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The Stories of Andrei Bitov, 1958-1966.

A search for individual perception.

Stephen George Sidney Hagen

Dissertation submitted for the degree of

M.A.

University of Durham Department of Russian

1980

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14 4 / 1984

ABSTRACT

S.G.S. HAGEN The Stories of Andrei Bitov, 1958 - 1966

The thesis traces and analyses Andrei Bitov's development from literary impressionist and short-story writer of the late fifties to philosopher and novelist of the mid-sixties. The writer's search for vision and idea is revealed through a detailed chronological study of each major work and cycle of short stories. The progression of Bitov's solitary hero through successive stages of childhood, adolescence and adulthood and his interaction with everyday problems follow a particular pattern towards self-perception. Although not a moralist, the writer guides the reader on an inward search for self-knowledge through his characters' experiences including both religious and mystical revelations. In addition to the treatment of the common themes of life, death and growing-up, Bitov gives literary expression to Zen Buddhist notions of Koan and Satori and reinterprets the nineteenth century concept of poshlost' in the new idea of poluson. The usual classification of Bitov as a "psychological" writer of molodaya proza is viewed as too narrow a definition despite the outward appearance of "confessionalism" and storylines concerning the alienated young man. The year 1966 is taken as the end of Bitov's early phase with the completion of the novel Dni cheloveka and the beginnings of Pushkinsky dom. The mid-sixties mark a transition in Bitov's search from one of idea to one of form and style. The thesis seeks to throw new light on Andrei Bitov's contribution to the Soviet short story of the sixties with a reappraisal of both the nature and progression of his writing, and the inclusion of original unpublished material from Bitov himself.

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Preface

The research for this thesis was carried out between October 1974 and August 1979. During this time Andrei Bitov published a number of literary works which either bear direct relation to his early period of creativity (1958 - 1966), or throw light upon it. The thesis thus had to be revised to incorporate new material or additional evidence, such as the publication of Bitov's two novels, Dni cheloveka in 1976, and Pushkinsky dom in 1978, though the latter has appeared only in the West in its complete form.

The groundwork for this research was initially laid in Durham University during a full-time postgraduate studentship awarded by the University as a scholarship in 1974-5. Without the University's valuable financial assistance it is doubtful whether the research would have taken place. Work on the thesis was greatly helped by a postgraduate study trip to the U.S.S.R. between March and June 1975. This opportunity was afforded by a British Council Postgraduate Studentship, an award without which the thesis would have revealed little of Bitov's own innermost unpublished thoughts. During this time, in the final week of June 1975, a series of interviews was held between myself and Andrei Bitov in Moscow. These contacts have led to an exchange of letters and a friendly relationship in which the author has clarified many areas of his writing where either the sense is obscure, or significant passages have been deliberately omitted prior to publication.

Foremost amongst recent evidence is Andrei Bitov's unpublished letter of 12th August 1978. It was sent solely to myself in reply to a number of queries and appears in the appendices with an English translation for general reference. My notes taken during numerous talks with Andrei Bitov in Moscow are included. These documents appear in print for the first time. Particular references to them will be stated in the footnotes as "Letter, 12.8.78" and "The Moscow Interviews".

I should like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance and encouragement of my supervisor, Mr. L.S.K. le Fleming of the Department of Russian, of Durham University, who made constructive suggestions and gave careful attention to the thesis during its preparation. I am also indebted to Mr. Martin Dewhirst of Glasgow University for his help and advice in both the initial and later stages of the thesis's preparation.

Finally, I thank my wife, Roulla, whose help, patience and encouragement have been invaluable.

A GLOSSARY OF ZEN BUDDHIST TERMS

- Avidya Ignorance in the sense of Nescience. The first of the Twelve Nidanas and the last of the "Ten Fetters".
- Jiriki The way of salvation by 'self-power' or self-effort.
- Koan A problem which cannot be solved by the intellect. An exercise for breaking its limitations and developing intuition.
- Nidana The Twelve Nidanas are spokes on the "Wheel of Becoming", links in the "chain of Causation".
- Nirvana A state of supreme 'Enlightenment' beyond the conception of the intellect. Annihilation of the personal, separative self.
- Real'nost
(reality) A mystical interpretation of "True existence". It is not an object of intellectual perception, but symbolic and to be spiritually interpreted; a feeling one has while going through Zen experience or Satori.
- Satori A state of consciousness which varies in quality and duration from a flash of intuitive awareness to Nirvana.

COMMON ABBREVIATIONS

D.N.	Druzhba narodov
Det.lit.	Detskaya literatura
Kh. lit.	Khudozhestvennaya literatura
Kom. pravda	Komsomol'skaya pravda
L.G.	Literaturnaya gazeta (Lit. gaz.)
L.R.	Literaturnaya Rossiya (Lit. Ross.)
Lit. Arm.	Literaturnaya Armeniya
M.	Moscow
M. g.	Molodaya gvardiya (Mol. gv.)
M. kom.	Moskovsky komsomolets (Mosk. kom.)
Mol. L.	Molodoi Leningrad
N.M.	Novy mir
Okt.	Oktyabr'
Prikasp. kommuna	Prikaspiiskaya kommuna
R.L.T.	Russian Literature Triquarterly
Russ. lit.	Russkaya literatura
S.P.	Sovetsky pisatel' (Sov. pis.)
S.R.	Sovetskaya Rossiya (Sov. Ross.)
Sib. ogni	Sibirshie ogni
Sov. lit.	Sovetskaya literatura
Tyur'men. pravda	Tyur'menskaya pravda
V.L.	Voprosy literatury
Yu.	Yunost'
Zap-Sib.	Zapadnaya Sibir'
Zn.	Znanya
Zv.	Zvezda

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to trace and analyse the search for perception in the early literary works of Andrei Georgievich Bitov between 1958 and 1966. The period of study marks the first phase of the writer's development in his emergence as a leading Soviet writer and novelist of the contemporary period.

Bitov was first published in the Soviet Union in 1960 when three of his short stories appeared in Molodoi Leningrad. During the early period Bitov's work received an abundance of commentaries and reviews. Bitov was generally derided by the conservatives (e.g. Geideko and Lisitsky), but he won the increasing praise and encouragement of more respected critics like Anninsky, Gusev, Solov'ev and Zolutussky. The recent appearance of Pushkinsky dom (Ann Arbor, 1978) has enhanced his prestige with the Soviet Intelligentsia and introduced him more fully to the West. Previously, Bitov was virtually unknown over here; only Zheny net doma and Yubilei have appeared in English anthologies thanks to the efforts of Martin Dewhirst who translated them¹. In the U.S.A. Infant'ev, syn svyashchemnika has been Bitov's only story to appear in English to date². In the U.S.S.R. an extract from Pushkinsky dom has been published in English as a separate short story with the title, 'Under the Sign of Albina'³. To our knowledge, very little has been written in the West about Bitov's early period as a writer. There are a number of superficial, fleeting references to works other than Pushkinsky dom, of which the most pertinent remarks are made by Deming Brown, but even these occupy little more than four pages⁴. Brown recognises Bitov's prowess as a 'psychological' writer but sees little else beyond a facility of style:

Bitov is probably the most subtle psychologist among writers of his generation and most closely resembles his Western contemporaries in the deftness with which⁵ he portrays private emotions.



It is an unfortunate measure of the ignorance surrounding Bitov's early writing that factual errors have twice occurred in references to him: Brown states, "Bitov began publishing in 1958"⁶, whereas he began writing in 1958 and publishing in 1960. Slonim is not even aware of Bitov's correct name, referring to him as "Alexander", not Andrei Bitov; "one of quite a few talented young and middle-aged writers in the Soviet Union"⁷. This passing, general recognition of Bitov's talent falls far short of the systematic study needed for a true assessment of the writer's abilities. There is no allusion to either the direction or the philosophical content of his works amongst western critics. Milner-Gulland and Dewhirst merely reiterate Brown's view of Bitov as a 'psychological' writer⁸ but inexplicably classify him as a writer of molodaya proza in the contents page⁹. Auty and Obolensky view him as merely one of a new wave of writers shifting interest to the private moments in life¹⁰. Certainly these comments are valid but do not suggest a pattern or progression in Bitov's early works from literary impressionist in 1958 to novelist and philosopher in 1966.

The emigre critic Karabchievsky places Bitov in the foremost ranks of Soviet writers; he refers to Bezdel'nik, for example, as Bitov's 'funniest yet at the same time the most serious, perhaps (his) deepest short story'¹¹. Karabchievsky attempts no analysis of where the "depth" lies, however. Similarly positive yet unsupported remarks are made about Fig¹², Puteshestvie k drugu detstva¹³ and Sad¹⁴ (which is nowhere classified as part of the novel Dni cheloveka). To our knowledge, academic analysis and discussion of Bezdel'nik as a part of Bitov's overall philosophical search has occurred only once in the West when the present author read a paper devoted to it in September 1977¹⁵.

The aim of this thesis is not only to analyse and interpret Bitov's early works, but to sort out the confusion of the general public on the real titles, dates, method and sequence of the publications. The record is set to rights

in the thesis and formulated in the appendices where the wealth of Bitov's early writing is categorised and presented chronologically according to the writer's own advice. Since a number of Bitov's stories have been published in different collections, references to a given work are generally taken from one particular edition to avoid confusion. Apart from one or two cases, the different publications of the same story differ very little. Moreover, in an endeavour to follow the sequence of Bitov's literary searches, each chapter either deals with a complete collection or a single major work.

In Chapter Two abbreviations will refer to the first collection of his stories, Bol'shoi shar (Sovetsky pisatel', 1963). References to Prizyvnik are taken from the first published version Takoe dolgoe detstvo in Yunost', 1964, 11, pp. 7-48. Chapters Four and Seven concern stories from Aptekarsky ostrov (Sovetsky pisatel', 1968). Bitov's search includes both inward and outward 'journeys'. The two stories on the latter theme have been published a number of times in a variety of editions. In Chapter Five, the text of the first outward 'journey', Puteshestvie molodogo cheloveka is quoted with reference to the same Bol'shoi shar edition, as above (Odna strana, pp. 5-106). Bitov's second 'outward journey', Puteshestvie k drugu detstva, is juxtaposed to the first in Chapter Five and extracts are taken from the Molodoi Leningrad publication (1966, pp. 126-168). One of Bitov's most successful collections, Obraz zhizni, (Molodaya gvardiya, 1972) is used in Chapters Six and Eight for references to Zhizn' v vetremuyu pogodu (pp. 71-106), Dver' (pp. 5-14), and Sad (pp. 15-70).

The mixed fortunes of Bitov's early novel, Dni cheloveka are explained in Chapter Eight. It appears in its fullest published version in 1976 (Dni cheloveka, Molodaya gvardiya, 1976 pp. 5-176). Up to this point four of its five parts, comprising four separate episodes, appeared under different

titles in a variety of publications. We have Bitov's word for the fact that the novel had been completed by 1966¹⁶, although its 1976 edition reveals certain changes and inclusions made to Les after 1966. For the purposes of this thesis, references are made to its separately published parts: Dver'-Sad (Obraz zhizni, Molodaya gvardiya, 1972); Trety rasskaz, published as Obraz (Zvezda, 1973, 12, pp. 135-151) and Les (entitled Uletayushchy Monakhov, Zvezda, 1976, 8, pp. 3-48).

During the writing of the final chapters of the thesis, Pushkinsky dom was published in the West. Although this work falls outside the title of the thesis, a small number of references will be made to its only edition, Pushkinsky dom, Ardis/Ann Arbor, 1978.

Each chapter of the thesis concerns a stage in Bitov's development and search for an idea. In some cases the writer marks a new stage or change of direction with a sudden prolific flow of writing which tests and explores a single idea; e.g. Chapter Two (the Bol'shoi shar cycle), Chapter Three (the Aptekarsky ostrov cycle), and Chapter Eight (the novel Dni cheloveka). Other chapters such as Five and Seven are consequently much shorter; here the author introduces a variation on the central idea or a digression to provoke the reader to greater thought. Thus Chapter Five marks the divergence between the inward and the outward 'journey' with an analysis of Bitov's travelogues Puteshestvie molodogo cheloveka (Odna strana) and Puteshestvie k drugu detstva. Although outwardly light-hearted and humorous in their treatment of travels in distant parts, the two stories reflect the author's new angle of vision. Both travelogues contrast sharply in style and theme with the main body of stories which principally concern travel of the mind rather than of the body. The central theme of self-perception through experience and explanation remains the same, however. Similarly, Chapter Seven

explores the supernatural and psychic phenomena in the story Infant'ev, syn svyashchennika. This lateral probe widens the search for meaning beyond everyday existence which is Bitov's usual field of exploration.

Bitov's path follows the different stages of growing up and adult development. Bolshoi shar principally concerns childhood in Chapter Two. Prizyvnik and Aptekarsky ostrov portray adolescence and the transition to manhood in Chapters Three and Four. Chapter Six concerns a married man facing questions raised by the birth of his son, Chapter Seven is the story of an older man who comes to terms with death when his wife dies of cancer. At the beginning and end of this process (which frequently coincides with stages in Bitov's own life) are studies which reflect the whole cycle of life. Whereas Bol'shoi shar is a patchwork of psychological slices, impressions and glimpses of many people of different ages and circumstances (though children predominate), Dni cheloveka is a tighter, sequential exploration of a man's inner world over four different stages. It is not fortuitous that the first part of this novel is published as the story Dver' in Bol'shoi shar, and the second part Sad with the two 'outward journeys' and Zhizn' v vetrenuyu pogodu under the title Dachnaya mestnost'¹⁷. The different stages apparent in the various cycles of stories are in turn reflected in the story of Aleksei Monakhov in Dni cheloveka written between 1960 and 1966.

The themes of childhood, adolescence, love, death and human weakness (which I interpret as a contemporary form of nineteenth century poshlost') resound throughout the stories as Bitov's introverted and weak heroes struggle for some understanding of themselves in relation to life's major problems.

The storyline is frequently banal, but the measure of psychological portrayal and analysis is astoundingly acute. A final philosophical pattern will be shown and similarities between Bitov's findings and concepts with established

world philosophies pointed out. Thus notions from Zen Buddhism are introduced at various stages, such as Koan¹⁸, 'reality'¹⁹ and Satori²⁰. Christian symbols and teachings are apparent in Dni cheloveka which recall Slavophile interpretations of certain Christian events and revelations referred to in Chapter Eight.

If we are to accept Bitov's view that his writing is sincere (chestny)²¹, we do not have to equate sincerity with originality. I shall show that Bitov is rather more influenced by the Russian classical writers of the nineteenth century than by philosophers²². Bitov is also compared with writers of the twentieth century, both Soviet and Western; for example, Chapter Four includes references to J.D. Salinger, Chapter Two to Yury Olesha. In Chapters Three, Six, Seven and Eight I examine Bitov's portrayal of the 'privileged moment'²³; common amongst European writers such as Rilke, Proust, as well as Solov'ev and Blok. Bitov uses it as a device to bring about a point of sudden mystical self-awareness for his characters in a number of later stories.

Bitov's search is not interpreted as a veiled attempt to prove the existence of a Christian God, although Bitov does specifically mention Him in Sad, part of Dni cheloveka. Bitov reaches his conclusions by entirely trusting his own feelings and experiences:

Я допустил для себя самую возможность
создавать культуру на основании /совре-
менного 24/ личного опыта ... К тому
моменту, как я взялся за прозу, я вторич-
но ... хлебнул жизни ..., что и приго-
дилось мне как опыт. 25

Bitov's search is neither a response to other literature, nor consciously influenced by it. He admits reading the Gospels only in 1965-6 (after the completion of Sad, Infant'ev and Penelopa) which was in turn prior to reading the fathers of contemporary prose²⁶. It is, thus, an individual

search which independently reaches a number of the same conclusions about the human condition that others have attained. The writer sees the search as an individual thirst for knowledge which must be assuaged before it is too late; he realises

Что, чтобы оториентироваться в море пропущенного, надо было самому найти правильные ключи ко всему, чтобы не взламывать, но и не простоять перед дверями, как раз запертыми к твоему приходу. 27

The vastness of the expression pravil'nye klyuchi ko vsemu is breathtaking. It assumes that there are correct keys, i.e. a right formula to life which can be discovered and implies a Weltanschauung. However, one must not lose sight of the fact that the letter of 12th August 1978 is written almost exactly twenty years after Bitov started writing. It is thus a statement made with hindsight of the discoveries of those early years.

By 1966 Bitov's writing has evolved certain regular characteristics: firstly, weak and faltering individual heroes. Secondly, the poshlost' of the present era is principally poluson, an original concept. Thirdly, the stories follow the pattern of observation, analysis and climax. Fourthly, the milieu rarely changes from the cold, close streets of Leningrad where Bitov tests his heroes out. Each story appears to be a controlled experiment, external interruptions and background details are generally very few. Fifthly, the psychological portrayal of the character is intricate and intense; he suddenly steps into the limelight out of semi-darkness, faces a crisis, either acts or does not, and disappears, but during those few moments Bitov casts a magnifying glass over his inner thoughts and feelings. Thus, the process also becomes an inward voyage for the reader who relates the selected details of human behaviour to his own experience in a variety of situations. By the fourth part of Dni cheloveka, Bitov has arrived

empirically at a code of moral conduct with which to arm modern Man against his own failings and spiritual vacuity.

Since 1966, the pattern evident in his earlier writing has disappeared: his major literary output is his novel, Pushkinsky dom and travelogues. Bitov's povesti, Uroki Armenii and Koleso have led to his increasing popularity as a literary ethnographer. This was partly encouraged by the publication of the collections Obraz zhizni (1972), Ne schitai shagi, putnik! (1974) and Sem' puteshestvii (1976). Their respective circulation figures of 100,000, 180,000 and 100,000 compare advantageously with 75,000 for the collection Dni cheloveka (1976) comprising parts of the two novels Dni cheloveka and Pushkinsky dom (though nowhere is this stated).

Outside the mainstream of his works, Bitov has taken to filmscript writing²⁸, articles on the environment²⁹ and literary criticism³⁰. Few references are made to these activities in the thesis owing to their extraneous nature. Bitov the man is rarely divorced from Bitov the writer and narrator, however. A study of Bitov's personal history and background is the essential starting-point for a fuller analysis of his writing.

- 9 -

Footnotes

- 1 A.G. Bitov, "The Wife's Out" (tr. M. Dewhirst) in P. Reddaway (ed.) "Soviet Short Stories, vol II", Penguin 1968, pp. 110-125.
A.G. Bitov, "The Jubilee" (tr. M. Dewhirst) in R. Milner-Gulland, M. Dewhirst (eds.) "Russian Writing Today" (1977) pp. 237-248.
- 2 A.G. Bitov, "Infant'ev" (tr. C. Avins), R.L.T., 1973,6, pp. 357-368.
- 3 A.G. Bitov, "Under the Sign of Albina", Sov. Lit., 1976,10, pp. 39-53
- 4 Deming Brown, "Soviet Literature since Stalin" (1978), pp. 192-197.
- 5 Ibid., p. 192.
- 6 Ibid., p. 193
- 7 M. Slonim, "Soviet Russian Literature, Writers and Problems 1917-1977" (1977), p. 404.
- 8 Milner-Gulland and Dewhirst, op. cit., p. 236.
- 9 Ibid., p. 7.
- 10 R. Auty, D. Obolensky, (eds.) "An Introduction to Russian Language and Literature", Companion to Russian Studies Series (1977), p. 201.
- 11 Yu. Karabchievsky, Tochka boli, Grani, 1977,106, p. 201.
- 12 Ibid., p. 150.
- 13 Ibid., p. 160.
- 14 Ibid., p. 163.
- 15 S.G.S. Hagen, "Bezdel'nik: An Introduction to the Mature Bitov" (unpublished paper); 4th Conf. of Sov. Lit. Study Gr. (BUAS) St. Edmund Hall, Oxford, September 27th 1977.
- 16 In one of Bitov's unpublished letters to S.G.S. Hagen, it states

„Роман-пунктир и впрямь окончательно
сложился в 66-м ..." /2I.09.79/

- 17 A.G. Bitov, Dachnaya mestnost' (1967).
- 18 See glossary, p. iii.
- 19 Ibid., p. iii
- 20 Ibid., p. iii
- 21 A further discussion of this occurs in Appendix v, p. 238
- 22 Letter, 12.8.78, Appendix vii, pp. 248-249
- 23 See page 152 for discussion of this concept.
- 24 This word sovremennogo is added later.
- 25 Letter, 12.8.78, op. cit., p. 244
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Bitov's first attempt at a film script was the kinopovest', Narisuem budem zhit', Aptekarsky ostrov, S.P. 1968, pp. 147-247. In 1967, he was co-writer of the scenario for the film Malen'ky beglets, a Soviet-Japanese co-production by E. Bocharov and T. Kinugasy concerning the experiences of a ten-year-old boy in search of his father. Recently Bitov wrote Zapovednik. Kinomelodrama (Iskusstvo kino, 8, 1977) which has been released as V chetverg i bol'she nikogda directed by Anatoly Efros. He has also published a review of the filmscripts of the Georgian, R. Gabriadze; Fenomen normy, Avrora, 1972, 5, pp. 58-64.
- 29 In the letter of 12.8.78, Bitov declares his interest in the ecology movement. His interest goes back as far as 1965 with the publication of Nikanor Ivanych i vedomstva on 13th March 1965, an article concerned with the preservation of the earth's natural resources. The theme of 'man and the environment' also appears in Voskresny den' which was published in 1980.
- 30 Bitov has been frequently involved in round-table discussions on modern Soviet literature organised by newspapers and journals, e.g. Granitsy zhanra, V.L. 7, 1969, pp. 72-76; Iz otvetov na anketu Literaturnoi Rossii, Lit. Ross, 21st August 1964, pp. 6-7. Bitov is

a patron of talented young non-Russian writers, such as Grant Matevosyan, whose work he reviews in Pastoral' XX vek, Lit. gaz, 28th June 1967, p. 6. He comments on the problems of contemporary Tadzhik writers in Tri pokoleniya, Druzhba narodov, 9, 1972, pp. 244-267. On the eve of the VIth Congress of the Union of Writers in June 1976, Bitov published an objective account of the contemporary literary process in the U.S.S.R. It appeared as Dlya kogo pishet kritik? V.I., 4, 1976, pp. 76-82. Its frankness surprised Radio Liberty which reprinted extracts on 21st June 1976 in a research bulletin Ref: PC 320/76.

CHAPTER ONE

The Man, his Life and Writing in Perspective

Bitov has not yet written an autobiography and has nowhere set down comprehensively his own early thoughts and feelings. For this reason his letter of 12.8.78 is particularly helpful; it is, to our knowledge, the only certain source of autobiographical material available to us. More importantly, most of Bitov's reviewers and critics regard him as "autobiographical" or "subjectivist"¹ without summarizing the nature of the links between Bitov - the writer and his characters. In this chapter I assume that the reader is already acquainted with the letter of 12.8.78 and I shall seek to point out the extent to which the writer's own background is reflected in his works.

Although Andrei Georgievich Bitov was born into a family of Leningrad intelligentsia in 1937, his early years as a child were by no means privileged. His earliest impressions were of the Second World War and the blockade of Leningrad during the winter of 1941-42. In the Spring of 1942 his evacuation to the Urals was memorable for the contrastive change from the cold, hunger and corpses of Leningrad to the peace, tranquility and stability of country life. Despite Bitov's assertion² that he did not find his sources as a writer in these early childhood memories, his first story, Babushkina piala, nonetheless portrays fleeting impressions from this period. Bitov does not specifically mention the influence of Dostoevsky but a surprising number of parallels do exist: from depictions of the dark, claustrophobic inner-life of Leningrad, occasioned by the war, to symbols identical to those in Prestuplenie i nakazanie which we shall refer to later. Such similarities with other writers do not detract from Bitov's

* See appendix vii

original contribution to Soviet literature, however. Bitov frequently, yet unconsciously, draws on either past events or the literary devices of others as a means of portraying the present and immediate in his writing. Bitov's fetish to be contemporary³ is seen in his admonition of English publishers' preoccupation with his past rather than present stories.⁴ He is particularly critical of those writers of his generation who have not developed their literary interests beyond wartime experience and nostalgia.

Bitov's tendency to dismiss his earlier works as unimportant relative to the present has meant my delving into our conversations and letters for clues to the prevailing influences on Bitov whilst he was writing in the past.

Apart from war and evacuation, Bitov's childhood was otherwise uneventful; he asserts he developed no complexes and describes himself as 'poor in spirit, but rich in emotions'. Nonetheless, certain family personalities exerted a lasting influence to the point of making an appearance in Bitov's later writing.

Thus in Babushkina piala we are aware of both Bitov's own father and grandmother in the characters of the story. In his letter Bitov refers to the lasting presence of his grandmother's personality even after her death. It seems she played an even greater role than Bitov's own father in terms of relative influence on the boy's childhood. However, Bitov appears reticent about his family relations and foregoes comment with the words:

... очень редкая была по структуре семья,
она-то и наиболее любопытна для моей
биографии, но писать о ней пришлось
бы слишком много. 5

Nonetheless, the commanding figure of Bitov's own uncle appears in both Fig and much later as Uncle Dickens in Pushkinsky dom. Bitov's childhood love for the classics is largely thanks to his uncle's encouragement. His uncle's study became the young writer's refuge where he developed his reading right up to college entrance, starting first with "Robinson Crusoe". Bitov's early education was not only English classics but included Turgenev, Pushkin, Lermontov and Gogol, the last three of whom he singles out for special praise⁶. Indeed, apart from a general interest in culture and sport, his main childhood interest was numismatics, a hobby that he now finds hard to believe he ever had. As regards English writers, Bitov progressed to his other favourite, Charles Dickens; indeed the sympathetic character of Uncle Dickens in Pushkinsky dom is a tribute to both Dickens the writer and his uncle. "The Pickwick Papers" was the first work of literature which Bitov valued more for style than content. His future novels, Dni cheloveka and Pushkinsky dom were published in a similarly episodic way to "The Pickwick Papers" though Bitov had no notions of serialising his works whilst writing them. His only concern was then to reflect the history happening before his eyes regardless of any official, impersonal interpretations foisted on literature by the authorities; he felt all along that art should be the result of a personal initiative in the creation of culture:

И поскольку настичь, догнать, восполнить
пробел было невозможно /и до сих пор .../,
то пришлось начать писать самому /это шутка,
но это и правда/ ... культуру короче было
начать делать, чем обретать. 7

These feelings coincided with the Post-Stalin thaw which seemed to confirm the importance of a personal search for values. Prior to the 20th Party Congress in 1956 Bitov had been a quiet, yet sensitive adolescent without

particularly strong views. Khrushchev's speech took place when Bitov was nineteen. When he was called up in the following year, the combined personal and social shock left him traumatized, solitary and in search of some kind of personal response to his alienation. It took the form of a deepening sense of urgency to do something with his life which resulted in the vivid impressions of his first sketches of 1958 - 1960 motivated by both universal and personal experiences. His own difficult transition to manhood took place at the same time that his generation was troubled by the larger, all-important questions of the meaning to life in the aftermath of Stalinism.

Bitov's own individual revelation was that a modern culture⁸ was being represented and developed in the literature and films of the time; the easing of the clampdown on foreign literature and films gave him the single most momentous event of his early life:

И вот это обнаружение было и ослепительным и случайным: в 1954 у нас перевели роман Лакнеса „Атомная станция“, а в 56-м я посмотрел фильм Феллини „Дорога“. С этого началось мое новое образование: я допустил для себя самую возможность создавать культуру на основании современного личного опыта. 9

Personal experience is the real social and historical process of the time; so the true culture of the times must be represented in terms of individual experience against the background of, and in relation to, the wider social issues.

Bitov's writing up to 1966 maintains this dual effect: his studies of small, apparently insignificant characters serve to raise the major questions of life, death, human weakness and cosmic consciousness in face of the demands

of society. However, this effect is gained only when the reader stands back to survey the whole. For the details are so intricately observed that one risks not seeing the overall design and purpose to the story. Bitov's stories are largely studies of characters in the flux of change or transition, though the first collection Bol'shoi shar reveals an early existential approach to life whereby Bitov sets out from his own intensely perceived personal experience, the only absolute truth he accepts, to express the world around him and his existence, indifferent to all types of a priori categories or concepts as aids to the explication of that existence.

Bol'shoi shar captures the fleeting impressions of a sensitive young man, attractive for their psychological authenticity without the need for anecdote.

The stories of Bol'shoi shar are the subtle portraits of a novice recently shocked by the deadening and depersonalising effect of joining the army.

Written during Bitov's days as a student of geology and mining at the Gorny Institut in Leningrad, the collection was not published until 1963, by which time another collection, Aptekarsky ostrov, and the povest', Prizyvnik, were almost complete, and his next major work started (Dni cheloveka).

