be Tolya von Steinbock. There is Pantelei Apollinariievich Pantelei, the writer; Aristarkh Apollinariievich Kunitser, the scientist; Samsik Apollinariievich Sabler, the jazz saxophonist; Radik Apollinariievich Khvastishchev, the sculptor; and Genady Apollinariievich Malkolmov, the doctor.³

Political, Moral, and Literary Power" (1986) and David Lowe's "E. Ginzburg's Крутой маршрут and V. Aksenov's Ожог: The Magadan Connection" (1983).

³ The criticism seems divided as to the nature of the five Apollinariieviches. Cynthia Simmons asserts that they are all one character who "metamorphose" from one personality to the other (Father's Voice, 31). Priscilla Meyer claims that Tolya represents a common past of the five main

Tolya's moral struggle is still going on twenty years later. All five oscillate between being productive professionals (but ones who toe the party line) and living a life of dissolution and licentiousness. After their final disillusionment they reject the regime and return to their drunken ways. They ultimately wind up incarcerated in the same jail cell together. The novel ends with The Victim's (a composite of the five Apollinarieviches) jumping out of a window after suspecting the infidelity (or simply after the infidelity) of his feminine ideal, Alisa.

Structurally, the novel is broken into three books: Мужской Клуб (The Men's Club), an ironically named beer joint in Moscow; Пятеро в одиночке (Five in Solitary), an allusion to the Apollinarieviches' incarceration; ППП или последние приключения Пострадавшего (FAV or The Final Adventures of the Victim). The books follow, as Anatole Shub notes (12), the structure of a sonata with the first book being a "wild, farcical, phantasmagoric fugue on the theme of escape", the second "a classic andante movement, more conventionally structured", and the third book "a chromatic fantasy that becomes ever more exalted, imaginative and visionary".⁴

characters ("Aksenov and Stalinism", 513), while Konstantin Kustanovich says that the five are adult "hypostases" of young Tolya (*Artist and the Tyrant*, 92). The truth would seem to lie, as Inger Lauridsen notes ("Beautiful Ladies", 113), in all of them and none of them at the same time. In Aksenov's postmodern, playful way, both possibilities, as well as the superposition of them all, are equally likely.

⁴ It is surprising that Shub's comment, written in a book review soon after the publication of the English translation, has not been further explored. In a novel that is so centered around music, both thematically and structurally this aspect represents a large gap in the current scholarship. Christopher Rahe proposes that *Ожог* is a "jazz narrative", that is, it is categorized by improvisation (for instance the chapters "ABCDE"). In this connection E.L. Doctorow's novel *Ragtime*, which Aksenov translated into Russian, should also be studied. Publishers would also be wise to heed Shub's advice to "provide [...] a critical introduction and an apparatus of explanatory notes so that its subtle riches and sly references can be understood by readers who have not been immersed in Russian culture".

Book One introduces us to the main characters of the novel. Not only do we meet the five Apollinarieviches (the narration actually threads seamlessly from one to the other), but the main villain(s) and the female interest(s) of the novel. Much as there are five semi-distinct apotheoses of young Tolya, there is a mirror-like quintupling of other characters. The main villain is a chekist by the name of Cheptsov, who is based on Chentsov from Ginzburg's memoirs. It is he who re-arrests Tolya's mother and tortures Sanya in detention.

He comes back in the late 60's as a cloakroom attendant, but with the same sadistic and depraved tendencies. His first appearance in the novel sets off the first flashback to Magadan. Here he is known, at first, as Shevtsov. Cheptsov has a near double in Lyger, his superior in Magadan, whom he denounces in order to take his wife and daughter. The former goes crazy upon hearing that her husband has been arrested for being a French counter-revolutionary whose real name was La Guerre. She becomes completely bed-ridden and repeatedly shouts "papa französish ... la guerre, la guerre ... [dad is French ... the war, the war ...]" She begins screaming "la guerre" not only because of his (supposed) real name, but because the man she loved is being sent to the *lager*, or camp. But Lyger comes back as Cheptsov/Shevtsov's partner in the cloakroom.

This group of evil doppelgängers also includes Colonel Guly (father of Tolya's first object of illicit desire) who is linked to Cheptsov by his sexual depravity. The final two, Theodorus and Hujer are less central to the story line and appear only in a subplot involving Gennady Apollinarievich Malkolmov's (Tolya's doctor incarnation) work with UNESCO in Africa. We see the same pattern here as we do with the hero: an original character dating from 1949 in Magadan (Tolya and Cheptsov) and five manifestations of

that character twenty years later (the five Apollinarieiches; and Shevtsov, Lyger, Guly, Theodorus and Hujer) (Efimova, Religious Motifs, 133-145).

The main female character(s) have five aspects as well . There is the initial girl, a Polish prisoner named Alisa with whom Tolya falls immediately in love, and then five reflections: the adult Alisa Fokusova, now married; Arina Belyakova, Marina Vlady (Vladimir Vysotskii's wife); Nina; and Masha Coulagot. The Main Hero's best friends are a slight exception to this pattern. There are still five of them in the late sixties, early seventies, but there is no template for them in the Magadan scenes. This perhaps explains why they turn out to be traitors. All five derive their names from the word 'silver' in various languages, pointing to the pieces of silver received by Judas (Kustanovich, Artist and the Tyrant, 95; Bolshun, 175 and others). Their names are Silvestrov (Silver), Zilberansky (German: Zilber), Sereybryanikov, Serebro (Russian: *serebro*) and Argentov (French: argent).

“The Men's Club” is characterized by narrative experimentation and playfulness. The narration jumps from Apollinarieich to Apollinarieich without signal, and shifts seemingly haphazardly from first to third person and back. This is designed to correspond with the semi-drunken state that the heroes find themselves in over the first part of the novel. The only information we get about Tolya in this section is through flashbacks inserted into the narration. At this point in the novel it is impossible during a first reading to know exactly how Tolya's story fits into the larger plot.

It is not until “Five in Solitary”, the “andante” book, that the pieces begin to come together. Aksenov signals this change in tone:

Перед тем, как приступить ко второй книге повествования, автор должен заявить, что претендует на чрезвычайное проникновение в глубину избранной им проблемы.

Да существует ли вообще здесь какая-нибудь серьезная проблема? Обоснованны ли претензии автора на глубину?

То и другое покажет время и бумага, автор же не может отказаться от своих претензий, ибо любой солидной русской книге свойственна проблемность. (209)

Before embarking on the second book of this narrative, the author is obliged to state that he aspires to penetrate with extraordinary profundity into the problem that he has chosen.

But does any problem of such seriousness exist at all? Do the author's pretensions to profundity have any foundation?

Time and paper will show; but the author cannot renounce his aspirations, because it is characteristic of any serious Russian book to tackle serious problems. (221)⁵

Here the Main Hero⁶ gets his life back together, and the structure of the novel reflects this. We learn who Tolya is, and what his relationship to the Apollinarieviches is. We identify the oscillations that they go through in their quest (an important concept in Aksenov) for self-realization.

As the Main Hero becomes sober, he advances professionally and gets on the good side of the authorities. Kunitser develops a satellite used by the military. Malkolmov discovers a substance called Lymph-D which contains "liquid soul". The sculptor Khvastishchev completes a marble dinosaur known as "Humility" ("Смирение"). Pantelei comes up with the idea for a new play entitled "The Heron" (which happens to

⁵ Quotations will be taken from both the Russian edition and the English translation by Michael Glenny. Nuances of translation will be noted. For instance, the Russian "любой солидной русской книге" is better rendered as "any self-respecting Russian book" or "any *real* Russian book".

⁶ I borrow this term from Boris Bolshun who uses "Главный Герой" as shorthand for the five Apollinarieviches.

be the title of an actual play written by Aksenov⁷). Finally, the musician Sabler plans to put on a concert entitled “The Revolt of the Giants against the Gods.”

The honeymoon is short-lived, however. Through a combination of authoritarian crack-downs (connected with the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968), being deceived by his friends, and his own misgivings about betraying his ideals, the Main Hero loses faith in the world around him and gives up on his plans and ambitions. Consequently the Apollinarieviches (rather ironically) remain true to them/himself by reverting completely back to drink, thus incurring the wrath of the authorities. All five are forthwith arrested and, due to the great number of detainees, are forced to inhabit the same cell (hence “Five in Solitary”).

Book Three, “The Victim’s Last Adventure”, is in part a mixture of the styles of both books. Here the narration is grounded, as in the second book, but is still fantastic as in the first. The post-modern nature of the final book renders any closed interpretation inadequate as many aspects are irreconcilable, but an interpretation that is consistent with the rest of the novel is still achievable. Here, after the symbolic uniting of the characters at the end of Book Two, there is only one hypostasis of the Main Hero known as “Пострадавший” – The Victim, or He Who Has Suffered. The Victim is also united with his original love, Alisa. In one instance, The Victim is convinced that she is bringing him to a mental institution and he commandeers an ambulance and flees to his father’s home in Ryazan to seek the pure heart of Russia. This medical note is highly appropriate, as it signifies the sick state of Russia and fits in with the first half of the title of Book Three. ППП can stand not only for “Последние Приключения Пострадавшего”, but also for

⁷ See Efimova (Religious Motifs) and Lauridsen (“Beautiful Ladies”).

“пост первой помощи” or “first-aid station”. Instead of the pure Russian spirit that he expects to find, the town is filled with peasants spouting Marxist bromides and a desecrated church.

Later, he thinks he is being deceived by her again and jumps out the window into a giant billboard of an eye (likely a symbol of authoritarian power). He winds up on the moon where he is confronted by a “philosophical construct” of Cheptsov. The novel ends with a moment of complete silence in Moscow, awaiting an “Ожидаемое”, an “Expected Something”.

Here I will be concentrating mostly on Samson Apollinarieievich Sabler, the jazz musician. Sabler’s masterpiece is a concert to be called “Борьба богов и гигантов”, “The Battle of the Gods and Giants”. The concert is ready to go on, the seats are packed, and the curtain is about to go up, when a *druzhina*, or people’s vigilante group, arrives and shuts down the concert.

The title of the concert is an allusion to a Greek myth, and the narration is in fact interlarded with fictional scenes from this myth. In the myth, the god of time, Cronus, in defiance of a prophesy that he will be overthrown by his son, swallows his children as they are born. When Zeus is born, Cronus’ wife, Rhea, slips him a stone wrapped in a sheet instead. Zeus is then brought up in hiding. Later, Zeus overthrows Cronus and rescues his brothers and sisters and assumes the throne.

Zeus imprisons Cronus and the rest of the Titans - Cronus’ siblings, the children Gaia and Uranus (whom Cronus had, in his turn, overthrown) - in Tartarus. Gaia, who is not pleased by having her children imprisoned, then gets the giants to attack Zeus and the rest of the Olympian gods. The giants are beings that are half snake, half gods and were

born from the blood shed when Cronus attacked and overthrew *his* father Uranus. The giants were, like all the gods, immortal, except that they could be killed under one circumstance: They had to be slain by a god and a mortal at the same time, and also had to be out of contact with their Earth where they were born and from where they draw their power.⁸ The giants' attack, however, is unsuccessful and with the help of Hercules (engendered by Zeus for this very purpose) the gods defeat the giants (Grimal, 160-1, 448-9, 454-5).

This myth, along with Sabler's concert patterned on it, is very important for the novel. It is the single most important image for Aksenov's theme of dissidence (including the crackdown of the Prague Spring and the diminishing tolerance of artistic expression following the Thaw), and is central to the motif of religion as well as Aksenov's theory of the purpose of art. Aksenov uses the halting of the concert as an indication of the restriction of freedoms that began in the late Sixties, in particular with the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. The audience's tacit acceptance of the shut-down underlines the Soviet people's acceptance and failure to react to this sea change. By this device he also makes a statement about the purpose of art in the Soviet Union. He propounds an art which is *engagé* and should support freedom, and reject the return of Stalinism which was then threatening to grasp the country again.

If art should have a dissident aspect to it, it should also be a means of transcendence. Through Sanya Gurchenko's Third Model it is connected to religion. Sanya himself, while being a religious figure in the novel, is also a dissident figure who

leads a would-be revolt in Magadan, only to be arrested. Through this connection religion, which was of course officially persecuted in the Soviet Union, also becomes a means of dissidence.

Within the novel these three themes run almost seamlessly into one another through a complex system of allusions, echoes, metaphors and plot devices. It is almost impossible to discuss one of these three meaningfully without direct recourse to the other two. The net effect is a novel which is thematically very tightly wound (if not always in plot) and which cannot be done justice in such a circumscribed study as this.

⁸ This can be alternately read as the peninsula of Pallene in particular, or as the Earth, that is their mother, Gaia. It also implies that the band “The Giants,” and all Russian artists, lose their power if they leave their land, Mother Russia.

Chapter One: Stalinism

The Burn is a very political novel. Even when Stalinism and its harmful offspring are not being discussed, the novel is commenting indirectly on them. There are several direct acts of dissidence in the novel, but metaphorically much of the rest of the book becomes politically charged as well. Starting with Sabler's concert, this chapter will follow the chain of images which are connected with the fight against Stalinism and the Soviet people's role in it.

When Samsik decides to have the concert, he gets a band together, which he aptly names "The Giants", and gets his friend Silvester to help out. "Сильвестер, развивая идею Самсика, заказал для концерта текст писателю Пантелею. Задники будут оформлены скульптуром Хвастичевым" (384). ("Developing Samsik's idea, Silvester commissioned the writer Pantelei to compose a script for the concert. The sets would be designed by the sculptor Khvastishchev" (407).) They book a stage in the Institute of Refrigeration Research, and everything is set to go on. On the day of the concert, in fact right before the concert is about to start, a *druzhina* (vigilante or citizens' militia group) shows up and shuts down the concert.