Much of his early commitment to writing was due to the freedoms of student life and the existence of a thriving literary circle at the mining institute. The fact that he gained admission to the circle by plagiarising his brother's poetry suggests that the urge to write preceded the actual writing. The same urge is reflected in the Moscow Interviews when Bitov declared he had to write "before it was too late". The apparent discrepancy between Bitov's educational training and chosen career is due entirely to the influence of his family, especially his father, who was an engineer by profession (though an architect in practice) and wished his son to have the same kind of position. Bitov was later to reject the profession of mining engineer on the grounds

that the time and energy spent in its pursuit could have been better spent writing. The same urgency not to waste time is also apparent in the feverishness of his search and personal commitment to his writing in the early sixties. Nonetheless, the grounding he received in maths and science contributes methodicalness and close precision to a systematic exploration of the human psyche. Furthermore, the geological expeditions he was obliged to undertake opened his mind to the value of travel, both outwardly and inwardly, and have provided the richness of material and impressions in his travelogues. He has become an amateur ethnographer and is particularly esteemed and popular in Armenia¹⁰.

One of Bitov's warmest characteristics is his sensitivity to detail and sympathy for the weakest of characters. This feature is apparent from his earliest stories to his most recent. Bitov's early stories (1958 - 1966) form an uncanny cycle; the first sketch, Babushkina piala, is an impressionistic study of a boy's reaction to the approaching death of his father. Les ends with a son's reaction and re-awakening at the death of his father. Themes of feeling and sensitivity regularly appear in Bitov's stories. He, himself, characterises his story as, stikhotvorenje po chuvstvu¹¹, similar in mood to Japanese poetry. Bitov's studies are emotive and highly personal. The constant repetition of the term chestny throughout the Interviews is reflected in Bitov's predominant portrayal of man's deception of both himself and others in everyday life. One can trace this fervour for chestnost' back to the events of 1956 when it became a byword of the new generation, a banner their parents appeared not to have respected. Most young writers of the period try to keep this principle uppermost in their writing:

... другого пути у моего поколения
не было, а в искусстве, к счастью,
подлинность /аутентичность/, первоздан-
ность, ценится, как качество, а не как
патент. 12

Bitov's resulting awareness of his artistic responsibility towards society does not go as far as explicitly expounding moral directives or doctrines in his works. The very notion of dogmatism was anathema to young writers in the post-Stalin period. However, there are strong autobiographical overtones which clearly show a coordination between the character's situation and the writer's own feelings on the matter. For example, Bitov wrote Prizyvnik between 1959 and 1961 just after he had completed military service. Bitov's father's serious illness in 1958 was reflected in Babushkina piata and the recent death of his grandmother. Bitov married, and his first child was born at the time of writing Zhizn' v vetrenuyu pogodu (1963-64). He was later to leave his first wife and marry Ol'ga, who bore him a son, Ivan, on 21st September 1977. Here, there is an ironic twist, for these events are reflected in Dni cheloveka which was completed in 1966 before they actually occurred. Nonetheless, the writer's occasional flights to the countryside of Kostroma Province are reminiscent of the storyline in Zhizn'. But Bitov's stories are not always a true reflection of events in his own life, as the writer himself admits:

Что касается отражения собственного опыта, то я полагал, что прямое отражение опыта никогда не вело к художественному эффекту и попросту малоинтересно. 13

Despite this, Bitov is not short of dramatic material from his own life and having consciously determined to write from his own experience, few of his stories are totally fictitious. His writing is thus intensely personal; there is a joy of life within it, particularly in the more factual travelogues. The stories reflect the effects of the Thaw which resemble a universal awakening among writers, producing a double capacity for fresh and original perception. Bitov's early literary career was like a newly aware adult

embarking on a journey with the perception of a child, hurrying to explore the new world of adulthood as well as the changing world of the Thaw. Each cycle of stories reflects a new discovery and a new step in this exploration. However, it is a world dominated by the human 'I'; consciousness of the world through the Self. The constant self-questioning in the stories of the early period reflects Bitov's ardour for seeking answers as well as posing questions; a process which lasted until Bitov was nearly 30 years old.

Between 1958 and 1966 Bitov produced seventeen short stories, one povest', one novel, numerous short articles and a filmscript. The evidence of his recent works suggests an end to the youthful searches of the sixties and a concern with the novel, so the regular pattern of short stories and povesti in the sixties changes into the slower, more ponderous, yet more serious mood of the seventies. The fact that Bitov himself draws a line across his works in 1966 and virtually repudiates them is significant. He is a writer who cannot remain static; by 1966 his youthful enquiries into the meaning of life were exhausted and his popular literary vehicles of the rasskaz and povest' were beginning to merge with that of the novel¹⁴. The year 1966 itself marks a clampdown in the history of literary expression in the U.S.S.R., Khrushchev's fall in 1964 and the end of the two-year hiatus heralded the beginning of the sterner Brezhnev Era; ironically, it was to be a decade before Bitov's early works were all published. Bitov remarked in the Moscow Interviews that the late sixties marked one of his hardest experiences in the aftermath of the publication of Aptekarsky ostrov. Not until 1972 did the publication of Obraz zhizni revive the writer's low fortunes. Then, again, between 1976 and 1979 the same 'empty' phase is repeated.

In many ways Bitov is the epitome of a modern "fellow-traveller". He is not afraid to speak out against the Writers' Union and threaten to resign (1979) over their hard line on young writers in the Metropol' affair. He also despatched his latest unpublished novel for publication in the West (1976) and is prepared to appear on British television and speak freely about the literary process in the U.S.S.R.¹⁵. His books are exchanged on the Moscow black market at higher prices reflecting his popularity amongst the intelligentsia and youth of the Soviet Union.

The writer's early life also reveals a history of antagonistic relations with the State. During 1963-65 prior to the appearance of his first collection, he was refused entry to the Writers' Union for disciplinary reasons after a minor 'contretemps' with the police. Although none of Bitov's stories has an overt political theme, they are nonetheless viewed by the authorities as mystical and excessively individualistic¹⁶. Moreover, the very notion of a search for a Weltanschauung within the matrices of one's own individual experience is a personal challenge to the prescriptive norms laid down for literature in the Soviet Union. Bitov's situation marks a recent change in the traditional approach to non-conformists. In Bitov's case the Soviet authorities allow the man to write as a sign of tolerance, though expect the critics to pillory any "false" concepts that may arise in his writing¹⁷. Bitov's recent action in publishing his novel in the West signifies the frustration of a man refused publication in his own country but also a change in policy by the Soviet authorities which condoned the publication of Pushkinsky dom in the West, but not in the U.S.S.R. Bitov has achieved only one publication since 1976, Zapovednik. Kinomelodrama, which appeared in the August edition of Iskusstvo kino¹⁸, 1977. Although another collection has been announced for 1979 - 1980 it still remains to be seen whether it will materialise¹⁹.

At present Bitov lives in a Moscow apartment having just become estranged from his second wife Ol'ga despite the recent birth of their baby son, Ivan, in 1977. Bitov's first wife still lives in Leningrad with their eighteen-year-old daughter. Bitov lives off his royalties, but in 1976 he was enrolled as a postgraduate student at the Institute of World Literature (Gorky Institute), Moscow. His main interests revolve around travel to distant parts (he was allowed a one-week visit to Holland in the early seventies), and the ecology cause. His friends appear to be few and well-chosen. As a person, he is friendly and sincere, open and honest in company with a clear, but subtly ironic sense of humour. Outwardly he appears somewhat diffident, handsome, tall and dark-haired. His one constant companion was Yuz Aleshkovsky, who has since gone to the United States. He, too, began by writing children's stories²⁰. The theme of childhood is the traditional starting-point in any search for self-perception and Bitov is no exception as I shall make apparent in Chapter Two.

Footnotes

- 1 See for example, V. Gusev's postscript to Dni cheloveka (1976), p. 349.
- 2 Letter, 12.8.78, p. 243
- 3 Ibid., p. 244
- 4 P. Reddaway (ed.), op.cit., and M. Dewhurst, R. Milner-Gulland, (eds.), op.cit.
- 5 Letter, op.cit., p.243
- 6 Ibid., p. 244
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Particularly due to Uroki Armenii, Druzhba narodov, 9, 1969; a penetrating and sympathetic study of that country for which he won a Druzhba narodov prize of 300 roubles.
- 11 The Moscow Interviews (1975), p.233
- 12 Letter, 12.8.78., op.cit., p. 244
- 13 Ibid., p. 245
- 14 See A.G. Bitov, Granitsy zhanra, V.L., 7, 1969, pp. 72 - 76.
- 15 "The Book Programme", BBC TV, November 1977.
- 16 This view was expressed to me by a representative of the political section of Voronezh State University.
- 17 See, for example, editorial comment in Literaturnoe obozrenie, 1, 1977, p. 61.

- 18 See Iskusstvo kino, 8, 1977, pp. 159 - 191.
- 19 In the past certain of Bitov's stories have been advertised and not appeared; e.g. Prepodavatel' simmetrii, advertised in Avrora, 8, 1972, p. 80.
- 20 Iosif Yefimovich Aleshkovsky, writer, e.g. Kysh i ya v Krymu, Det.Lit., (M. 1975).

CHAPTER TWO

Andrei Bitov's Early Sketches

One is immediately struck by the diversity of theme, structure and style in Bitov's first published collection of short stories¹. Between 1958 and 1961 when most of these stories were written, Bitov was barely in his twenties and an apprentice writer eager to experiment with both form and ideas. The post-Stalin Thaw of the mid-50's had made it easier for authors to write more candidly and to diversify style and subject-matter than at any time since the literary blossoming of the 1920's. Many of Bitov's early sketches have characteristics in common with those of other young writers of the time. Comparisons between Bitov and others of his generation such as Vasily Aksenov, Vladimir Voinovich, Il'ya Zverev, Fazil' Iskander and Anatoly Gladilin have already been made². During the early sixties there existed almost an entire generation of short story writers in search of an identity. Clearly these writers' paths were to cross many times before each established a clearly defined line of individual development. Similarly, Bitov increasingly adopts a philosophical viewpoint peculiar to himself and yet worthy of special attention for its originality in Soviet literature.

In his first collection Bitov expresses the common feelings of his generation: a keen desire to explore the human condition without preconceived notions and the trappings of Socialist Realism; an examination of immediate, authentic experience and a fuller concentration on the private problems and interests of the individual. The subject-matter, though extremely varied in this collection is not original, but distinctive in its new approach to old problems. Childhood is not, of course, a new or original theme in both literature and philosophy. As an important early theme in Bitov, childhood

is treated freshly and intimately, especially in the story Bol'shi shar. Bitov is impressive even at this early stage of writing for his acute observation of detail and an ability to express the confused and turbulent inner world of his characters.

The epigraph to his first story Babushkina piala³ suggests the dominant tone of the inner, impressionistic world of these early sketches. A characteristic in common with Takuboku, a Japanese poet of the 20th century from whom the quotation is taken:

Я в комнате сидел под вечер без огня
И вдруг гляжу:
Выходят из стены
Отец и мать,
На палки опираясь. 4

Most of the early stories are constructed around similarly vague impressions, whilst maintaining unity of time; Bitov concentrates his reader's attention on a moment in time which is significant for a single individual. Bitov reflects the effect on his hero by means of subtle observation and selected detail (ostroidenie). There is no obvious desire to probe or analyse, simply a wish to catch the surface and movement of life which is conveyed directly and immediately.

As the narrator grasps his dead grandmother's bowl in Babushkina piala⁶ the thoughts of the past return by a process of involuntary memory. They are not well-defined and documented visions but subconscious sensations; the dead grandmother is more apparent by her aura than by visual description:

Та же ласковая и теплая волна снова
подхватила меня. 7

The choice of imagery (e.g. teplaya volna) is both unusual and evocative for the reader. Bitov terms such personalised sensation as nablyudenie cherez opyt⁸. Bitov portrays the child's mind with great psychological

insight by adopting the child's own stance. The sugar is seen as 'fantastically' white⁹, weird Asian plants pictured on the bowl appear as strange hedgehogs. Only later, on our return from the past to the present do we know of their true identity. As in the Proustian moment, the past is locked within the present. The flashback to the war years in Babushkina piala¹⁰ takes three and a half pages¹¹ but is an instant in the narrator's mind. The contradictory and illusory dimension of time is only touched upon here; it is one of a variety of themes, ideas and devices which are left for further exploration later.

The first person narrator, Alesha, has no distinct character or features: he is cast as an impression, too. The sense of temporal immediacy is provided by the extensive use of the present tense in a past-tense context; a sudden shift to the present tense brings the reader closer to the emotions experienced by the narrator or main character:

Сегодня нам поставили новые трубы -
кривые и ржавые.
И отец красит эти трубы. II

The surface dialogue is kept to a minimum: typical of Bitov's inarticulate young man, Alesha speaks in a laconic, ironic and tight-lipped manner suggestive of a podtekst. When Alesha says,

Я вижу отца. I2

we know there lies a wealth of emotion behind this short, clipped remark; his father is ill and near death. The similarly casual references to a newly painted chimney relate to the father's last act before his final illness and the desultory conversation between the dying father and his son is important for what is inferred, rather than said. The son's final remark,

Я наливаю чай в пиалу. I3

serves to bring the podtekst to its climax. Alesha chooses to drink the

tea from his grandmother's bowl which evokes memories of childhood mingled with the sadness of his grandmother's death. The piala is a symbol of childhood security as well as family grief. Several themes combine within this symbolic act; themes which occupied Bitov during his early years as a writer. A young man realises that his childhood has passed with the earlier death of his grandmother and the forthcoming end of his father's life. The young protagonist is now left the responsibilities of an adult. The ending is left open; there is no clear message, only the atmosphere and impression of a significant moment remains.

Certain features occur in Babushkina piala which develop into significant themes in late stories: psychological intimacy is brought about by a highly personal style, attention is carefully focussed on a brief, yet important, moment that marks a turning point or realisation in an individual's life. There is a sense of timelessness which contrasts with the obsessive concentration on a moment: images from the past, present and future combine together at a given point. Finally, the reader is left to apply his own imagination to the indistinct lines of characterisation and apparently uneventful ending.

Autobiographical elements are present, though not overtly so: Bitov's father did not die until 1977 but was seriously ill in 1958. Bitov's own grandmother who had been with him in Soviet Central Asia died in 1955, three years before this story was written. Bitov's memories of her are fond, but mere impressions which the story subtly conveys.

Bitov maintains the special kind of impressionism of Babushkina piala in his next sketch, Solntse¹⁴, the main character, Vitya, has the same vague outline and is of about the same age. Whereas Bitov's first story alludes to sombre themes of childhood and death, Solntse is filled with the light and joy of the early morning sun. The narrative is richly lyrical,

creating the writer's own vision of the world. The sun's rays filter into a young man's room, waking him up. On the way to the institute the sun pervades every description: the reader is left unsure as to whether Vitya is an employee there or a student. Both writer and character appear equally mesmerised by the sun which symbolises the very essence of life:

Воздух прыгал, вокруг, теплый и лас-
ковый. I5

The sun's activity is described with childlike freshness, pictured in a personalised form as a living ubiquitous presence;

В каждой новой кнопке загоралось новое
солнце. I6

The literary devices remind one of Olesha's prose, such as,

В металлических пластинках подтяжек
солнце концентрируется двумя жгучими
пучками. I7

Bitov's selected observations restructure the world so that everyday objects come to life similar to Olesha's nevidimaya strana¹⁸. Yet Bitov achieves that same fresh vision of the world without the bitterness of Olesha's Zavist¹⁹.

In many ways Olesha and Bitov follow similar paths; both are preoccupied with childhood to the point of infatuation. Both are like travellers engaged in a search and are visually aware of another world lying beyond normal perception:

Все это происходит в невидимой стране,
потому, что в стране, доступной нормаль-
ному зрению, происходит иное: просто пут-
ник встречает собаку, заходит солнце,
зеленеет пустырь. 20

Bitov seeks to achieve a childlike vision of the distortion of reality, where the old concierge appears as a vision of -

неестественных форм, похожая на большую
ватную игрушку,.. 21

Cinematic devices are also evident in Bitov's narrative style. Vitya watches the snow falling off workmen's shovels overhead:

От них отрывались, замирали на мгновение, а потом, медленно набирая скорость и увеличиваясь, летели слоенные серые глыбы. 22

Bitov, like Olesha, seeks to experiment with both theme and style.

Babushkina piata is similar to Olesha's Ya smotryu v proshloe²³ with its emphasis on adolescence and death. Solntse introduces the theme of the man-woman relationship when a brief encounter gives rise to a wealth of fantasy. Love is not a deep emotional affair for Bitov in this story, but a mere corollary to the light and joy around. It is natural for Vitya to fall in love on such a day, nor is it ironic that this should be on the bus as Bitov tries above all to reflect the everyday reality of life.

Thus, like the briefness of sunshine, so the scene melts away as quickly as it came, ending with the ironic touch of the sun beating on the window 'like a heart'²⁴.

In the face of the sun, time loses all meaning; despite his commitments at the institute Vitya is unconsciously lured towards the sun. Bitov and Olesha share a similar poetic vision of the sun: for Olesha the sun is life itself²⁵ and in the final image of Solntse the sun triumphs over objective reality:

Полупрозрачные глыбы домов плавали,
парили в воздухе

The beauty of Bitov's Solntse lies in its simple evocation of the world's natural and forgotten beauty; one which can only be caught for a moment by an adult distracting himself from his routine. It is a fleeting return to childlike vision.

Bitov's Soviet critics see little beyond the light, impressionistic surface-play of this story. Their comments ironically echo the critics of Olesha's works at the time. Apart from respectable critics such as Solov'ev²⁷, Gusev²⁸, Zolotussky²⁹ and Anninsky³⁰ whose studies of Bitov are sound and will be examined later, only Turkov recognises the writer's skill and talent in Bol'shoi shar:

В героях Битова мне дорого то, что, молодые и наивные во многом, они чутко улавливают те мгновения, где жизнь начинает катиться по опасной колее обывательского существования, где ослабевает пытливый интерес к миру. 31

Many of Bitov's Soviet critics view Bitov's most serious shortcoming in the almost total absence of the sociological or political message³² in these stories. Sherel³³ and Voevodin³⁴ assert that Bitov has a false sense of priorities; mere impressions of life require a social message. But although the early stories are devoid of a social message, they contain an implicit moral: Man has ceased to communicate with his natural surroundings and lost a childlike spontaneity and joy of living; such a condition can be interpreted as a kind of 'sleep':

... „притаившимся сном" хочется назвать подстерегающую человека инерцию будничного существования, повторение затверженных поступков и речей, при котором остается в бездействии пытливое творческое начало. 35

At this stage Bitov almost unconsciously outlines the existence of this deadening of the soul and mind. The development of this idea is given a much fuller treatment in Aptekarsky ostrov³⁶ with the world of adolescence.

No better example of Bitov's understanding of the invisible world of child-like perception exists than the story Bol'shoi shar³⁷, the title-piece of

the collection. In his description of a little girl's search for a large balloon, Bitov not only captures the girl's mood and fantasies but also creates a narrative rhythm to reflect the rapid pace of the storyline. The reader is carried into a child's world where fantasy and reality merge into one. Therefore the reader has to reach his own understanding of what really happens; external actions are no longer accountable as fact, for they are 'real' to the girl and this alone counts.

The storyline is simple; a little girl is separated from her father whilst watching the May Day processions. Tonya, the little girl, mysteriously strays off in search of the biggest and best balloon she has ever seen. The time sequence is lost and selected details are seen only through the girl's own eyes. Ordinary everyday objects, such as a soldier bending down with a radio on his back are described exactly as they appear to the girl:

На голове был шлем с наушниками, за плечами металлический язык /сразу видно, сложный-сложный аппарат/ а от ящика вверх - железный прут, он торчал над головой. 38

The description follows the child's eyes cinematically from the earphones to the set and finally to the antenna. The narrator does not intrude on the texts; each thought is conveyed innocently as though written by the child herself.

Motivated by the same instinct as Vitya in Solntse, Tonya joins the procession and follows the soldier unhindered by the fears and constraints of an adult. The sun, symbol of unadulterated life, lightens up Tonya's auburn hair as if in harmonious response to the child's innocent nature. A distant ringing of a bell completes the unity of sound and vision in the

story. The source of the ringing is not explained but serves to orchestrate the child's growing excitement as she nears the big balloon. The occasional chimes enhance the mood of mystery and fascination, similar in their occurrence to the breaking string in Chekhov's Vyshnevyy sad. The culmination of the narrative pace and child's vision come as the child finally sees the balloon:

... на голубом небе огромный /таких
и не бывает даже! / красный шар. Трень-
бом-динь! 39

The tone is infectious with its evocative vision of a lost mysterious world in which the lady who possesses the balloon is described as;

... меховая тетенька ... 40

Tonya is directed to Nedlinny pereulok, to a curious green house with white stone women. The big trees outside stand holding hands. The benches nearby are occupied by others waiting for the same balloon. An old woman from nowhere calls out,

Ты ведь пришла за воздушными шарами? 41

The outer and inner worlds lose focus in the child's mind with no clear indication of time or place. The fairytale atmosphere surrounding the search is shattered by the alliterated phrase;

Нет здесь никаких таких шаров! 42

a sentence resounding with a harsh cacophony of 'n' and 't' sounds. The severe note jars the reader's pleasant complacency whilst evoking greater sympathy. Such a simple everyday object as a balloon has become the child's all-consuming passion, she is oblivious to adult constraints of common sense and time. The reader finds himself adopting the adult stance in the first instant; the overwhelming evidence that no balloon

exists is convincing to all but a child. Thus Bitov confronts the reader with the false logic of what his response might be in the same situation. Bitov continues to provide evidence to the contrary until the final movement when the 'adult' in the reader is ousted and proven wrong.

In what appears as a parody of the traditional fable of a lost childhood paradise, Tonya returns home to find no-one knows of the house and street where she went. That night the red balloon is symbolised in a dream by Tonya's red trousers, a present from her mother who used to make her such gifts while Tonya was in the orphanage. The child's personal details are left undisclosed to the reader, yet a deeper meaning becomes apparent: the mother has either died or left Tonya, but her memory is mysteriously present when the red trousers in the dream become associated with the balloon episode. The child remains with an inner secret, an experience and joy exclusive to her, even beyond the reader.

Apart from the clear allegory of the search for the balloon, symbol of pure childhood perception, Bitov again captures the intimacy of the individual experience by portraying the natural beauty of a private and emotional moment in the life of a child. An important factor in the child's portrayal is what is left unsaid. The story reintroduces the long-forgotten joy and sensations of childhood fantasy not only with the progression of the child's actual thinking, but the effect and power suggested in a one-word phrase, Volshibly!

И, может, вовсе это не её город, такой
солнечный, красивый и пустой. А другой,
совсем другой ... Волшебный. И тут слу-
чаются необыкновенные вещи! Такие, такие ...
Она никак не могла представить, какие ... 43

Fig⁴⁴ (1959) is a similar portrayal of a child caught in a moment of intimacy. Unlike Bol'shoi shar there is no clear storyline and Alesha

the little boy and hero of the story is clearly drawn in a way that reminds us that childhood's locked doors do not always reveal beauty and innocence. The boy is clearly mischievous, living in a totally different world from that of his mother. The skill of the portrayal is in the discrepancy between the actual thought and actions of the boy and their interpretation by the mother who symbolises adultlike impercipient.

Unlike the carefully orchestrated unity of sound and vision underlying Bol'shoi shar, it is the tortured mewings of a cat which resound in Alesha's presence:

Вот ведь гадкое животное, - сказал Алёша.
От буфета шёл ровный гул. - Порычи мне
ещё, порычи! 45

It is a common feature of Bitov's writing that one type of story is counter-balanced by another which is diametrically-opposed. Just as Bitov's travelogues become a counterpoint to his 'psychological' stories so Fig contrasts with, and complements Bol'shoi shar. Bitov's aim in both types is to explore the inner dialogue between the individual and his perception of the world. Bitov is too much of a realist to deny that a darker side to human nature goes hand in hand with beauty from birth. In Fig Bitov explodes the myth of the purity of childhood by describing Alesha's natural and yet, disturbing, thoughts, such as dropping his cat down the waste-disposal chute:

Спустить бы туда кошку ... Вот была
бы симфония! 46

A realistic and frank portrayal of the child's mischievousness and malice can surprise and shock the reader just as childlike beauty can please. Bitov does not condemn the negative traits of a child nor criticise them; they are described light-heartedly, playfully, so that an underlying tone

of irony exudes from the narrative. One occasionally senses the hidden presence of the narrator jocularly pointing out the bizarre, yet natural features of his characters.

The scene of the uncle's meeting with Alesha is in a bantering dialogue which reveals the origin of the boy's naughtiness. The boy is chastised for acting in a way similar to dyad'ka, who is as playfully mischievous as the boy but reveals a more rakish side to his character:

- Нет, ты фиг, - дядька выпустил облачко коньячного духа. - А кто же ещё?
- Я - человек, - сказал Алёша. Разговор с дядькой доставлял ему удовольствие.
- Ах, да! Извини, извини ... Впрочем, это ещё не значит, что ты не фиг. - Дядька снял с губы окурок и приклеил его к краю стола. Там уже был изрядный бордюрик. 47

Similar to other vignettes of children and youths in Bol'shoi shar, Bitov shows a preference for small insights over ambitious generalisation. Few have fathomed Bitov's meanings, for they are inconspicuously hidden and so closely interwoven into the fabric of the story that they are easily missed. Furthermore, the strand of one story is frequently woven through into another. Only with the publication of Dni cheloveka⁴⁸ did it become widely known that the hero of Dver', published as a short story in Bol'shoi shar as early as 1963 was the same as that of Sad⁴⁹. Though several stories form part of the same novel⁵⁰, the same type of character can appear in many different guises in various stories. Alesha in Fig shows the early signs of future alienation in his deception of his mother and hostility towards his immediate surroundings. Moreover, Fig is a subtle study of human irrationality in its more negative forms. As yet, the theme is in embryo, though in Bezdel'nik⁵¹ the negative symptoms of alienation manifest themselves at a more advanced stage.

If Fig is the forerunner of Bezdel'nik, then Inostranny yazyk⁵² (1959) is that of Prizyvnik. In the latter two, a youth is struggling with his first major emotional relationship. The hero of Inostranny yazyk is the first in a series of socially-awkward young men, even before Kirill. Apart from a Hamlet-like inability to act, Bitov's awkward young men are unable to integrate the outer and inner selves and are frequently given to social disorientation. One particular manifestation of this is the tendency to fantasize. In the Moscow Interviews, Bitov stressed the frequent role played by fantasy in his hero's mental processes. The hero, Genka, discovers both fantasy and reality in himself when he finds himself alone in a carriage with an attractive woman. The visual effect of interplay of light and dark breaks down objective reality and leads to the author's evocation of Genka's unease.

В окне была плотная темнота. Как будто к стеклу прижали что-то сплошное и черное. Время от времени проскакивали какой-нибудь фонарь или дом, и от окна улетали клочья разорванной тьмы, и фонарь, и дом. И снова что-то плотное прижималось к стеклу, непонимаемое, глухое ... из вагон, где-то несущийся, а кругом ничего нет. 53

At the same time, we are aware of two sides of Genka's personality: the one acting from an emotional urge as above, the other surprised by the former's spontaneity:

И в то же время Генка думал о том, что не стесняется говорить вот как, не стесняется, что это может оказаться пошло или шаблонно или красиво. Что ему всё равно, так это или не так. И поэтому это не так. 54

Part of Genka reacts to the demands of the situation, the other to the lack of control in his own reaction:

- Генка, - сказал он. Почему-то он сказал именно "Генка".
- А сколько вам лет?

- ... А сколько дадите?
- Двадцать семь.
- Ошиблись, двадцать три, - сказал он. И
сам не понял, почему убавил два года. 55

(My emphasis)

This inner division of the Self leads to an inability to act, a failing which Bitov sees as symptomatic of the time.

Nonetheless, the adverse reaction provokes a point of sudden self-awareness and vitality which momentarily harmonises his two disparate halves.

Просто что-то важное и живое шевельнулось вдруг внутри, и надо было прислушаться к этому живому. Генка почти не замечал девушки, хотя её присутствие, наверно, и было необходимо, чтобы прислушиваться к этому "чему-то". 56

(My emphasis)

Genka awakens "a certain something" which had previously been dormant.

The double use of the adjective zhivoi (alive) is not fortuitous; Bitov makes clear reference to the significance of this term in the Moscow Interviews⁵⁷. Although there is no attempt to produce any philosophical message, there is the hero's new understanding of himself in the light of experience. Bitov takes the reader through each of Genka's steps of rationalisation:

Некоторое обладение есть, это да. И
определенно - есть облегчение. А пустоты
нет. 58

The feeling of inner freedom exists for only a second, then is lost, perhaps forever, as the ego re-asserts its dominance in a flood of introspective questioning. Bitov himself refers to a contact with an inner vital force which inspired him to write⁵⁹, we are not led to believe that Genka similarly benefits, however.

The story is still pessimistic: Genka only senses the possibility of self-fulfilment with this woman and remains unable to act or develop the relationship.

Он чувствовал - почти знал, что может
взять вот сейчас, сию минуту, её руки
в свои и даже поцеловать её ... И он
не брал её руки в свои и не целовал её. 60

Bitov develops the theme of converting thought into deed more fully in

Puteshestvie k drugu detstva:

Время выдвигает своё слово. И слово это
- ПОСТУПОК. 61

The theme of adolescent problems is not new in Soviet literature, but Bitov takes old narrative situations and refreshingly examines them. We find that whereas the themes of childhood and adolescence predominate during these early years, the story Yubilei⁶² concerns the other end of man's lifespan, the finality of death. The story is faintly reminiscent of Lev Tolstoy's Smert' Ivana Il'icha in that it recounts the old man's thoughts as he evaluates past and present life. As in his other stories, Bitov seeks to establish an intimate relationship between narrator, protagonist and reader. Death provides another old narrative situation which, because of its universality opens up an important channel of communication with the reader. Bitov's treatment of death is not embellished with generalities on the finiteness of life but delicately approached through the eyes of the protagonist who unknowingly awaits his fate. The same theme occurs in both the first and last stories of the early period. It is introduced in Babushkina piala in 1958 and features on the last two published pages of Les (1966). The deathly-slow narrative of Yubilei contrasts with the youthful vigour of other stories in the collection on the theme of childhood. Vagin's apparently wasted life and dulled

perceptions are juxtaposed with the vitality of Tonya in Bol'shoi shar, for example. On the other hand, Bitov is merely exercising his hand at the character portrayal of an old man. Vagin has to come to terms with the fruits of his own life. His loneliness and desperation suggest the ultimate conclusion of life without zhivost', in its finality, it is Bitov's most pessimistic story in the collection.

Yubilei is typical of the Bol'shoi shar collection in the subtlety of its psychological portrayal. The first two pages are concerned with the immediate present as the protagonist awakes and contemplates the events of the day before him. In previous stories we have seen old men through the eyes of children; now the angle of vision appears in the first instance to have been reversed. The narrative is loaded with irony; as the story progresses Vagin experiences a timeless transition and return to childhood sensations; again it is the sun's reflection that sets off a sequence of impressions:

... на потолке тот же отсвет - это было точно то же ощущение, как в детстве. И если так смотреть на потолок, а потом закрыть глаза, он мог словно бы перемещать себя по комнате и поворачивать кровать. 63

Vagin becomes aware of a cyclical progression in his life; he relives his mother's touch in childhood. Then, in an instant, the cycle is complete with a premonition of his own death and a vision of his epitaph. The themes of childhood and death then separate: the former is externalised in the final scene of children playing in the park, and the latter is reflected in the irreversible pace of the storyline towards Vagin's death. Thus Bitov continues the two notions from the first paragraph in which Vagin experiences the life-force (the sun spot) as he wakes up⁶³, an act symbolic of birth, and finally the light goes out; signifying death:

Все ушли и погасили свет. Писатель Борис Карлович Вагин умер на 71-м году жизни. 64

The two themes of childhood and old age frequently merge as, for example, when Vagin feels himself as a child again:

Борис Карлович почувствовал, будто у него в руке самолёт и это он планирует и набирает высоту. Он даже ощутил самолётик в своей руке. И понял, как можно слиться с этой железкой в одно. 65

There is the further hint of transcendence into an ethereal dimension, a timeless zone, such as experienced in childhood. It is through a consciousness of this state that Vagin comes to a new realisation of some deeper meaning to life in a series of childlike questions:

Иначе, для чего же?.... 66 К чему всё это?.... Что им ещё от меня нужно?.... 67

The questions are given to the reader in the form of a Zen koan⁶⁸, a riddle so common in many of Bitov's short stories, especially Zhery net doma⁶⁹, that it becomes a recognisable leitmotiv of Bitov's early writing. There is no clear answer to the riddle which is designed to teach the inadequacy of logical reasoning⁷⁰. Thus the end becomes a beginning and a stimulus to thought. The koan is Bitov's own original contribution to the literature of an era whose spirit was one of moral exploration and discovery⁷¹. The use of a philosophical device in the short story militates against simplified notions of man. Posed in the form of a series of open questions, the koan reflects a realisation that there are multiple and various legitimate avenues to the truth about human existence and its finality in death. No single system of belief is presented except that of the right of individual interpretation. The koan in itself is an implied repudiation of the dogmas of the recent past, for example Socialist

Realism. It is a new ingredient intended to arrest the reader's attention and bring him to re-evaluate the value-system foisted on him by others.

Boris Vagin realises that his life has not been his own, that he has lived his life alienated from his true self:

К чему всё это? Мне уже ничего этого не нужно. Это всё не моё - а их. Как они этого не поймут! И жизнь моя - это тоже у них. И они не дадут мне жить ... Что это потребность ... Что им ещё от меня нужно? 72

The 'they' who are mentioned are unclear. But it is the 'they' who have organised the forthcoming celebrations for the writer despite his objections.

In his final moment of death, the circle of life is completed as Boris returns to childhood symbolically using his diminutive name 'Borya':

Он почувствовал себя снова маленьким, совсем маленьким мальчиком прошлого века. 73

The final scene is a masterful stroke of ironic symbolism; a child asks him the time which is the first sign of departing from the timeless state of childhood. Furthermore, Vagin dies counting the minutes to the planned celebrations of his birthday. Weak-willed and pathetic, he is unable to thwart 'their' plans of his own accord, but is saved by fate's timely intervention.

The theme of time appears in a variety of guises in Bitov's early stories. Time has little significance for children who are beyond its power, whereas for Bitov's adult protagonists it brings oblivious regularity characterised in part by a state of semi-somnolence. In Zheny net doma⁷⁴, Bitov's koan is specifically directed at the individual's blind loss of time due to his state of oblivion:

И вдруг мне становится так скучно! Что же это я? Куда уходят дни? И как же действительно можно это всё объяснять? 75

Zheny net doma provides a contrasting rhythm of narrative pace with Yubilei; whereas Boris Vagin experiences a slow realisation of his situation, Bitov's young, impulsive protagonist in Zheny reaches a sudden awareness in a moment. The notion of the "privileged moment" is not new to literature⁷⁶, here it is only in embryo to be developed later. Bitov's combination of the two devices; koan and "privileged moment" provide a doubly effective ending and culmination to Bitov's narrative technique.

Zheny provides one of the best displays of Bitov's narrative devices whereby the reader becomes intimately involved with the protagonist. Firstly, a sense of intimacy is provided by the confessional and conversational mode of the narration. The narrator is dramatised, speaking in individualized language. He employs a laconic, ironic and tight-lipped speech. There is extensive use of the present tense in a past-tense context. The effect of sudden shifts from the past to the present is to bring the reader close to the emotions of the protagonist. The reader is immediately brought to identify with the main character and participate with his subjective ruminations and speculations on a personal level. Bitov employs clipped phrases with predominating verbs in the form of dialogue:

Вышел.
А она мне в окошко ручкой машет.
Не выдержал, пересилил робость, вернулся:
- А когда вы кончаете работать?
Сказала. И я сказала. И она сказала ... 77

Secondly, immediacy and intimacy are achieved through narration in the first-person with a strong trend towards stream-of-consciousness technique. The use of interior monologue becomes extensive, though the thoughts and ideas themselves are superficial and shallow. Thirdly, the reader is confronted with an everyday situation which he has probably experienced.

In Zheny, the protagonist is another weak-willed character, shallow in thought, who is tempted by an illicit affair with another woman whilst being tormented by his wife's delayed return home. It is the account of a few wasted hours in the alienated life of a young man. He wanders aimlessly around town, waiting for things to happen to him. His life is thus governed by the external world; he is prey to accidental events and, in this case, to irrational flights of jealousy mingled with momentary fantasies.

But the young hero is unable to articulate his anxiety and communicate it to his acquaintances. By the use of repetition of key phrases in the dialogue, Bitov subtly demonstrates his hero's inner feelings:

Жена на съемках. Актёрка! 78'

Within this simple phrase lies a wealth of emotion similar in the extent of its psychological portrayal of the hero to the line,

Я вижу отца. 79

There is a further change of narrative rhythm when the wife returns home. The protagonist's fears have reached a crescendo: half-crazed by imagined visions of his wife's misconduct in his absence, he is forced to confront the fantasy of his own mind with the reality of the situation. The point of sudden self-awareness is like a shaft of light into the hero's own darkened disorientated inner world. Whether this new awareness is sustained or not is not discussed, nor is it important. It is a self-awakening from poluson similar to Boris Vagin's in Yubilei. In this case, however, the situation is more of an everyday one and suggests Bitov's own view that self-revelation can occur at any time and not merely prior to death. Furthermore, the koan is now placed at the end of the story so that it ends on a question, emphasising its more obvious open-ended nature.

From studying the role of the final remark or sentence in Bitov's stories of the Bol'shoi shar cycle, we can arrive at a clearer understanding of the author's own literary development. Up to this story, Bitov has generally left his reader with an emotionally-charged impression, such as:

Я наливаю чай в пиалу. 80

This can be one illustrating the hero's psychological state, as in the above quotation, or simply an evocative visual impression:

Полупрозрачные глыбы домов плавали,
парили в воздухе. /р. 130/

/Солнце - 1959/

As Bitov progressed in his writing between 1959 and 1960 he shows an increasing concern to dramatize the endings, either by including a question-mark or an exclamation-mark in the final sentence:

- Ну, что, пойдём смотреть пароходы?
- сказал дядька. 81

/Фиг - 1959/

- Ах, чёрт! сказал он.

/Иностранный язык - 1959/

И как же, действительно, можно это всё
объяснить?

/Жены нет дома - 1960/

- Вова! Вова! Иди обратно!

/Юбилей - 1960/

А я свинья. Я перед всеми виноват. И дома.
И перед ней. Свинья. Всё именно так и было.

/Дверь - 1960/

Может, недоразумение?
И что такое - всеядность?

/Страшная сила - 1961/

Трень-бом-динь!

/Большой шар - 1961/

Whereas a koan is frequently discernible in the form of an open ending, it is clearly formulated in Zheny net doma and Strashnaya sila. Bitov is not apparently concerned with constructing his stories upon a koan at this stage, he is merely seeking to illustrate a riddle for the reader to solve. The koan is paradoxically posited in Bitov's least attractive sketch of this first series, Strashnaya sila, as well.

Bitov's major travel stories of this early period are left for study in a later chapter as they form a separate genre and another dimension to Bitov's development. Strashnaya sila would fall into this category but for its peculiar history. According to Bitov⁸⁹, the title was not his but attached prior to its publication as part of Bitov's first volume. Its original title and form is apparent in a story published in Zvezda in 1962⁹⁰ and in Leningradskaya pravda on 21st July of the same year. In these cases it appears with the more appropriate title of Na praktike.

Rather than illustrating an incident, an approach common to Bitov's first collection, the story is concerned with the situation of a young man on a geological expedition. It is partly autobiographical in that Bitov was also sent on similar expeditions to the Kola peninsula, Tadzhikistan, Zabaikal'ye and Karelia. When one compares the two published texts of the same story, the hand of editorial censorship is immediately apparent in the change of direction in the story-line. The hero is one and the same character in both, a student on field-work attached to a drilling collective. The villain changes his name, however; he is 'Kryuk' in the Bol'shoi shar collection and 'Yura' in the Zvezda version. 'Kryuk' sounds

harsher and ironically close to the English 'crook' which is his role in Bol'shoi shar. The reason for his ostracism is different in each version and exposes the aim of the censor. In the original version Yura is ostracised for his treatment of a local girl whom he makes pregnant and then abandons. In the censored version he is sent to Coventry for his attitude towards the collective:

Неколлективный он человек, вот что ... 91

Strashnaya sila is interesting only insofar as it is a good example of a story altered to satisfy the views of the editor. There can be little doubt that its inclusion mollified the censor's attitude to the publication of the collection, whose other stories differ greatly in subject matter and moral from Strashnaya sila. Rudin, for example, praises the story for its statement of the socialist ethic: that it is incorrect to be 'omnivorous' towards the collective; a point which brings Bitov closer to what Rudin calls 'real life'⁹². Whereas most Soviet critics condemn Bitov's so-called narrow, individualistic approach to life, owing to this story, they are unable to state that Bitov shows no signs of social awareness⁹³.

The 'Yura' of Na praktike is still a much more human character than Kryuk. He is simply a pathetic soul and the object of his fellow workers' spite and envy for acting as they would have liked. In this respect Yura is another fore-runner of Bitov's young, fallible heroes of later stories, such as Kirill in Prizyvnik.

Footnotes

- 1 A.G. Bitov, Bol'shoi shar, (1963).
- 2 See Deming Brown, "Narrative devices in the Contemporary Soviet Russian Short Story: Intimacy and Irony". American Contributions to the Seventh International Congress of Slavists, Warsaw, August 21-27, 1973. vol.II. Victor Terras (ed.) (Mouton, 1973), pp. 53-74.
- 3 Bol'shoi shar, pp. 107-115.
- 4 Bol'shoi shar, p. 107.
- 5 Trifonov, Yu. Yunost', 4, 1964, p. 74.
- 6 Bol'shoi shar, p. 111.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 The Moscow Interviews, (1975). p. 233
- 9 Bol'shoi shar, p. 111.
- 10 Ibid.,
- 11 Ibid., pp. 109-113.
- 12 Ibid., p. 113.
- 13 Ibid., p. 115.
- 14 Ibid., pp. 124-129.
- 15 Ibid., p. 125.
- 16 Ibid., p. 126.
- 17 Yury Olesha, Zavist', Izbrannoe, (1974), p. 14.
- 18 Yu. Olesha, ibid., p. 215.
- 19 Ibid., pp. 13-96.
- 20 Ibid., p. 215.

- 21 Bol'shoi shar, p. 128.
- 22 Ibid.,
- 23 Yu. Olesha, op. cit., pp. 220-225.
- 24 Bol'shoi shar, p. 128.
- 25 Yu. Olesha, op. cit., Koe-chto iz sekretnykh zapisei poputchika Zenda, p. 246.
- 26 Bol'shoi shar, p. 129.
- 27 V. Solov'ev, ch. Problema talanta in Puti k khudozhestvennoi pravde (1968) pp. 262-295.
- 28 V. Gusev, V predchuvstvii novogo (1974).
- 29 I. Zolotussky, Ostriem vnutr', M. Komsomolets, 22 Dec. 1967, p. 4.
- 30 L. Anninsky, Tochka opory. Don, 6, 1968, pp. 168-181, 7, 1968, pp. 178-187.
- 31 A. Turkov, Protivnik pritaivshegosya sna, Mol. gv., 8, 1964, p. 310.
- 32 With the exception of Bitov's Strashnaya sila, Bol. shar, pp. 150-166
- 33 A. Sherel', Kom. pravda, 17th March 1965, p. 3.
- 34 V. Voevodin, Lit. gaz. 24th March 1964, p.3.
- 35 A. Turkov, op. cit., p. 311.
- 36 A.G. Bitov, Aptekarsky ostrov (1968). See the story Penelopa in particular.
- 37 Bol'shoi shar, pp. 196-214.
- 38 Ibid., p. 199.
- 39 Ibid., p. 201.
- 40 Ibid., p. 201.
- 41 Ibid., p. 203.

- 42 Ibid., p. 208.
- 43 Ibid., p. 201.
- 44 Ibid., pp. 116-123.
- 45 Ibid., p. 118.
- 46 Ibid., p. 118.
- 47 Ibid., p. 121.
- 48 A.G. Bitov, Dni cheloveka, (1976).
- 49 First published in Dachnaya mestnost' (1967).
- 50 See appendix iii. pp.229-230.
- 51 A.G. Bitov, Aptekarsky ostrov (1968).
- 52 A.G. Bitov, Bol'shoi shar, pp. 130-139.
- 53 Ibid., pp. 135-6.
- 54 Ibid.,
- 55 Ibid., p. 134.
- 56 Ibid., p. 137.
- 57 See appendix v. p.233
- 58 A.G. Bitov, Bol'shoi shar, p. 137.
- 59 See appendix v. p. 233
- 60 A.G. Bitov, Bol. shar, p. 136.
- 61 A.G. Bitov, Sem' puteshestvii (1976), p. 253.
- 62 A.G. Bitov, Bol. shar, pp. 182-195.
- 63 A.G. Bitov, Bol. shar, pp. 182-3.
- 64 Ibid., p. 183.

65 Ibid., p. 191.

66 Ibid., p. 192.

67 Ibid., p. 194.

68 The Moscow Interviews (1965) p. 235

69 Bol. shar. pp. 140-149.

70 According to The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 6th Ed., (O.U.P. 1976) p. 599, a koan is defined as "Riddle used in Zen to teach inadequacy of logical reasoning (Japanese)".

71 See G. Hosking 'The Search for an Image of Man in contemporary Soviet fiction', Forum for Mod. Lang. St., XI, 1975, pp. 349-365.

72 A.G. Bitov, Bol. shar, p. 194.

73 Ibid., p. 195.

74 Ibid., pp. 140-149.

75 Ibid., p. 149.

76 See E.F.N. Jephcott, "Proust and Rilke: The Literature of Expanded Consciousness" (1972).

77 A.G. Bitov, Bol. shar, p.141.

78 Ibid., p.141 and repetition, p. 143.

79 Ibid., p. 133.

80 Ibid., p. 115.

81 Ibid., p. 129.

82 Ibid., p. 123.

83 Ibid., p. 139.

84 Ibid., p. 149.

85 Ibid., p. 195.

- 86 Ibid., p. 181.
- 87 Ibid., p. 166.
- 88 Ibid., p. 214.
- 89 The Moscow Interviews (1975) p. 238
- 90 Zvezda, 8, 1962, pp. 16-21.
- 91 A.G. Bitov, Bol. shar, p. 165.
- 92 N. Rudin, Mir glazami molodykh, Smena, 14, 1963, p.27.
- 93 See V. Geideko for a typical hard-line Soviet approach to Bitov's works, especially Ot opisani k osmysleniyu, Sibirskie ogni, 3, 1965, pp. 173-180.

CHAPTER THREE

Andrei Bitov: A Child of his Times

The tenor of Soviet criticisms of Bitov's first collection is re-echoed in Kochetov's editorial statement on molodaya proza in February 1961¹. Kochetov's condemnation of the emerging literary trend towards depicting inner feelings reveals Bitov's early writing as neither isolated nor original in the context of the early sixties. It is, however, apparent from Tvardovsky's speech at the 22nd Congress of the C.P.S.U. in 1961 that the term molodaya proza has more to do with the writers' own youthful age than that of their characters². Certain themes are nonetheless common to writers of this period, such as an almost obsessive concentration on adolescent problems and the man-woman relationship.

Much of Bitov's reputation as a writer of molodaya proza rests on his povest' Prizyvnik published as Takoe dolgoe detstvo in 1964³. The first title was restored only in a later version as a sub-title⁴. The title chosen by the editorial board is clearly tendentious; it is misleading insofar as it suggests a story about childhood whereas Bitov is more concerned with the traumas of adolescence than with renewing his study of childhood. Further editorial problems caused delay in its publication as well as its change of title; it appeared in Yunost'⁵ three years after its completion in 1961. Bitov wrote Prizyvnik, his longest story at the time, over two years during the same time as he was producing Bol'shoi shar.

Prizyvnik appears to follow Aksenov's major short stories of the period; Kollegi (1960), Zvezdny bilet (1961), Na polputi k lune (1962) and Apel'siny iz Morokko (1963). Although Aksenov and Bitov write about the young man or woman of the same generation and the same kind of moral

dilemma, their styles are quite different. Aksenov's prose is neither as refined nor as psychologically subtle as Bitov's. Bitov's prose is written in an almost classical nineteenth century style by comparison⁶. Certainly the heroes of both authors speak in an individualised language, yet Bitov's heroes never reach the sarcastic, slangy self-deprecating tone of Aksenov's. Whereas much of the effect of Aksenov's prose is achieved by a deliberate use of the language of modern, urban Soviet youth, Bitov's narrative techniques lead the reader to a more personal intimate understanding of an individual.

Furthermore, Bitov generally concentrates on the psyche of a single character at a given moment in a given situation, whereas Aksenov often alternates between two or more main characters. In Apel'siny iz Morokko⁷ there are five narrators. Both use similar techniques, such as stream-of-consciousness which abounds in Aksenov's Zatovarennaya bochkotara⁸ and Bitov's Zheny net doma. In Bitov's Prizyvnik the technique of interior monologue is similarly employed to relieve intimacy between reader and hero. Without using the more obvious technique of first person narration, Bitov achieves a sympathetic proximity between the omniscient third-person narrator and his hero, Kirill, but at the same time manages to achieve a tone of ironic objectivity. For example, at the end of the story, the narrator watches his character depart with the thought that he is "not a bad fellow":

Но нет, ещё можно разглядеть ... Вон там,
в колонне, со всеми, в третьей шеренге
с конца, второй справа ... уже совсем
маленькая фигурка ... Уходит со всеми
Кирилл Капустин, неплохой вроде бы
человек. 9

The story itself traces the psychological development of an adolescent who is thrown into adulthood by accepting work down a mine. It is an

experience taken from Bitov's own life; he had been expelled from the Gorny Institute in his first year, but, unlike Kirill, Bitov had managed to be reinstated. Furthermore, the background of mining in the far north is taken from real life, inasmuch as Bitov had experience of similar geological field trips. Kirill is similarly expelled from a mining institute for poor academic performance and reluctantly joins a group of his former classmates on a summer practical in the far north. Soon after his arrival, Kirill writes a letter to his parents telling them of his expulsion. In their reply the reader is not presented with a verbatim reproduction but an interpretation of it in Kirill's own mind.

... пусть он старается, и тогда, может, его и восстановят, но если и не выйдет ничего, пусть он не расстраивается, потому что всё равно она его очень любит ... IO

The storyline of Prizyvnik is itself quite simple and uneventful in common with the "plotlessness" of Bitov's other stories. In becoming an ordinary worker, Kirill feels more and more alienated from his schoolmates. He finally and irretrievably crosses the line into adulthood whilst they remain children. He achieves some satisfaction in the hard physical labour of mining, falls in love with a local girl and is drafted before he can marry her. Our final picture of Kirill is of a shaven head indistinguishable from the rest marching off up the road. The ending is inconclusive as in Bitov's earlier stories.

Prizyvnik is classifiable as a work of molodaya proza insofar as it deals with a topical situation and closely resembles Gladilin's Khronika vremen Viktora Podgurskogo¹¹ which is generally recognised as the original example of molodaya proza. Firstly, their respective routes to publication coincided: both were published in Yunost'; Khronika in September 1956, Prizyvnik (Takoe dolgoe detstvo) in November 1964. They are both about the same length and

were later published in hardback versions by Sovetsky pisatel' a few years after their appearance in Yunost'. Secondly, discussions with Gladilin have produced comments similar to those of Bitov in the Moscow Interviews; for example, Gladilin refers to the openness of thought inspired by the great changes in attitude due to Khrushchev's post-Stalin Thaw¹². Gladilin was a young man who wrote openly about the problems of his generation. He was twenty when he produced his povest', Bitov was twenty-two when he wrote Prizyvnik. Thirdly, both writers are concerned with individual, almost autobiographical, experience which is a recognised characteristic of molodaya proza¹³. Fourthly, Bitov and Gladilin threw off the enforced quasi-romantic directive ideals of Stalinist literature.

A superficial glance at Khronika and Prizyvnik reveals undeniable similarities. But if Khronika is a work of molodaya proza, is Prizyvnik one ipso facto? Certainly, if we define molodaya proza as stories which conform to a loose framework of common characteristics, then Prizyvnik fits the model. Yet the question remains; to what extent was Bitov flirting with molodaya proza in Prizyvnik? Andrei Bitov's stories frequently exude the ironic objectivity of a narrator who is commonly the author's alter ego. Bitov's Prizyvnik is written as a work of molodaya proza but he merely uses its framework for further personal searching and individual development. A major aim of this chapter is thus to ascertain the extent to which Prizyvnik goes beyond the loose criteria for a work of molodaya proza, and so gives us an insight into Bitov's individual contribution to the literature of the period.

If we seek out references to molodaya proza as a literary movement, we can determine whether a more precise definition exists than a loose bundle of common features. Firstly, the Soviet critic Svetov defines molodaya proza

as essentially a search for new moral foundations amongst young writers,

... /способ/ в душе подрастающего молодого поколения образовать тот прочный нравственный фундамент, который выдержал бы то, что время воздвигнет на нем. I4

There was an obvious contradiction between the reality as portrayed in the official media and that of the individual. As an individual who felt this discrepancy strongly, Bitov believed he should write about childhood first; the period of life where perception and spontaneity are keenest. This view coincides with that of his contemporaries Iskander and Gorenshtein. Gorenshtein's short story, Dom s bashenkoi¹⁵ bears an uncanny resemblance to Bol'shoi shar, for example. The methods of achieving effect are similar: in both stories events are pictured through a child's eyes, both child characters are searching for something; in Dom s bashenkoi it is the mother, in Bol'shoi shar, the balloon. Certainly much Soviet prose in the 1950's and 1960's is produced by a flood of young people hurrying to express themselves in writing. They could only turn inwards in the first instance as a reaction to Stalinism by concentrating on the small private moments in life. But most literature of the post-Stalin era expresses a feeling that goes far beyond intimate individualism:

Let's write about present-day Russia
in human, psychological terms, satire,
let's get back to experimentalism, the
new writing, the fantasy of the 1920's¹⁶.

Rather than a school of writers, the 'New Writing'¹⁷ reflects a return to normality for authors previously forbidden to express themselves freely. Inevitably, the personal expression of the man-woman relationship strongly features in post-Stalin prose, for example, yet it is not these generally-accepted norms of molodaya proza which concern our study of Bitov, but the

writer's skill in portraying such commonplace themes. Vera Panova expressed great admiration for Bitov's technique in perceiving the inner emotions¹⁸.

The preponderance of stories portraying private human emotions in young people during the post-Stalin period does not preclude the existence of stories and novels written on a multitude of other themes, but 'for the drawer'. The fact that the short story or povest' is the genre consistently used throughout this period is not fortuitous; it is merely the best vehicle to avoid the "all-seeing eyes and all-hearing ears of incorrigible and dogmatic official critics"¹⁹. The brevity of this genre enabled writers to publish ideas and plots without strict adherence to the norms of Socialist Realism. As Bitov discovered from personal experience, he was able to publish parts of Dni cheloveka and Pushkinsky dom as rasskazy and povesti, but not the complete form. For this reason, whereas Bitov sees himself as a writer of novels, the Soviet critics still view him as a short-story writer. Nearly two decades later, we should no longer view Bitov as a writer of molodaya proza in the same way that Tendryakov and Nagibin are not classified as such.

By 1962 Khrushchev's Manezh declaration on art and attack on the young writers Aksenov, Voznesensky and Yevtushenko foreshadowed a clampdown on the literary phenomenon of molodaya proza. The impression of its continuation into the later sixties results largely from the delay between completion and publication. Thus Bitov's Aptekarsky ostrov collection remained unpublished for six years, 1962-1968. A more satisfactory explanation of Bitov's writing during this period is possible within the context of his belief in creating contemporary culture. The notion of molodaya proza as a literary movement arose largely from a commonly-felt

need to reflect the feeling of the day which meant largely that of young people seeking identity in the moral vacuity of post-Stalinism. Moreover, the only writers untainted by Stalinist conformity were the young themselves, who wrote about their own generation, reacting in the same way to their surroundings, yet independent of each other, so creating the myth of a unified literary movement. Insofar as Bitov was young in the 1950's, and anxious to express his own feeling, predicament and social milieu, he formed part of this movement.

As regards depicting the individual's immediate problems as honestly and truthfully as possible, Bitov found ample scope in the psychological difficulties of his young contemporaries. The fact that the youth problem that existed at the time is generally glossed over by the Soviet authorities is now given the lie by numerous contemporary references to such phenomena as stilyazhestvo and infantilism²⁰. The critic Svetov remarks on its peculiar characteristics:

the people of this generation were children during the war, had their adolescence after the war and had the problem of Khrushchev's 'secret speech' thrust on them as they grew to maturity. On the other hand, they were the first generation to achieve uninterrupted education and higher material standards. 21

The growth of a technical intelligentsia²² involved both Aksenov and Bitov who completed higher technical education; Aksenov in medicine, Bitov in geology. In this fact of a trained geologist turning to creative writing against a background of the rapid industrial and technical advances, we are reminded of Olesha's plea in his povest', Zavist', for the right of non-utilitarian poetry to exist alongside the overvalued, but necessary,

industrial growth and production in society. Yet each writer's plea is different during the 1950's and 1960's; Aksenov and Bitov reflect the alienated existence of urban youth, Shukshin and Belov the village. Nonetheless, each is concerned with carrying time forward in his own way²³. This does not preclude the evident overlapping of themes, however, such as the 'village' theme in Bitov's Dachnaya mestnost'; a fact that repudiates the narrow view of Bitov as a mere writer of youth stories.

One feature of the late fifties and early sixties commonly associated with molodaya proza is alienation. The theme itself has been the object of several academic studies of which the most comprehensive is Rogers' book²⁴. Bitov's Kirill displays many of the characteristics of alienation set out by Rogers²⁵: firstly, Kirill's resistance to his call-up into the army can be construed as his personal rebellion against a form of human regimentation. Secondly, the apolitical and individualistic nature of the hero conforms to Rogers's pattern of alienated heroes. Thirdly, Kirill achieves a heightened and new sense of his own part in the eternal processes of life.