Knowing the context of the Greek myth, the parallelism between these two scenes is fairly obvious. The myth is about a revolt by the giants against those who wronged their brothers—a revolt that is quashed by the Olympians. The concert is a symbolic revolt against the authorities, which is emphasized by the concert's title and the name of the band. The Giants' concert is quashed just as the giants' revolt is.

If these affinities were not enough to tip the reader off, the scene of the concert is intermixed with a fictive narration of the Greek myth⁹:

ФЛЕГРЕЙСКИЕ БОЛОТА

где в то утро собралась компания: Порфирион и Эфиальт, Алкионей и Клитий, Нисирос, Полибот и Энкелад, и Гратион, и Ипполит, и Отос...

[...]Мы ждали атаки, грома, диких вспышек и прочих психических эффектов, на которые так падок Зевс, но все было тихо, бесконечно тихо. Даже не чавкала вода в необозримых Флегрейских болотах. Вот наш мир – необозримое болото, серая вода, серая трава, и здесь мы взбунтовались! (386, 387)¹⁰

Phlegraeon Marshes

where the company was assembled that morning: Porphyriion and Ephialtes, Alcyoneus and Clytius, Nisiros, Polybotes and Enceladus, and Gratian, and Hippolytus, and Otho ...

[...]We were expecting attacks, thunderbolts, wild flashes of lightning and the other psychic effects that Zeus was so fond of, but all was quiet, endlessly silent, without even the sound of water splashing in the limitless Phlegraeon marshes. This was our world – the vast swamp, gray water, gray grass – and there we were rebelling! [...] (409, 410-11)

This parallel turns out to connect with the rest of the text on many levels. One of these levels is the opposition of fathers and sons, that great Russian theme. Politically, the first thing that comes to mind is Stalin as *otets naroda* or Father of the People. Of course, Stalin died in 1953, but the struggle with the *nasledniki Stalina*, or the followers of Stalin (to borrow Evtushenko's term), continues. In this vein, The Burn is a comment on the contemporary political situation in the Soviet Union which will be discussed below.

The Main Hero's patronymic, Apollinarievich (son of Apollinary), seems to have a dual significance. The first is as "son of Apollo" (Bolshun, 165). This fits in with the

⁹ Interpretations as to nature of this narration are varied. Some (Dalgård, "Literary Roots") see it as a hallucination, and others accept it as part of Aksenov's generally schizophrenic style. I see it also as a flashback to another scene which will be discussed below.

¹⁰ Ellipses in brackets are mine, those without brackets are Aksenov's.

giants-gods opposition as Apollo is one of the Olympian gods. In particular, he is the god of the Sun and prophecies, and was the patron of medicine and music (thus connected to Malkolmov and Sabler). He was also closely associated with the muses and had many affairs. The action of the novel proves that the Main Hero is a true son of his mythological father.

Literarily, the echo here is not of Turgenev, but of Andrei Bely's Petersburg.¹¹

The second allusion in the Main Hero's patronymic is to Nikolai Apollonovich Ableukhov, the main character of Petersburg (Kustanovich, 95). In the novel, Nikolai is commissioned by revolutionaries (the novel was written between 1913 and 1922) to assassinate his father, Apollon Apollonovich, a high-ranking bureaucrat, with a time bomb. At the end of the novel, the bomb goes off in the Ableukhov house, utterly destroying it, but leaving father and son unharmed. This fits into our pattern well, because the bomb (the death of Stalin) has gone off, but the old regime, the fathers, are still intact and unharmed. Nikolai's quest, like Sabler's, is an external failure. Interestingly enough, the patronymic of Nikolai and Apollon is the same, and hence the Main Hero is connected with both generations. The allusion to Apollo is ambiguous as well, since Apollo is an Olympian and fought against the giants. This is indicative of Aksenov's mixed view of his generation as both responsible for the return of Stalinism and for fighting against it.

Bely's novel may also be a source for other images in the novel.

¹¹ Although this connection is mentioned often (Kustanovich, Dalgård, Kessler) and is well established, it deserves a more complete study. Of the criticism, Kessler's is the most complete in this respect.

In *The Burn* we find the same dream-motif as in *Petersburg*, namely the motif of the child-eater Cronos. As a last attempt to live and work in the USSR, the saxophone player Samsik Sabler tries to stage a show called “The Battle Between the Gods and the Giants.” At the last moment it is stopped by the censorship; but before this happens Samsik has a hallucinatory vision of it, in which the Gods fight against the Giants, but when Cronos, the dictator, appears they join in the common battle against him [...] (Dalgård, “Literary Roots”, 75-6).¹²

The dual opposition of giants v. gods and gods v. Cronus¹³ is important for understanding the role of art in the novel, and fits in well with the theme of dissidence and will be discussed later in this chapter, as well as in Chapter Three.

Another important aspect of the concert scene is that it is not broken up by the secret police (or by the censors), but by a *druzhina*, a people’s militia. This implies that the Russian people themselves are somehow implicated in this action. This is reinforced by several other details throughout the book. Samsik asks one of the militiamen “Твоя фамилия не Чепцов? [...] Сын чекиста?” (431) (“Your name isn’t Cheptsov, by any chance? [...] The son of the State Security man by that name?” (458)). This is a direct link between the early Seventies and the repressions of Stalinism portrayed in the Magadan scenes. At the end of this same scene, when Silvester tells the audience that the concert will be canceled due to technical difficulties, its reaction is silence: “они безмолвствуют”. This is an allusion to Pushkin’s play “Boris Godunov” where the people’s reaction to the ascension of the false Dmitry is similar: “народ безмолвствует” (Kustanovich, 200 n. 17) – a line that did not make it past the censor when Pushkin first

¹² Kustanovich confuses the organization between the myth portrayed in the Pergamum Frieze and the action of the novel, as does Efimova, but the basic observation is still a good one.

¹³ There are alternate ways of spelling this name. The god’s name is generally Cronus (Gr. Κρονος, Ru. Кронос), but is sometimes confused or interchanged with Cronos or Chronus (Gr. Χρονος, Ru. Кронус) which is Time personified. In the Russian, the word “Крон” is also used, which appears to be intentionally ambivalent (383). This distinction is not preserved in the English translation. Kessler seems to be the only critic to note it (160-1).

tried to publish the play. Similarly the people of 1970's Russia are silent as the children of Stalin (comparable to Ivan the Terrible here) assume power.

Another image in the book reinforces this. Radik Khvastishchev's masterpiece, a marble dinosaur called "Смирение" — "Humility", or "Submissiveness" assumes gigantic proportions and begins destroying houses and stepping on people. Aksenov tells us twice that the dinosaur has "простое рязанское лицо" (437); "the face of a Ryazan peasant" (467). This metonymically links the rampaging dinosaur with the people (Kustanovich, 98-9). "This dinosaur seems submissive and good-hearted, but it will destroy everything in its path nonetheless. The dinosaur is the ultimate destination of all art and science, no matter how humanistic its creators" (Proffer, 134). "Submissiveness" shows the damage that the Soviet citizens' own submissiveness is doing to the country. Not to leave anything to chance, Aksenov introduces some actual Ryazan peasants in Book Three when The Victim steals an ambulance and meets his father in Ryazan. In the "heart of Russia" he finds the peasants reciting Marxist formulas and empty Soviet catch-phrases.

The image of the dinosaur is also picked up elsewhere. A Soviet textbook on Darwinism reads:

Однако самым интересным персонажем картины был, конечно, некий незадачливый динозавр, лишенный головы. Все у него было на месте – колоссальное мускулистое и мясистое тело, длинейший хвост, колоннообразная шея, не хватало лишь маленькой детали — головки, вес которой, как известно, у динозавра равен одной семитысячной части веса всего тела. [...] Теперь уже достоверно доказано, что обезглавленный ящер мог жить в доисторической среде не менее одного года и даже сохранял функции продолжения рода (64, 66).

The most interesting character in the picture, however, was one unfortunate dinosaur that had been deprived of its head. Everything else was there – the

colossal, muscular, fleshy body, the long tail, the pillarlike neck. All was there except for one little detail – the head, the weight of which, as we know, is equal to one seven-thousandth of the weight of the whole body. [...] It has now been definitely proved that a headless dinosaur could remain alive in the prehistoric environment for no less than a year and could even retain its reproductive functions (67, 68).

This, it seems to me, is a reference to the death of Stalin. Even though Stalinism has lost its head, it still continues to function, and even to reproduce. This circle of images (people - dinosaur - Stalinism) cements this relationship. It seems that Aksenov intends to link the Russian people with the crimes being committed in their country.

The people's culpability extends far further than allowing a concert to be shut down. The main reference here is to the Soviet people's reaction to a much more important event, the entry of Soviet tanks and troops into Czechoslovakia to put down the "Prague Spring" in 1968. This was a watershed moment for the Russian intelligentsia. It was the death knell for the few liberal reforms that had occurred after the death of Stalin. It signaled the official end of "*Otтеpel*" or "Thaw." This is symbolized in the novel by the concert's taking place in the "Institute of Refrigeration Research." Sabler actually sings about it, or at least intends to, at his concert. One of his songs is titled "The Fateful Questions of Nineteen Sixty-Eight." In a practice session "Самсик Саблер рифмовол "Прага – Чикаго" (386) ("Samsik Sabler was rhyming "Prague" with "Chicago" (409)).

The paradigm that we see repeated in the novel is that a band of would-be dissidents (the giants, The Giants) hold a revolt (the concert), but are put down by an opposing force (the gods, the *druzhina*/authorities). Whereas the giants stage an actual revolt, The Giants use an art form - music. The implication is that art, or at least music, represents a form of modern-day rebellion. Indeed, Sabler exclaims at one point: "Суть

искусства – бунт против Крона!” (383); “The essence of art is the revolt against Cronus!” (406).

As has been noted above, the Russian “*Kron*” is ambiguous and can be either Cronus or Cronos - that is a Greek god, or time personified. Viewed as the latter, art is the revolt against Time: it strives for immortality¹⁴. But if we view it as “Cronus”, by analogy we get the reading that “the essence of art is the revolt against authority!” In the context of the novel, art is a form of dissidence against Stalinism and the people’s silence in the face of it which are both represented by the *druzhina*. It is also interesting to note that there is an implication that a revolt is not a revolt unless there is some reaction on behalf of the authorities. “Мы стояли и ждали, и нам уже казалось, что ничего не будет, не будет нам ответа, а значит, не будет и бунта [...]” (387); “As we stood and waited, we were beginning to think that nothing was going to happen, there would be no response, and therefore no rebellion [...]” (411).

This talk of “the essence of art” echoes another major point in the novel: Sanya Gurchenko’s “Третья Модель” or “Third Model”. Although the “Third Model” will be treated more fully in the chapters on art and religion, it is important to note this connection with Sanya Gurchenko, or as he is known by the early seventies, Father Alexander. The heart of Sanya’s idea is that the arts are a means to transcendence. It is the closest man can come to God without religion, which is the only true way. Art and religion are thus the only ways of overcoming Cronus/Cronos, and thus the only ways of overcoming Stalinism.

¹⁴ See page 46.

Sanya Gurchenko connects us with the other great example of our paradigm of thwarted revolts. In Magadan in 1949, Tolya von Steinbock runs into Sanya Gurchenko, who then takes him to a part of the town known as the “Crimea”. The ensuing scene is one of the most important in the novel and is directly relevant to Sabler’s concert. The “Crimea” is located in a part of town known as “Shanghai” (217/229, 346/367)¹⁵. It is an underground tunnel where the heating-pipes are located. This is where some of the released zeks go while they wait for the sea to unfreeze so they can move somewhere else. It is a convenient place because they have nowhere else to go, it is heated by the pipes, and the authorities leave them alone.

When Sanya takes Tolya down into this underworld, it is filled with steam and there are extremely hot pipes on which these underground denizens sit without being harmed. This world is filled with people with names like Pugachev, Pantagruel and Enemy of the People; and a transvestite named Lenka. The inhabitants, including Sanya, are planning to take over the ship *Felix Dzierżyński* and take it to America. Dzierżyński was the first person to head the Cheka, the organization which would later become the NKVD and the KGB. Symbolically, as if it were not clear enough, the planned revolt is a literal and symbolic blow against the authorities and their “extraordinary commissions”.

While in the Crimea, however, Sanya is given some *chifir*, a type of hallucinogen. During his delirium, he has mythological visions.

Голова моя лежала на этих ногах и смотрела, а к нам приближалась другая богиня, на этот раз Артемида, которая была, как и подобает охотнице, немного жилиста и суховата. Но прелестная! Трудно отрицать прелесть десной охотницы Артемиды. Она прогоняет своих собак – брысь, Барсик! Пошел, Шарик! — и тянет меня за руку в свой хвойный шалаш. [...] Где ваш

¹⁵ As elsewhere, the Russian is cited first, followed by the translation.

колчан, где волшебные звери Барсик и Шарик, устрашающие гигантов?
(352-53)

As my head lay on these legs I observed the approach of another goddess, this time Artemis, who was, as is proper for a huntress, somewhat muscular and scrawny. But gorgeous! Who can deny the attraction of Artemis, huntress of the forest? She urges on her hounds – sic ‘em, Panther, go Puffball!¹⁶ — and pulls me by the hands into her hunter’s cabin of fir branches [...] Where is your quiver, your arrows, where are the magic hounds Panther and Puffball, the terror of giants? (374)

It appears that this *chifir*-induced hallucination is the origin of “The Battle between the Gods and the Giants.” The scenes taking place in the “Phlegrean Marshes” during the concert are possibly flashbacks to this scene. Indeed, later on one of the giants says “Ой, братцы! [...] Ей-ей, даже во сне не видал такого красивого бога, как тот с собачками!” (394). “Oh, brothers! [...] In truth, never even in my dreams have I seen such a handsome god as that one with the dogs!” (418)¹⁷. This mythological connection is one of the links between Sabler’s concert and “the Crimea.”