Although Kirill's new self-awareness fits with Rogers's alienation syndrome in stories of this time, it is the pursuit of the Self which interests Bitov more than mere depiction of an alienated individual. In the character of Kirill Kapustin we do not have the usual Bitov hero who tends to be an intelligent eaten up with self-remorse and introspection. Kirill is a none-too-bright boy from a working-class background whose parents aspire to rise socially through their children's education. Kirill fails to make the grade and becomes part of the new dynamic generation of the technical intelligentsia. He is not the author's alter ego, moreover. Kirill's aspirations are shattered after dropping out; he fails himself as well as the values of his

milieu and parents. So Bitov asks the question, what has this man left to reach out for? According to the Soviet press at the time, this literary type was negative and unworthy of attention, even though it was a common type in reality, as is clear from articles in Komsomol'skaya pravda²⁶. Thus Bitov's Prizyvnik appears as an apology for these 'young rebels'²⁷ who "displayed a deplorable political instability, irresponsibility and ... an unthinking 'couldn't-care-less' attitude to life"²⁸. The reason for a change of title is evident from Odintsov's condemnation of Kirill for being guilty of infantilism²⁹. Aksenov was similarly condemned³⁰. Amid the severe criticism of Prizyvnik in the Soviet Union, Kirill's glimpse of regeneration made possible through a mystical union of the Self with nature is nowhere apparent in the critics' appraisals.

A study of the Self through literature is not, of course, new. In Bitov's case we can look back for roots to the poetry of Yevtushenko, who articulated most clearly the long-ignored claims of the Self. For example, Yevtushenko stated his desire to promote "the revolution in human consciousness" for a generation suffering alienation³¹. Secondly, we can look to Boris Pasternak and his call for man to be alive and never to step back from himself³² as a possible root to Bitov's search into mystical consciousness. In these aspects Bitov's story differs from the usual examples of molodaya proza. Whereas Aksenov's stories give us a realistic portrayal of the feeling and style of contemporary Soviet youth, Bitov tentatively suggests a prescriptive route out of the malaise of alienation and discontent. Unlike Aksenov, he is not concerned with a precise rendering of young people's coarse language but with the inward series of mental responses to the stimuli of the external within an individual. Further comparisons and

differences with molodaya proza can be made apparent by a careful analysis of the story itself.

Bitov chooses a form of narration common in molodaya proza: that of the 'confessional' diary which allows for a close sympathetic contact between the reader and hero. The reader feels as if he is inside Kirill's mind from the very beginning when the story begins quite dramatically as Kirill stands on the platform undecided whether to get on the train or not. The dramatic opening scene is a good introduction to the story as it illustrates Kirill's emotional nature. Kirill is seen as an indecisive individual without any real depth of mind or convictions. When confronted by an external situation requiring decisive action³³, Kirill is unable to make any move. This lack of inner conviction is a common feature of Bitov's stories, especially Aptekarsky ostrov³⁴. Initially, Bitov's heroes appear as automata when facing a decision or sudden series of problems. Kirill stands symbolically half on, half off (na podnozhke) as the train leaves. His only conscious motivation is to avoid upsetting his mother.

The story is told in the immediate present, apart from a few passages to fill in the background such as Pis'ma and the 'portrait gallery' of fellow-workers on pages 30-32. The first part, Tri dnya neuverennogo cheloveka, describes his first Saturday, Sunday and Monday in great detail on pages 9-26 when Kirill comes to terms with his new situation. In the last part of this first section, Kirill ascends a high peak which culminates in Kirill's near perception of the Self as part of the cosmos.

The main theme of the story is typical of molodaya proza; the hero is young and faced with integration into society. The work ethic is also present, though it plays a small part in the hero's process of self-awareness as

compared with other examples of molodaya proza. Prizyvnik further displays the tendency towards 'psychologism' (in its concentration on the individual) and 'plotlessness'; recognisably common literary themes of the period³⁵ as well as developments from those of Bol'shoi shar.

As regards the work ethic, the mineworkers' attitude toward their job is made clear; it is a realistic view of their situation in line with Bitov's adherence to chestnost' rather than to the norms of Socialist Realism:

Работа, как здесь говорят, „медвежья“...
Даром тут не платят, говорят работяги,
но даром тут не работают. Шахта - это
шахта. Гора и есть гора, говорят работяги. 36

The mineworkers are epitomised by a certain Kolya who becomes Kirill's best friend. Although his views on the work, management and his own ambitions in life might seem trite to us, they were refreshingly honest to Russians at the time of publication. No mention is made of the collective, Kolya wants to

... денег подсобрать. Домик ... на
Волге /купить/. Сговорился уже ... Вот
жизнь!... Хозяйство своё - раз, дом - два. 37

Many other parts of the novel are written with the vibrancy and freshness of youth. There are Kirill's startling first impressions on descending into a mine:

Вряд ли где-нибудь ещё можно встретить
такую тишину и темноту.
Здорово!
Как в могиле. 38

In imagery reminiscent of his early impressionistic work, Bitov conveys the new sudden physical awareness of darkness and light, and in particular the simple joy of coming out and seeing the sun. Yet it is by means of

hard and heavy labour that brings Kirill to an important point of introspection; as he looks at an old friend, Bryunet, he questions the reason for his own expulsion rather than Bryunet's. Despite his new awareness of himself as a weak, insignificant being, he realises his existence is unique and individual:

„И что это я за человек?..-говорил он себе с горьким недоумением.- Раз я не умею ничего из того, что умеют все, то, может, я умею что-то, чего не умеет никто? Но что же это?" 39

The reader is conscious of the theme of individuality and isolation from the start;

Кирилл уже один стоял на платформе. 40

He watches closely as the character's own consciousness of himself unfolds. Kirill develops greater individuality by being freed from his peer group. He is neither student nor mineworker. He continues to possess the particular weaknesses of earlier heroes (as in Inostranny yazyk⁴¹); an inability to act. He stays on at a dance despite himself:

Давно пора уходить, раз уж, дурак, приплелся сюда ... Но хоть и равнодушный, а всё равно не уходил. 42

Kirill shows passive tendencies, tries to force himself to be active on the Sunday when he gets up (nado deistvovat'), but he still achieves nothing⁴³. Not only is Kirill passive about his expulsion by the authorities, but in his relationships with women he constantly makes a fool of himself, despite himself. But unlike the earlier Kirill who merely "exists", the Kirill of the mines develops self-consciousness, albeit painfully conceived.

In his need to identify with something or somebody, Kirill seeks to rebuild a new identity for himself by imitating characters in films and fantasizing. Kirill imagines that the three men walking behind them after the film are going to attack Valya. Like other young heroes, Kirill becomes very self-conscious, thinks he walks like a little dog, and cannot express himself. He wants to say something pleasant to the fellow behind him (the expected attack is pure fantasy), but he cannot. Ideas come into his head thick and fast but he cannot "grasp them" and "draw close" to them:

... они проносились мимо, как бы на
больших скоростях ... 44

One further insight into Kirill's inner world lies in his personification of external objects which react in the same detached way as people.

Kirill observes how houses "float towards him" as he walks along. He reduces people and things to the same level which suggests Kirill's deep alienation from other people. Bitov's subjectivist approach has been wrongly put down to the influence of Olesha by some critics⁴⁵ as it inevitably leads to a similar distortion of objective reality:

И снова плыли навстречу улочки и переулки,
стандартные дома повторялись, как один не-
скончаемый дом, и шли навстречу женщины
... совсем молодые девочки несли свои лица.
... "несли", потому что лица их казались
отдельными и независимыми от души, от тела,.. 46

Bitov, however, asserts that such a subjectivist vision is not affected, but a "truthful", common, individual impression of the outside world⁴⁷.

It is not a technique with Bitov as it is with Olesha, but a view of reality.

The Street Scene is another popular one with Bitov: as the individual walks down a crowded road (viz. Penelopa and Bezdel'nik) he becomes more

aware of himself in relation to others. Kirill asks himself,

Неужели у всех у них любовь? 48

He feels he wants to make contact, just to go up, but cannot. As a first symptom of the individual's growing self-awareness, a need to be loved quickly arises in Bitov's characters. Love appears as both the test and confirmation of a new identity. As we have seen in Solntse, the street also provides scope for the play of light and the sun on the external shapes of building in the individual's perception.

И воздух между ними, это просвеченное
солнцем „ничего“, тоже существовал отдель-
ными геометрическими объёмами, только прозрачными ... 49

Again we see Bitov's predilection for the sun, the symbol of living nature.

Bitov shows his hero's psychological reality on two levels: firstly, there is the immediate vision, thought and word of the hero as he lives.

Secondly, Bitov presents the hero's subconscious world by carefully chosen devices. Bitov's characters often enter into mental states and have experiences which, although significant for them, are unclear for the reader. The reader is unsure whether such states are fantasy or not. As in Tonya's experience in Bol'shoi shar, the truth of it is not important. The vision of Kirill's inner fantasy deepens our knowledge and perception of his changing state of mind.

Kirill's dreamlike state and accompanying visions at the beginning of the section Ponedel'nik reveal the important inarticulated inner feeling of the hero. The refrain throughout is chertovski khotelos' pit'⁵¹, and includes Kirill's fantasized failure to obtain either water or woman (who becomes water and trickles away) which underlines his growing inner need for the human contact and succour that comes with the growth of human feeling through the pain of individuality.

As the First Part draws to an end, Kirill comes to terms with his own isolation and individuality. He firmly identifies himself with the workers, accusing other students of being lesser people. However, it is only a superficial integration; Kirill remains passive and speaks "in a loud whisper". Finally, Kirill develops a peculiar inner satisfaction in his isolation, almost a sense of freedom within his solitary self:

Наконец-то я остался один ... Теперь я
свободен. Ничто мне не мешает. Займусь-ка
я делом. Давно пора. А то одни намерения,
пункты плана ... Жить пора! 52

Kirill's declaration underlies Bitov's own belief in the importance of the individual I over other things. Implicit in this is an alternative route; ultimately the individual can achieve self-awareness other than through the collective. Self-awareness can be achieved by rejecting the mantle of conformity in a social grouping. Kirill's symbolic ascent in Pobeda proposes more than heightened self-awareness for the individual; Kirill experiences a sense of closeness to a natural endlessness or eternity and combines knowledge of himself with a vision of the Self as an entity in an external cosmic order:

А город совсем слился. А озеро - капля.
А за теми горами - ещё горы. И всё это
без конца и назад без конца ... 53
Кирилл стоял как бы немного внизу и смотрел
на себя вверх ... 54

As he seemingly transcends himself he feels a sense of strength and a momentary loss of Self into the cosmos:

Его даже и вовсе не было, а было только
ощущение силы, обновленности ... 55

Kirill senses an inner harmony not only through the awareness of his own identity, but also ironically through its loss in a mystical union.

This point of perception in the individual forms a key to Bitov's later outlook on life. At this stage Kirill's momentary contact with a higher force is developed no further than a brief statement of its existence; no philosophical explanation is provided by the author, however.

The beginning of the Second Part, Trava i nebo completes the circle of experience begun on the first page: Kirill is standing on the platform as the train is about to return, but he rejects the students and their lifestyle completely. Kirill's personal experiences have made him forever separate from the group; he has even reached a conceptual point of negative discrimination in his likes and dislikes:

Он не любил их. Не любил несложную
определенность их жизни завтра ... 56

Kirill has not consciously sought a meaning to life, however, he has simply come to terms with what life has brought before him and is able to rationalise events to a limited extent. He realises, for example, that the students who are shouting for him to go with them on the train do not really mean it, yet at least he responds with emotion:

Он вдруг замахал руками, закричал что-то
и побежал, крича и размахивая ... Впрочем,
грусть была детской и приятной "Один, один ..."
повторял он, и всё в нём сладко ныло от
жалости к себе. 57

Bitov is aware of the individual's inner need for others, for human contact; it is a latent, natural force in Man, one which acts in spite of him. It is most frequently reflected in the desire for love and to love. Unlike Kirill's previous liaisons, his relationship with Valya seems to be successful, but the existence of other forces is apparent in the malevolent hand of fate: Kirill is called up for military service before

he can formalise relations with Valya. The pace of the storyline quickens as Kirill faces a decision over Valya. Thus Kirill is put to the test for the third time after the two platform scenes. Valya offers him a limited chance of happiness in an ever-changing world, although we are aware that ultimately Kirill is not in control of his own fate.

The question of compulsory military service was a topical one, moreover. Bitov's true title, Prizyvnik, reflects the emphasis on the encroachment of military service on the individual. Poets interviewed during the gatherings at Mayakovsky Square in 1962 insisted that compulsory military service tended to erase individuality⁵⁸. Pages 38-40 of Prizyvnik paint a picture of a senseless affront to human dignity at the pre-draft inspection, the officer who speaks

... с такой же придуманной грубоватостью. 59

Then there is the army's unjustifiable certainty in its rights over the individual:

Вам нужна армия. Вам она просто необходима. 60

Bitov's own condemnation of the army's rights over individual development is apparent in the chapter Aspirin which has never been published. The call-up symbolises the uncertainty and transience of life for the individual. Bitov allows his hero to be called up just after the latter achieves a moment of cosmic perception and one of happiness through love. Thus we are aware of Bitov the realist; he insists on a more pessimistic than optimistic conclusion. Kirill has at least a glimpse of some higher reality through mystical transcendence and love. This is all Man can hope for.

Prizyvnik goes beyond Bitov's early stories in the theme of self-perception. In Bol'shoi shar self-knowledge is hinted at in childlike perception, in

love or in death. Love and death are more fully explored in Prizyvnik: love is a natural phenomenon and one of the few ways open to all of achieving greater self-knowledge. Kirill's love for Valya harmonises with the background of nature suggesting some link with Kirill's contemplation of an eternity in nature:

Над лесом левого берега появилась тонкая, более светлая, чем ночь полоска, а звезды слабели и таяли, словно удалялись в следующую свою бесконечность. 61

The problem of death is posed in the accident to Kolya. There is an attempt to attach some kind of meaning to life in the face of death. Time assumes greater importance not only as a quickening prelude to call-up for Kirill but also as a factor in Kolya's accident; had Kirill arrived seconds before he did, he could have saved Kolya:

Разве время возможно терять или не терять? Можно жить или не жить. Если жить - разве может быть речь о потере времени? А если не жить, то его и вовсе нету. 62

Time is important to the living; Bitov examines those occasions when he believes man to be alive. Firstly, an awareness of being alive can come through anxiety, e.g. as occasioned by Kolya's near-death:

Я понял, что не в обстоятельствах дело. Жизнь всюду одна - так мне теперь кажется. Я не знал хорошей жизни, но теперь припомнить - всё у меня было ... Вот я и думаю теперь, что понимать и есть свобода. 63

Secondly, thinking can make one alive:

Подумать только, попасть в беду человеку надо, чтобы он думать начал. 64

Kirill also achieves the ability to think by his enforced divorce from the student group which had given him his identity. Thirdly, Kirill's

desire for life is through love, but principally when it is threatened
by call-up:

Надо спешить к Вале, надо прожить
этот день ... 65
(My emphasis)

It is love which forces Kirill to act; a development which contrasts
with his previous inability on the platform. But although the incapacity
for action is not entirely cured, it is now at least made conscious and
revealed as an inner somnolence of the soul:

/Кирилл/ Хотел перестать - и всё более
отчуждался ..., он словно был не властен,
и бессилён, и не мог сопротивляться,
как во сне ..., и вот он уже не он -
точка, ..., отчуждения, которая сейчас и
совсем исчезнет ... он ненавидел себя ... 66
(My emphasis)

Despite Kirill's feeling of oneness with an eternal nature⁶⁷, the future
remains bleak, he is unable to deepen this moment of 'truth' or develop
it into a more philosophical approach to life. Bitov continues his study
of Man's reaction to similar glimpses of 'truth' in the Aptekarsky ostrov
cycle of stories. It is not enough for man to simply perceive himself,
however, he must convert perception into action; such self-awareness is
only a glimmer of light at the end of a dark tunnel. But without Man
being aware of this flicker of light has the effect of a vzlyët, there is
little value in life:

Мир огромный. И что в нём один человек?
И вдруг кажется, что жизнь одного человека
в этом мире может быть измерена одним
таким взлётом. 68

Self-realisation in Man has to be achieved in three stages: firstly, Man
has to see himself as an individual, unique within the faceless crowd;
secondly, he must be aware of himself as part of an eternal cosmic force;

and thirdly, be able to embody this philosophy in conscious, selfless action.

In Prizyvnik Bitov is more concerned to explore the first step in this process; that of realising one's own individuality:

Главным по-прежнему остаётся твоё отличие от других, чем ты нов и не совместный с другими, то есть, что ты привнёс в эту жизнь. Главным остаётся: ты сам среди других и с другими, а не такой же, как они. 69

The final scene is outwardly pessimistic but left open; Kirill merges into the faceless brigade of soldiers marching off, each with an identical shaven head. Outwardly, Kirill has lost all traces of individuality in the army, but inwardly he can be distinguished by having momentarily loved:

Он успел уже полюбить что-то. 70

Bitov ends the story on a note of hope, albeit a minor one, that Kirill may achieve some spiritual development in life through a glimpse of love. For Bitov, Kirill is one of many 'blind souls' of his generation. Only Anninsky has pointed to a possible spiritual interpretation of Prizyvnik:

... духовное сознание связано /для меня/ с личностным началом, при котором личность мыслится мерой мира, его содержательной, духовной пробой, причём личность выступает не как обратная сторона „общности“, а как первоэлемент и критерий её человеческого смысла. 71

Bitov's inclusion of the theme of workers (whom Kirill at one point stresses as real people compared with students), saves him from the great wrath of the critics⁷² and probably that of the censor as well. As one might expect, the establishment critics praise the setting; the background of hard work

and the miners' collective. But most of them chafe at the manner in which the workers are not portrayed as true socialists. Brovman points out the nuance of the word rabotyaga as opposed to rabochy, the usual word for 'worker'.

Эти работяги ... всегда больше потребители,
чем производители. 73

Brovman adds,

Лицо работяги - обывательское, мещанское. 74

Yet most of the establishment critics⁷⁵ who write about Bitov's Prizyvnik interpret the work as a study of infantilism. Many wrongly believe that this was the author's real intention by referring to the published title. Litvinov sees the main theme of the story as

... как герой долго и трудно борется
со своей закоренелой инфантильностью. 76

Since the charge of infantilism is frequently levelled at writers of molodaya proza, it is worth considering the nature of Kirill's infantilism as far as the critics are concerned. Thus we may also achieve an insight into whether the dictates of Socialist Realism have changed in the mid-sixties.

Firstly, Brovman points out the 'inertness' of the hero; his indifference to all that is going on around. Secondly, Anan'eva refers to the 'aimlessness' of Kirill's existence, his easy-going attitude to work and in particular the absence of any aspiration to seek guidelines for social behaviour. Thirdly, Kirill is considered uninteresting because he is 'ordinary' and not a model for the young worker of the day⁷⁷. Odintsov claims that Bitov has not solved the problem of creating a genuine hero

of the day; an active, fully developed man in the era of the building of Communism⁷⁸.

Rather than condemn Bitov's work completely, Brovman stresses the optimistic element in the story.

Неверно думать, что Капустин начисто лишен общественного самосознания. Нет ... в конце концов последовательно начинает складываться характер Кирилла /Капустина/ ... нравственный облик Кирилла ... развивается в действенном направлении, но происходит это с большим торможением. 79

Other critics are more anxious to remind the author of his responsibilities; Odintsov makes the outstanding claim that 'mastery' (masterstvo) is unthinkable without a broad ideiny maturity and a knowledge of social development and the path of socialistic art. Grinberg reprimands Bitov for not intruding on the narrative and contradicting his hero with the correct view and arguments⁸⁰. Anan'eva claims Bitov does not interpret Soviet readers' needs by writing about more intelligent people to whom one can aspire⁸¹. Bitov, according to her, selects a narrow section of youth who are alien to the vast majority⁸². Ivanova criticises Bitov for his refusal to condemn his hero's amoral attitude in watching someone steal five roubles from someone⁸³. She further wants to know why work did not have a broadening effect on Kirill's soul⁸⁴. Several critics remark on a deeper significance, albeit hidden. Klado refers to the element of fate; Man is seen as a cork floating on the waves, if by chance or fate he is carried to the rocks, the shock can be enough to give him a new insight into the meaning of life⁸⁵. Odintsov, on the other hand, claims that Bitov has reverted to the philosophy of l'homme naturel, selecting an ordinary individual and describing his simple feelings and everyday life⁸⁶. Both Odintsov and Klado recognise that the passage on 'enlightenment' on page 47 concerns man's spiritual life but

fail to see its significance, as indeed they fail to grasp Bitov's true meaning in the work.

Only one critic, Mitin, goes into the story deeply and defends it as a realistic representation of a young man in his first job⁸⁷. He accurately analyses the nature of Kirill's identity crisis within his peer group:

Это маскарад детства, дети растут и примеривают "лица" до тех пор, пока не отбросят все, оставшись со своим собственным лицом. 88

Mitin asserts that individuality, as a sign of maturity, comes when one no longer seeks to be part of a distinct group. Mitin rightly observes how Kirill achieves knowledge of himself as a single entity in the first part and his own understanding of what time is, in the second. He adds his own moral:

... человек должен быть самим собой.
Только в этом смысле его сегодняшний день
может быть настоящим. 89

The hero's analysis of his inability to act and mystical insight are not referred to. Critics have failed to look beyond this work as any other than an example of molodaya proza.

On the one hand Bitov reflects the subject-matter and framework of molodaya proza in Prizyvnik and employs the psycho-analytical approach common in his generation. On the other, the introduction of a mystical element is new and a prelude to a fuller investigation of such phenomena in later stories. The mystical insight coincides with the experience of an identity crisis but no explicit philosophy is yet developed through Kirill's self-revelations.

However, in Prizyvnik Bitov has reached certain important stages; firstly, Man can achieve self-perception when in a personal crisis, secondly, a

mystical state can be reached in a sudden moment of union with an
Eternal Nature; thirdly, Man can also achieve self-fulfilment in love
and so overcome his natural inclination towards alienation and passivity.

Footnotes

- 1 Oktyabr', February 1961. pp. 3-7.
- 2 Quoted in T. Whitney, "The New Writing in Russian", (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press 1964), p. 20.
- 3 A.G. Bitov, Takoe dolgoe detstvo, Yunost', 11 (1964), pp. 7-48.
- 4 A.G. Bitov, Sem' puteshestvii, (S.P., L. 1976), pp. 5-134.
- 5 A.G. Bitov, Takoe dolgoe detstvo, Yunost', 11, (1964), pp. 7-48.
- 6 For a fuller appraisal of this point, see Deming Brown, op. cit., p. 197.
- 7 V. Aksenov, Apel'siny iz Morokko, Yunost', 1, (1963).
- 8 V. Aksenov, Zatovarennaya bochkotara, Yunost', 3, (1968), pp. 37-63.
- 9 A.G. Bitov, Takoe dolgoe detstvo, (S.P., 1965), p. 205.
- 10 Ibid., p. 9.
- 11 A. Gladilin, Khronika vremen Viktora Podgurskogo, (S.P., M., 1958).
- 12 Interview with A. Gladilin, Critique (Glasgow), 4, (1965), pp. 92-95.
- 13 See V. Alexandrova, "A History of Soviet Literature 1917-1964" (Doubleday Anchor, 1964), p. 404.
- 14 F. Svetov, O molodom geroe, Novy mir, 5, (1967), p. 221.
- 15 F. Gorenshtein, Dom s bashenkoi, Yunost', (1964), 6, pp. 47-57.
- 16 A. Werth, "Russia: Hopes and Fears", (Simon & Schuster N.Y. 1969), pp. 293-4.
- 17 T. Whitney, op. cit.,
- 18 V. Panova, Introduction to Dachnaya mestnost', A.G. Bitov, Sov. Rossiya, (M. 1967), pp. 3-4.
- 19 H.L. Wrassky, "Some Examples of Recent Soviet Short Stories. Their significance and common characteristics", N.Z. Slav. Journal, 4, (1969), pp. 41-53.

- 20 Examples taken from Komsomol'skaya pravda, (17.3.67) p. 2 and (22.3.67) p. 2 and Kommunist (Vilnius) 10, (1966) pp. 41-53.
- 21 Quoted in P. Meyer, "Aksenov and the Soviet Literature of the Sixties", R.L.T., 6, (1973), pp. 447-459.
- 22 For a fuller study of this phenomenon see A. Werth, op. cit., p. 267.
- 23 For a fuller study see Russky sovetsky rasskaz: ocherki istorii zhanra, (Nauka, L. 1970), pp. 573-735.
- 24 T.F. Rogers, "Superfluous Men and the Post-Stalin Thaw. The Alienated Hero in Soviet Prose during the Decade 1953-1963". (Mouton Press, 1972).
- 25 Ibid., pp. 160-186.
- 26 See for example the article by Yu. Andreev, Komsomol'skaya pravda, (3.12.61), p. 4.
- 27 Term used in Komsomol'skaya pravda, (17.3.67), p. 2.
- 28 See Komsomol'skaya pravda, (4.2.67), p. 1.
- 29 I. Odintsov, Ot infantil'nosti k ideinoi zrelosti, Oktyabr', 7, (1966), pp. 210-12.
- 30 In Pravda, (27.12.61), p. 2.
- 31 Yu. Yevtushenko, Foreword to "Stolen Apples", (Panther, 1973).
- 32 Ibid., quoted by Yevtushenko himself.
- 33 Yunost', 11, (1964), pp. 7-8.
- 34 Aptekarsky ostrov, (S.P., 1968).
- 35 Russky sovetsky rasskaz: Ocherki istorii zhanra (1970) op. cit.
- 36 Yunost', 11, (1964), p. 8.
- 37 Ibid., p. 10.
- 38 Ibid., p. 9.
- 39 Ibid., pp. 13-14.

- 40 Ibid., p. 7.
- 41 Bol. shar., op. cit., pp. 130-39.
- 42 Yunost', 11, (1964), p. 14.
- 43 Ibid., p. 15.
- 44 Ibid., p. 17.
- 45 P. Meyer, op. cit., R.L.T., 6 (1973), p. 149.
- 46 Yunost', 11, (1964), p. 18.
- 47 Op. cit., The Moscow Interviews, p.235
- 48 Yunost', 11, (1964), p. 18.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Ibid. p. 25.
- 53 This part included only in book version. (S. P., 1965), p. 98.
- 54 Yunost', 11 (1964), p. 26.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Ibid., p. 27.
- 57 Ibid., p. 28.
- 58 Molodoi kommunist, 2, (1962), pp. 88-89.
- 59 Yunost', 11 (1964), p. 40.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Ibid., p. 29.
- 62 Ibid., p. 46.

- 63 Ibid., p. 42.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Ibid., p. 43.
- 66 Ibid., p. 44.
- 67 Ibid., p. 47.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Ibid., p. 43.
- 70 Only in Takoe dolgoe detstvo, (S.P., 1965), p. 205
- 71 I. Anninsky, Tochka opory, Don, 6, (1968), p. 168.
- 72 Ibid., p. 171.
- 73 Molodoi geroi - ego dukhovny oblik, Moskva, 2, (1965), p. 208.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 N. Klado, G. Brovman, A. Anan'eva, I. Odintsov, L. Ivanova, I. Grinberg and V. Litvinov. See "Criticism of Takoe" in bibliography.
- 76 V. Litvinov, Muzhchiny v korotkakh stanishkakh, Kom. pravda, (9.10.65), p. 2.
- 77 A. Anan'eva, Preuvelichenie chuvstva, Sibirskiye ogni, 2, (1966), p. 172.
- 78 I. Odintsov, Ot infantil'nosti k ideinoi zrelosti; Oktyabr', 7, (1966), p. 212.
- 79 G. Brovman, op. cit.
- 80 N. Grinberg, A rasti emu-v nebo, Lit. gaz., (9.1.65), p. 3.
- 81 A. Anan'eva, op. cit., p. 172.
- 82 Ibid.

- 83 L. Ivanova, Rasstavanie s detstvom, Moskva, 8, (1968), p. 201.
- 84 Ibid.
- 85 N. Klado, Detstvo deistvitel'no zatyanulos', Lit. Ross., 6, (5.2.65), p. 10.
- 86 I. Odintsov, op. cit., p. 211.
- 87 G. Mitin, Proshchanie s detstvom, Smena, 12, (1965), pp. 18-19.
- 88 Ibid., p. 18.
- 89 Ibid., p. 19.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Aptekarsky ostrov cycle of stories:
an exploration of individual poshlost'

Aptekarsky ostrov (S.P., 1968) comprises eight stories which were written over six years between 1959 and 1965. At first glance the collection appears to cover all but one year of Bitov's early period as a writer. However, three of the stories, Bol'shoi shar, Fig and Dver' are repeats from the earlier Bol'shoi shar collection, the longest story, Narisuem - budem zhit', is little more than a failed film script which adds little to our overall knowledge of Bitov's stories; and Infant'ev is rather an anomaly which was accepted as such by Bitov in our talks and thus shall be left for a fuller study in Chapter Seven. When Bitov refers to the Aptekarsky ostrov cycle of stories, he is referring to those remaining rasskazy; Aptekarsky ostrov, Bezdel'nik and Penelopa, all of which were completed in the same year, 1962. The three stories reflect the second stage of the writer's development and search prior to the revelations of Sad (1962-3). They have lost the exuberance of the early Bol'shoi shar sketches and delve deep into the tortured depths of the human psyche with Dostoevskian perceptivity. They almost appear to follow in sequence; Aptekarsky ostrov (real title, No-ga) concerns a boy, Bezdel'nik - a youth and Penelopa - a young man. The cycle of these three stages provides a closer analysis of contemporary poshlost' than Prizyvnik and are written in a less disjointed and amateurish way.