The next day, a group of the Crimeans, including Sanya, Lenka and Tolya, wake up in an awkward situation. It is clear that something happened between them, but it is not clear what. Shortly thereafter Martin arrives and takes Tolya away. Not five minutes later, everyone in the Crimea is arrested and taken away. There was an informer in the underground. Sanya is carried away and Tolya forces himself to watch.

This scene takes place in a place called “the Crimea” by the inhabitants of Magadan, but there are scenes which take place in the actual Crimea. The tone of these

¹⁶ The names of the dogs in Russian are Barsik, which means ‘a little snow leopard’, and Sharik, which means ‘a little ball or sphere’. It is also interesting to note that Sharik is the name of the dog in Mikhail Bulgakov’s Heart of a Dog. See page 39

¹⁷ The giants have no concept of sex, and thus refer to the goddess as a god. This meeting, in fact, proves to be an education.

scenes is very light, even compared to the often happy-go-lucky Moscow sections of the book. One or all of the aspects of the Main Hero (it is never clear which one) fly to the Crimea with the Oxford slavacist Patrick Thunderjet (*Tanderdzhet* in Russian) where they engage in drunken revelry and get thrown into a detox unit. Here the inmates attempt to revolt and are arrested, tried, and sentenced to fifteen days of hard labor.

This scene, though highly parodic, fits into the above paradigm. While not central to the book, it does help deepen the connections with the scenes already described. The main allusion which informs these scenes is Mikhail Bulgakov's The Master and Margarita¹⁸. Rubles float in the air as in the performance at the Variety Theater and Aksenov makes direct reference to Bulgakov (169/176). While a detailed comparison of these two great works is not in the scope of this study, a few useful parallels can be drawn. The religious aspects of the novels are striking, as are the conditions under which they were written. Both were written "for the desk drawer" so to speak. In particular the line "Рукописи не горят" (297), "Manuscripts don't burn" (245) and its implications of the power of art is applicable here..

Also of importance are the following lines which are from the chapter "A Dream While Unconscious":

Вся истина в расправе над злодейством?
В попытке пытки¹⁹
в наказанье болью
в частичном умерщвлении мерзавца
растлителя садиста палача? (207)

¹⁸ See Meyer (1986, 520-23), though even this is a very brief analysis. Although I believe that she overstates the affinities between the two books (i.e. Eugenia Ginzburg as the Margarita of the novel), her assertion that the Magadan scenes are akin to the Jesus/Pilate scenes in Bulgakov's novel is very interesting. See also Simmons (33) and Efimova (122-23).

¹⁹ I am grateful to Prof. Karen Ryan for noting that "попытка не пытка," "an attempt is not torture," was one of Stalin's favorite sayings.

Does the whole truth lie in revenge on evildoing?
 In the attempt to torture
 in punishment through pain
 in the partial mortification²⁰ of a scoundrel
 of a molester of a sadist or a hangman? (217)

Here, tucked at the end of an inserted prose-poem is one of the biggest themes of the novel. It will become particularly important later when the physician Malkolmov is forced to decide whether to revive the Stalinist Cheptsov, or let nature take its course.

The image of the Crimea must be particularly resonant for Aksenov because the next novel published after The Burn is entitled Остров Крым or The Island of Crimea (1981). The book is a form of historical fiction which has as its fundamental premise the idea that the Crimea is not a peninsula (полуостров or half-island) but an island, which allowed Wrangel's White forces to hold out against the Reds during the Revolution. Now the Crimea is an American/Western European style Democracy which is trying to reunite with the Motherland. The Crimeans believe that Communism and Capitalism can coexist peacefully, but these pipe dreams are crushed when Soviet forces stage a military takeover of the island that is very reminiscent of the Soviet tanks rolling into Prague in 1968.

The main hero of The Island of the Crimea, Andrei Luchnikov, writes an article called "The Nonentity: On the Hundredth Anniversary of Stalin's Birth" which closely resembles some of what Aksenov is saying about Stalinism in The Burn.

Конечно, Сталин не умер в 1953 году. Он жив и сейчас в немыслимой по своей тотальности "Наглядной агитации", в сталинских сессиях так называемого Верховного Совета и в проведении так называемого выборов, в ригидности и неспособности к реформам современного советского

²⁰ More accurately "killing" or "destruction."

руководства (во всяком случае тех из них, кто наследует Калинина и Жданов), в нарастающем развале человеческой экономики (еда, одежда, обслуживание, все области *человеческой* жизни поражены сталинским слабоумием) и в разрастании *нечеловеческой* экономики (танки и ракеты в безумном числе как фантом сифилитического бреда), в неприятии любого инакомыслия и в навязывании своему народу идеологических штампов преустрашающего характера, в экспансии всего того, что именуется сейчас “зрелым социализмом”, то бишь духовного и социального прозябания... (239-240)

No, Stalin did not die in 1953. He is alive today. His presence is felt in a propaganda machine of unprecedented scope, in the sessions of the so-called Supreme Soviet, in the sham elections, in the rigidity of the contemporary Soviet leadership (or at least the group carrying on the legacy of Kalinin and Zhdanov and its aversion to reform), in the breakdown of human economy (food, clothing, service — all areas of human existence are stymied by Stalinist dementia) and the growth of inhuman economy (tanks, rockets, bombs — all means of destruction loom like a phantom of syphilitic delirium), in the rejection of all iconoclasm and the imposition of a stale, dated ideological boiler plate on a nationwide scale, in the spread of what is known as “mature socialism” (and is in fact social and spiritual stagnation of the worst kind) beyond Soviet borders. (241-242)

While The Burn is never this direct, this same message is easily discernible in the earlier novel.

There are many other connections between this scene in the underground “Crimea” and the concert besides the hallucination. For instance a taxi on its way to the concert drives “по этому ‘шанхаю’” (392), “through this ‘Shanghai’” (416), which is the part of Magadan where the “Crimea” is located.

Another motif is that of heating pipes. In the “Crimea” the ex-prisoners sit on the burning hot pipes without harm to themselves. Sabler, however is not so lucky. While practicing in a boiler room sometime before the concert, he gets carried away and injures himself:

Однажды произошел веселый случай. Самсик в порядке тренировки импровизировал на тему американской группы “Чикаго” и прислонился голой спиной к колену раскаленной трубы. Тема было до чрезвычайности близкая – “Роковые вопросы Шестьдесят Восьмого”. Самсик увлекся, если

можно так сказать о человеке, исторгающем из своего инструмента то хриплые однотонные вопли, то визг перерезанной собаки, то какое-то растерянное темное кудахтанье.

[...]Худой весь в поту, с латунным крестиком. Прилипшим к запавшей груди. Самсик Саблер рифмовал “Прага – Чикаго”.

Как вдруг что-то преблизилось постороннее. Он закрыл глаза и загудел нечто нежное и печальное, простую память о юности. Он вдруг увидел пар, клубы пара и сквозь них людей в нижнем арестантском белье, сидящих на тепловых трубах, славно диковинные наросты. В новой элегии не было ни одной ноты протеста, ни одной ноты бунта, а, наоборот, безысходность, нежная, безнадежная тема личной судьбы.

[...]Личная судьба лидера никого не интересовала.

Лидер отвалился от трубы и упал на живот. Спина у него дымилась, кожа слезала клочьями – ожог 2-й степени. Доигрался! (385-86)

One day a funny thing happened. By way of practice, Samsik was improvising on a theme from the American group Chicago and leaning with his bare back against a bend in a red-hot pipe. The theme was very close to his heart - “The Fateful Questions of Nineteen Sixty-Eight.” Samsik was carried away - if one can say that of a man who was making his instrument give forth a series of hoarse, monotonous yelps, like the squeals of a dog being slaughtered, mixed with dark, confused clucking sounds.

[...]Thin, bathed in sweat, with a little brass cross sticking to his sweaty, hollow chest, Samsik Sabler was rhyming “Prague” with “Chicago.”

Suddenly, something from far away came closer. He closed his eyes and blew something tender and sad, a simple memory of the days of his youth. He could see steam, clouds of steam, and through it people wearing prison underwear sitting on heating pipes, like clusters of some wild, tumorlike growth. In this new elegy that he was playing, there was not a single note of protest or rebellion, but on the contrary it expressed a gentle, disconsolate theme from his own personal fate.

[...]No one was interested in the leader’s personal fate. The leader fell away from the pipe and collapsed face down. His back was smoking, the skin peeling off in clumps - a second-degree burn. He’d really done it this time!²¹ (408-09)

The song, and the resulting burn, are associated with the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. Sabler is burned symbolically by the invasion, as well as the pipe. As mentioned above, '68 was a wake up call to Russia’s intelligentsia. It forced them to realize that things were not getting better, but returning to the old ways under Stalin. The

people's, in particular the intelligentsia's, reaction was to put their proverbial head in the sand, and not the righteous indignation and demands for change that The Burn indicates it should have been.

Sabler's song gives an indication of what the people's reaction should have been. He rhymes the words "Prague" and "Chicago". This is a reference to the protests over the Vietnam War held in Chicago outside of the Democratic National Convention in 1968 which were violently broken up by the police. In echo of this, some Soviet citizens hold a similar rally against the Vietnam War which is also broken up by the police. The youths copy the Americans in deed, including signs written in English, but not in spirit. There is also an allusion to the student protests in Paris in the same year (397/422) which serves as a similar example. In fact, the Russian youths are politically naïve and see nothing wrong with their gathering. They have no intention of causing trouble, but just want to have a good time. They are shocked when the police show up.

“Зачем гусей дразнить?” – это, можно сказать, было лозунгом их поколения. Конечно, играй, конечно, лабай, но только гусиков, смотри, не раздражи! Живи, твори, дерзай, но только смотри не раздражи могущественное стадо!

Дети репейники пока еще гусей не боялись. Не то что были особенно храбрыми, а просто еще не очень-то встречались с яростью пернатых. Не было еще достаточного опыта у московской хипни. (393)

“Why make waves?” This, one might say, was the slogan of Samsik's generation. OK, play; OK, have fun²², but just make sure you don't make waves! Live it up, do your thing, be brave, only don't tread on the toes of the powers that be!

The children of the Khrushchev generation were not yet afraid of the powers that be. Not that they were particularly brave; they simply had not had much

²¹ While this last sentence is an accurate translation of “*doigralsya*”, it literally means “He/It was played to the end” indicating that the burn is some sort of logical conclusion, or fulfillment of a purpose for Sabler.

²² The translation leaves out the word “*labai*” which means “play your instruments” (Bolshun, 200).

experience of the fury of the authorities when roused. Moscow's hippiedom had not yet acquired sufficient experience. (417)

It is because of this innocence that Sabler is burned. The "Crimeans", who have served their sentences, are all too experienced with the "fury of the authorities", and they can sit on the hot pipes unharmed. The eponymous "burn" is the burn of neo-Stalinism.

This loss of political innocence is parallel to Sabler's loss of sexual innocence. As a young musician, Sabler is lured home by Arina Belyakova where he loses his virginity to her. The pipes and electrical conduits in her apartment are, as in the "Crimea" and the boiler room, glowing with heat and electricity, and in Sabler's post-coital raptures, he gets shocked. As it turns out, Arina has a "mission" (41/43) to lure young free-thinking artists. The KGB knocks at the door and Arina thinks: "Какие вежливые, ... Как во времени Дзержинского" (42), "How polite they are, ... Just like when Dzerzhinsky was in charge" (44). Fortunately Sabler exits out the fire escape. "Her sexual education of Samsik is linked to Tolja's first sexual experience: in Beljakova's Silver Age apartment building all the cables and pipes are overheated and shine through the walls; Tolja loses his innocence in 'the Crimea,' a manhole full of underground steam pipes where the ex-zeks of Magadan live while waiting for transportation out of Siberia" (Meyer, 514).

This scene is juxtaposed with two peripherally important ones. In the first one, Sabler and a group of *stilyagi*, or Russian hippies, are arrested by a *druzhina*. Sabler is eventually released and allowed to go back to his apartment on Decembrists Ave. The other is Sabler's first concert where he attracts the attention of the authorities. He plays a song entitled "ПЕРЕОЦЕНКА ЦЕННОСТЕЙ" or "Reevaluation of Values" which included the lines "юношей-ровесников / уроки / дававших танкам / въехавшим под

утро в их город / в молодость / и в память навсегда” (45); “lessons young men of my age / gave to the tanks / that drove into their city / early one morning / in their youth / and in their memories forever” (47). The theme of “The Battle between the Gods and the Giants” has been in his head for quite a while.

Sanya’s arrest occurs almost concurrently with the re-arrest of Tolya’s mother. While bringing a care package to her at the police station one day, Tolya witnesses the brutal beating of Sanya by Cheptsov. Tolya’s mother will be sentenced to permanent exile, but Sanya is sent off to work in the uranium mines.

After his mother’s second arrest and humiliating treatment by Cheptsov, Tolya renounces his membership in the Komsomol and has his ideals shattered. But this does not mean he will have nothing to do with the regime. His pattern of alternating between hating the regime, but toeing the line, and hating the regime and refusing to be used by it continues throughout his life. It is not incidental that this is the same time he learns of the existence of the “Crimea” and the seeds of Sabler’s future revolt are sown.

He is so distraught by his revelations that he attempts suicide, only to be saved by his step-father, the German Catholic, Martin. This serves as his initiation into religion and he accepts Grace, asking Martin to teach him to pray. I will return to this in the third chapter.

Another, seemingly innocuous, detail is that he is shown kindness by Paulina Ignatievna. She works at Tolya’s school and encourages him in his academic endeavors, particularly his writing. She is a true Communist, which would seem to work against her, but it does not; she is a positive character. She sincerely believes in the ideal of the state, but at the same time has nothing to do with the atrocities being committed by her

husband, Lyger, and her lover, Cheptsov. Her anxiety about Tolya's future is sincere, no matter how little Tolya thinks of it, and this makes what happens to her such a tragedy. This is reminiscent of a scene in Journey into the Whirlwind where Ginzburg suspects that the nurse who has essentially brought her back from certain death performs her good deeds in order to expiate the sins of her husband who is a camp officer (362).

Cheptsov informs on Lyger, saying that he is a French spy and that his real name is "La Guerre." When Cheptsov tells Paulina, with whom he is having an affair, she faints, hitting her head on the floor and becomes paralyzed. Cheptsov is then forced to take care of her and her daughter, Nina.

Despite her allegiance to the regime and two Stalinists, she is not tainted by it. She indicates that there is humanity and goodness, even in the midst of this corruption. In fact, there is a hint that despite her communist affinities, she is connected with the Sablers and giants of the novel. As Cheptsov later tells the story to Nina:

Вбегаю. Перед моими глазами Полина Игнатъевна. Занимается с крошкой, то есть с тобой, Нина, изобразительным искусством, показывает картину Репина "Запорожцы пишут письмо турецкому султану" и рассказывает об истории создания мирового шедевра. Незабываемый момент: луч солнца падает на синее крепдешинное платье Полины Игнатъевны (327).

I ran into the house. There before me was Paulina Ignatievna. She was busy with the kid, that's to say with you, Nina, teaching you about art - she was showing you Repin's picture *The Zaporozhian Cossacks Writing a Letter to the Sultan of Turkey* and telling you the story of how this masterpiece came to be painted. It was an unforgettable moment - a ray of sunshine falling on Paulina Ignatievna's blue crêpe-de-chine dress (346).

The Repin painting (see appendix) shows a group of Cossacks writing a letter. They are all laughing heartily, and some have a ribald look on their faces. Since the title of the painting tells us that they are writing to the Turkish Sultan, it can be assumed that

they are not writing a polite RSVP. The painting becomes an anti-authoritarian symbol which depicts the freedom-loving Cossacks abusing the Sultan. “Repin treated the vivid episode ... as a demonstration of the patriotic and freedom-loving spirit of the people. ... He wanted to glorify the people defending their freedom, and the hero of the painting is the people” (Sarabyanov, 49-50). Also, it is not likely an accident that “Sultan” is one letter away from being an anagram of “Stalin”.

Nina will later get involved with Aristarkh Kunitser, and work for an underground democratic movement. It is not a direct line between these two facts, but it seems that there is some connection between Paulina Igantievna’s teaching and her daughter’s political beliefs twenty years later. It is clear that Paulina is a good Communist, as she encourages Tolya in his Komsomol work. The conclusion appears to be that her humanity, her charity to the young boy, is naturally anti-Soviet. Her good will plants the seeds that will turn Nina against the regime, with tragic results for her, as we will examine later.

There is another level to this scene when we examine another artistic allusion. In Guillaume Apollinaire’s poem “*La Chanson du Mal-Aimé*” (The Song of the Ill-Loved), from his collection *Alcools* (alcohol, spirits), there is a section entitled “*Réponse des Cosaques Zaporogues au Sultan de Constantinople*”. In the poem, Apollinaire puts words in the mouths of the Cossacks who are “*Ivrognes pieux et larrons / [fidèle] Aux steppes et au décalogue*” (24) (Drunk pious and thieving / [faithful] to the steppe and the

decalogue)²³. The Sultan asks the Cossacks to be his subjects, and they respond in no uncertain terms that they decline his offer.

In the poem the allusion marks the poet's rebelliousness at his status as "*mal-aimé*", but in Aksenov it marks rebelliousness at the authorities. Another connection here, as several commentators have noted (Simmons, 30-31; Kessler, 146-48; Dalgård, Grotesque, 108), is the patronymic Apollinarievich. Apollinaire (itself a *nom de plume* which comes from the Latin *apollinaris*, a place sacred to Apollo) is another possible source for and connection with the Main Hero. People believe that Apollinaire coined the term "surrealist", a word that can be applied to The Burn, but he was also involved with the Symbolists and the Futurists. "*La Chanson du Mal-Aimé*" "marks his most concentrated use of the trappings of Symbolism" (Stegmuller, 116). This serves as a bridge to the Russian Silver Age, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Twenty years after these events, the Main Hero meets Sanya again. He finds out how he escaped from prison, sailed to America, and eventually became a Catholic theologian at the Vatican. At this meeting Sanya tells of his idea of the "Third Model" which is central to the novel and escaping from the Stalinist world represented by Cheptsov.

²³ All unattributed translations are my own. There is no punctuation in all of Alcools.

Chapter Two: Art

Art and artistic production play a very important role in The Burn. This includes both individual works - Samsik's concert, the Pergamum Frieze, Khvastishchev's dinosaur sculpture - creativity and the role art should play - "the revolt against Cronos", "the Third Model" - as well as literary allusions - The Master and Margarita, Petersburg, and dozens of other works. Of these, the last are the most diffuse, and the least inextricably linked with the core of the novel. They are still, however, important to the work and help elucidate what Aksenov is doing.

Many of the allusions in the work refer to the period of Russian culture known as the Silver Age. Extending roughly from 1890 to 1920, the *Serebryanyi vek* was a change in literary mores from the Realistic trend of Turgenev, Dostoevskii and Tolstoy to a more avant garde and formalistic approach to literature. The predominant genre of the time is lyric poetry and the major schools are Symbolism, Futurism and Acmeism. Specifically mentioned or alluded to are the Symbolists Alexander Blok, Andrei Bely, Innokentii Annenskii, and Vladislav Khodasevich; the Futurists Velemir Khlebnikov, and Vladimir Mayakovskii; the Imaginist Sergei Esenin; the Acmeists Anna Akhmatova, Nikolai Gumilev and Osip Mandel'shtam; and the unclassifiable Mikhail Zoshchenko and Boris Pasternak.

Allusions to the Silver Age far outweigh allusions to the rest of Russian literature which here includes Mikhail Bulgakov, Vladimir Vysotskii, Vladimir Nabokov, Fedor Dostoevskii, Lev Tolstoy, Nikolai Gogol as well as others. There are several reasons which might motivate this choice. The most general is that the early years of the twentieth century were simply one of the, if not the, richest periods of literary output in

Russian history. Another important reason is that the Silver Age was the predominant movement before the Revolution of 1917. Thus, it represents a lost heritage, the world before the Soviets came to power, a patrimony.

Because the Revolution ended, if not immediately, the innovation and creative energy of these writers, allusions to their work hark back to an era before Soviet power, to times of more artistic freedom. Important here as well is the fact that the agents of the Revolution drove some of these writers abroad (Khodasevich), hounded some into silence (Zoshchenko, Akhmatova), arrested others (Mandel'shtam), drove still others to their death (Mayakovskii, Esenin), or even simply shot them (Gumilev); so allusions to their work emphasize the repressive nature of the Soviet regime.

An illustration of the separation of the Main Hero, and his generation, from this patrimony is given on a plane trip to the Crimea. The Main Hero (we don't know which one), can only remember the first two lines of Mandel'shtam's poem: "Бессонница. Гомер. Тугие паруса. / Я список кораблей прочел до середины" ("Insomnia. Homer. Taut sails. / I have read the list of ships half-way through"). They cannot even remember the poet's name. This is indeed an egregious sin for an educated Russian (159/165).

This poem has other resonances as well. Mandel'shtam chooses to listen to the waves of a "black sea" (more interesting than the ten-page catalog of ships) and the Main Hero is headed for the Crimea, located on the Black Sea. Also, the poet is trying to show how Western culture as we know it would be impossible without Helen, the cause of the Trojan war, the subject of the Iliad - the first major literary work of Western civilization (Cavanagh, 138). Aksenov can be hinting here that Soviet culture cannot exist without its

heritage, especially the Silver Age, but also the Western cultural heritage which influenced it.

He suddenly remembers the poem, as well as the author, when he and his friends are brought before the court for their antics in the Crimea (192/201). This would seem to suggest that there is some connection between their cultural patrimony, and the court, or more precisely, the crimes for which they are being tried. One possible interpretation is that not only are the Main Hero and his friends on trial, but also the Silver Age along with them.

Another allusion to Mandel'shtam is made before Pantelei attends a meeting of writers in Leningrad. It is in this scene that Pantelei divulges that he has “connections with the Vatican” and we hear the story of Father Alexander and the ‘Third Model’. The city is not named, but the location is given as “под стеклянным куполом, под прозрачным небом того города, куда мечтал когда-нибудь вернуться с друзьями Мандельштам, где в зеркальных окнах по ночам, где в подъездах среди витражей все еще бродят тени “серебряного века”...” (242) (“under a glass dome, beneath the translucent sky of that city to which Mandelstam dreamed of returning one day with his friends, where among the stained-glass windows of doorways, the ghosts of the Silver Age still wander at night...” (256”).

The reference here is to Mandel'shtam's poem “В Петербурге мы сойдемся снова” - “In Petersburg we will come together again.” This poem, written in 1920, exhibits Mandel'shtam's disillusionment with life in the former capital. The poem is filled with nervous imagery: “Дикой кошкой горбится столица / ... злой мотор во мгле промчится / И кукушкой прокричит.”, “The capital hunches like a wild cat /...

Only a spiteful motor speeds past in the gloom / And like a cuckoo cries out”; and paints a bleak picture of life in Soviet Russia. This combined with the “glass dome” which recalls Evgeny Zamyatin’s dystopia We and Dostoevskii’s Notes from Underground, underlines the satiric and anti-Soviet vein of the following scene which makes fun of the Writer’s Union.

Opposed to this allusion to Mandel’shtam is one to Alexey Nikolayevich Tolstoy on the following page. In describing a fatuous bureaucrat, a secretary of the Writer’s Union, Aksenov writes “вот вам галстук-бабочка, как у Алексея Толстого (графа, между прочим)” (244), “hence the bow tie (like Alexei Tolstoy, who was, after all, a count)” (257). It is clear here that the member of the official, government-supported Writer’s Union is directly opposed to Pantelei because one of the possible reasons for Mandel’shtam’s being arrested is his having slapped Alexey Tolstoy in 1934²⁴ who then went to Gorky seeking retribution.

Other references to the Silver Age appear in other parts of the book. Arina betrays Sabler amidst “crumbling houses of the Silver Age” (41/43). There is also a “memorial of the Silver Age” near by as well (396/421). The once great culture is now falling apart and is reduced to witnessing the corruption of Soviet youth. “This suggests that the offspring need only look toward Russia’s inspired intellectual past before the advent of Soviet rule to find a model” (Bennett, 61).

As a youth, Tolya von Steinbock has a particular fondness for the Futurist poets Mayakovskii and Khlebnikov. He imagines himself in the role of the early Mayakovskii

shocking the bourgeoisie, complete with top hat, cape and signature stare (212/224, 264/279, 341/361). Allusions to Mayakovskii are troublesome as he was regarded as the greatest Soviet poet while poets like Mandel'shtam were persona non grata for decades. This is partially resolved by the fact that Tolya idolizes the young Mayakovskii, and not later Soviet cheer leader, and also by his ultimate death by his own hand.

This image, however, dissolves in the face of real life. When his mother is arrested for the second time he realizes: “Нет, мужества не было в этот момент в душе юноши фон Штейнбока. Все его образы улетучились в этот момент, пропал и ранний Маяковский, и золотоискатель Джека Лондона, и европейский бродяга, бесстрашный любовник.” (282) “No, there was no courage in the soul of young Von Steinbock at that moment. All his mental images had evaporated at that moment. Gone were his romantic role models – the young Mayakovskii, Jack London’s gold prospector, the European tramp, the fearless lover” (298). Roughly twenty years later, Pantelei is sitting at the foot of the Mayakovskii statue in Moscow and thinks “хотя и запечатлен тридцатисемилетним, то есть моложе, чем он сам, сидящий у подножия Пантелей, стареющий юноша, вечный друг красивого двадцатидвухлетнего Маяка, плеснувшего краску из стакана.” (413) “even though the inscription stated that he had died at the age of thirty-seven – in other words, at a younger age than Pantelei was himself who was sitting on the plinth of the statue, an aging youth, a perpetual friend of

²⁴ See Nadezhda Mandel'shtam's memoir Hope against Hope: “After slapping Alexei Tolstoi in the face, M. immediately returned to Moscow” (3). Also pages 11, 22, 90 and Clarence Brown's note on pages 415-16.

the handsome twenty-two-year-old Mayakovskii who had splashed paint out of a glass.²⁵”

It appears that the Romanticism and hope which Mayakovskii represented for the young Tolya has dissolved in the face of the realities of the early seventies. But Pantelei still holds the memory of Mayakovskii dear, and along with it the memory of his days of innocence before his mother’s second arrest.

Besides the Mandel’shtam connection, Tolya’s mother and Sanya are connected with the Silver Age in other ways. Tolya’s mother would recite Blok, Pasternak, Mayakovskii, Gumilev, and Akhmatova from memory.²⁶ After her arrest, Tolya sees his mother’s bookcase with busts of Blok and Mayakovskii (334/354). This is right before Tolya asks his step-father, Martin, to teach him to pray, a concept that unites poetry, if only superficially, with the religious aspect of the novel. Tolya see-saws in his youthful enthusiasm between Mayakovskii and the Ringo Kid who is directly associated with Sanya Gurchenko/Father Alexander.

During the Main Hero’s conversation with Father Alexander in Rome, he recalls two lines from Blok’s poem “Три послания” (“Three epistles”): “И в золоте восходном тающий / Бесцельный путь, бесцельный вьюн...” (254-55), “And in the gold of sunrise, / The melting aimless path / The aimless restless seeker” (268-69). Within two pages Aksenov repeats these lines three times. In the context of their religious discussion, this underscores the Main Hero’s search for religious truth. However, Blok’s poetry plays

²⁵ The last phrase refers to Mayakovsky’s 1913 poem “А вы могли бы?” - “Could you do this?”.