Thematically and stylistically Prizyvnik has the mark of a novice writer, Bitov himself admits it is the work of an amateur, as he tries to achieve too much within it for a povest'. When he says it is his first novel in the Moscow Interviews, it is not convincing. Its characters are far from developed; only Kirill Kapustin assumes the proportions of an authentic

individual. Since Kirill is inarticulate, the narrator is almost obliged to hastily step in with the suggestion of a vague philosophical interpretation at the end. Indeed, it is the narrator who recognises the existence of a higher cosmic force, or 'reality', rather than his weak character. Perhaps the fact that Prizyvnik took two years to complete accounts for its fragmentariness, as Bitov managed to start and finish Bol'shoi shar during the same period.

Nonetheless, there is distinct thematic progression between many of Bitov's early stories; the child-characters of early works grow up in later ones. In Bezdel'nik, for example, the basic framework of molodaya proza continues from Prizyvnik: Vitya is in a similar situation to Kirill; they are both in their first jobs, alienated, young and indecisive. Yet Vitya is not the same dull, unassertive character as Kirill, but an alert rebel; his alienation is not a passive reaction, but a spirited refusal to comply. In Prizyvnik, alienation takes the form of a half-conscious passive approach towards life, a lack of coordination between inner and outer selves; whereas in Bezdel'nik Vitya is a complex character whose alienation is more uniformly directed towards the outside world than the inner.

Bitov commonly seeks to reflect a contemporary malaise in the framework of his stories, in this sense he is a child of his times, but one with a specialised, individualised view. Although Vitya is a Soviet adolescent and Bitov dismisses outside influences, Bezdel'nik is the study of any young rebel and as such bears many resemblances to "Catcher in the Rye" which was published in Russian by Inostrannaya literatura in 1960. Vera Panova notably describes Holden Caulfield as a bezdel'nik who indulges in infantilist behaviour in her introduction to the translation. Similar criticisms to those of Chapter Two are levelled at almost all Bitov's young characters

of this period. Comparisons go further, however; Holden Caulfield, according to Panova, also suffers from passivity and a lack of will. The 'phonies' of his world match up with those representatives of authority who people Vitya's world, such as his supervisor in the opening scene who resembles the army recruiting officer of Prizyvnik.

Despite marked similarities of theme, the reader never gets the impression that Bitov is dealing with other than very real problems of alienation. There is no hint of plagiarism, and we can accept Bitov's assurance to the same. Apart from its alienated young hero, Bezdel'nik has other characteristics of molodaya proza: it is written in the first person and appears in a quasi-confessional form. There is no real plot and as such it has been classed as bessobytiiny by Soviet critics. Outside notions of day, night and time are no longer apparent as Vitya's own interior monologue assumed prime importance. This impression of 'inner' or 'mind' travel is a deliberate contrast to Bitov's other stories such as Puteshestvie k drugu detstva, Odna strana, Koleso and Uroki Armenii, where the outward physical journey forms the storyline itself.

Vitya's reactions to external events, such as his talk to his supervisor, are interlaced with recollections of his innocent and pure childhood. There is a hint of an autobiographical element as Vitya's struggle to enter the adult world is almost a symbolic representation of Andrei Bitov's coming awareness that he must also overcome this preoccupation with the world of children and young people and explore other worlds around him in his writing.

In the fifties, Robbe-Grillet, with his nouveau roman, recognised the visual fallacy of representing the working of the individual mind as a linear function, and broke down the traditional narrative technique by presenting

the same scene several times in different forms. This technique attests to the fact that individual reality is only a personal interpretation of external events mixed with individual fantasy. The line between external events and Vitya's fantasy is often blurred in Bezdel'nik. Particular scenes, such as the assault on the supervisor (p. 53) and the sabotage of the office, are written with such force and sense of urgency that Bitov's reader is as confused as any reader of Robbe-Grillet as to what really happens;

... беру бутылку чернил, подхожу ... и
выливаю /её/ ему на лысину. Ну, что,
понял? I

It is a measure of Bitov's prowess as a 'psychological' writer than this confusion in the reader's mind serves to reflect the violent despair of Vitya's own mind, thus creating closer contact between reader and narrator. For example, the scene in the half-darkened room (pp. 70 - 72) is repeated four times while Vitya looks out of the bus window. Each has a different outcome, each time leaving the reader in some confusion as to the real events.

In the final analysis, the scene is important only in so much as we understand Vitya's own psychological reality more deeply through his interpretation of whatever took place. Vitya's need to report the murder symbolises his desire to be part of society, though he feels alienated from it. In this he suffers from the same internal contradictions as Olesha's Kavalero. The social recognition which would inevitably follow from being a key witness in a murder would have solved his immediate problem easily once and for all. Further visions as to the outcome finally tend to support Vitya's own

negative image of himself: the policeman discovers that no murder has taken place, which leads to rejection and embarrassment at the hands of society.

The point is that each individual has to come to terms with himself and has in turn to find his own level of integration with society.

Bitov gives no moral directives, though in this manner he guides the reader to draw certain conclusions. Bitov has a clear vision of the writer's role in society which conforms to the social responsibility often felt by classical Russian writers. Indeed, one is aware of their influences; the office scenes with their petty bureaucratic chores and small-minded administrative bigots using different ink to denote status suggest the world of Gogol:

То есть просто, наверно, промышленности
трудно справляться с таким обширным
ассортиментом, чтобы каждому чернильницу
по чину. 2

Bitov has sought to reinterpret the poshlost' of Gogol's world in the context of contemporary Soviet society.

On the other hand, parallels with Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov are immediately apparent. Apart from a similar intense study of an individual psyche progressively approaching mental collapse, there are similar devices, such as the scene of a horse collapsing on the road under the weight of its cart.

Она лежала на боку, отгибая голову, и тихо
ржала. Она была так виновата, лошадь, и
столько было вины и обиды на её лице, что
было ясно: она плачет ... лучше бы это я
лежал сейчас на льду и пытался встать, и
мне было бы больно и обидно, и лучше бы
я всю жизнь возил эту телегу ... 3

Bitov's parody gives us insight into Vitya's realisation that, firstly, there is a feeling of happiness in a communal effort and, secondly, that a sense of freedom from acting spontaneously forms the beginning of Bitov's own philosophical approach to life.

Может, это единственно истинное чувство свободы, когда человек сознаёт, что только что поступил по-человечески. 4

It is the freedom which results from pulling away from the social rails of man's existence, - the social rails along which man inevitably travels, blind to his natural needs to be a part of, and act within, the community of fellow men. He sums up his alienation thus:

У каждого неумолимый и одинокий путь,
и только можно взглянуть с грустью и
сожалением, как за прозрачной стенкой
проходит другой один-человек и тоже
смотрит на тебя с грустью и сожалением ...
проходим мимо, и столько в этом горького
опыта невозможности. 5

Bitov's pessimism is expressed in Vitya's particular formula:

Один-человек плюс один-человек - равно
два один-человека. 6

Essentially, Vitya suffers not only because he is not free but by not knowing that he is not free. Vitya simply feels mental pain but cannot analyse it; eventually he comes to terms with himself and appears to conform, though once again the ending is left open and the outcome uncertain. The reader is placed in the role of the psychoanalyst, having been given a virtual case-study in the form of a confession. Bitov leaves the reader with the problem not only of analysing Vitya's condition, but of relating it to himself and seeking a solution. It is, on the other hand, an obvious plea for sympathetic treatment of the apparent delinquent who is cast in the role of a 'lay-about' or bezdel'nik by an uncomprehending public.

In describing Vitya's state of mind, Bitov does not attempt to formulate any moral panacea, the detail in the text is clearly selective and designed

to guide the reader along certain lines of enquiry. Firstly, Bitov points to Vitya's sense of happiness in acting spontaneously and in communion with others, which in turn leads to a sense of freedom. Secondly, there is the leitmotiv of childhood, the theme of most of Bitov's earlier stories of the Bol'shoi shar cycle. On page 59, for example, Vitya speaks of having been truly 'alive' as a child.

Я всё чаще вспоминаю о детстве, и так грустно становится. И не то, что розовое, что сам я был чистый и хороший, а теперь грязный и гадкий, не в невинности тут дело. Живой был до самой последней клеточки! А сейчас я если и живу, то минутами, между чем-то стыдным и чем-то гадким. Так что ли? 7

He desperately tries to return to this world of warmth, beauty and security; a fact which is symbolised when Vitya crawls into the child's miniature snow town on pages 80 - 81. Whilst Vitya still possesses a childlike sensitivity which he cannot shrug off, he grows increasingly conscious of his rapid, irreversible transition into the adult world.

A brief comparison with 'Catcher in the Rye' can be made on this point.

Both Holden Caulfield and Vitya are affectionate towards children in whom there is not the phoniness of the adult world. However, both are rejected by children:

I put my hand on the skinny kid's end, to sort of even up the weight, but you could tell they didn't want me around.

Compare,

Теперь можно позвать мальчика. Нам с ним будет очень просторно в этом доме.
- Мальчик, мальчик, - зову я. - Где ты? 9

Holden wants to catch little children before they fall over the cliff, whereas Vitya feels he will grow up only when he has children of his own. Like Holden, Vitya's quest is, firstly, to preserve the purity of childhood that vanishes on becoming an adult; and secondly, for the Self. Vitya's ambivalent attitude towards people is also similar to Holden's. Both desire responsive relationships with others, but another deeper side urges withdrawal and flight. Bitov prompts the reader to seek the reasons for Vitya's alienation in these distinct areas: both with their emphasis on the loss of spontaneous action and the communal spirit. Bitov ends this story on what he terms a khudozhestvenny vektor ('an artistic vector') or a question which is designed to take the reader in a different direction:

Там снежный город. Кто-то живёт в нём
вовсе крохотный ... Интересный, каким он
видит меня оттуда? IO

Apart from the philosophical overtones of a final question designed to provoke the reader to thought, the story leaves us with a masterly psychological portrait of an alienated adolescent. No hint of the cause of Vitya's anxiety is given, yet the portrayal is convincing and suggests a paradigm case of maternal deprivation. Bitov reproduces many of the features of this syndrome in a literary study.

Bitov's skill as an accurate recorder of psychological states is one of his recognised talents¹¹. It is our belief that Bitov's ability to portray the condition of maternal deprivation is due to his own early evacuation during the war. Bitov was indeed subject to the same type of suffering as Vitya. The author did not experience 'complete deprivation', only 'partial deprivation'¹² during the war years. At the age of four, Bitov was evacuated to the Urals with memories of 'corpses, hunger and the cold'¹³ in Leningrad

under siege; though he asserts this left no harmful effects or complexes¹⁴, he was undoubtedly aware of the syndrome of maternal deprivation present in many of the other children whose parents were dead. The psychologist, John Bowlby, has assessed the following typical symptoms:

- superficial relationships;
- no real feeling - no capacity to care for people;
- or to make true friends;
- an inaccessibility, exasperating to those trying to help;
- no emotional response to situations where it is normal - a curious lack of concern;
- deceit and evasion, often pointless;
- stealing;
- lack of concentration at school. 15

Not all these characteristics apply to Vitya; 'deceit' and 'stealing' are lacking. However, Vitya is unable to communicate with those around him, he is aggressive and lives in a fantasy world.

The symptomatic complaints are of various types. They include, frequently, aggressive and sexual behaviour in early life, stealing, lying, often of the fantastic type, and, essentially, complaints variously expressed that indicate some lack of emotional response in a child. 16

Vitya's disturbances are not simply a Soviet phenomenon, and it would be too hasty a judgement to see Vitya merely as a product of the problems that faced Soviet youth in the 1950's and 1960's. The after-effects of war are general and are not confined to the U.S.S.R. alone. Five to ten per cent of children reaching a New York doctor in the nine years from 1935 - 1944 suffered from similar mental disturbances¹⁷. The most common characteristics is 'affectionless character formulation'¹⁸ (a socio-pathic personality disturbance).

Further common features are uncannily present in Bezdel'nik not only in the structure which eschews the flow of time:

There is no conscience... They have no idea of time, so they cannot recall past experience and cannot benefit from (it) or be motivated to future goals. This lack of time concept is a striking feature in the defective organisation of the personality structure. 19

In addition, other epithets have been applied to this condition such as 'infantile'²⁰. Though the Soviet critics condemn infantilism as a negative social feature, Western psychologists recognise it as a characteristic associated with maternal deprivation.

We are not aware whether Vitya is finally regenerated or not after his catharsis in the snow-town. The characteristic of a lack of conscience is one that is not present in his syndrome. The scene in the office at the end is optimistic on the whole, though Vitya is still unable to communicate with his supervisor and drifts into a fantasy world dominated by the final riddle;

Интересно, каким он видит меня оттуда?
/p.85/

Here the narrative technique of breaking down objective reality combines with the apparent purpose of the story; the reader is deprived of the traditional closed ending, the relationship between him and Vitya is abruptly broken off with only a hint of Vitya's reconciliation with his circumstances. The meaning is left for each individual reader to interpret in his own way.

Priscilla Ann Meyer's interpretation of Bitov's Aptekarsky ostrov cycle of stories is unconvincing when she states:

stories of this sort contain neither a moral nor a model for emulation but simply the portrayal of an interesting character, the recounting of an incident or the evocation of a mood. 21

Vitya is clearly more than an 'interesting' character, there are several morals to be drawn for the reader; for example, one only understands goodness after an act of evil:

Так уж подло устроен человек! Только
после гадости может ощутить радость. 22

Meyer's interpretation of the story falls far short of the real message:

Vitya is involved in a process of self-exploration, of seeking his identity through self-awareness. Bitov's own view of this cycle of stories emphasises the importance of self-realisation through self-consciousness:

... в "Дачной местности" и "Аптекарьском острове" - я занимался именно темой самоосознания или отсутствия его; меня занимал вопрос, как интеллигентный вроде бы человек умудряется избежать столкновения с собственным опытом, каким затейливым способом должно выгнуться его самосознание, чтобы обойти самосознание. Что-то в этом роде. 23

Bezdel'nik does not tell us the full story of achieving self-realisation; Vitya lacks self-consciousness to a greater degree than self-realisation. Nonetheless, it is a valuable first step and a good introductory piece to later stories. Bitov's own interpretation relates more to Penelopa in the same collection. His letter is written with hindsight; he is unclear exactly what separate contribution each of these stories makes to the overall theme which he sums up here, the additional что-то в этом роде is a recognition of the generality of his statement.

Soviet critics generally see little more than Meyer does in this work.

El'sberg, who is kinder than most to Bitov, admits of some higher meaning to stories of molodaya proza, such as Bezdel'nik, but goes no further;

... /они/ дают ощутить нечто большое,
разрывающее, рамки быта и личных судеб ...
стремление к высокому. 24

Most Soviet critics continue to judge stories of this period within the framework of Socialist Realism. Although Bitov pays little attention to the critics' values, the same cannot be said of the state publishing houses. His experience with Prizyvnik demonstrated the need for an appropriately worded title in order to assure a degree of official acceptability. At a cursory glance Bezdel'nik satisfies certain characteristics associated with Socialist Realism. Firstly, the title suggests the author's own standpoint. Secondly, the hero apparently reforms after seeing the error of his ways, suggesting an optimistic conclusion. Moreover, Motyashov uses Bezdel'nik as an example of how the searchings of an individual mind can be just as acceptable to Socialist norms as those of the collective:

... лежит через его идейность, через воспитание у человека стремления к совершенствованию, росту, дерзанию ради наиболее полного осуществления общего интереса как интереса одновременно и личного. 25

Motyashov's interpretation of Vitya as a "positive hero" is based on Vitya's sympathetic attitude towards his parents, animals and children²⁶. Most Soviet critics are still not prepared to condone Bitov's total commitment to literature above all other considerations:

... основной упрек Битову - увлечение литературностью в ущерб социальности. 27

Such views are more interesting as statements of officially-approved attitudes which plot the present course of Socialist Realism and its implications for writers. Another critic's condemnation of Vitya's character reveals criteria necessary for a "positive hero":

... образ цельного, гармонически развитого человека, человека - творца и создателя, хозяина своей земли и новой жизни. 28

Soviet critics have generally failed to remark on either the philosophical direction of the story or the psychological authenticity of the characterisation.

Bezdel'nik remains a work of transition between Bitov's study of the adolescent and a more mature appraisal of man's cosmic possibilities in later stories, (e.g. Infant'ev in the same collection). Bitov continues nonetheless to highlight a particular incident in an individual's life, such as in the story Noga²⁹ written in 1962. It is concerned with the effect on a young schoolboy of a broken leg and adds a further dimension to Bitov's theme of perception through suffering. Before the adolescent hero, Zaitsev, breaks his leg he is continually seeking his friends' approval as a way out of loneliness. Zaitsev's psychological complex is reflected in his masochistic endurance of the other boys' malevolent attitude towards him. He consequently foregoes his father's birthday and ironically breaks his leg trying to prove his right to be accepted by the group. The main feature of the story lies in the psychological portrayal of the boy as he drags himself home with his broken leg. The reader is aware of the boy's inner trauma by the bizarre technique of Zaitsev's talks with the broken leg which takes on a separate identity. The other boys act callously, as though asleep (kak vo sne)³⁰ abandoning the boy despite his broken leg. Zaitsev realises certain truths about himself only at this point of supreme mental and physical torment. He asks himself a question common in Bitov, showing the point at which self-awareness occurs.

„Что же это я?.. - сказал он себе.-
Размечтался. Так я никогда не доберусь.
Давно был бы дома. Что ж это я?” ЗІ

(my emphasis)

Zaitsev's pain becomes more acute and the psychological play develops as the boy addresses and scolds his leg as a father would a child. Thus Zaitsev is able ultimately to correct his psychological complex, return to his father and reject the other boys:

Ты ведь меня не предашь, как эти ... Мы
казним их завтра. Они будут молить,
ползать на коленях ... 32

The final point in the story pleases the critics³³; Zaitsev reforms in what is a sensitive, though rather naive conclusion. It is nonetheless a positive ending and can be seen as a further example of Bitov's weaker stories that principally appeases the state publishers and critics. Krashukhin³⁴ and Lisitsky³⁵ reject the ending as lacking in social direction. The final question is viewed as undesirable for its transfer of the right of judgement from author to the reader, who assumes the position of the doctor:

- Доктор - сказал он. - Что же это, доктор? 36

The critic Lisitsky is aware of the podtekst in this story but ignores it, failing to see a reason behind the boy's monologue with his leg and to grasp the point of the final question.

This kind of revelation does not always take place after a physically painful experience, such as breaking a leg. Penelopa³⁷ is one of the best examples of Bitov's work in this cycle where the trauma is entirely psychological and deep within the recesses of the mind. Both Aksenov³⁸ and Gibian³⁹ have referred to this as an outstanding work of modern Soviet literature. Penelopa is a drama which develops from Bezdel'nik and Noga where the external incident disturbs the inner balance of the hero's mind. The main character, Lobyshev, is no longer the faltering youth of previous stories but older, having passed through adolescence without any self-questioning. He is an office worker pictured against an everyday background, on this occasion, strolling along the Nevsky Prospect waiting for pay-time and almost 'mechanically' watching the girls. Although it seems shameful, Lobyshev consoles himself

with the thought that he, too, is treated in the same uniform, detached manner. Vitya, in Bezdel'nik, similarly recognises how people erect a barrier against natural human impulses. The pace of Lobyshev's thought processes is much more accelerated and intense than in previous stories, and the reader follows each minute change and progression. In his excellent study of Penelopa, the Soviet critic Anninsky has referred to these intense thought patterns as myslegramma⁴⁰, in which one thought leads directly to another as a linear function which progresses in spite of the hero delving deeper into the inner recesses and complexes of his mind. Unlike Bitov's other stories, however, Lobyshev displays moments of self-awareness before the crisis point. His thoughts on walking along the Nevsky Prospect about people's 'mechanical' lives are preceded by a moment of insight into the nature of his own actions.

... /он/ думал о том, почему и как это так получилось, что дожид вот и испытывает разные такие чувства, как в коридоре, на лестнице и в закоулке ... он ещё подумал, что странно, что такой уже возникает мотор этих ощущений, что о них и не думаешь, что они как бы во сне проходят, неприятные и свинские и потом будто бы их и не было. 4I

(my emphasis)

Bitov adds, however, that such thoughts happen "in passing" (vskol'z)⁴² and that the weather, sunny and bright, is enough to prevent them taking root in his mind. Lobyshev's state of semi-somnolence (poluson) is characterised by a distancing of reality and lack of emotional response. He has an urge to return to childlike days, the joy evident in the image of the sun and where disturbing thoughts of the present have no place. Lobyshev is a type alienated from work which is gadost' to kakaya⁴³, and overcomes thoughts of work by escaping into a thoughtless, responsibility-free world of limbo. The narrator himself steps into the text to stress the exact nature of Lobyshev's condition:

... он не думал, не вспоминал и его нигде
не грызло и не тянуло. 44

This marks only the first of several such intrusions by the narrator. Whether Bitov is influenced by the critics' demand for a clearer authorial direction is unclear. But these interferences make the intensity of the text weaker and appear almost in the form of moral directives. Whereas the narrator of previous stories is often fused with the hero, in Penelopa the former tends to step aside and direct. On the other hand, he is not a purveyor of absolute values. One particular incursion suggests that the narrator wishes to appear identifiably human and not infallible by giving a sincere picture of events:

И вот он проходит в тёмную подворотню
кинотеатра, и это чуть ли не первая фраза
рассказа, который я собираюсь писать. И
теперь наконец я начинаю с неё ради ещё
одной, единственной, которую я знаю и
которая должна быть чуть ли не в самом конце.
Так вот я приступаю к началу рассказа, и если
мне до того уж не стыдно, то меня охватывает
дрожь, потому что я приступаю. 45

Bitov has a firm aim in sight, he takes his reader into the 'boiler-room'⁴⁶
of the story, as if he cannot help himself. Thus he introduces a many-sided
reality into the narrowly-drawn framework of a moral lesson⁴⁷. If he does not
identify with the hero, he now seems to identify with the reader. Because of
this tendency, the story gives the reader a sense of his own participation in,
and even responsibility for, the events that follow.

Furthermore, the contrast in mood between the narrator's voice and his hero's
also serves to increase the psychological and moral tension of the story.
The narrator's apparent desire for strict and honest objectivity, couched in
measured tones, stimulates a concern on the part of the reader for the fate
of Lobyshev. This adds a touch of poetic pathos to the style.

Further narrative techniques are used to good effect; the stream of consciousness lulls the reader's attention which allows the writer to shock the reader with the interjection of startlingly crude words:

СКОТЫ! Ах, скоты! 48

These and other emotive words produce a similar awakening for both the reader and Lobyshev. The external world in the form of a very distraught shabbily-dressed young woman invades both consciousnesses. Lobyshev's reaction clearly shows the extent of his mental distance from reality:

... обернувшись, сказал совершенно МОТОРНО,
НЕ ЗАДУМЫВАЯСЬ, - Это вы мне? 49

(my emphasis)

Bitov is anxious to show a duality in the hero's mind: one part reacts to the outside world 'mechanically' (motorno), and the other reflects on the first with complete detachment. Bitov creates a parallel juxtaposition of inner and outer worlds within the style. On the surface of the story lies the external action largely in the form of the dialogue between Lobyshev and the young woman. The narrator's descriptions of external actions are simple and direct; 'they went into the cinema', for example. The external play is only the tip of the iceberg of Lobyshev's inner world. His feelings, meanwhile, revolve in free play like an engine with its gears disengaged. The inner world is further divided into two conflicting halves, one of which is surrounded by sexual fantasy:

Тут уже Лобышева стало раздирать на две половины: одна половина, которую как бы никто не видел, уже как бы спала с этой девушкой, причём их обоим никто, как положено, не видел, а другая уже упиралась и отставала, на эту другую смотрели во все глаза люди ... этой второй половине было стыдно и неловка, она хотела стусеваться, исчезнуть. 50

This duality that Bitov observes is similar to Dostoevsky's vision. Even Dostoevsky's own word, stushevat'sya, appears in the text. Gradually, the two halves of Lobyshev's inner world give rise to a constant flow of vague, often contradictory feelings. Meanwhile, the Lobyshev on the outside keeps up a facade of acting normally, albeit at variance with his own inner, true feelings. Bitov is pin-pointing a form of deceit using a painstaking step-by-step analysis of Lobyshev's mental processes so that the reader is able to follow the logical development of each thought.

Lobyshev leads the girl on, unconcerned, except at himself. Only when he feels the brunt of responsibility for another human being, has he to opt out. It is this experience during which Lobyshev discovers his failure to unite his inner and outer selves which leads to a new perception of his Self:

... ведь день за днём живёт в уверенности,
что всё-таки передвигается, говорит и де-
лает сам - а нет, не сам ... он сегодня так
не властен. 51

Lobyshev tries to analyse his reactions: primarily, he realises how difficult it is for a person to rise to sudden responsibility, especially when he is normally 'turned off' (neotvyaznost' sna)⁵². In this state he is aware of not having known true freedom, an idea preceded by an accelerating series of self-revelations:

Эти мысли ... были о том, что и раньше
бывало вскользь, но теперь они были по-
резче ... не приходилось уже сомневаться
в их существовании. 53

He is emerging from that world of semi-somnolence and 'non-living'.

The film Odysseus, which Lobyshev and the young woman see, acts as an interesting interlude to Lobyshev's intense inner turmoil. It also allows the theme of art in general to be discussed as it fulfils many of the

requirements of good Stalinist art: it is of epic proportions, the hero is brave and strong and brings justice to his part of the world in an optimistic conclusion. Only the present times and Soviet ideology are missing. Nonetheless, Bitov makes oblique references to the cult of personality and notions of Socialist Realism. Firstly, the narrator criticises the notion of 'pomposity' characterising 'epicality':

Недаром же мы живём в эпическое время.
Только не помпезность - мера эпичности. 54

Bitov is making a covert statement about the need for writers to return to normal proportions, lifesize ones with which ordinary people can identify. Lobyshev is set against an everyday background whereas Odysseus, though outwardly positive, is made only of cardboard and is a nechelovek⁵⁵. His apparent selflessness in tying himself to the mast to hear the sirens is interpreted merely as 'hunger for acute sensations'⁵⁶. An allusion to Nietzsche is apparent in Bitov's rejection of the superiority of the strong over the weak.

У нас хоть, от нашего-то эпоса, какая-то
человечность очевидной стать может.
Чаплин, к примеру. А тут - словно так и
надо, будто это-то и есть что-то лучшее
в людях - их сила. Собаки, в сущности,
они чрезвычайные. 57

The narrator argues that Odysseus is potentially "a lout" (gryadushchy kham); he learnt nothing from becoming a beggar and his revenge is a justification for cruelty. Yet a member of the cinema audience is presented with this classical hero as an object for emulation.

Bitov implies that the promotion of unrealistic heroics is a hindrance, rather than a help, to the growth of spiritual development in Man. As in the case of Kirill Kapustin, a weak individual unconsciously models himself on the

false illusion of a film-hero. By imitating a crude and unrealistic epic norm, the Self becomes increasingly divided between inner fantasy and outer everyday reality:

И надо выходить из кинотеатра. В твою
обыденно-эпическую действительность. 58

Lobyshev's inner world has assumed so great a prominence that outer reality intrudes on him like a bad dream on a sleeper:

... они шли рядом, но это дурной сон,
он боялся взглянуть на неё, чтобы она
не стала явью. 59

(my emphasis)

Lobyshev is not only afraid, but unable to face reality. It is essentially a fear of accepting responsibility for another who is in greater difficulty than himself. The unfortunate waif accompanying Lobyshev is little more than a child, moreover, a guilty one⁶⁰. Vitya realises that a sense of responsibility for others is a necessary prerequisite to the pure 'act' (postupok), and an inability to act is seen as man's essential failing. Both Vitya and Lobyshev are aware of their human responsibility but can do little about it. Bezdel'nik is more optimistic only insofar as Bitov believes Vitya has the potential to act, but Penelopa is pessimistic, for Lobyshev uses all manner of means to avoid committing an act of human kindness towards a young woman needing help. Lobyshev's bogus offer of assistance is the negation of the pure act; it is devised in selfishness and cowardice and designed to alleviate the hero's own torment rather than that of a fellow being.

It is not the portrayal of a meaningless yet prettily described 'moment' or slice of life which concerns Bitov here, as Meyer suggests⁶¹. There is a recognisable, though not overt, message. Bitov admits he is not writing for artistic effect alone;

... прямое отражение опыта никогда не вело к художественному эффекту и попросту малоинтересно. 62

Secondly, the message does not come by writing blindly and experimenting with the outcome. The study of a character is solidly based on the experience of Bitov's own perception:

... то есть всё-таки не отражаю, или творю опыт, до сих пор мне неведомый. 63

The title is well chosen to reflect Bitov's initial aim. Penelopa is the name of Odysseus's mythical wife. She symbolises the true heroine; loyal, trusting, honest and ever-patient. Her modern equivalent is the girl in the street, Lobyshev-her bogus hero. The ending is pessimistic, however, for Lobyshev is not to return as Odysseus did.