²⁶ Poetry played an important role for Aksenov’s mother, Eugenia Ginzburg, during her imprisonment. In her memoirs she relates how she maintained her sanity by repeating poetry to herself and making up her own while in solitary confinement and also how she recited Evgenii

a much broader role in the novel. His “прекрасная дама” or “beautiful lady” appears to be the overarching template for the female characters of the book²⁷. The prototype is that of Alisa, a young Polish prisoner whom Tolya meets in Magadan. She is abused by the guards and begins drinking “Mermaid” cologne to ease her suffering. Tolya fantasizes about saving her, but actually does nothing. This is the start of the rupture between patriotic Komsomol and Ringo Kid which characterizes Tolya’s personality for the rest of the book. At this instant a young man comes out of nowhere and comforts her. He is chased by the guards, but somehow, fantastically, escapes. Tolya follows him and he is introduced to Sasha Gurchenko, whom I will discuss more fully in the next chapter.

This image of the feminine, which begins so purely, devolves into the image of a society whore. At the end of the book, it is her betrayal that drives The Victim to his two attempts at escape. (This will in turn be discussed in Chapter Three.) This pattern of a heavenly image turning into an all too earthly reality follows the same trend as Blok’s “beautiful lady” who starts off as the incarnation of the Solov’evian Eternal Feminine (“Вхожу я в темные храмы”, “I enter into dark temples” 1902), but quickly becomes a lower, even crasser, being (“Незнакомка”, “The Stranger” 1906) and is finally reduced to a profligate woman and is summarily shot (“Двенадцать”, “The Twelve” 1918). As it is the camp experience which reduces Alisa to these depths can be interpreted as the Soviets’ degrading of the Muse and of culture in general. It is also tempting to interpret Alisa as a symbol of Russia. Under this rubric, Alisa’s initial innocence and beauty

Onegin for a half an hour straight during the trip from Yaroslavl to Vladivostok (Into the Whirlwind, 293-296).

²⁷ For a more exhaustive study of Blok and Aksenov see Chapter III of Lauren Bennett’s 1993 MA thesis “Blokian Images of the Feminine in Vasilii Aksënov’s Post-Thaw Prose.” The study is

correspond to pre-Revolutionary Russia; she is sullied by Stalinist oppression and ultimately betrays the hero. As neatly as this template fits, it is reductive and does little justice to Aksenov's subtlety.

Of particular resonance is Aksenov's one-page aside on Zoshchenko. In the chapter entitled "The Evolution of a Type Discovered by Zoshchenko" Aksenov directly compares Cheptsov to Zhdanov. Andrei Zhdanov was secretary of the Central Committee from 1944 to 1948. He lent his name to "Zhdanovism" which is shorthand for cultural Stalinism at its worst. In 1946 he pronounced a literary death-sentence against Mikhail Zoshchenko and Anna Akhmatova, after which they were hounded into silence until after the death of Stalin. Aksenov equates Zhdanov with Bulgakov's uncultured mongrel-turned-human Sharik from Heart of a Dog²⁸ and Zoshchenko's bathhouse attendant.

The latter appears in a 1956 short story entitled "In the Bathhouse" (and very briefly in "Bathhouse and People") where a man is discovered to be carrying over 20,000 rubles on his person. The attendant pesters the man trying to find out how he made the money, why he has it and what he plans to do with it. He is not satisfied until the man tells him that he saved the money up for his destitute parents and says "I don't get any real satisfaction out of it. I don't have anyone to rejoice over it except myself" (198). The attendant takes an unnatural interest in the man and finally takes an almost sadistic pleasure in the other man's misfortune. It is this sadism which connects the two otherwise disparate figures. "Жданов ненавидел своего открывателя, уроды, отрыжку общества, мусорную шкварку перегоревшего серебряного века." (313) "Zhdanov

very well done, except I believe her interpretation of the ending gets in the way of what could be a much more clear-cut argument. See the end of Chapter Three for my own interpretation.

hated his discoverer and labeled him a monster, a social throwback, a piece of garbage left over from the burnt-out Silver Age of Russian literature” (332).

These authors’ power does not derive from anything special, but from something very simple.

Анти-Банщик, анти-Шарик, анти-Жданов, их ненавистный открыватель, узнаватель с его единственным оборонным оружием – Готовностью. Понадобилось немало лет, чтобы понять достаточную силу этого оружия.

Тогда мы признали истинным именно этот мир, мир маленьких спокойных одиночек, мир поэтов, а тот, огромный и налитой, как волдырь, признали миром неистинным, недолговечным и уже смердящим. (314)

Anti-bathhouse attendant, anti-Sharik, anti-Zhdanov, their hated discoverer had recognized them with his sole defensive weapon - Awareness. It took several years to comprehend the true force of that weapon.

Then we admitted that it was this world, the world of calm little loners, the world of the poets, that was the true world, and that the other one, huge and as juicy as a swollen blister, was false, ephemeral, and already reeking of decay. (332-33)

Here we see again the dissident quality of art. Amongst other things, art is supposed to bear witness. We can assume that due to the emphasis that Aksenov puts on this “weapon” that the book we are holding in our hands as we read these lines is such a force, which is the thesis of Chapter One. It does not necessarily have to *change* anything, or denounce anything per se (which would be difficult, if not impossible under Soviet censorship) it simply has to record the evils of the regime. The rest will come eventually if the ball is started rolling. Much like in Solzhenitsyn, it is the jailers who will eventually be punished. As we shall see later, the artist plays the role of gadfly.

The scene in the “Crimea” in Magadan also contains a couple of references, albeit obscure ones, to the Silver Age. In the underground world, Tolya is introduced to a man

²⁸ See page 20 and note 16.

named “Pantagruel” (348/369). This is rather appropriate as the excesses that take place later are Rabelaisian in character. The connection is with Gumilev’s essay “Acmeism and the Legacy of Symbolism” where he claims Rabelais as one of “the names most frequently heard” in Acmeist circles (248). Also included are Shakespeare, Villon²⁹ and Théophile Gautier, whose theory of “art for art’s sake” (“*l’art pour l’art*”) was anathema to the Soviet standards of Socialist Realism. Later, Gumilev’s poem “Заблудившийся трамвай” (“The Streetcar that Lost its Way”) is used as a connection between the Main Hero and his new father-in-law, that is, between the fathers and the sons (236/249, 443/474).

Tolya also meets a “professor” who is reading a book by Apuleius. Seemingly an odd book to be reading under the circumstances, and an odder detail to point out, this is an allusion to Kuzmin’s essay “On Beautiful Clarity” where he not only mentions Apuleius, but touts the Apollonian in art - a connection with the Apollinariéviches:

Even more so does a novel demand a plot element and, in this connection, one must not

forget that the cradle of the novella and the novel was the Romance countries, wherever the *Apollonian* view of art was more developed than anywhere else: dividing, forming, exact and well-proportioned. And so the models of the short story and the novel, beginning with Apuleius, the Italian and Spanish novelists [...] must be sought of course in the Latin lands. (203, italics in original)

The entire system of allusions to the Silver Age seem to point to the current degradation, both artistic and political, of the Soviet Union. Aksenov seems to be saying that by returning to the tradition and values represented by pre-Revolutionary writers and works, Russia can get out of the artistic and political doldrums that it was in. Besides

²⁹ It is interesting to note that Rabelais has a chapter about Villon in his *Quart Livre* (Fourth Book).

showing the role that Silver Age art plays in dissidence, Aksenov also shows how contemporary works should deal with Stalinism. This is most directly evident in the scene involving Samsik Sabler's concert.

Samsik's concert represents a syncretic moment in the novel. All three of the creative Apollinarieviches converge for the performance. The writer Pantelei writes the script; the sculptor Khvastishchev makes a backdrop; and of course Samsik plays the saxophone. As this is the only scene where multiple Apollinarieviches work together (even if only one of them shows up to the concert), it takes on an added importance.

Although the concert is the most central creative work in the novel, there are other important creations. Pantelei Pantelei conceives of a play to be called "The Heron", but he never follows through with it. Or at least Pantelei doesn't. Aksenov himself later wrote a play by that very title³⁰. This is a singular instance of an author carrying on the work of one of his characters and serves to connect the two, who are already united by other parallels. Most importantly Pantelei's dealings with "Kukita Kuseyevich Kornponevich" closely resemble Aksenov's own stormy relations with Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev.

A more directly important creation is the sculpture "Смирение" ("Humility" or, more accurately, "Submissiveness"). This image has been variously interpreted by critics, but it seems to fit in with our discussion of Czechoslovakia and the culpability of the Russian people in the face of the return of Stalinist repression. The first sign that the statue is not as benign as its name suggests comes in the second paragraph of its

description: “‘Смирение’, сожравшее уже автомашину Хвастыщева, пай в жилищно-строительном кооперативе, фонотеку и драгоценности его бывшей жены, было огромным чудовищем [...]” (100). “*Humility*, which had already devoured³¹ Khvastishchev’s car, his mortgage deposit, his record collection, and his ex-wife’s jewelry, was an enormous monster [...]” (103). Further evidence of the beast’s evil nature is given in the detail of a human leg dangling from the dinosaur’s nostril.

As has been mentioned above (p. 16) the dinosaur is linked with the Russian people because of its “face of a Ryazan peasant” (437/467), and with the advent of the “наследники Сталина” or the “heirs of Stalin” by the connection with the headless dinosaur from the biology textbook (64-66/67-68). The sculpture is also explicitly linked with Khvastishchev himself, who here represents the Soviet intelligentsia:

Да почему же подлая блудливая жадная мразь называется “Смирение?” В этой мраморной глыбе ты саморазоблачился, Радий Аполлинариевич. Ты все еще обмонуешь сам себя, все еще убеждаешь себя в любви, навязываешь себе жалость, рисуешь в воображении смиренного, туповатого, но чистого – ах, чистого душой! — телка динозавра. Однако, вот он перед тобой каким вырастает – резец не даст тебе соврать! (100)

Anyway, why was this revolting, obscene, greedy heap of junk called *Humility*? You have torn away the mask and revealed *yourself* in this lump of marble, Radius Apollinarievich. You’re still deceiving yourself, still convincing yourself that you love it, still making yourself feel pity for it, imagining a humble, stupid, but pure – ah, spiritually pure – body of a dinosaur. But now look how it has turned out. The chisel won’t let you lie! (103-04, italics in original)

The first interesting thing we see here, is his having “revealed” himself in the statue. In light of the other connections with “Submissiveness” this seems something of

³⁰ A full examination of this play is not in the scope of this work. See Efimov and Kustanovich (“Notes” and The Artist). It is potentially useful to note that there is a novel by Giorgio Bassani of the same title that also deals with anti-Communist themes.

³¹ This is the same verb, *zhrat*’, which is used in reference to Cronos, devourer of his own children.

an accusation, not only directed at himself, but at the class of *intelligenty* of which he is a member. It also shows Radik's lost illusions as regards the Russian people. He wants to believe that they are pure in spirit (this makes little sense in reference to a dinosaur, but metaphorically it works well), but his work has shown him the contrary. This will not fully sink in until Chapter Three of the book where The Victim runs away to his father's village in Ryazan and he sees the "the people" first hand. Finally we are told that "the chisel won't let [him] lie", that is to say that the truth lies in art. The reader can assume that the same applies to the pen and the saxophone as well.

The dinosaur will later assume gigantic proportions, take on a life of its own, and begin destroying buildings, stepping on people and causing general mayhem. Through the somewhat complex series of connections and associations linked to "Submissiveness", it is fairly clear that Aksenov means to indict the Russian people for their "submissiveness" and failure to decry the return of Stalinism, and in particular the sending of Soviet tanks into Czechoslovakia that ended the Prague Spring. If there were any doubt of this connection, Aksenov inserts, as a seeming non sequitur (especially on a first reading) an allusion to Samsik's concert where the allusion is much clearer: "Шестидесятые кончились, а семидесятые не начались, да и начнутся ли? Прага – Чикаго..." (102), "The sixties are over and the seventies haven't begun yet. And will they ever begin, I wonder? Prague, Chicago ..." (106).

With this in mind it seems particularly damning that Khvastishchev has found a comfortable spot in the sculpture. "Хvastiщев не раз благодарил Небеса за то, что они повернули его резец куда надо, за этот неожиданный подарок судьбы, за округлую и лбширную вподину в мраморе, где так мило было сидеть или

возлежать ...” (99), “Khvastishchev had thanked heaven for guiding his chisel in the right direction and so providing this unexpected bonus, this broad, curving indentation in the marble, in which it was so pleasant to sit or recline” (103). This indicates a complacency, or even laziness that needs to be overcome in order to remedy this intellectual malaise, but the remedy has already been indicated: art.

To return to Samsik’s concert, another detail of note is the backdrop, which was done by Radik as well. It is a copy of the “Pergamum Frieze”, a 364 foot-long bas-relief built in the 2nd century BC, which depicts the battle between the gods and the giants (see appendix). Radik’s copy is faithful to the original with its missing pieces and large cracks. As discussed above, the band is playing out the same scene depicted in the bas-relief. But the two works are directly connected. “Мы взбунтуемся против Крона и заполним пустоты Пергамского фриза!” (384). “We shall rebel against Cronus³² and fill up the gaps in the Pergamum frieze!” (407).

If the Pergamum Frieze seems important to the novel, it gains even more importance in light of one of Aksenov’s other works (what Efimova calls his “intertext”). In August of 1976, shortly after the manuscript of The Burn was completed - but several years before it was published - Aksenov published in *Novy Mir* (New World) an account of his stint as guest lecturer at UCLA in 1975 entitled “Круглые сутки нон-стоп” (‘Round the Clock Non-stop). While it pretends to be a simple account of his “впечатления, размышления, приключения” (51) (impressions, meditations, adventures³³), the work is actually a humorous mixture of travelogue, commentary and

³² And Cronos.

³³ All translations from “Round the Clock” are my own.

fictional episodes centered around “*Moskvich*” (“the man from Moscow”), and Memozov, Aksenov’s anti-hero who also appears in Our Golden Ironburg.

In this essay (for lack of a better word) Aksenov describes the first talk he gave at UCLA, entitled (or at least the chapter about it is) “The Pergamum Frieze, or Patches in Prose [прозаические заплатки] to Ancient Sculpture.” Almost the entire section, a page and a half, and all of the “quotes” from his lecture are taken verbatim from the then unpublished novel, The Burn (“Круглые”, 72-73). Virtually all of the scenes involving the giants are strung together in answer to the question “about what else?”. The lecture ends with the following important paragraph:

Now, ladies and gentlemen, respected państwo³⁴, dear comrades, before you is the field of battle. You see that the bas-relief has fundamentally suffered from the long centuries. If you please, here is a piece of the waist, a bunch of hair and the handle of a sword... empty, doomed spaces... Any of those sitting here can literally put their own person in the frieze. We, then, are proposing patches in prose, should anyone need them. (73)³⁵

It would seem that this is exactly what is going on in The Burn – he wants to “fill up the gaps in the Pergamum Frieze”. That Aksenov includes this image, with the same exact message, in a work published before there were any definite plans for the novel’s seeing the light of day, shows how important it is to him.

Here the image of the Pergamum Frieze takes on added significance. The sculpture has not aged well. The backdrop at the concert, modeled on the actual Frieze on Museum Island in East Berlin, shows the gaps and cracks of the original.

Безголовый Зевс борется с тремя гигантами. Нет у него и левой руки, а от правой

³⁴ Polish for “Mr. and Mrs.” or a group of people of mixed gender.

³⁵ This paragraph, with the exception of the last sentence, which is new, is located on page 397 of the Russian text and 422 of the English. Glennly omits the Polish.

остался лишь плечевой сустав и кисть, сжимающая хвост погибших молний. Конечно же не гиганты нанесли богу этот страшный урон.

Глубокая трещина расколола бедро гиганта, куски мрамора отвалились от ягодицы Порфириона, он потерял руку и кончик носа, но конечно же не боги так его покалечили... (397)

A headless Zeus is wrestling with three giants. He has no left arm, and all that remains of his right arm is the shoulder joint and the hand, grasping the tail of a bunch of spent thunderbolts. It was not the giants, of course, who caused the god to suffer this terrible loss. A deep crack has split the hip of one of the giants, lumps of marble have fallen away from Porphyrion's buttocks, he has lost an arm and the tip of his nose, but it is not the gods who had crippled him thus. (421)

It is Cronos, or time, that has injured the giants and gods thus. But here we are speaking more literally. It is not the mythological beings that have been wounded, but the work of art depicting them that has. In this realm, the differences between them have been erased and they have a common enemy: Time. “Они были врагами на Флегрейских болотах, на полуострове Пеллена, и стали союзниками в Пергаме. Подняли мраморную волну и так остановились перед напором Времени [...] В Пергаме в мраморе вместе схватились против Кронуса боги и гиганты” (397). “They were enemies in the Phlegrean marshes on the peninsula of Pellene, yet they became allies in Pergamum. They raised a wave of marble and thus withstood the pressure of time [...] In the Pergamum marble, both the gods and the giants fought together against Cronus” (422).

Here the myth is turned around. Instead of the giants versus the Olympian gods, as we would expect, the giants and gods fight together against a common enemy. This can only be read metaphorically. Whereas the sculpture depicts the giants fighting the gods, the sculpture itself, the work of art, fights against Cronos for immortality.

This is also hinted at in the scene where Sabler first sees a reproduction of the Pergamum Frieze. He gets drunk at some sculptor's studio (presumably Khvastishchev's)

and sees some photographs of the frieze. He overhears the sculptor talking about how an American wanted to buy his “идею современного Пергамского фриза, модель вечности ‘Мёбиус’” (383) “idea of a modern Pergamum frieze, a *Moebius* model of eternity” (406). A Möbius strip is a slip of paper where one end has been rotated 180 degrees, and then connected to the other end, producing an object that has no beginning, no end, and only one side (see appendix).

This attempt at immortality has practical import as well, one specifically tied to art’s role as dissident. The sculptor rejects the American’s overtures saying “все останется здесь, где родилось, в Третьем Риме, ведь когда-нибудь и большевики дорастут до искусства, когда-нибудь и бюрократия станет мучиться от комплекса вины, а он, тихий гений, пока что подождет в нищете и неизвестности” (383-84), “the whole thing would stay here, where it was born, in Moscow, the Third Rome - after all, one day even the Bolsheviks would mature sufficiently to appreciate art, and one day even the Soviet bureaucracy would be racked with guilt, and he, the modest genius, would meanwhile bide his time in poverty and obscurity” (406). This implies that the powers that be are currently incapable of understanding art (which is shown more fully in the scenes involving Pantelei and Kukita Kuseyevich) and that they have something over which to be racked with guilt. This also recalls the “quiet little loners” of the Zoshchenko type that exposed Zhdanov. Until such a time as art can be appreciated in the Soviet Union, the function of art is to help bring that time about.

Yet as far as its goal of immortality is concerned, we know that it will not win, because the Pergamum Frieze has lost its battle. It is cracked and falling apart.

Когда в пустынные времена бились друг с другом боги и гиганты, знали ли они

об истинном смысле битвы? Зевс, должно быть, знал. Ведь если бы вместо младенца Зевса Кроносу в пасть не подсунили камень, был бы пуст и Олимп.

Да, они бились там ради мраморного воплощения. Так и мы хитрим и стараемся

в нашем искусстве подсунуть Кроносу камень вместо живого тела. Сколько мы можем выиграть – век, тысячу лет? Он отыграется и на мраморе, и на холстах, и на словах, и на всем, он все пожрет... (423)

When the gods and the giants fought each other in the days when the world was uninhabited, did they understand the true meaning of the battle? Zeus, no doubt, understood it; after all, if someone hadn't pushed a stone into Cronus' mouth instead of the baby Zeus, Olympus would have been uninhabited too. Yes, they were fighting in order to be perpetuated in marble. In the same way, we artists use every trick in the book in an attempt to make Cronus eat a stone instead of a living body. How much time can we buy in this way? A century, a thousand years? But he always gets it back, be it in marble, on canvas, in words, in any medium. In the end he devours it all. (450)

But if art is only a stopgap measure, if it is not permanent, than what is the ultimate point? Other than its capacity to protest, if not change, current societal and political problems, art is, if not a direct path to immortality, the first step towards it. This brings us to Father Alexander's "Third Model". Creativity plays a role here, but, just as with the Pergamum Frieze, it only goes so far.

Однако в мире существует и третья модель для сравнения, она не лучше и не хуже, она – совсем иная! К этому ниогда приближается человек в своем творчестве, в музыке, в поэзии, в математике, но только лишь приближается, только чувствует ее пресутствие. Ты не понимаешь? Понять этого нельзя. Однако ты чувствуешь это? Необъяснимое – это и есть третья модель. (252)

However, there does also exist in the world a third model for comparison; it is not better and not worse – it is completely different. Sometimes man comes close to it in his moments of creativity – in music, in poetry, in mathematics – but he only just comes close, he only senses its presence. You don't understand? It is impossible to understand. But do you feel it? The inexplicable – that is the third model. (266)

Although art is transcendent, it is not the key to transcendence. This is not to detract from art's other important functions: bearing witness, moral compass, dissidence. The only thing which does supersede the other two models, the essence of the "Third Model" is religion, which connects the third major set of images and allusions.

Chapter Three: Religion

While the number of scenes and references directly related to religion are fewer than those dealing with the other two areas of this study, it is no less important to the novel. In fact, the novel as it stands would be unimaginable, and the ending completely different without the few direct references, and slightly more numerous allusions to religion. In particular, the references are Christian ones. They are not explicitly Orthodox or Catholic, but the main religious figures of the book, Tolya's step-father Martin and Father Alexander/Sanya Gurchenko, are both Catholic. Aksenov himself does not seem to claim one tradition over the other: "I'm formally a member of the Russian Orthodox Church, I was christened in an Orthodox church as a child: as described in the short story 'The Village of Sviyazhsk,' but I'm likewise close to Catholics also, because Anton Yakovlevich³⁶ was a Catholic" (Interview, 15). Aksenov is also half-Jewish, as is Tolya who uses the name Bokov to hide his real name of von Steinbock (Bolshun, 165).

In the entire book there is only one scene, or rather succession of scenes, that is explicitly religious. Even the scene with Father Alexander in Rome, while having much to do with Christianity, is not patently and *prima facie* spiritual. The section of the book begins with his seeing Alisa among the new prisoners. What at first seems like love at first sight shortly takes a grotesque twist. Tolya's dream of rescuing her is ruined in the face of reality and his own cowardice. Alisa (who was incidentally brought over on the *Felix*, the ship the "Crimeans" are planning on hijacking) drinks from a bottle of "Mermaid" ("Rusalka" in Russian) cologne. In Russian folklore the rusalka is a

³⁶ Anton Yakovlevich Val'ter was Eugenia Ginzburg's second husband, a doctor whom she met in Magadan and the model for Martin in The Burn.

mythological creature, often the spirit of a woman who died prematurely or from unrequited love, who lures men to their death by drowning. The rusalka theme is a common one in Russian literature and folk belief, but two major examples that come to mind are Lermontov's "Морская царевна", "Sea Princess", and his "Таман" from Hero of our Time. Undoubtedly this foreshadows Alisa's, or rather all five of the main female characters' betrayal of The Victim at the end of the novel.

In contrast to Tolya's inaction (not that a boy would be able to help her that much, but his passivity is more indicative of a moral battle that will go on in him throughout the book) are the heroics of Sanya Gurchenko. He bursts onto the scene to console Alisa, and is confronted by one of the guards. Sanya dispatches this guard, and escapes. Inexplicably "лейтенант, начальник конвоя, стрелял ему в спину, раз за разом, несколько раз, но мазал, непостижимым образом мазал" (223), the "lieutenant in command of the escort fire[d] at his back several times, again and again, but he missed – in some incomprehensible way he missed" (236). He gets away, and Tolya follows him.

The juxtaposition here of Sanya and Alisa is important. This is the first time (chronologically) that we meet both characters. What happens between them seems to be a statement about the broader themes that they represent. Alisa (and the four other female personae), who seems almost to be a stand in for Russia with her (their) fickleness and contradictory constellation of characteristics, is comforted, but not saved as Tolya dreams about, by Sanya. Again there is a parallel in Blok's "The Twelve" where Katya, who has betrayed one of the twelve, is a symbol of Russia and is ultimately shot. Sanya is directly related to religion. First we see him as a student of Martin's in the following scene, and he later becomes Father Alexander, the proponent of the Third Model. He is also, not

accidentally, connected with the West, in the form of the Ringo Kid, a Western movie hero whom Tolya emulates. Although broadly sketched, the basic relationship of religion propping up Russia, but not saving it completely, seems applicable to the novel as a whole.

The following scene is particularly striking after the heroics of the previous one. Sanya happens to be going to the apartment where Tolya lives with his mother and her second husband Martin. When they walk in, Martin, who is then praying, recognizes Sanya and offers his hand to be kissed. Then the two kneel down and begin to pray the Our Father in Latin. Oddly enough, the text of the prayer, which is given in its entirety, is not entirely correct. The prayer, which should begin “Pater noster, qui es in caelis: Sanctificetur nomen tuum” reads instead “Pater noster, qui est in caeli, sanctificetur nomen Tuum” (229)³⁷. The rest of the prayer is equally misspelled, but still easily recognizable. Although it is possible that this is merely a series of misprints, or the result of bad editing, this is unlikely, especially because the prayer is also misspelled in the original Russian edition of 1980³⁸. Instead this might be a subtle commentary on the state of religion in the Soviet Union. The religious traditions of the past, much like the literary tradition symbolized by Mandel’shtam’s poem, are in desuetude. Yet it is important that this does not interfere at all with the religious devotion of the two men. This is an illustration of how their faith overcomes the restrictions - physical, legal and social - placed on religion in the Soviet Union.

³⁷ These errors are “corrected” in the translation.

³⁸ Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1980. Surprisingly, some of the misspellings are different in the two editions: “Pater noster, qui est in caeli, sanctificetur nomen Tuum!” (1980, 206).

This scene touches a nerve in Tolya. He tries to study literature, but is tormented by the events of the past hour and thinks about Alisa and about Christ:

Кто Его распял? Почему он Сын Божий? Как Он воскрес? Почему к нему обращаются униженные люди? Кто я и к кому мне обращаться? Откуда я пришел в этот мир и куда уйду? Я чувствовал близость ужаснейшего порога, за которым – пронзительный страх непонимания, мучительное сознание своей малости, ничтожности, никчемности в невероятном мире солнц и планет. (231)

Who had crucified Him? Why was He the Son of God? How did He rise from the dead? Why did oppressed people turn to Him? Who am I and who can I turn to? Why did I come into this world and where will I go when I leave it? I have sensed the proximity of that terrifying threshold, across which there is the piercing fear of incomprehension, an agonizing awareness of my own littleness, insignificance, and uselessness in the incredible universe of suns and planets. (244)

The significance of these questions is so great that it drives him to commit suicide. He finds some rope, attaches it to the ceiling and stands up on the table. He puts his neck through and moves to end of the table, saying the Pioneer oath. The moon is shining brightly through the window. At this point Martin enters the room and tries to talk him out of going through with it. Martin's reasons amount to a crash course in Christianity. While Tolya surely knew about religion, this appears to be his first direct exposure to his father-in-law's spiritual life.