From the tone of Bitov's writings about himself, he stands out as a man who feels a responsibility towards his readers in the tradition of Russian nineteenth century writers. In his personal life a moralistic care for others is apparent in, for example, his letter to the author:

Передай своей жене привет от меня и не забывай, что она красива, хоть и ты красив, и что ты любишь её, хоть и она любит тебя. 64

Though he recognises man's weaknesses, his concern for the individual does not appear as strictures or dogmatic statements by the narrator. The ending of a story on a question, or riddle, is meant for the reader as well as the main character. It is essentially a point of hope, an end which could be a beginning:

... Ведь это же я делаю каждый день!
Больше, меньше, но каждый день,..
И как давно забытое ощущение
было, что думал не вскользь, не как бы
не вроде, не забывая, не в полусне. 65

(My emphasis)



It is an everyday event that is depicted, though the ending provides a potential victory for the individual over himself. The Soviet critics falsely see the emphasis on the banality of events, not the podtekst. Thus it has been argued in the Soviet Union that Bitovism is no more than bytovism⁶⁶; the triviality of the latter giving rise to the exclusion of higher, nobler goals of existence⁶⁷. Penelopa is specifically criticised for its lack of ideological base and direction (ideinost')⁶⁸. Soviet critics are frequently unaware of the innuendo and deeper undercurrents in Bitov's stories and if Mayakovsky had continued to write on his favourite subject of byt in the 1960's, we have the impression he would have suffered the same condemnation as Bitov⁶⁹. Ironically, many Soviet critics clamour for the feat (podvig), for clearly recognisable acts of courage on the part of similarly recognisable heroes. Bitov's presentation of Odysseus in Penelopa ironically anticipates the voice of his own critics and defends his own view in answer to their predictable comments:

... не помпезность мера эпичности ... 70

Вроде бы Одиссей что-то понять должен,
когда он нищий и в него вином женихи
плескаются ... Просто он дожидается
момента, чтобы с ними получше расправиться,
чтобы вроде оправдание иметь своей жес-
токости через их свинство, не больше. А
сам был хамом ... 71

Bitov disarms his critics in his exposé of the positive hero. Ultimately, man must answer to himself for himself; ideinost' and its manifestation in heroism add nothing to man's knowledge and perception of himself, they only create an unreal world.

И надо выходить из кинотеатра. В твою
обыденно-эпическую действительность. 72

Of the critics, only Bursov appreciates the value of depicting everyday events meaningfully⁷³. For the majority, Penelopa does not depict a

realistic situation, but merely distorts reality. Lobyshev is not a true representation of Soviet man, 'for his greatest pleasure is to go to the cinema during the working day'⁷⁴. The discrepancy between Bursov's and Lisitsky's view of Penelopa serves to illustrate the Soviet confusion over notions of authenticity in art. Lisitsky is clearly looking for an Odysseus in art-form, someone who elevates the masses rather than portrays the human foibles of the age.

The fact that Penelopa has been published only once in an edition of 30,000 copies is not fortuitous.* The tendency to depict a small Gogolesque world in post-revolutionary society peopled by petty-minded individuals suggests a society in which many live out their existences untouched by a surrounding 'progressive reality'⁷⁵. Furthermore, the absence of a positive outcome not only challenges a precept of Socialist Realism, but the tenor of the story suggests there are no simple straightforward formulae to interpret life's complexities. It is a lost cry for the individual in a mass society; Odysseus's norms of 'heroic' behaviour provide little guidance for the Soviet bednye lyudi and 'blind souls' whose existence is overlooked in the present. Ultimately, any definitive pattern of resurrection is unrealistic; there is no guarantee that life will be happier, just a personal hope for Bitov's characters, one which is expressed in the final riddle symbolising the need for individual search and individual solution.

*Not including Vosknesny den' (1980)

Footnotes

1 Aptekarsky ostrov, p. 53

2 Ibid., p. 58.

3 Ibid., pp. 76 - 77.

4 Ibid., p. 78.

5 Ibid., p. 61.

6 Ibid., p. 61.

7 Ibid., p. 59.

8 J.D. Salinger, "Catcher in the Rye", (Penguin 1958), p. 135.

9 Aptekarsky ostrov, p. 81.

10 Ibid., p. 85.

11 M. Dewhirst, R. Milner-Gulland (eds.) (1977), op.cit., p. 236.

12 John Bowlby, "Child Care and the Growth of Love", (Pelican, 1965),
2nd Ed., p. 14.

13 Letter, 12.8.78, p. 243

14 Ibid.

15 J. Bowlby, op.cit., p. 37.

16 Ibid., p. 38.

17 Ibid., p. 40.

18 Ibid., p. 216.

19 Ibid., p. 40.

- 20 Ibid.
- 21 P.A. Meyer, 'Aksenov and the Soviet Prose of the 1950's and 1960's',
(Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Princeton University, 1971), pp. 171 - 182.
- 22 Aptekarsky ostrov, p. 59.
- 23 Letter, 12.8.78. p. 245
- 24 Ya. El'sberg, Lit.gaz., 10, (1967), p. 4.
- 25 I. Motyashov, Molodost' - vozrast' bor'by, Moskva, 2, (1970), p. 207.
- 26 Ibid., p. 206.
- 27 B. Bursov, Vechernie dumy, Zvezda, 8, (1968), p. 202.
- 28 S. Lisitsky, Stydlivaya nevinnost', Zhurnalist, 2, (1969), p. 60.
- 29 Published under the title of Aptekarsky ostrov in the collection of the
same name, pp. 24 - 42.
- 30 Ibid., p. 27.
- 31 Ibid., p. 37.
- 32 Ibid., p. 40.
- 33 G. Krasukhin, Detyam trudnogo vozrasta, Don, 12, (1968), p. 169.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 S. Lisitsky, (1969), op.cit., p. 59.
- 36 Aptekarsky ostrov, p. 42.
- 37 Aptekarsky ostrov, (S.P., 1968), pp. 101 - 126, and Molodoi Leningrad,
(1965).

- 38 See P. Meyer's interview with V. Aksenov, R.L.T., No. 6, (1973), p. 571.
- 39 G. Gibian, Problems of Communism, 2, (1967), p. 61.
- 40 For a first-rate commentary on Penelopa and other works by A.G. Bitov, see Anninsky's article Tochka opory, Don, 6(1968), pp. 168 - 181.
- 41 Aptekarsky ostrov, p. 102.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid., p. 103.
- 44 Ibid.,
- 45 Ibid., p. 107.
- 46 V. Solov'ev, Sud'ba cheloveka v zhanre rasskaza, Yunost', 10, (1974), p. 72.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Aptekarsky ostrov, p. 108.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Ibid., p. 110.
- 51 Ibid., p. 114.
- 52 Aptekarsky ostrov, p. 114.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Ibid., p. 119.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Ibid., p. 120.

- 58 Ibid., p. 121.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Ibid., p. 122.
- 61 P.A. Meyer, op.cit.
- 62 Letter, 12.8.78, p. 245
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Aptekarsky ostrov, p. 126.
- 66 Ya. El'sberg, Byt i dukhovnaya zhizn', Lit.gaz., 50, (1968), p. 4.
- 67 X. Gasiorowski, 'On happiness in Recent Soviet Fiction', R.L.T. 9, (1974), pp. 473 - 474.
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CHAPTER FIVE

In Search of Lost Perception

Part One: The First Outward Journey

In 1960, during the time that Bitov was writing Prizyvnik, he turned his attention outwards to a young man's travels and impressions in Central Asia. The travelogue was entitled Puteshestvie molodogo cheloveka¹ (1960) and appeared in his first collection, Bol'shoi shar². It turned out to be the first of a whole cycle of such journeys which include Puteshestvie k drugu detstva (1963-4), Uroki Armenii (1967-8), Zapiski novichka (or Koleso) (1969-71), and Tri Gruzina (or Vybor natury), (1970-3)³.

Whilst ostensibly concerned with travel to distant parts, the traveller-narrator is more openly airing his philosophies of life; sometimes they coincide with the author's own, sometimes not. The style is in marked contrast to his other stories of the period, although the same subtle psychology is present.

Bitov allows himself a large degree of experimentation in his travel stories which defy the limits of any genre. There is still the serious, deep study of moral and sociological problems, yet the approach is outwards, with the narrator reflecting on what he observes, rather than on his character's narrow inner world. There are apparently no fictional characters and the settings seem genuine enough. On the other hand, Bitov creates this aura of apparent sincerity in his narrative in order to introduce a podtekst.

Puteshestvie molodogo cheloveka is the work of Bitov the young man, and is lighter and less philosophical than later works. Cleverly and humorously written, the first 'journey' is interesting both for its style and its presentation of Bitov's usual themes from a new and original angle.

Bitov wrote this story about the time the so-called molodezhno-isповедal'naya proza was reaching its zenith⁴. Its style is distinctly confessional; a series of adventures and observations recorded in the first person by a young man on his practical (na praktike) in Central Asia. Bitov employs the stream-of-consciousness technique, so we have a lively flow of colourful, exotic and fresh pictures of Asiatic life. The outside world is refreshingly perceived by a newcomer who conveys his impressions with the candour and astonishment of a child. The narrator is completely taken up with this "new" world and its surprises; the rhythm and pace of the story and style correspond to his own excitement. The constant flow of bright impressions is common in Bitov's other travel-stories, but differs here in that there is an undercurrent of humour evident in the ironic discrepancy between the author and childlike narrator which allows an element of self-satire to creep in. A certain degree of comparison can be drawn with the role of the narrator in Babel's Konarmiya. The narrators of both Puteshestvie and Konarmiya appeal directly to the reader; the former by an excitingly original presentation of a commonplace situation, the latter by a dispassionate presentation of the extraordinary and horrific. Both achieve their effects by using a narrator who thus responds unpredictably to the subject-matter. In both sets of sketches there is no single idea pervading the story. The feeling of vague indefiniteness created in the reader throws him back on his own devices and startles him with a new and upsetting vision of reality. In Puteshestvie the important and the trivial are placed side by side. There is a humorous anecdote about the hero's friend Tolik who almost dies of a bite, saved only with the help of a hip-flask. The effect of the deadly bite is described with a humorous cacophany of verbs falling to a sudden anti-climax:

Во сне он икал, рычал, клокотал, ворочался,
раскидывался, задыхался, ругался, дрался,
свистел, сопел, хрюкал, чавкал, чмокал,
плакал, храпел - в общем, спал беспокойно. 5

The characters of the sketches are ordinary, likeable people. The narrator himself is good-natured, and his light and easy touch contrasts with the nervous, gloomy tone of Yubilei and Zheny net doma, for example. It possesses something of the ethereal, reflecting the same bright, light colours of Solntse. Sherel'⁶ calls it a liricheskaya povest' for its poetic vision of life. Written in the continuous present, the reader feels he is actually there; a feeling frequently reinforced by the narrator's acuteness of observation and personal tone.

Bitov's intention is to make the reader feel the simple delights of Asia in a new and exhilarating way. The narrator judges geographical distance not by time or mileage, but by the size of the gazvoda glass which grows larger at each station kiosk as the train gets nearer to Asia.

These observations continue Bitov's early belief in the need to return to a fresh and original childlike vision of everyday reality. The hero, Boris, walks past the fruits and other objects in the bazaar as though he has just seen such things for the first time. Not only does he have the vision of a child, but also the fear:

И когда я убежал от тентов, то попадал
в разливанное арбузное море: огромные
арбузные кучи, как зелёные волны ... в
этом море плавали, размахивая руками, и
в этих барханах кочевали пропитанные солн-
цем узбеки в распахнутых халатах. 7

This childlike vulnerability of the narrator also makes him closer to the heart of the reader. He can also be cheeky: when he sees a notice saying 'everything - no more than 10 roubles', he offers the shopkeeper ten roubles for the latter's hat⁸. There is an ironic discrepancy between the reader's expectation of a young man's descriptions and their sudden originality; instead of facing death and starvation in the traditional

sandstorm, the youthful hero faces hunger in a tea-room where people are eating all around him. In the anecdote entitled Plov⁹, the hero spends ages talking to a chef about a special dish which he finally never tries despite his ravenous hunger. Such ironic twists to the story lend it intrigue which it achieves in spite of its concern with everyday objects. One critic recognises the topicality of Bitov's story:

... наши молодые и не молодые писатели,
рисую образ молодого современного чело-
века, ищут и находят самое высокое, вдох-
новляющее в самом ... будничном, простом ... IO

In Puteshestvie Bitov is concerned with a search for new scaled-down proportions, a search for a practical literature in which people's confidence is restored as an instrument of popular expression after what he saw as the masquerade of Stalinist literature. In the same article Mitin recognises the search as a 'reevaluation', but still urges the writer to depict 'a new heroic act' as opposed to a search 'for its own value'. Despite articles to the contrary¹¹, there is depth and meaningfulness behind the lighthearted facade of Bitov's first 'journey'. In the chapter Vesely chelovek, Bitov portrays Tolik as a man to model oneself upon. Tolik is, in effect, set up as an alternative to the 'positive hero'¹². Tolik is nothing if not human and down-to-earth; a man with whom most can identify:

Есть у Толика и официально отрицательные
черты. Например, пьёт ... I3

Drinking is not seen as the evil depicted by Soviet propagandists. These officially 'negative' characteristics of drinking are meaningless compared with the joy and happiness Tolik brings to the people he meets; he exudes a feeling of well-being. Basically, Tolik knows how to live, or in Bitov's

sense, knows how to be 'alive'. Tolik has no political aspirations, but he recognises the essence of life evident in nature, for example:

Горы я люблю. Тут, всё не ровно.
Взглянуживо. I4

Tolik rebukes literary portrayals of life:

Про жизнь скучно пишут. - Веселее надо.
Уж лучше вранье. I5

Bitov brings Tolik's philosophy to bear on this work. His message is clear from the style as well as from the podtekst of Tolik's words: Man must wake up to the essence of life in the here and now, live in the present and be jolly in doing so. The essence of life is all around us, there ready to be perceived by the observant. Proust's Celtic myth of spirits trapped in trees can apply with equal force here, for when man breaks away from his path in life and stops to look around, he releases the 'spirits', as it were, and untold riches which otherwise lie unperceived. The hero's name has some significance; it relates to the word for 'ant', murav'ei. Boris is conscious of a different world; that of the ant:

Как редко видишь этот мелкий мир ...
Странно. За всю жизнь можно пересчитать
по пальцам. I6

Boris's other world bears some resemblance to Olesha's invisible land: one locked within everyday things:

Самые обычные вещи: раннее утро, заход
солнца, звездная ночь, зимний лес ...
Все-то мы знаем. А что мы помним? I7

Bitov's intention is simply to awaken his reader to the beauty of that other world and to let him experience its freshness through Boris. For example, the everyday event of people laughing is given an original presentation which is infectious:

Никогда я не слышал, чтобы человек так смеялся ... У-ах-ха-ха-ха-ха! - захлебнулся большой.

- Ленинабад лучше?

- Вот и ты говоришь, что лучше.

- Я? И-иг- ги-ги-ги! Я говорю?... И-и-го-го-го-го-го! 18

Bitov leaves the question of whether the town Leninabad is better than Fergana to the reader. Bitov's idea of leaving the reader with something to think about is repeated here in the same light-hearted tone as the story and contrasts with the apparent seriousness of Aptekarsky ostrov.

Most of the Soviet critics have failed to see any point in Puteshestvie; Geideko criticises its lack of osmyslenie zhizni¹⁹. Voevodin considers Bitov overdoes the lightness of tone and tomfoolery; 'serious matters should never be used as material for joking'²⁰. Although Voevodin grasps the technique by which Bitov reproduces the freshness of a child's perception, he regards this childlike ingenuousness as a sign of infantilism which shows up the writer's irresponsible attitude towards life. Grinberg sees no unity of approach to the stream of impressions. In Olesha, he argues, this kind of smattering of colours is a systematic approach to life and therefore defensible. But Grinberg ironically interprets Bitov's use of the same device as a "motley parade of impressions"²¹, and agrees with most Soviet critics who demand a functional value for artistic devices; a penetrating eye is of no literary value in itself without unified developed thought. On the other hand, Bazhin sees a distortion of Soviet reality in Bitov's story; the adventures that Boris has could not take place in the Soviet Union; if a student were short of money he would just go and get an advance on his practical work²². Such a critical viewpoint is worth including for its pedantic approach to literature. Other articles of criticism praise Bitov's apparent 'optimism', but recognise Puteshestvie

as an artistic work rather than a documentary²³. Both Voevodin and Gulia complain of the hero's lack of 'social features'²⁴ and his 'flatness':

... он бесплотен, он абстракция, просто так,
некий молодой человек. 25

Yet Bitov's original title Puteshestvie mladogo cheloveka²⁶ suggests firstly a young man's exploration in general, and only secondly the story of Boris in particular. While admitting that the hero reflects in part an idea, the critics fail to go any further and suggest what this "abstraction" of a character might signify.

Bitov's secondary aim is to experiment with style; not only is his approach to what his hero sees originally refreshing, but the technique is a return to ornamentation of the 1920's²⁷. In the Moscow Interviews Bitov acknowledges such similarities but claims no conscious effort to reproduce them. Comparison can be made, nonetheless; for example, sounds are reproduced exactly as heard, as in the laughing episode on page 96²⁸. In his descriptions of Boris's drilling work, Bitov tries to convey the rhythm:

Р-раз-трень! Два-бом!
Трень-бом!
Раз-два!
Приседаем, разгибаемся. 29

The words are deliberately spaced out, leaving the impression of action taken during the intervening space. Boris's own fleeting impressions are recorded in short, clipped sentences reflecting his inner thoughts more authentically:

Подблеивают козы.
Но тут машина затормозила.
Новое дело. 30

The jolting effect in the wagon is conveyed through repetitions:

„Вниз-вверх. Вверх-вниз.“ 31

Thus Bitov puts into practice the message of the work to draw the most out of each moment, however insignificant it may appear:

Главное, не спешить всё увидеть. 32

One Russian critic praises Bitov's facility of expression; his sensitive feel for the language³³. The same critic also confirms Bitov's ability to make visible to the reader what the narrator has seen. It is this tendency to experiment with form that gives 'atmosphere' (nastroenie)³⁴ to the work. Anninsky rightly points out that,

... это полное растворение человека в ритмах окружающего мира. 35

but adds that there is no spiritual depth to the character of Boris Murashov. Boris is indeed a typical Bitovian 'child-character'. He has the perception of a child but not the awareness of the spiritual consequences of such perception. Bitov leaves this problem unresolved until Aptekarsky ostrov.

It is worth remembering that the first 'journey' was written parallel to Prizyvnik. Both stories reveal two sides to Bitov's heroes. Boris Murashov knows no more about himself than that he lives and feels. He exudes the pure joy of a child. But Kirill Kapustin is the self-conscious adolescent; introvert, weak and tormented. Both heroes are on their 'practical', yet each one's surroundings are quite different. Puteshestvie marks the point at which Bitov recognises childlike awareness as a perceptual starting-point in a search for spiritual values. Prizyvnik represents the grim world of 'childhood lost'. Both types of story stand in carefully-balanced contrast. They show different degrees of perceptual 'blindness'; Boris's blind joy, Kirill's blind torment. Both approach a new consciousness along different paths; inward and outward.

Part Two

The Second Outward 'Journey'

When Andrei Bitov embarked on his second outward 'journey', Puteshestvie k drugu detstva: nasha biografiya³⁶, his thoughts had progressed far since the first outward 'journey', Puteshestvie molodogo cheloveka (1960). He wrote the second Puteshestvie in 1963-4 after completing Prizyvnik (1959-61), all the stories of Aptekarsky ostrov (1960-62) except Infant'ev, and the first two parts of Dni cheloveka; Dver, (1960) and Sad (1962-3).

The pattern of the second Puteshestvie is similar to that of the first: the main character is the narrator who describes his thoughts and experiences in a 'confessional' style whilst travelling to the Far East to meet a childhood friend. The story is similarly autobiographical but the narrator is now a writer, not a student. The style is also comparable; the story is written in the first person in a chatty personal way which is designed to engage the reader's deeper thoughts. But unlike the first 'journey' this one is not so lighthearted or immediate; there is little outside scenery to which the narrator responds. Instead, it is a journey into the narrator's own past, in particular, a return to his childhood, which gives him the scope to analyse his relationship with the world, past and present. The narrator's thoughts are carried back into his childhood when his editor tells him to find a suitable model for a 'positive hero'. The narrator fixes on Genrikh Sh., his closest childhood companion, and relives his relationship with him in his mind's eye. Yet while the character Genrikh Sh. is studied in all the glory of his great exploits, what is really taking place is a progressive 'debunkment' of this hero and a reductio ad absurdum of the concept of the 'positive hero'. The latter theme is introduced in the opening dialogue between the editor and the narrator; when asked to recreate a 'positive hero' in his writing, the narrator replies:

У меня все положительные ... на отрицательных у меня сил не хватает ... только героизм - не черта, а проявление, в обстоятельствах ... А так все люди обыкновенные. 37

Bitov is not concerned merely to discredit the notion of the 'positive hero', he progressively substitutes a different set of values by which people can live in the everyday world. Bitov re-emphasizes the importance of creating visible ideals for people. The word which is most linked to Genrikh is 'feat' (podvig); for this Bitov substitutes 'act' (postupok). The narrator progressively juxtaposes more of his own everyday 'acts' in his distinctly ordinary life to the 'feats' of

Genrikh in order to create an ironic discrepancy. The reader begins to identify more closely with the narrator who openly admits his very human deficiencies in comparison with the 'positive hero':

.. обстоятельства мои были очень будничны,
прозаичны и лишены романтики. 38

For example, the narrator's anecdote about the theft during military service is humorous, interesting and more identifiable for ordinary folk.

The climax to the story takes place in the airport lounge when the narrator overhears a young woman complaining of having been made pregnant and abandoned. It is a simple and touching event with a significant sequel: the works superintendent's decision to accept responsibility for her is a spontaneous act of courage and selflessness:

Если хочешь ... выйдешь за меня, я его
усыновлю. 39

Such an act is an everyday requirement, the form of the 'incarnation' of the person⁴⁰. Furthermore, it is more appropriate to the times than a 'feat' which is a vestige of superhuman Stalinist proportions.

Время выдвигает своё слово. И слово это - ПОСТУПОК. 41

Despite the outward appearance of a travelogue, the second 'journey' attempts to provide a model answer to the disturbing point raised in Penelopa, that 'pomposity is not a measure of epicality'. Unlike Lobyshev, the superintendent is capable of a pure act in everyday circumstances. The woman in both stories performs the same role; helpless victim of circumstances and essentially a foil by which to judge the main character. Not only is there a parallelism of theme between the second 'journey' and Penelopa (a positive and negative variant respectively), but also between the 'journey' and 'inward' stories. The second 'journey' is optimistic in the tradition of Bitov's travelogues, it continues the positivism from the first 'journey' and acts as a kind of antidote to the stiff medicine of his other more sombre stories. As the narrator looks around the airport lounge he observes another incident; a father gives his hungry daughter a piece of an apple he really wants for himself:

Просто он только через себя всё понять может. 42

Bitov recognises how important it is for people to identify with the characters. The father understands his daughter's needs only when he feels the same. Bitov uses simple observations to portray a further step in his study of personality: one can really understand others only by knowing oneself.

The second 'journey' is also concerned with the relationship between literature and life. Bitov has already set out the type of characteristics required in a modern hero, now he moves on to discussing the relationship between a writer and his characters. It is the same as for any individual trying to relate to others. Above all no absolute judgement is necessary:

Что мы вообще знаем о людях? А всё
судим и судим. 43

If knowledge of others comes through knowledge of ourselves, then Bitov concentrates on a single character who is closest to the reader's heart. The writer adds a further dimension of psychological reality by describing a character's situation and experiences which coincide with his own. Bitov is not saying that a writer's work should be autobiographical, though autobiographical overtones exist in his own works, but that a writer should not place store in themes alien to his own environment and experience. These ideas in themselves negate the notion of writing literature to order.

Bitov's view is that what is outwardly strong is often inwardly weak. He narrates one particular incident when the only 'positive hero' he had known in his life had turned out to be a very weak, broken man putting on a front.

Почему закаленная сталь может обладать
чрезвычайной твёрдостью и быть хрупкой
при ударе?... Кто сильный? Кто слабый?
Это непросто. 44 (My emphasis)

In this we have an allusion to the major Socialist Realist work, Ostrovsky's Kak zakalyalas' stal'; though Socialist Realism is not mentioned by name, Bitov is undermining any such political or literary philosophy which claims to impose standard positive and negative values on people's lives regardless of need, time or place.

Outwardly, Genrikh fulfils the norms of the 'New Soviet Man', so frequently demanded by Bitov's conservative critics. Four years after Bitov wrote this story, Party Secretary Brezhnev made a demand for similarly unrealistic and grandiose feats to inspire the youth of the day:

Империализму нечего противопоставить
великой силе благородных идей и гран-
диозных целей, которые вдохновляют
советских людей, нашу молодёжь на
ПОДВИГИ в труде и борьбе. 45 (My emphasis)

Genrikh can also be seen as the spiritual successor to Andrei Babichev in Olesha's Zavist'. There are many similarities between the two works. Both

Babichey and Genrikh are heroes of the Soviet Establishment. The narrator of Bitov's second 'journey' includes newspaper cuttings to substantiate this. Both Kavaleroev and the narrator of Bitov's 'journey' offer an alternative package of ideas to the heroes' deeds. Both Bitov and Olesha are concerned to show the world around them; the simple everyday things which are in danger of being forgotten in the mad rush towards the building of Communism. Both relate to their respective heroes with envy; the narrator of the 'journey' admits,

Он был первая и последняя моя зависть,
самый непохожий на меня человек ... Я
мечтал украсть у него жука, но не знал
как это делается. 46

But whereas Kavaleroev hatches a conspiracy with Ivan which fails, the narrator of the second 'journey' reaches a more positive conclusion. He depicts Genrikh as spiritually empty, and the envy disappears as he realises that Genrikh's heroism is only a childhood myth. The second 'journey' is a deliberate attempt to make the reader rethink his own values. The once weak Kavaleroev of the 1920's returns in the form of Puteshestvie's narrator to expose establishment values as myths. It is Bitov's narrator who is left on the stage at the end, not Genrikh. Bitov's 'journey' ends encouragingly, whereas Kavaleroev's defeat is final and closes the story.

There are also stylistic similarities between Olesha's Zavist' and Bitov's Puteshestvie. Many works of the young writers of the sixties repeat the stylistic experimentation common in the twenties. In Bitov's case the inclusion of such devices as press-extracts on Genrikh's feats reflects a similar preoccupation with such effects in the twenties. The young Soviet writer Anatoly Gladilin, credited with the first molodaya proza work, bases his style on a similar influence. But whereas Gladilin's inclusion of such quotations creates a light and easy amalgam of styles with an ironic tone, Bitov's over-use ironically denotes his narrator's own embittered preoccupation with his hero as an alter ego. The juxtaposition between the official press releases on Genrikh and the narrator's personal view creates a rhythm in the work that reflects the continuing competition between the two. But it is a struggle from which the narrator finally triumphs.

There is a certain ornamentalism evident, though less so than in the first 'journey'. The narrator emphasises words by using capital letters which stand out immediately due to size and thickness of print. Marchenko interprets the clever mix of autobiographicality and the direct appeal to the reader as a new departure in the narrative viewpoint;

... впервые так отчётливо проявился в молодой прозе новый романный тип отношений между автором и главным персонажем произведения. 47

This new relationship stems from a combination of two factors: firstly, the narrator's omniscient, yet personal view of his hero; and secondly, what she calls,

... динамика несовпадения и разнобоя между различными моментами ... образа. 48

This suggests a genre which lies somewhere between fictional narrative and the literature of autobiography such as confessions and diaries. Bitov's narrator is partly Bitov, partly a fictional character who, nonetheless, embodies one angle of the author's thinking and one side of his character. This invests the story with a further dimension, providing a greater variety of interpretation. The story can be read, on the one hand, as a discussion on art and life, and on the other, as a 'confessional' return to childhood and a variant on Bitov's main theme of growing-up.