As Martin attempts to explain to Tolya why he should not step off of the table, an odd shift in narration takes place. While remaining standing on the table, Tolya is also walking with Martin up a snowy hill. “Он остался стоять с петлей на шее и пошел с Мартином”, “He remained standing with the noose around his neck and went with Martin ...”; “Толя остался стоять над ним на краю твердой дорожке, а также и на

краешке обеденного стола³⁹”, “Tolya stood over [Martin] on the edge of the firm path, and also on the edge of the dining table.”; “Толя ... быстро стал карабкаться по тропинке вверх, к серебристо светящемуся гребню ... Долго или недолго он балансировал на краешке стола, неизвестно”, “Tolya ... began rapidly clambering up the pathway toward the gleaming silvery crest... He did not know whether it was for a long or a short time that he teetered on the edge of the table” (232-33/245-46). The incompatibility of these two sequences is stressed by the fact that the view from the hill “obviously” (233/246) does not belong to Kolyma.

The overlapping of these two places is concomitant with Martin’s expounding of Christianity. In the novel as a whole, such fantastic elements are strongly associated with religion, especially in Father Alexander’s Third Model and in Chapter Three when The Victim winds up on the moon (which shines brightly though the window in this scene - a Bulgakovian note⁴⁰). While on the hill, Martin and Tolya also see two groups of men walk by, dressed like ancient warriors and spattered with mud and blood. The second group is described as “бледных, смертельно усталых, тоже выпачканных кровью, но своей, со скрещенными руками на груди, в достоинстве и мире” (233), “pale and dead tired, also spattered with blood – their own – with arms crossed on their chests, in dignity and peace” (247). This is not likely to make much sense on a first reading, but with more familiarity with the imagery of the novel, this scene is likely to be linked with allusions to the first Christians, hiding in the catacombs of Rome - an image which is repeated elsewhere in the novel. Two associations that can be made with the hill

³⁹ The Russian word “*obedennyi*” comes from “*obed*”, diner, but there is a possible double meaning here with the word “*obednya*”, mass or church service.

described here is Pasternak's Gethsemane, or with the "Крутой маршрут" or "steep path" that both Tolya's and Aksenov's mothers traversed. Also important here is the "silvery crest" which links this religious awakening with the Silver Age discussed above.

What Martin is telling him finally hits home when he asks "And what about your mother?" This thought finally makes him get down from the table, and also deals a major blow to his Komsomol zeal. He keeps saying the Pioneer oath, "но это было, право же, не очень серьезно" (234), "but it was not, to tell the truth, meant very seriously" (247).

Finally, after his crisis is over he hears a song which ties in another one of the major themes of the book. In the hallway he hears Perfisha the Yakut singing Cavaradossi's aria. This is an allusion to Puccini's opera "Tosca", and likely refers to "Vittoria!" which goes:

Vittoria! Vittoria!
L'alba vindice appar
che fa gli empi tremar!
Libertà sorge,
crollan tirannidi!

Victory! Victory!
Here comes the conquering dawn
which makes cowards tremble!
Liberty arises,
may tyrants collapse!

The juxtaposition of these elements, religion followed by antiestablishment rhetoric, would seem to insinuate that the former has something to do with the latter. This is a connection that we also see in Samsik Sabler's concert.

⁴⁰ See p. 66.

After Sabler's concert is shut down, The Giants return to the boiler room to lick their wounds. Vladimir Vysotskii⁴¹, who has several cameos in the novel, joins them and sings his "Ballad of the Sentimental Boxer". As Sabler begins to come around, the setting is likened to a much more ancient place: "Опять котельная! Убежище древних христиан – котельные Третьего Рима!" (433), "Back in the boiler room! The refuge of the first Christians – the catacombs⁴² of the Third Rome!" (460). This connects Sabler, not only with the religious elements in the book, but also with another group of people - the early Christians - who were persecuted by an authoritarian government - the Romans. The echo of the scene where Tolya tries to commit suicide is also a conscious and important link here. Also, while with his statue "Submissiveness", Khvastishchev fears the approach of a "King Herod" who is actually Lyger coming for a sitting.. This is another allusion linking the regime with a tyrant - in this case with one who persecuted Christianity in the first Rome.

Tolya's seeing Sanya and Martin praying, and his subsequent existential crisis, is a watershed moment for him, but it does not mark his complete conversion to Christianity. This happens, instead, after his mother's second arrest. Tolya is sitting alone

⁴¹ Vysotskii's role here is similar to the one he played vis-à-vis Aksenov himself during the fallout of the Metropol' affair. See Aksenov's brief article in В. Высоцкий: все не так: мемориальный альманах-антология, page 11, and about Metropol' see Johnson, 46-47. This connection would then place Sabler's concert parallel with Metropol'. Also his poem "I never believed in mirages" seems particularly resonant for this novel: "A sea of lies devoured my teachers / And cast them out beside Magadan // But staring at ignoramuses from above, / I differed from them very little: / Budapest left no splinters / And Prague did not explode my heart." It is interesting to note that the spontaneous demonstrations after Vysotskii's death in 1980 are the very type of grass-roots protest that Aksenov seems to advocate in the novel.

⁴² The Russian uses the same word, *kotel'naya*, for "boiler room" and "catacomb" (instead of *katakomba*), but as there were no boilers in ancient Rome, the translation is justified.

in the apartment when Martin returns and asks where his mother is. Tolya responds that she has been arrested. Here begins Tolya's true initiation to religion.

— Филипп Егорович, научите меня молиться [...]
 — Молится тот, кто верует, — тихо сказал Мартин.
 — А тот, кто хочет уверовать?
 — Кто хочет, тот уже верует.
 — Так научите меня молиться, — прошептал Толя, сорвал с пиджака комсомольский значок и отшвырнул его прочь. (334-35)

“Philip Yegorovich, teach me to pray” [...]
 “He prays who believes,” said Martin quietly.
 “What about someone who wants to believe?”
 “He who wants to believe already believes.”
 “So teach me to pray,” Tolya whispered, tearing off his Komsomol badge from his jacket and throwing it away. (354)

It is important that Tolya's response to the re-arrest of his mother, that is to Stalinism in general, is to turn to religion. Later, in Moscow the Main Hero will also turn to religion when faced with the horrors of Stalinism. After making his request, Tolya tears the Komsomol pin from his jacket, thus symbolizing his complete rupture with Soviet authority. Hence it seems that the two, Soviet power and religion, are mutually exclusive and binary opposites of each other. Here Martin teaches him the Our Father, the same prayer that he and Sanya recited earlier⁴³.

In the novel, the scene that comes right after this one supplies the Main Hero with an opportunity to demonstrate the values he has accepted in the previous scene. It depicts Cheptsov - the officer who arrested Tolya's mother and the representative of Stalinist and neo-Stalinist oppression - wandering around the city after having raped his step-daughter. He falls in with two other people to form a drinking party. Under the spell of the vodka

he confesses his sin and an attack of cognitive dissonance drives him to attempt suicide by ramming his head against a radiator repeatedly. It is possible to see this radiator as a symbol of the Thaw, in which case it may be meant as a contrast to the Institute of Refrigeration. Stalinism (almost) destroys itself through the creative freedoms represented by this brief period of relative artistic liberty.

An ambulance is called, and as it happens, Gennady Malkolmov is on duty. He is faced with the dying body of his greatest enemy. This supplies the context for the most important example of Christian forgiveness in the novel. Malkolmov has recently extracted a substance known as “Lymph-D” or “liquid soul”. In essence it allows people, or more accurately their soul, to be brought back to life. The Main Hero is thus faced with the decision of whether or not to resuscitate the man who arrested his mother.

With him at this crucial moment is his colleague Zilberansky who plays the role of Judas. This is underlined, as has been noted by several commentators (see above), by his name which comes from the German word for “silver”, a reference to the thirty pieces of silver for which Judas betrayed Christ. This is also underlined by the explicit reference to Mozart and Salieri. It was rumored that Salieri poisoned Mozart out of jealousy. This supplies the basis for Pushkin’s “little tragedy” called Mozart and Salieri where the latter convinces himself that he has murdered the great composer to restore order to a world where capricious Mozarts should not eclipse fine craftsmen such as himself. The truth is that his motive is simple envy.

⁴³ Oddly enough, the Latin prayer that is given in part here is written in Cyrillic letters (“Патер ностер, кви ест ин целли ...” (335)) whereas it is written in Latin letters in the earlier scene, yet with the same errors.

These allusions are a reflection of the text in that Zilberansky tries to persuade Malkolmov to use his life-giving discovery Lymph-D to resuscitate the “chekist of Magadan”. While this seems like an exemplary thing to do, Zilberansky has his own selfish reasons for advising him to use the entirety of his miracle on Cheptsov. These include professional jealousy, and the knowledge that the anti-Soviet Malkolmov would not turn his discovery over to the use of the regime, with whom he is collaborating (Efimova, 226). Zilberansky’s name also links him with the theme of the Silver Age. While this connection is less contextualized, it would seem to indicate a selling-out of the values of pre-1917 Russia, particularly the artistic values discussed above.

Malkolmov does succeed in reviving Cheptsov, and he expends his entire stock of Lymph-D in the process. However, the results of his actions are not so clearly distinguished. On the one hand, the resuscitation is a very Christian thing to do; on the other hand, it seems to personify the return of Stalinism during this period. Cheptsov will only survive for a short while after this, and will be killed again in Book Three, only to appear again as a “philosophical construct” in the last pages of the novel. Hence this part of the book requires a more minute analysis. A complete explication is beyond the scope of this work, but an outline of one will be attempted at the end of this chapter.

Ultimately, Malkolmov must be judged independently of the result of his actions. It is his reasons that must be analyzed. It is clear that Malkolmov is faced with a difficult moral dilemma. When it is first confirmed that it is the body of Cheptsov he is treating, he has a flashback to his mother’s interrogation during her second arrest, and Tolya’s humiliating treatment by Cheptsov. His first thoughts are:

это он! Толя фон Штейнбок, мститель из Магадана, где ты сейчас? [...]

Теперь он в твоих руках, в твоих длинных пальцах. Две твоих кисти спасают жизнь садиста, ре-ани-мируют преступника. [...]

Ладно, не мсти, но только лишь выдерни у него иглу из вены и предоставь все дело природе. Не ты ведь колотил его вонючей башкой по радиатору — сам бился! Пусть сам и погибается! Ты не имеешь права его спасать! (363)

It's him! Tolya von Steinbock, avenger from Magadan, where are you now? [...]

Now he is in your hands, in your long fingers. Your two hands are saving the life of a sadist; they are resuscitating a criminal. [...]

OK, don't take revenge. Instead, just pull the needle out of his vein and leave the rest to nature. It wasn't you who banged his stinking head against a radiator. He did it himself! So let him kill himself! You haven't the right to save him!

Malkolmov does not even have to *do* anything to get his revenge, he simply has to let Cheptsov die like he himself wanted to. Yet his quandary is not quite so simple. It is complicated by an earlier scene. Malkolmov looks at the EKG of a man with “глазки, горячие бусинки” (238); “eyes, like two hot beads” (251) and proclaims that he is in perfect health, despite the fact that he notices a lethal shortage of Lymph-D. “не для этого сюда вызывали, да и нужна ли таким пациентам ‘лимфа-Д’” (238); “this was not what he had been summoned for, and in any case did such patients even need Lymph-D” (252). This amounts to questioning whether or not this man needs a soul which violates what Martin tells Tolya - that “[Богу] нужен каждый человек” (232); “[God] needs every human being” (246).

In order to link this with Cheptsov requires a little bit of legerdemain. It is fairly clear that it is Lyger who has just received this faulty clean bill of health for he is on his way to a sculptor for a sitting. However, much like the Apollinarieviches, Cheptsov and Lyger are closely associated. The former takes the other's wife and becomes father to his daughter. The two are almost indistinguishable while working together as cloak room attendants. Thus it is possible to connect the experiences of the Main Villain the way we

do with the Main Hero. If we accept this connection, then it is warranted to say that Malkolmov is in some way responsible for Cheptsov's deadly lack of Lymph-D which causes his suicide.

As a marker of the magnitude of his decision, Aksenov inserts a brief literary allusion. Malkolmov, before making his decision, has a pear soda. This is likely a reference to St. Augustine's Confessions, where young Augustine and his friends steal pears from a neighbor's tree. The episode is an obvious echo of the apple tree in the Garden of Eden. Adam's choice is the beginning of man's fallen state, of his propensity for evil. Augustine's tale has a similar moral. He comments on his actions: "I became evil for nothing, with no reason for wrongdoing except the wrongdoing itself ... I loved destroying myself; I loved my sin – not the thing for which I had committed the sin, but the sin itself" (45). Similarly Malkolmov is drawn to Evil, which here is represented both by letting his enemy die and by the evils of Stalinism. The line that Malkolmov must walk is a fine one, but one he appears to navigate successfully.

The road of inactivity and passivity, to let Cheptsov die without using Lymph-D to resuscitate him, is redolent of Russia's silence and inactivity in the face of the return of Stalinism that plays such a large role in the novel. By not doing anything, Malkolmov would be committing the same sin that Aksenov implicitly accuses the Soviet people of having committed. As with all of the major themes of the book, Aksenov weaves various important scenes together in order to connect and associate different aspects of the novel. Before his concert, Samsik Sabler is walking around and witnesses the ambulance arrive to take Cheptsov's body away. Sabler, who has been experiencing (hallucinating, dreaming about) the revolt of the giants against the gods, sees "Бог-кузнец Гефест тихо

спустился по ступеням и поднял фонарь.” (389), “Hephaestus, the blacksmith god, quietly descended the steps and raised his lantern.” (412-13). This same image appears again right after Sabler finds out that his concert has been canceled: “Гефест с фонарем над каменным телом. Хорошо работает реанимация!” (430), “Hephaestus with a lantern over the stone-hard body. The resuscitation team’s working well!” (458); as well as previously in Magadan in a scene where Tolya dreams of taking revenge on Cheptsov: “Кто мог тогда с магаданского плаца заглянуть в будущее и увидеть: мрак во дворе госпиталя святого Николая, фонарь Гефеста над окаменевшим уже Чепцовым,?” (390), “Who in those days, could have looked from the Magadan square into the future and seen darkness in the forecourt of St. Nicholas’s Hospital, Hephaestus holding his lantern over the body of Cheptsov in rigor mortis?” (414).