The sub-title of the story, Nasha biographiya, reflects a second level; many readers identify with the revelations the narrator makes about his own uneventful childhood in the course of the story. Genrikh is the object of a hero-worship, which has all the unfortunate aspects of the one-way relationship; giving and not receiving. Genrikh ostensibly fulfils the romantic image of the hero that all boys have. By comparison, the narrator's own life is correspondingly dull:

Я возвращаюсь тогда домой разбитый, с печальными мыслями о том, как неинтересно, скучно и тускло я живу в этой жизни ... 49

Yet as Genrikh's feats are enumerated, they too create the impression of hyperbole as much for the reader as for the narrator. It is a voyage of self-discovery and

realisation; by recounting Genrikh's life-story the narrator proves the inadequacy of his previous opinion; it was unnatural for Genrikh to have to keep proving himself,⁵⁰ for example. Incidents happen independently of Genrikh; the narrator recalls how the physical education instructor and the nurse made love in the woods outside the Pioneer camp. The technique of feigned childhood innocence is used throughout in the portrayal of such events. On the other hand, Bitov creates no myth of the purity of that innocence:

Мы употребляем все неприличные слова,
какие знаем. Больше всех стараюсь я. 51

Genrikh is pictured from the two distinct, juxtaposed angles; from the position of a pathetic dotting fan (in the present tense), and that of the mature narrator, e.g. in the same passage;

Когда я вспоминаю Генриха, меня всегда
поражает эта способность уйти ... и не
участвовать. /p.143/

If we accept the latter perspective with the added authority of the mature narrator who speaks with hindsight, the myth of the super-hero is exploded. Ultimately, Genrikh can only be proud of his greater knowledge of swear-words, he is a natural loner and cannot help standing outside the others. Bitov makes this incompatibility between heroism and collectivism implicit. The young narrator manages only to ridicule the hero by analysing him, his reaction to Genrikh is that of any ordinary man to such a false prophet. The mode of a strong and able hero has a detrimental effect by setting too high and artificial standard to emulate; compared to the 'hero', most people are failures. Such feelings of failure are seen to lead to alienation at a young age as in the choir incident. Despite feeling the spirit of collectivism for the first time, the narrator has to leave the choir whereas Genrikh, who merely mimes the words, succeeds by deception. The character of the narrator as a child has the seeds of the alienated young heroes of earlier stories:

Так я впервые ощутил несоответствие,
несовпадение внутреннего чувства и его
выражения. 52

This division of the Self is seen here in embryo. It marks the initial step in alienation from the outside world due to underachievement. This kind of

confrontation with society allows a person either to develop a deceitful character, in order to win society's approval, or to be rejected as a failure or misfit by society. By implication, the deceit is nourished and later develops to the point at which it can take over and allow the other more genuine and natural side to 'fall asleep'. This sequence can easily develop during the transition between adolescence and maturity when a young person is at his most vulnerable.

These kinds of revelation about childhood and alienation show Bitov's own desire to probe his inner life and past images of the Self. Bitov intrudes on the narrative himself in order to render this otherwise implicit understanding explicit. In the chapter Chto-to ne tak⁵³ a voice different from the narrator's enters the narrative:

В последнее время меня поддерживает уверенность, что всегда можно вернуться к себе и выделить это „что-то не так“ ... скажем, врать тебе приходится ... слишком много ... И вроде бы ты не властен: всё это ты вроде вынужден делать из самых человеческих чувств ... - а заглянешь в себя и найдёшь пакость, исправешь ... 54

Bitov isolates the source and symptoms of a contemporary spiritual malaise. He exploits the ill-defined limits of his genre to create a forum for debate. However, the Soviet critics received Bitov's second 'journey' with a vehement attack on allegedly misguided moral values. Nikul'kov accuses Bitov of being afraid of self-affirmation and self-admiration and interprets his approach as one leading to self-abasement⁵⁵. Another sees Bitov's invalidation of heroism as a step into a vacuum;

... в ту пустыню бесплодного скепсиса ...

which can give rise to,

... хилые былинки толстовского самосовершенствования. . 56

The Soviet critics accept that the philosophical implication of Bitov's stories gives rise to an alternative set of values to those of Soviet society. The notion

of an inner search for moral guidelines negates the right of the party as guide and formulator of the country's moral values. The same anonymous critic lays the blame for Bitov's 'journey' at the doorstep of the Detskaya literatura publishing-house for allowing it to be published specifically for children and adolescents.⁵⁷

The story is interpreted as an attack on the romantic,

... попытка лишить эти свойства и качества романтического ореола, морально развенчать их. 58

Moreover, Motyashov regards it as 'publicistic':

Ни в какой другой его повести авторская мысль не заострена столь откровенно публицистически, как здесь. 59

Bitov is accused of parodying the Soviet press in the fictitious extracts he uses⁶⁰. Some seek to rehabilitate Genrikh's character and 'heroism', claiming, on the one hand, that the narrator omits Genrikh's devotion to science,⁶¹ on the other, that Bitov does not reveal an emptiness in Genrikh but simply does not wish to see his true personality, creating only a caricature in the consciousness of the narrator⁶².

El'sberg commends Bitov for moving away from the narrow personal conflicts of earlier stories and offering the possibility of a moral solution⁶³. Anninsky realises that in sweeping away the spiritually vacuous and superficial character of Genrikh, Bitov has posed the question of an inner spiritual potential⁶⁴. Anninsky rightly observes the importance of the airport scene in offering an alternative to fill the vacuum but that Bitov's apparent refusal to probe another human being gives no insight into the workings of a man's psyche when he acts consciously and not merely on impulse:

/Здесь нет/ уровня духовного, когда личность несёт в своём сознании моральную норму безотносительно к ситуации. 65

Anninsky's remarks are largely correct, but he forgets that no such search of man's inner world would be normally published if, for example, the conclusions smacked of an alternative philosophy. Anninsky is wrong to think that this hidden layer of consciousness is not the object of Bitov's search. Enough is revealed in Bitov's

work of his 'inward' cycle in 1963-4 (especially in Zhizn' y vetrenuyu pogodu)
to answer Anninsky's criticism, though it still remains valid for the second
'journey'.

Footnotes

1. Also called Odna strana & Puteshestvie Borisa Murashova.
2. Bol'shoi shar, S.P. (1963), pp.5-106.
3. For the most complete versions of Uroki Armenii, Zapiski novichka and Tri Gruzina, see Ne shchitai shagi putnik ; Izvestiya, (M. 1974), pp.13-280. For Puteshestvie k drugu detstva see Dachnaya mestnost ; Sov.Ross. (1967).
4. V. Kamyarov, Evklidu-evklidovo, V.L., 4, (1969), pp.26-71.
5. Bol.shar, p.69.
6. A. ShereI', op.cit.
7. Bol.shar.p.24.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., pp.27-33.
10. G. Mitin; Ishchu sebya v knige Mol. komm., 7, (1964), p.125.
11. V. Voevodin, op.cit.
12. Bol.shar. p.42.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., p.43.
15. Ibid., p.44.
16. Ibid., p.79.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., p.96.
19. V. Geideko, op.cit., p.174.
20. V. Voevodin, op.cit.
21. I. Grinberg, V.L., 10, (1970) p.7.
22. N. Bazhin, Nash drug, Neva, 1, (1965) pp.190-191.
23. G. Gulia, Kak zhe byt ' s umorom?, Lit.gaz, (2.4.64), p.3.
24. V. Voevodin, G. Gulia, op.cit.
25. Ibid., (G. Gulia)
26. Correctly used in Puteshestvie k drugu detstva, Det.Lit. (1968)
27. See L. Anninsky, Tochka opory, Don, 6, (1968). pp.169-181.
28. See note 18 for this chapter.
29. Bol.shar. p.37.
30. Ibid., p.49.
31. Ibid.

32. Ibid., p.99.
33. A. Sherel', op.cit.,
34. N. Rudin, op.cit.
35. L. Anninsky, op.cit., p.170.
36. First published in Molodoi Leningrad, (1966), pp.126-168.
37. Ibid., p.127.
38. Ibid., p.158.
39. Ibid., p.163.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid., p.164.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., p.165.
45. L. Brezhnev, Anniversary Plenum of the Cent.Cttee. of V.L. K.S.M. (25 October 1968), quoted Pravda, (26.10.68), p.1.
46. Puteshestvie, op.cit., p.147.
47. A. Marchenko, Vremya iskat' sebya, N.M. 10, (1972), p.235.
48. Ibid.
49. Puteshestvie, op.cit., p.134.
50. Ibid., p.136.
51. Ibid., p.143.
52. Ibid., p.149.
53. Ibid., pp.154-155.
54. Ibid., p.154.
55. A. Nikul'kov, Mol. gvardiya, 3,(1973), p.289.
56. See (anonymous) Kogo my berem v druž 'ya?, Det.Lit.3, (1969)..pp.11-15.
57. It was published in book form designed for secondary school children by Det. Lit. (1968).
58. Kogo...? Op.cit., p.15.
59. I. Moyashov, Otvetstvennost- khudozhnika, V.L. 12, (1968), p.11.
60. See note 59 and op.cit, Kogo my berem v druž 'ya?
61. Ibid. (I. Motyashov).
62. Ibid. p.12.
63. Lit.gaz. No.50, (1968), p.4.
64. L. Anninsky, op.cit., p.173.
65. Ibid., p.174.

Chapter Six

Journey into Mystical Revelation;

Zhizn' v vetrenuyu pogodu

Zhizn' v vetrenuyu pogodu, written in 1963-4, is the most important short story amongst Bitov's works of the early sixties. Prizyvnik does little more than suggest that knowledge of Man lies in a state of higher individual consciousness whereas Zhizn' probes this area of fertile perception with the psychological prowess of the author's increasing maturity.

The hero of Zhizn' is no longer the fumbling adolescent of previous stories but a youthful, yet mature, writer much closer to the personality of Bitov's narrator. Autobiographical links have been made stronger and we find a distinct shift towards introspection and self-perception on the author's own part. Moreover, the typical urban backcloth of many of Bitov's stories has disappeared with a move from town of country. The eternal and ever-present nature that Kirill experiences through a mystical union with the elements silently participates in the play of the story and in the hero's thoughts. The pressure of time, the bustle and claustrophobia of town life, typical themes in Bitov's stories, are wound down in the mind of both the hero, Sergei, and the reader:

...изменились все параметры его
существования, и время в первую очередь. I

With a clever ironic touch, the lack of time-compulsion and bustle make the hero much more conscious of his own 'body-clock'. In the first instance, the reader senses the author's deliberate attempt to slow down the pace and hectic rhythm typical of Bitov's earlier stories. Time almost ceases to exist on the backcloth of nature:

...не жалея времени, даже как-то желая,
чтобы оно побегало с привычной для него
скоростью и перестало быть так уж отно-
сительно, /он/ принялся устраивать себе
рабочее место. 2

For such an individual as the hero, conditioned to live by the clock, the slow-down in pace leads to confusion and disorientation. The hero's relationship with the real world is dependent upon time and, moreover, relative to it. The absence of the daily clock undermines his established and solid view of the outside world, replacing it with states of fantasy:

Сергей с удовольствием отдавался представлению, как взлетает его этаж, и тогда уже не ветер, а этаж понесся с такой скоростью, что рассекал воздух и образовывал ветер,.. 3

New realities thrust themselves upon his perception so that the full force of nature replaces the man-created notion of time as the leading force in Man's environment. The new power is orchestrated by a cacophony of noises and sounds carried by the wind. Wind is the messenger of nature, and as a symbol of its invisible force and power is represented in the title of the story. The first published title of the story, Dachnaya mestnost', does not include this important point and is a further example of editorial intrusion on Bitov's creative rights as an author⁴.

The wind sweeps the previous pillars of Sergei's existence away as he is left to rediscover himself and seek a new relationship with his world. He painstakingly reaches those selfsame conclusions of the author evident in Bitov's earlier works:

...главное - это просто ж и т ь, быть живым... то, что же успеть: всё равно неживой ты уже ничего не успеешь. 5

The theme of being 'alive' is linked to the similar theme in the stories of Bolshoi shar, but the perspective is different. Life is not viewed by either child or adolescent but by a mature adult now contemplating the existence of a child - his own. The cycle and angle of vision is complete, though it would be untrue to suggest that Bitov has portrayed the vision of the same person progressing from child to man in his stories. Such a process is later carried out in the novel Dni cheloveka. His little son is the object of Sergei's attention and the frequent subject for a precise, intimate tracing of the hero's mental processes:

... он всё больше сидел дома и постоянно видел рядом сына, существо столь совершенно живое, что становилось стыдно всего неживого в себе, а тем более такой неживой вещи, как фиксация и переживание в себе этого неживого. 6

The world is seen through the eyes of Sergei alone, and Bitov's choice of an articulate intellectual as his main character allows for a clear erudite expression of the flow of subjective feelings; at times lyrical, the search of rational self-understanding continues throughout. This search is spurred on by the child's own

gradual discovery of his environment by his naive astonishment at the existence of a new world of strangeness and mystery which yearns to be explored. Sergei is suddenly made aware of how ossified he has become by comparison with his son;

Он думал о сыне, и вдруг становились понятны ему вещи, к которым он как-то, не заметив, когда это произошло, потерял вкус и чувствительность, вещи необыкновенно простые и бесконечные в своей простоте: радость и наслаждение, ... 7

The child's existence gives Sergei a new perception of love, no longer is it the frantic and nervous passion of earlier heroes, but a love which makes no demands and expects nothing, it is present by itself in the radiant, unsolicited smile on the child's face. The narrative proceeds as each step of realisation takes place in the hero's mind. The evidence of some new reality appears and raises a question which cannot be answered; the questions accelerate the rhythm of the narrative:

Знание того, как получают дети, не расхолаживало его, он отбрасывал это знание как ничего не объясняющее, и тогда ещё больше удивляло его появление сына - откуда? 8

Bitov does not give the answers but expects the reader to come to an understanding by empirical means. He seeks to educate his readers to rationalise events. Firstly, it is education only in the original Latin meaning of 'leading his reader out (of ignorance)' and secondly, the events he portrays usually defy a clear-cut logical explanation and force the reader to find his own answers. In Zhizn', the process of 'education' of previous stories is apparent, but on a higher level. The situation is nonetheless in keeping with Bitov's earlier approach of portraying an event which is a frequent occurrence in life yet special for each individual, such as a child's birth and growth, as in this case. Furthermore, it is a variant on the treatment of Bitov's favourite theme of childhood.

Sergei is made aware of his own childhood in his relationship with his son, and a further dimension is added with the role played by Sergei's own father in the story. Sergei performs an ironic dual role of both son and father at one and the same time. He fluctuates between both these roles, between mature adult reflection and almost childlike acts of puerility; though the latter state of

mind is reinforced by the reawakening of a childlike consciousness due solely to the observation of his son:

"... Игрушечный пистолет... И игрушечный мой висок... И игрушечный мой стол..." 9

Interspersed with childlike outbursts are statements testifying to his deep and mature understanding of his relationship with his own father which goes beyond mere words:

... форма разговора у отца такая неудачная, а суть самая прекрасная - любовь. IO

Maturity of outlook has come from the existence of his own child, a state of mind predicted by Bitov's Vitya in Bezdel'nik as the only solution to his problems. The theme of duality runs throughout the story, reflected in the turbulent changing states of mind and the switching of roles between the two fathers and two sons in the story with Sergei as the central, yet alternating, pivot. Maturity contrasts with apparent childishness, yet all fluctuations and rhythmic change have sprung from the baby son's existence. Sergei is a typical hero of Bitov's stories, afraid of reflection, his whole life formed by living with people in a state of ignorance and suspicion ¹¹. Such is Sergei's 'semi-somnolent' state prior to the awakening that his son brings. On the other hand, Sergei is not typical insofar as Bitov has endeavoured to break the egocentricity of the hero's development so apparent in other stories. Sergei is the only hero of Bitov who ceases to sense his exclusivity by establishing good, happy relations with his friends ¹².

By creating an intellectual alter ego, Bitov is more able to present his views on literary genre through the mouthpiece of his hero. The great debate over genre and especially the changing features of the povest' at this time is well documented ¹³. We shall return to Bitov's own views in a later chapter, though in Zhizn', Bitov is obviously keen to take advantage of the professional thoughts his main character is permitted to have as a writer.

- Не вполне ясно, какой смысл стали вкладывать в слово "формализм". I4

The digression of pages 82-3 on artistic form has little to do with the storyline itself. To the discerning reader it appears as an attack on prescriptive literature. Art for Sergei, and for Bitov as well, should reflect the living and 'the actual' (priblizhenie k zhivomu ¹⁵). New literary forms should approach the living truth.

Formalism can in no way be equated with the creation of new forms. Sergei begins to accept the notion of 'formlessness' in art. The new-found freedom from the structured life and routine of city life develops these new ideas on the nature of art, and we assume that Sergei's writings of previous years had reflected conventional forms. As if to confirm this new 'formless' perception of the world. Bitov carefully describes how Sergei's very idea takes shape beyond the solid physical dimension and stark lines of reality:

... он постепенно возвращал себе чувство времени и места, расплывчатая во время речи комната как бы фокусировалась, и предметы становились видны отчётливо,.. I6

Time is again linked to place, underlying the timeless nature of thought. Sergei's thoughts can drift into a world of fantasy, such as his vision of the mushroom cloud of a nuclear explosion whilst driving his father along the country road. This rather violent image is significant as a symbol of Sergei's own generation in contrast to his father's. The experience of the Second World War is no more a valid experience than the new generation's fear of a nuclear holocaust.

Yet although Sergei's new state of awareness has resulted from his move to the countryside, he keeps hurrying off to the town unable to come to terms with this new freedom from time and space. Even at the busiest and most time-conscious place, the railway station, Sergei is troubled by the wind and has a fantastic vision of a lady. It is at the same time the image of a woman, standing in the wind and the premonition of a future event at the dacha. Bitov explores a different, more ethereal dimension to the man-woman relationship. It is not a physical attraction, it is an intangible aura linking the natural with the eternal:

И было в её движениях что-то от такого притяжения всей обстановки и Сергея в том числе, что сразу естественным и вечным показалось ему её существование тут и как будто она должна была бы остаться, а приятель-уехать. I7

A similar ephemereal vision occurs in Infant'ev, syn svyashchennika with a hint of the supernatural rather than the mere ethereal¹⁸. Sergei's perception of this higher plane reveals a union of their two existences. It is not the feeling that Kirill experiences which unites him with a life-force, but a union between two souls, a union of individual-consciousness bringing a happiness reminiscent of childhood fantasies:

Как в детстве невозможным, высшим, недостижимым счастьем казалась ему такая связь двух людей в море жизней. 19

The final metaphor is significant in understanding the author's search for perception. The 'sea of life' appears in English as a hackneyed metaphor, but in Russian it has greater significance. The wind and the sea are formless. Whereas the wind speaks of the invisible infinite eternal, and sea is its visible physical counterpart more akin in its very nature to the union of two individuals who exist bodily as well as co-exist in the infinity of their minds. Sergei experiences the link between the two of them despite himself:

... их связь усиливалась словно помимо их желания, и они как будто даже пригласили её. 20

In Zhizn' Bitov reaches a perception of the individual's place in the world almost identical to that expounded by Zen Buddhism. He achieves this empirically by a progressive exploration of the human condition in his writing. It is our view that Bitov is not himself a Buddhist, nor did he set out on his literary searches intentionally to prove the validity of the Zen Buddhist belief. But he reaches a conclusion about the human condition in his early writing which resembles Zen Buddhism in one or two aspects. Firstly, Bitov's notion of poluson closely resembles the Buddhist doctrine of Avidya. For both poluson and Avidya are 'fettters' to a knowledge of the Self:

It is for the sake of knowledge - real, final, absolute knowledge - that the Path has been followed. To know that the Universal Self is one's own real self - to know this truth, not as a theory, not as a conclusion, not as a poetic idea, not as a sudden revelation, but as the central fact of one's inmost life - to know the truth in the most intimate sense of the word 'know', by living it, by being it - is the final end of all spiritual effort. The expansion of the Self carries with it the expansion of consciousness, and when consciousness has become all-embracing, the fetter of ignorance has been finally broken and the delusion of self is dead ²¹. (my emphasis)

In town, Sergei has the same symptoms of poluson as the characters of Aptekarsky ostrov. There is the excessive concern with the day's work and the blinding effect of the noise and bustle of city life. This condition is a 'fetter of ignorance', as Sergei himself admits, closing his mind to the life of his son, for example;

Но в городе это бывало как-то мельком, не входило в сознание, ощущение, и только как-то быстро привыкал он: ну да, пришёл домой, и тут его сын - ничего удивительного...

Bitov does not use the term poluson in Zhizn', but refers to a similar condition as sloyno sp'yanu²³ (as though in a state of drunkenness). On the other hand, Avidya, the first of the twelve Nidanas, cannot be classed as a distortion of the vision of reality such as that caused by intoxication. But it is the state of non-awareness by which the mind is fettered so that it remains as a calm, unruffled pool²⁴. Only when the mind is disturbed can action (Karma) be born, and Karma in turn gives rise to enlightenment. Lobyshev in Penelopa and Vitya in Bezdel'nik both suffer from a form of Avidya; a state of self-delusion and suffering for unknown reasons:

... the drift of suffering minds which, blinded still by Avidya (Ignorance) meshed in their own illusion-fed desires, have not yet faced the fact of suffering, and its cause, and the Way which leads to the end of it. Of such men it is said that they stand in their light and wonder why it is dark²⁵.

In Bitov's own illustration of the process of self-enlightenment he refers to a man walking in a dark, dense forest who on only one occasion crosses a point where the sun penetrates the darkness, allowing him to see all around him for a split second.²⁶

Bitov's characters of the Aptekarsky ostrov cycle encounter a situation in which they either have to act or abdicate responsibility. For Bitov the clue to enlightenment is through 'an act' (postupok); a point made clear in Puteshestvie k drugu detstva. The Buddhist term for "action" is Karma. However, Bitov's postupok is fundamentally different; Karma is inseparable from the notion of Rebirth.

For Buddhists, whatsoever a man reaps, that has he also sown.

Karma, though literally 'act', 'doing' or 'deed', is at once 'cause', 'effect', and 'the law which equilibrates the two'. It is Newton's third law of motion that Action and Reaction are equal and opposite, applied to the moral and all other realms of sentient life²⁷. In his writing Bitov is not concerned with the next life, though he believes that man is master of his own destiny and has the power to change his condition through action. It is not so much a question of metaphysics for Bitov as the actual here and now, the psychological process of thought, action and reaction that a man undergoes at a given and significant moment in his everyday life. Retribution cannot lie beyond the individual in some other distant life-form; Bitov's character can either fulfil the demand of the moment or degenerate back into a state of blind ignorance. On the other hand, Karma is not the first step towards inevitable self-enlightenment, though it may create the conditions in which awakening can take place²⁸.

As previously mentioned, the greater link between Bitov and Buddhism is the existence of the Koan, a concept in Zen Buddhism principally associated with

Rinzai Zen. In Zhizn', Bitoy no longer makes the koan the final point in the story, which is then left open-ended as in the Aptekarsky Ostroy cycle. Bitoy uses the koan as a means of achieving the desired end of self-enlightenment through perception. Such a process, including the use of devices such as the koan, is fully in keeping with Zen:

The process of Zen is a leap from thinking to knowing, from second-hand to direct experience. For those unable to make the leap for themselves a bridge must be built which, however rickety, being built for the occasion before being flung away will land the traveller on the 'other shore' of enlightenment²⁹.

At regular intervals throughout Zhizn', Sergei arrives at a question which is insoluble by the intellect. The questions are strategically placed on Sergei's path towards self-knowledge, they are the 'bridges' which carry him on. The presence of his baby son provides the first step:

Он удивлялся, глядя на сына, удивлялся
наивно и простовато. И, приближаясь к истине
примитива и к вере, даже добродушно не ус-
межался над собой, думая такие, например,
вещи: откуда он взялся такой? 30

It is principally Sergei's consciousness of a link between himself and other human beings that leads him to a higher level of perceptivity. Thus we have seen the union he experiences with his vision of the woman standing at the other end of the railway station. The form of koan is that of self-questioning of a mystery he is unable to solve:

... он был с ней когда-то, что-то
между ними было, .. Приснилось, может?
Да нет, не было, не забыл бы; придумал,
пожалуй... Но нет, какое-то согласие,
какая-то нить уже протягивалась между
ними, и оба ощущали её, .. 31

Sergei's path towards self-enlightenment is made more difficult by an intellect that seeks to rationalise even the lost spontaneous urges and feelings. Sergei justifies a trip to town, for example, when he is really motivated by escapism from work and an inner need for the atmosphere of city life. It is the purpose of Zen to pass beyond such false justifications of the intellect, which are only symptoms of a thought-machine which readily becomes a cage or workshop for handling secondhand material 32.

Bitoy deliberately chooses the countryside as the setting for Zhizn', enabling Sergei to acquire 'knowledge' first-hand through the senses and intuition. The process is compounded by his son's natural intuition and vision. Sergei has to return to a simple, childlike view of the world:

При незнании того, что думало его дитя, совершенно определенная связь, казалось ему, устанавливается между ними. Причем скорее в этой связи в подчинении находился он, а не сын, скорее он видел глазами сына. /Жизнь, р.96./

The step back into childhood denotes a rejection of formalised patterns of thought and rationalisation. It is an acting-out of Sergei's own literary views on formlessness; a dispensing with 'conventions' (uslovnost'). But the process is achieved only by self-effort; salvation will not come by faith in another's power. Such self-effort is a precept of Zen itself (Jiriki)³³. Though self-effort is clear on the part of Sergei, who finds what he has been unconsciously, though stubbornly, searching for³⁴, this is true of neither Lobyshev nor Vitya, who find themselves in unsolicited situations. On the other hand, all are subjected to a breaking-down of the bars of the intellect, so that the mind is freed for the light of Enlightenment.

In the Aptekarsky ostrov cycle, the characters achieve self-understanding without a strong sense of happiness or a glimpse of a higher, eternal life force. Kirill Kapustin achieves a limited sense of union with nature for a split second, but the end result is uncertain. However, the circumstances of Kirill's mystical revelation is important; it takes place in the countryside on top of a hill in the fullness of nature. The 'privileged moment' is also of unexpected suddenness and described vaguely in a few lines. The narrator of Prizyvnik points to the conclusion that should be drawn:

Это такое индивидуальное чувство, но именно оно роднит нас с миром. И оно же делает одного человека отличным от другого. 35

Zhizn' marks out a slow process of awakening, circumstance building on circumstance; childlike perception combines with visions of a mystical union of separate human existences. The intermittent wind and power of nature in the background slowly release Sergei's bonds to organised city life. Sergei's increasing state of perceptivity reaches a climax which has the characteristics of a 'privileged moment', a point of supreme mystical clarity:

Он ощущал нечто гениальное в этой назывной простоте вещей и слов, и ему казалось, он находится на каком-то высшем пороге, за которым-то всё и начинается, и что на этом пороге новой логики нового мышления, нового мира, наверно, что редко кто стоял. 36

Sergei undergoes an intensification of consciousness whilst out with his son in the countryside. The notion of such an experience has been debated at length and is a well-known phenomenon in many literary works. Baudelaire, Proust and Rilke present similar moments in their writing. Life as experienced during such moments is quite different from what is normally meant by the terms 'life' and 'existence'. The notion of a separate Self disappears, consciousness expands to embrace external things, physical and mental spheres are perceived as identical or at least inseparable. External reality becomes a part of the self. Jephcott characterises the onset of the 'privileged moment' as a heightening of sensations coupled with a unification of all the parts of awareness³⁷.

Sergei experiences a perfect symmetry in nature, which suggests an eternal accord between people and inanimate objects:

И это всё было действительно так - и луг, и мальчик, и поезд, ещё корова с теленком, и он с сыном... всё это на какое-то длящееся мгновение, совпав на одной прямой, образовало как бы ось, и в этом была словно бы самая большая правда из всех, что он с упорством искал или находил. 38

The perfect axis appears to extend ad infinitum, and Sergei reacts with an effusion of great happiness. The vision of unified symmetry in nature strikes him with such force that he is momentarily dispossessed of all his everyday purposes and faculties. His experience is like a sudden "explosion" (vzryv³⁹) which empties him, but in a pleasant way. The distinction between subject and object is blurred. A transcendental experience ensues in which Sergei's inner life flows and unites with the life-force that pervades all things. The Self detaches itself from the body and merges with the world around.

Жизнь его, взорвавшаяся, разбрызганная, как бы разлилась и наполнила все содержанием и жизнями. Он чувствовал себя богом, нигде и во всем, обнимавшим и пронизывающим мир. 40

Bitov, like Proust in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, recognises, firstly, the

lost perception of childhood years, and secondly, the existence of a higher dimension. Without such a dimension life is incomplete and even incomprehensible. One is left with the impression of a metaphysical realm, cut off from the everyday world, to which the Self can transport itself and suffer the disintegration of its own separateness in an act of union. Like Proust, Bitov would agree that there is a state of being incomparably superior to everyday life within man's reach if he can pull himself out of the deadening state of routine existence. Sergei achieves a state of happy fulfilment as an end result:

И Сергею казалося, что это тот самый мир
и покой, который он будет вспоминать
всю свою жизнь - ведь жизнь неизвестно
как ещё может повернуться. 41

Zhizn' is one of the few stories to end on a note of happiness and fulfilment, yet no reasoned analysis can provide a rational explanation for the events. Sergei has a mystical experience; there is no underlying logic. Such is the teaching of Zen, which seeks to develop the mind to the limits of thought and philosophy and then drive it to the verge of a precipice. Sergei's experience is itself a koan for the reader; it defies the intellect, an example of spiritual fact to be intuited and not understood.

Sergei's mystical experience bears many of the outward characteristics of Satori in Zen. It is that state of consciousness wherein the pendulum of the opposites has come to rest, where both sides of the coin are equally valued and immediately seen, when the fetters of time and space have for the moment fallen away⁴².