There are some interesting parallels between the God Hephaestus and the Main Hero. While he is one of the Olympian gods (such as Apollo), he was cast down from Olympus, becoming lame in the fall. The Giants and the Apollinarieviches suffer similarly from the wrath of the Olympians/Stalinists. Hephaestus is also deceived by Aphrodite, the goddess of love, a parallel with The Victim’s relations with Alisa. While there are no images of Hephaestus standing with a lantern in the mythology associated with him, the image seems to be one of superiority. If we can associate Hephaestus with the Main Hero, the implication is that he has won out over Cheptsov, and is in some way illuminating his life. The image can also be associated with Diogenes’ search for an honest man - an image which appears in the vestibule in Aksenov’s story “Стальная птица” or “The Steel Bird.”

If Malkolmov allowed Cheptsov to die, he would be guilty of the very things that Aksenov accuses the rest of the Soviet Union of being guilty of. His decision to use the entirety of his discovery to bring his greatest enemy back to life is not only a rejection of the moral indolence Aksenov sees in the Russian people, but also represents a purely Christian act of love for one's neighbor. In this act, we see the epitome of Sanya Gurchenko's Third Model.

After Malkolmov's operation and Sabler's concert, both of them return to their old self-destructive ways. This (somewhat ironically) signifies a form of defiance against the authorities because as drunks, their talents cannot be used by the government. As a reward for their newly found integrity, all five Apollinarieviches are locked up together in a solitary confinement cell.

This is not, however, the last time that we see Cheptsov. In Book Three, The Victim hijacks an ambulance and goes off to his father's home town because he believes that he will find the heart of Russia there. What he finds is a bunch of peasants reciting Marxist tag-lines and a desecration of the religious heritage (which seems in part a parody of the *derevenshchiki* or village prose writers, of whom this section is reminiscent). In fact, while in one of the churches, which has been turned into a gym, he sees an *apparatchik* in an iron cross on the still rings - a profanation of the crucifixion. The ambulance turns out to be the very one that Malkolmov took Cheptsov to the hospital in, and it seems that Cheptsov never got out of it. As The Victim attempts to flee back to Moscow, he runs over Cheptsov, cutting him in half.

When they find him in the back of the ambulance, Cheptsov says “Я уничтожен оживлением путем введения в организм чужой Лимфы-Д” (484), “I was destroyed by

being resuscitated through the introduction of someone else's Lymph-D into my body" (517). This would seem to say that his death was caused by the Lymph-D, but he is obviously alive. It is more likely that what was destroyed was "Cheptsov," the Magadan death-dealer. It is the Stalinist in him that is destroyed, which perhaps does not leave much, but is still a change for the better. Here we see that Malkolmov's actions are more positive than they at first seem.

Malkolmov's act of Christian good will connects back with the central religious model of the book - the Third Model. All of the artists in the book (and presumably Aksenov as well) are confronted with the problem of art's temporality: the artist always loses the battle with Cronus. Of course art is still useful in the present day - it has some very important functions in terms of bearing witness and being a social conscience. Its most important application, however, is as a stepping stone to the Third Model, to the inexplicable. In religion we find the answer to the ultimate problem of art, the key to defeating Cronus: "Смешно выходить против Кронаса с поднятым мечом. Один лишь воин есть готовый к победе — вневременный и безоружный Иисус Христос" (423), "It is absurd to attack Cronus with upraised sword. There is only one warrior who is ready for victory – the unarmed, the timeless Jesus Christ" (450).

One of the primary aspects of the Third Model is the fantastic: "Необъяснимое — это и есть третья модель [...] Христианство фантастично и опирается на фантастические чувства и доказывает существование фантастического." (252), "The inexplicable – that is the third model [...] Christianity, being itself fantastic, relies on fantastic emotions and proves the existence of the fantastic" (266). In this Aksenov seems to be borrowing from Abram Tertz's On Socialist Realism as well as from Dostoevskii.

Tertz (the pseudonym of Andrei Sinyavskii) writes that “Right now I put my hope in a phantasmagoric art, with hypotheses instead of a Purpose, an art in which the grotesque will replace realistic descriptions of ordinary life. Such an art would correspond best to the spirit of our time” (218). The Third Model also seems to be much in the spirit of Dostoevskii who, while claiming to be “eminently realistic”, gave his story “Кроткая” or “A Gentle Creature”, the subtitle “A Fantastic Story”. It is possibly this element of the fantastic that explains the idiosyncracies of Book Three which is the ultimate apotheosis of the Third Model.

As an example of the fantastic nature of Christianity, Father Alexander tells the Main Hero that “Христианство подобно прорыву в космос, это самый отважный и самый дальний бросок к третьей модели” (252), “Christianity is like the breakthrough into space, that most courageous and far-reaching spurt toward the third model” (266). This, as it turns out, is exactly what happens at the very end of the novel. The Victim (a very Christ-like name) and Alisa (who now represents all five of the female characters) are at home in Moscow. The Victim picks up a book of Russian verse and reads Innokenty Annenskii’s poem “September” which speaks of an “understood lie of the final meeting” and of suffering and bereavement. While foreshadowing what is about to happen, it also signifies a reawakening. Earlier in the book the Main Hero could not even remember Mandel’shtam’s name, but after reading this poem he feels a “shiver of excitement” which “был добрый знак — оживление чувств” (487), “was a good sign – his feelings were coming to life” (521).

Unfortunately, he does not get to enjoy his rebirth of feeling. Shortly after this he realizes that Alisa is deceiving him. After this realization he decides to act on a plan of

his that involves a billboard of a large, almost Orwellian, eye outside his window. “У него давно уже созрел план, но только сейчас, когда она отвернулась в рыданиях, он смог его осуществить. Он [...] сильно разбежался, оттолкнулся обеими ногами и, как в воду, головой вперед, или вниз, или вверх, прыгнул в глаз” (490), “He had long been hatching a plan, but only now, as he turned away sobbing, could he put it into effect. He [...] took a long run, pushed off with both feet, and dove, as though into water, head first into the eye” (523).

This scene has led quite a few commentators to posit that this is a suicide, yet it seems more in keeping with the rest of the novel, and with the fact that he had been “hatching a plan” that this is more of a leap of faith than anything else. After passing through the eye he floats through space, meets Patrick Thunderjet, and lands on the moon. This is likely an allusion to the end of Bulgakov’s The Master and Margarita where Christ longs to walk along the path of moonlight, but “на эту дорогу ему выйти почему-то не удается” (397); “he never does manage to walk on the path” (323) until the Master frees him with the words “Свободен! Свободен! Он ждет тебя!” (398); “Free! Free! He is waiting for you!” (324). Christ then gets up and walks along the path. Thus the Moon becomes an image of religious fulfillment, a realm to which the writer seems to hold the key.

After landing on the moon, the two men see a Chinese museum. The only person in this museum is, once again, Cheptsov. Only now he is not a person, but a “philosophical construct” who “мысл[ит] в тишине по религиозным вопросам” (492), “think[s] in silence about religion” (525). Cheptsov seems like a completely different man since his transfusion.

The two ask why they have been punished by being sent to the moon, and whether God's power exists there as well. God then speaks to them saying that God is everything that is good, and they are far from God, but there is hope and they should await His Son. Here the narration switches back to Moscow where Alisa and The Victim are driving through the city again. All of a sudden everything in the city comes to a halt and is filled with a feeling of anticipation for a certain "Ожидаемое" or "Expected Something". This would appear to be connected with God's command to The Victim and Patrick to "Ждите" (493), "Await" (526). The novel ends on a religious note, seemingly promulgating religion and the Third Model as an answer to the problems in Russia described in the rest of the book.

Religion is the ultimate answer to all of the problems posed by art and Stalinism. Christian forgiveness serves as a way of exorcising the demons of the past without repeating them. It is also the only way of overcoming the shortcomings of artistic production, namely the temporal nature of all man-made creations. Ultimately, it is through both artistic, political and religious freedom that Russia will return to and continue the tradition so unfortunately cut short by the Revolution of 1917.

Conclusion

Vassily Aksenov's The Burn is one of the most impressive Russian novels of the past 25 years. It is also one of the most ambitious. In 500 pages Aksenov attempts to reconcile 75 years of Russian history, to demonstrate the shortcomings of artistic production and to show how both of these are overcome by "the unarmed, the timeless Jesus Christ". The structure of the novel is such that the vast majority of elements in the novel (plot, literary allusions, metaphors etc.) serve to deepen or adumbrate one or more of these main themes.

Furthermore, all three of these themes are interconnected and inextricably linked one with the other. Under Soviet oppression one of the main purposes of art is to rebel against the totalitarian regime. In the context of the early 1970's, this specifically includes registering dissent over the return of Stalinism symbolized by the Soviets' quashing of the Prague Spring in 1968. Art's second main function is to attempt to achieve immortality - the fight against Cronos. Art alone, however, is incapable of achieving this lofty goal. Instead it serves as a stepping stone to the one thing that can overcome time: religion. Through Sanya Gurchenko's "Third Model" art and religion are linked and become inseparable in the fight for eternity. Just as art and religion both fight against Cronos for immortality, by linking Cronos with Soviet power both religion and art also become instruments of dissidence as well. The fight for artistic and religious freedom takes on ontological importance in the novel as the effects of Stalinism are manifested in the life of the Main Hero.

It has been my contention that a central scene for developing this interrelation is the jazz saxophonist Samsik Sabler's concert at the Institute of Refrigeration Research.

Sabler's band, which is called "The Giants", plans on putting on a concert which is called "The Revolt of the Giants against the Gods". This taps into a Greek myth which describes how the giants, the children of Uranus, try to avenge their siblings' being thrown into Tartarus by the Olympian Gods. They revolt and are consequently destroyed by the more powerful Olympians. Similarly Samsik's concert is stopped by a band of people's militia (*druzhina*).

This parallel is emphasized by multiple literary and historical references and also by an innovative interweaving of the plot lines. One of the main references here is to the Pergamum Frieze - a bas-relief depicting the battle between the Olympians and the giants. Although this sculpture is faithful to the myth, Aksenov says directly that "В Пергаме в мраморе вместе схватились против Кронуса боги и гиганты" (397); "In the Pergamum marble, both the gods and the giants fought together against Cronus" (422). This must be read metaphorically as the work of art, the sculpture itself, fighting against Time in a struggle for immortality. By a series of analogies, we arrive at the conclusion that in same way that the Pergamum Frieze, and art in general, fights against Cronus, so the band "The Giants" is fighting against Stalinism. Important as well here is a connection to a scene in Magadan where Sanya Gurchenko is arrested for plotting a small revolt of his own. He and his accomplices are arrested while Tolya von Steinbok looks on. While Tolya is with Sanya and his friends in an underground world called "The Crimea", Tolya takes a hallucinogenic drug that makes him have a vision of the giants being attacked by the Olympian Gods. It is here that the idea for Sabler's concert is born.

Also interesting here is that the concert is stopped not by the KGB, but by a group of civilians. This emphasizes Aksenov's assertion that the Russian people are in a way

responsible for the return of Stalinist era repression. There is a duty to protest the encroachment of censorship and new societal controls. In particular Aksenov blames Russia for standing idly by while Soviet tanks rolled in to Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Politically the novel supports a form of art which is *engagé* and politically involved. Artistically the system of allusions and references suggests that Soviet literature should return to the values and styles of the Silver Age - that is to pre-Soviet literature. But as important as art is in the novel, it is still ultimately inadequate. Art cannot win the battle against Cronos no matter how hard it fights. However, art is a means of getting to the one thing that can be victorious against Time, and by extension against Stalinism as well, Religion. “Смешно выходить против Кроноса с поднятым мечом. Один лишь воин есть готовый к победе — вневременный и безоружный Иисус Христос” (423), “It is absurd to attack Cronus with upraised sword. There is only one warrior who is ready for victory – the unarmed, the timeless Jesus Christ” (450).

This religious theme is best exemplified by the actions of Gennady Malkolmov who brings his worst enemy, the Stalinist Cheptsov, back to life with his brilliant discovery, Lymph-D. This is a demonstration of how to deal with Russia’s problematic history. Forgiving those that tortured the country for decades is the only way of moving on and avoiding the sins of the past. This does not mean that Russia should forget - quite the contrary - but simply that Russia must first (and the entire country must take an active part in this) avoid falling back into the sins of the past, and then must forgive those who committed them before picking up where Russia left off in 1917.

The novel ends on an ambiguous note. The Hero manages to make the “breakthrough into space” which is at the heart of the Third Model, but seems to fall just

short of living up to the religious message of the novel and is sent back to Earth. In Moscow everything comes to a brief stop. It is a moment of expectation, presumably of God or some form of revelation. Moscow seems prepared, but either nothing happens or the result is utterly intangible. Aksenov leaves history to decide how his novel has ended.

Все смотрели в разные стороны, в разные углы земли и неба, откуда, как им казалось, должно быть возникнуть Ожидаемое: в тучах ли, за гранью ли крыш, в странной ли раковине метро... Мгновенная и оглушительная тишина опустилась на Москву, и в тишине этой трепетали миллионы душ, но не от страха, а от Близости встречи, от неназванного чувства.

Сколько это продолжалось, не нам знать. Потом все снова поехало. (495).

Everyone was looking in different directions, at different angles of the earth and sky, from whence, they felt, the Thing that they were expecting should appear: in the clouds, perhaps, from over the roof-tops, or maybe in that strange shell of the metro station... A momentary and deafening silence settled over Moscow, and in that silence millions of souls were trembling – not with fear, but with the Imminence of an encounter, with a nameless emotion.

How long it lasted, we knew not. Then everything started moving again. (527-28)

Appendix



The Pergamum Frieze.



The Pergamum Frieze, Museum Island, Berlin.



Ilya Repin, "The Zaporozhian Cossacks Reply to the Turkish Sultan", 1880-1891.



Möbius Strip.

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