At first it is reached in flashes which come and go. Later it comes in profound meditation or when the mind, by this device or that, is raised to its highest plane. Satori is seeing into one's own nature, and that Nature is not one's own.⁴³

Sergei's enlightenment contrasts with his previous condition of ignorance and darkness. He achieves a moment which liberates him from the everyday world of the city and work, after this the parameters of everyday life are restored. Satori exists only when time and space are transcended and the individual being becomes a part of eternity. Zen allows for such a state of perception in those who are not disciples of its own philosophy. For it is clear that Sergei is no Buddhist himself, nor is any mention made of it in the story. Yet it is present in Bitov's own thoughts and transferred to a literary image, though not necessarily consciously. Above all, Bitov's beliefs concur with Zen Buddhism

in the dynamic pursuit of self-knowledge. He is more concerned with the "travelling" than the "arriving", however, because Zen seeks spiritual truth as its end. Both use the same techniques, but the emphasis is different, compare:-

1. Самоосознание - это процесс, это подвижно, это реально /в зенбуддистском смысле/. Мне кажется в первых своих книгах,.. - я занимался именно темой самоосознания или отсутствия его;.. 44

2. Zen wearies of learning about it and strives to KNOW.⁴⁵

Bitov's use of Zen techniques such as koan and Satori in his search for perception is wholly original, though the search for new meaning is not. Todd has pointed to an engaged creative search for values, dimensions and ultimate meanings in his study of the spiritual in Soviet literature⁴⁶. He pinpoints the alienation which is common in Bitov's writing as well as the general preoccupation with the mystery of life and death among writers of the sixties. Gasiorowska refers to the theme of byt, the open and generally unhappy endings.⁴⁷ Zhizn' is concerned both with byt and self-questioning, but there is the clear suggestion of a mystical solution which, on the contrary, can fulfil a man and bring happiness. On the other hand, Bitov is advocating a particular approach to life and state of mind, rather than a prescription for guaranteed happiness. The ending in Zhizn' departs from previous stories of the 'inward' cycle by combing the optimistic element for the 'outward' cycle.

Similarities can be drawn between Zhizn' and certain of Vasily Belov's stories. Belov's hero, Ivan, in Privychnoe delo⁴⁸ senses a communion with nature as though part of him corresponds to the same eternal life--force that Sergei experiences. Ivan ceases to be aware of himself, feels his Self merging with the snow and the sun⁴⁹, whilst in the fullness of nature Ivan loses account of time which also ceases to exist. Moreover, Ivan thinks back to his small child who has no sense of time, Ivan, too, experiences childlike perception. However, Belov is satisfied merely to portray Ivan's happiness in nature as a prelude to the tragic events of the story leading to his wife's death. Ivan has always lived in the country, his pantheistic view of the countryside has remained with him as he has grown up in nature. This naive, yet instinctive philosophy of the world is brought into doubt by death. Ivan's conclusion lies in his realisation of himself as a finite being amid the infinity of nature. By comparison, Sergei starts with little real perception of himself, either as a part of nature like Ivan Afrikanovitch, or as a member of the community of Man. Ivan Afrikanovitch is alive to himself as a part

of an eternal nature, although his self-awareness is naive and needs to be rethought in the face of tragedy. Bitov concentrates on a step-by-step approach to cosmic consciousness and the psychological process of self-perception in the apparently soulless individual.

Ivan and Sergei both achieve a greater degree of self-perception, but each in different ways and from different stances - Ivan the peasant and Sergei the intellectual writer and town-dweller. Each has to rediscover a new identity in the face of the external world. But whereas Sergei accepts that he is in search of something eternal, Ivan is forced into reassessing his situation after his wife's death. Both men are the central pivot of the story, irresponsible towards their wives and represented against a backdrop of eternal nature. Ironically Ivan has to return to the town whilst Sergei finally senses an ultimate peace in the countryside.

Bitov's message is essentially more positive than Belov's; whereas Belov examines the way in which an individual copes with a trauma and is finally forced to leave home, Bitov seeks to lead the reader along a particular path to a philosophical vision of man's place in the universe and his achievement of happiness. Unlike Bitov, Belov does not use the Zen technique, but otherwise, modes of narration are very similar. Internal monologue interspersed with the author's narration is common to both stories. Both authors seek to step inside their main character in order to achieve sincerity in their depiction. The technique of the ending is different; for Belov it is a closed one, but Bitov the reader is left to fathom out the meaning for himself. Bitov's open-ended conclusion is fully in accordance with the Zen Buddhist view of thrusting the question back into the questioner's mind and with the Zen emphasis on the 'breaking' and not on the 'chain'⁵⁰.

Although in Bitov Zen Buddhism is neither ideology nor dogma, but merely the framework for self-perception and self-realisation, it is clearly an unacceptable formula within the precepts of Socialist Realism. No critic, East or West, has recognised the similarity of approach between Bitov and that of Zen, though the philosophy itself is not unknown to other Soviet writers of the period⁵².

It is indeed this metaphysical content of Bitov's stories that is a source of severe criticism on the part of the Soviet authorities⁵¹. This was the reason given for Bitov's mere toleration as a writer by the state in contrast to the positive encouragement many other Soviet writers receive. In a quotation from Lenin, Motyashov points to the fact that Zhizn' reflects a view contrary to dialectical materialism:

"... Признание каких-либо неизменных элементов, "неизменной сущности вещей" и т.д. не есть материализм, а есть метафизический, т.е. антидиалектический материализм". 53 (My emphasis)

Motyashov is unsure how to describe the views expressed in Zhizn'; Bitov's ideas are seen as philosophical idealism at worst and metaphysical materialism at best ⁵⁴. Motyashov's comparison of Bitov with Olesha is an interesting one, for the 'philistine heroes' (obyvateli) of Olesha's world are seen as the same as in Bitov's. For the Establishment, Bitov's hero, Sergei, is negative insofar as he is devoid of both class and social awareness. Sergei is certainly not a "positive hero" according to the principles of Socialist Realism. Nor does the story itself possess the necessary characteristics of that prescriptive framework for literature. On the other hand, it has been published on two separate occasions: * in 1967, as the story that gave its name to an entire collection, and in 1972 in the significantly entitled collection, Obraz zhizni. Each collection was published by a different publishing house ⁵⁵. Zhizn' clearly flies in the face of those critics who argue that Socialist Realism exists as the only viable formula for creative writing. For not even narodnost' survives in Zhizn' as Hosking claims it does in Belov's Privychnoe delo ⁵⁶. Neither is there any evidence of partiinnost' or ideinnost'. The optimism in the ending is also in no way comparable to the that expected in works of Socialist Realism.

Zhizn' is a work whose apparent thematic inadequacies have been overlooked by the Soviet authorities for the sake of its values as a traditional type of lyrical story ⁵⁷. The beauty of its lyrical interludes have been recognised in the West as well as in the Soviet Union ⁵⁸. But it would be incorrect to interpret the main theme of the story as lyrical rather than philosophical. As one Western critic states, it is a story that can be read on many levels: an account of the normal anxieties of a young urban adult and professional, as well as a study of creativity and aesthetics, and their associated problems ⁵⁹. But Bitov's own confessed aim in Zhizn' is one of self-realisation through self-perception ⁶⁰.

Both Deming Brown and Anninsky, respected critics on each side of the East-West divide, recognise the exploration without the exact nature of the discovery.

* Zhizn' also reappears in Voskresny den', (Sov. Ross., 1980)

... лейтмотив „Дачной местности“:
пустоту заполнить нечем, потому что тем,
чем он собирался её заполнить ... этим
не хотелось. 61

Deming Brown wavers on the threshold of interpreting Zhizn' as search for self-knowledge, for he latches on to the spirit of the writing without specific comment on Sergei's actual achievement; it is

moral exploration and discovery of increasing realisation that there are multiple and various legitimate avenues to the truth about human existence, and that no single system of belief is final and immutable 62.

However, Bitov has pursued a particular path of belief which leads to a climax in Zhizn'. Anninsky recognises the hero's development from a state of 'mechanical living' which he terms mekhanichnost'. 'Mechanical living' is a state which could more appropriately be termed poluson. Brown's view of Bitov as primarily a psychological writer who would accept no belief as final and immutable is too simplistic an approach. Bitov's hero treads a path that leads to a revelation suggestive of another world-view. Bitov is not writing a roman à thèse, but his exploration does take a definitive course. The ending points the reader in a particular direction rather than divesting him of all notions of value-systems and leaving him naked and aimless. In Zhizn', the path follows those time-honoured signposts of poluson, koan and Satori. As regards the former, poluson or mekhanichnost', it is only with the aid of a system of moral values that one can triumph according to Anninsky:

... система моральных ценностей отрывает
человека от этой механичности. 63

Sergei cannot be classed as a 'moral' hero, nor does the revelation lead to a sudden change of heart in his character or behaviour. During the final part of the story when two friends call on the hero's family, Sergei starts flirting with the woman. Sergei's wife remains a nameless and faceless individual to whom he passes the baby when in difficulty. She forms part of the hero's surroundings throughout the story. The other characters are equally vague and indistinct; they enter the story through the prism of Sergei's perception. A key figure is the friend's girl-friend who is the embodiment and realisation of the vision Sergei experienced at the station in the early part. She becomes an extension of the eternity of Sergei's own mind. He feels an unspoken communion in her presence even when they are neither physically close nor speaking to each

other. The reader is unsure of their relationship; we know only that (he) Ivan vaguely recognises a long-standing acquaintance from the past (and he) feels an irrational and inexplicable jealousy at the couple's apparent affair. Forgotten feelings from adolescent years return: Sergei feels his head being caressed by an older woman and the readiness for love he experienced as an adolescent. The return of past sensations is re-echoed in Bitov's Dni cheloveka when Monakhov thinks back to his childhood. We are aware that Bitov's themes recurs in different forms in a number of his early works, probably due to the writer's attempt to produce several stories in quick succession, if not at the same time.

Sergei is powerless to control the thoughts and sensations that rise to his conscious mind from within settling for a moment before being carried like pieces of fluff on the wind. The girl-friend and the wind are linked by the refrain from Novella Matveeva's popular song:

Какой большой ве-тер
напал на наш ос-тров
и снял с домов кры-ши
как с молока пе-ну ... 64

The girl personifies the wind, a symbol of an invisible living force from eternity which disrupts the notion of the everyday stability (the house) of man (the island). Finally, the various themes are interwoven in that same atmosphere of formlessness, vagueness and fragmentation that pervades the story after Sergei's moment of revelation. The irregular and threadless pattern of events in the final part reflect both Sergei's own jumbled mind and the disarray brought by the wind. Whereas the girl-friend departs with the wind into the city; her boy-friend simply dissovles (rastvorilsya),⁶⁵ thus confirming the unreality of his presence. The refrain of the song is reiterated by the wind casting aside a piece of cardboard which seeks for one moment to resist it. The same image of resistance to wind is twice repeated in the same words, firstly before the couple's departure, secondly, on Sergei's way home. Each time the cardboard reacts in the same way:

... лист вставал, замирал на мгновение,
затем шлепал по насыпи и прокатывался,
лежа и пыля, и снова его переворачи-
вало, и на какой-то краткий, но очень
длительный по ощущению миг он замирал
и, дрожа, сопротивлялся ветру. 66

The piece of cardboard represents stages in man's development: growing up,

standing up, walking, sleeping, changing and resistance to the life-force.

It is the wind which raises him up, gives him life and finally casts him down again. Ironically, Man proudly confronts the very force that created him, unaware of his own weakness in face of the life-force. Man is as blind to his situation as the wind is invisible.

The theme of childhood recurs during the final scene in the symbol of the child's pistol. Up to this time, Sergei is only aware of childhood reminiscences intruding on his conscious mind. The pistol is a childhood anachronism which leaves with the couple under the boyfriend's arm, thus it accompanies the woman who is herself a part of Sergei's childhood fantasy. The couple's departure represents a conscious farewell to childhood for Sergei.

The final paragraph exudes comfort, contentedness and peace. The struggle with the wind and the perceptions it engenders is over. Sergei accepts a new vision of life in the happiness of home and family closeness. The final words nonetheless speak of the restlessness of life's process; there is no hint of finality, merely that one individual has found a path to peace and happiness;

... - ведь жизнь неизвестно как ещё
может повернуться. 67

Life is seen as a living force acting on Man's fate like the wind with the cardboard sheet. Sergei does not seek to formulate any new philosophy of life, the reader is aware only of a vague spiritual change having taken place. Sergei feels he will no longer need to leave his wife; he does not seek to rationalise this change of heart, it simply IS:

... жена, бесконечное его знакомство,..
- была рядом, и никуда не надо было Сергею
уезжать от неё,.. 68

Footnotes

1. Obraz zhizni, (Mol.gv. 1972), p.74.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.75.
4. The story was first published as Dachnaya mestnost' in the collection of the same name published by Sov. Ross. in 1967. Its correct title was finally given in Obraz zhizni, from which these references are taken.
5. Obraz zhizni, p.77.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p.78.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p.93.
10. Ibid., p.89.
11. Ibid., p.84.
12. Ibid., p.103.
13. V.I. Protchenko, Povest' 60-kh -- nachala 70-kh godov in Sovremennaya sovetskaya povest 1941-1970, (Nauka 1975), p.161.
14. Obraz zh., p.82.
15. Ibid., p.82.
16. Ibid., p.82-3
17. Ibid., p.99.
18. Apt.ost. (1968), p.138.
19. Takoe dolgoe detstvo (1965), p.99.
20. Obraz zhizni, p.100
21. Edmond Holmes, The Creed of Buddha,(Greenwood, 1973) p.80
22. Obraz zh., p.78.
23. Ibid., p.76.
24. Christmas Humphreys, Buddhism, (3rd. edn. Pelican 1962), p.152.
25. Christmas Humphreys, ibid, p.20.
26. "The Moscow Interviews".p.234
27. Christmas Humphreys (1962), op.cit., p.100.

28. Ibid., p.152
29. Christmas Humphreys, Zen Buddhism, (Allen & Unwin, 1971), p.116.
30. Obraz zh., p.78
31. Ibid., p.100
32. Christmas Humphreys, Buddhism (1962), p.183.
33. Ibid., p.170
34. Obraz zh., p.97.
35. Takoe, (1965), op.cit., p.199.
36. Obraz zh., p.96.
37. E.F.N. Jephcott, (1972), op.cit.
38. Obraz zh., p.97.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., p.105.
42. Christmas Humphreys (1962), op.cit., p.186.
43. Ibid.
44. Letter, 12.8.78., Appendix vii., p.245
45. Christmas Humphreys (1962), op.cit., p.180.
46. A. Todd, 'The Spiritual in Recent Soviet Literature', Survey, No. 66, (1968), p.95.
47. X. Gasiorowska, 'On Happiness in Recent Soviet Fiction', R.L.T., No.9, (1974), p.473.
48. First published in Sever, 1, (1966), and then Set'skie povesti, (Mol.gv., 1971).
49. V. Belov, Set'skie povesti, (Mol. gv. 1971), pp.134-135.
50. Christmas Humphreys (1962), op.cit., p.185.
51. This was made clear to the author of this thesis by a representative of the pervy otdel of Voronezh State University in March 1975.
52. See Zavadskaya, E.V. Vostok na zapade, (Nauka, M.1970).
53. I. Motyashov, Otvetstvennost' khudozhnika, V.L., 12, (1968), p.16.
54. Ibid.

55. Dachnaya mestnost', (Sov.Ross. 1967); Obraz zhizni (Mol. gv. 1972).
56. G.A. Hosking, 'The Russian Peasant Rediscovered. Village Prose of the 60' Slavic Review, 32,4 (1973).
57. N.A. Grosnova, V.A. Kovalev, (eds), Sovremennaya sovetskaya povest' 1941-70. (Ak.Nauk, SSSR. Nauka 1975), p.166.
58. Deming Brown, (1978) op.cit., p.197.
59. Ibid., p.196.
60. Letter 12.8.78. p. 245
61. L. Anninsky, Tochka opory, Don, 6, (1968), p.181.
62. Deming Brown, op.cit., p.182.
63. Anninsky, op.cit., p.180.
64. Obraz zh., p. 101.
65. Ibid., p.104.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid., p.105.
68. Ibid.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Perception beyond Life:

Infant'ev, syn svyashchemnika

One of the least known, yet most intriguing, of Bitov's early stories is Infant'ev, syn svyashchemnika, published in the collection Aptekarsky ostrov in 1968 and in Dni cheloveka in 1976.* It has been largely passed over by the critics on both sides of the East-West divide, though its value was finally recognised by Russian Literature Triquarterly, which published Carol Avins's translation in 1973¹.

In the eyes of its Soviet editors it has suffered from its religious overtones and its title was altered to the name of the leading character, Infant'ev, leaving out 'son of the priest' (syn svyashchemnika)². In discussion with Bitov³, it is clear that the second part of the title is significant enough not to be omitted. Infant'ev is an old Russian clerical name and forms part of Bitov's subtle characterisation of his hero. The story has nothing to do with Bitov's novel, Dni cheloveka, although it is confusingly published as the final part of Rol', roman-punktir in Dni cheloveka. A glance at the dates of the previous story, Les (1965, 1972), illustrates the actual time sequence of publication. Infant'ev syn svyashchemnika has "1961, 1965" after it⁴, substantiating the fact that it pre-dates the final part of Dni cheloveka. It is thus the last of Bitov's early short stories⁵.

The storyline is a simple one in common with other stories of the period, such as Belov's Privychnoe delo, and it continues the theme of death from Bitov's earlier story, Yubilei. It concerns an older man whose wife dies of cancer and examines the extraordinary events that take place in the character's

* Also in Voskresny den' (1980)

mind during and after the funeral. It has many of the characteristics of the Aptekarsky ostrov cycle: Infant'ev initially displays the same symptoms as Lobyshev; he exists without thought or feeling. The realisation of his wife's forthcoming death wakes Infant'ev up and reveals that there is a living, human side to his cold, dispassionate character. Indeed, some Soviet critics have recognised Infant'ev's resurrection as the only point to the story:

... с этой минуты с Инфантьевым и происходит переоценка самого себя, своей жизни, взаимоотношений с женой. Он жил с ней и не замечал её, жил в полусне. 6

Only one Soviet review of Aptekarsky ostrov suggests that Infant'ev is in a different category from the other stories in the collection and acknowledges Infant'ev as the beginning of the mature Bitov⁷. This view is correct in that the story itself was not completed until a year after Zhizn'. Nonetheless, Infant'ev contains similar characteristics to Bitov's earlier stories: an intense concern with the psychological processes going on inside a single character; a narrative viewpoint which engages the reader's sympathy and attention despite being in the third person. The resulting return to a confessional tone contrasts with the chatty, personal style of the travelogues. But Infant'ev is important for two special additional features: firstly, the extensive use of fantasy, and secondly, the phenomenon of a manifestation from the dead. The latter develops a new dimension to Bitov's investigations with the introduction of extra-sensory perception and the existence of life after death. Bitov's use of inference and suggestion resembles Pushkin's Pikovaya dama in the depiction of the supernatural. Objective reality and the character's fantasies intermingle so that the former breaks down and leaves the reader in confusion as to the actual events.

The characterisation of the hero is masterful, for the reader is left with a stream of impressions without definite line or shape. We know Infant'ev only by his second name; his past is equally shrouded in mystery. Both his name and his actions suggest he is linked to the Orthodox church, yet he denies this to others. The fact that Infant'ev buries his wife in a beautiful cemetery suggests that he has connections in high places:

... захоронения там производятся
в исключительных случаях. У Инфантьева
достало связей добиться. 8

During the burial sequence, Bitov employs a narrative technique similar to the French nouveau roman. In his endeavour to portray the actual thoughts occurring to Infant'ev at the time of the burial, Bitov completely dispenses with objective reality and a chronological time sequence. The vision of the burial scene oscillates between present, past and future, between the positive and the hypothetical as if it were a cinema-screen on which various episodes, true or false, were being projected in a jumbled, incoherent order. This creates the effect of a dream in the narrative, for only in dreams can things be seen in patches of exaggerated realism out of sequence. Sometimes we see inside Infant'ev, sometimes we watch him from the outside. The interior monologue present in Bitov's other stories here takes the form of a filmstrip seen from within, with a few sound effects and an occasional snatch of dialogue.

The burial is pictured in three distinct visions within Infant'ev's mind as he looks back on events from some distant point in the future. Infant'ev does not register the events of the burial, merely noticing certain meaningful details which give us insight into his subconscious. Though we would expect

the main character to be under stress, Infant'ev feels as though he is not participating. He returns to his childhood world of the past and so distances himself from the reality of the present,

Он бежал словно мальчик по поручению
взрослых, задыхаясь от ответственности
и доверия - такое забытое чувство ... 9

The funeral becomes a bizarre external event seen through the dispassionate eyes of the narrator and those of the child. The coffin is referred to not as such, but as a 'long box', with the words a child would use:

... там происходило что-то явно постороннее, не имевшее к нему отношения, и непонятно было, зачем он участвует, должен участвовать в странных передвижениях людей с длинным ящиком,.. IO

It is the narrator who adds the explanation that they are in a procession; the use of brackets does not impinge on the childlike vision of the 'strange movements' of people. Infant'ev's ordered world of objective reality is fragmented to the extent that the reader is unsure, firstly, whether it is in reality Infant'ev's wife being buried, and, secondly, whether it is Infant'ev who is there as a man or merely providing us with a childhood dream from the past. There is the suggestion that Infant'ev is remembering his own father's burial as a boy. Infant'ev's father, if a priest, would have had the rituals and ceremonial procession apparent in this disjointed description. Bitov is interested only in his character's actual thoughts, not in filling in information to give a comprehensible whole. The narrator is himself uncertain of Infant'ev's background, and is interested in giving us an account of events as they occur to Infant'ev without recourse to the past or future:

Пожалуй, он ни разу в жизни не был в церкви, про себя он сказал "не был внутри". II

It is the narrator's 'as far as I know' (pozhalui) which is significant, with its implicit assertion of the narrator's own independent objectivity. Though Infant'ev denies any religious belief, we are told that he shows an automatic unconscious respect for the church - he bows his head and takes his hands from his pockets¹². The funeral service has the same existential approach, similar to the narrative description of Meursault's murder of the Arab in Camus's L'Etranger. It is as though Infant'ev acts in spite of himself in a dimension where time has no significance.

The narrative itself reflects the confusion of time. The point on page 132, where Infant'ev leaves the procession to look for the grandmother, is in actuality the final one of the burial sequence. The chronological order is reversed. The interior film is running backwards. Thus the point where Infant'ev meets his own procession and wanders into the church service occurs prior to the funeral procession. The priest giving the sermon at the service is the same one leading the procession. Finally, Infant'ev finds the grandmother on page 135 weeping by the coffin in church;

Бабушка, наконец узнав его, засуетившись, прятала комочек платка в рукав и бочком отходила уже от гроба. I3

Infant'ev refers to the grandmother as maimenka, thus underlying the childhood theme with this affectionate diminutive for mother. Though not in chronological sequence, it is the meeting with the grandmother in church that forms the climax to the events. On entering the church, Infant'ev feels an intangible, joyful aura of unity and harmony emanating from the congregation:

Они вдруг замерли, сориентированные в одном направлении и устремлении, они были теперь что-то одно, слитное. Но в этом уже не было горя. I4

There is the implicit suggestion of a religious awakening in Infant'ev on joining this communion of souls. The unity of being and loss of individual identity through religious devotion acts as a preparation for the final sequence of events at the graveside: firstly Infant'ev has an intensely personal experience of those around him merging and spinning into infinity,

... и странное разбегание поворачи-
вающихся лиц за спиной и удаление
их в бесконечность. 15

It is a further example of the mystical experience of a 'privileged moment'. The whirling of the objective world about him is accompanied by bright light and music. Infant'ev is the epicentre of the explosion of senses,

И этот снег с солнцем, и протяжный
музыкальный звук, и какое-то безмерное
разбегание от него, как от центра
взрыва, убегание' ... 16

The 'privileged moment' is the point of supreme self-awareness, Bitov has never before rationalised such a milestone in a human life or put a name to it.

Instead, he recognises it as an experience that does happen in everyday life.

The phenomena match up with similar moments described elsewhere in modern literature and are familiar to critics. Kenneth Clarke describes the experience as one of

those flashes when the object at which we
are gazing seems to detach itself from the
habitual flux of impressions and becomes
intensely clear and important for us. We
may not experience these illuminations
very often in our busy adult lives but
"they were common in our childhood" and
given half a chance we could achieve them
still.

17

The 'privileged moment' is here linked to childhood experience: Infant'ev returns to a state of childlike vision during the burial sequence which allows him to achieve a higher plane of consciousness. He has a vision which

is complete, inter-related and musicalised. The intensification of sensation produces feelings of vagueness and disorientation. But Infant'ev does not become totally as a child. He enjoys childlike perception for a limited time. Unlike Proust, Bitov does not view childhood merely as a lost paradise bliss unequalled in adult life¹⁸; he recognises the greater powers of perceptivity that a child possesses but concludes that this is barren in itself unless it leads to some ultimate knowledge about the meaning of life. Bitov uses childhood as the key to the door of individual perception. Although Proust admits the possibility of a higher dimension without which life is incomplete, he writes essentially about time and memory. Bitov and Proust agree on the process by which perception is dulled: as the individual grows older, childlike perception recedes behind a wall formed of the concepts by which the adult interprets experience of life. Bitov tries to take the notion of the wall one step further: the wall is a barrier which divides a person into two selves, one of which has the power to dominate the other causing stultification of the mind and inertness (poluson). Proust sees this wall as the intellectualising activity of the mind; Bitov interprets it as the adult tendency to close one's eyes to reality, shutting the world off.

One essential point of difference lies in the nature of that other world into which one achieves a momentary insight. Proust's concept of the 'lost homeland' can be understood in purely psychological terms. Bitov's 'reality' has a further mystical dimension: a higher reality exists in its own right outside and inside Man. In the burial scene, Infant'ev does not merely experience a vision from his past, though there is a clear suggestion that a similar sequence of events occurred in his childhood, but Infant'ev's suppressed inner self undergoes a kind of cosmic union with an external 'reality'. The shock and psychological turmoil of the wife's burial have

disturbed Infant'ev's facility even to rationalise or explain what happens to him. Thus we have to reach our own conclusion.

As the story progresses, the disorientation of the funeral gives way to an apparent air of normality, though Infant'ev's pattern of life has changed. He regularly visits his wife's grave and thinks of her, whereas, previously, he had rarely considered her. It is the change that comes over Infant'ev after the 'privileged moment' that becomes increasingly significant for Bitov. In the other stories of the Aptekarsky ostrov cycle, the moment of self-perception usually occurs near the end of the story, but in Zhizn' and Infant'ev, it is near the very beginning. Bitov increasingly adopts the view that a moment of insight cannot be the end in itself, so we must closely follow the process of enlightenment through to examine the nature of the experience in the long term. At first, Infant'ev returns to normality, but his mind has been opened to a mystical experience for the first time. In the second part of the story Infant'ev's facility for such visions develops into a psychic experience when he sees his wife on a tram several months after her burial:

... и Ната, вдруг она входит в трамвай,
а за окнами ... небо ... и сосны, они
шумят, а она входит, тонкая, неслышная.
Входит, и-что же? - вдруг ему страшно так.
Нет, она живая. 19

The reader is unsure whether the death had unsettled Infant'ev's mind, but Bitov gives the reader no cause to think that Infant'ev is dreaming, fantasizing or simply insane. Infant'ev is as certain that she appears as Tonya is that the bol'shoi shar exists. The image is drawn with the same ambivalence as the old Countess's apparition in Pushkin's Pikovaya dama. For the reader wishing to approach the event scientifically there is the hint

of some external natural cause: 'precisely because of sun, and sky and pines'²⁰ (imenno potomu chto solntse, i nebo, i sosny). Perhaps Infant'ev is mesmerised by the surrounding sun and nature and so imagines the image of his wife. The same rational explanation could be given to the 'privileged moment', where it is 'this snow with the sun and the long drawn-out musical sound' (etot sneg s solntsem, i protyazhny muzykal'ny zvuk)²¹. A similar aberration of the mind brought about by the effect of the sun and environment is apparent in L'Etranger, when Meursault shoots the Arab:

everything began to reel before my eyes,
a fiery gust came from the sea, while the
sky cracked in two, from end to end, and
a great sheet of flame poured down through
the rift. . . 22

Yet Infant'ev's experience is so intense that for him the sun, sky and pine trees appear as part of his wife's aura rather than the instigators of a psychic vision. It is our opinion that Bitov is putting forward the proposition that such apparitions can take place in reality. Nor is this Bitov's first allusion to the possibility of life after death:

Я в комнате сидел под вечер
без огня
И вдруг гляжу:
Выходят из стены
Отец и мать,
На палки опираясь. 23

Bitov continues to enforce such a possibility throughout the story. Infant'ev admits he sees his wife in his dreams and thinks of her ringing the door-bell; though his experience on the tram is essentially different, the verisimilitude of the event is further reinforced by the old lady in the cemetery who claims to communicate with her dead son:

- Они живые, конечно, -сказала женщина.-
- Иначе как бы мы с ними разговаривали?
- Я как-то так не догадался рассудить,
- пораженный, протянул Инфантьев.
- Он даже приходит ко мне ... 24

The prospect of life after death is not one that has occurred to Infant'ev. His attitude remains ambivalent; at one and the same time he feels it to be perfectly natural and yet quite impossible²⁵. It is the link between eternal nature and life beyond death that convinces Infant'ev. Firstly, the old lady declares 'the other place' (tam) to be the blue sky²⁶. Secondly, the vibrant, living nature of the cemetery suggests to Infant'ev that there is no death:

А если небо чистое, и солнце, и сосны
шумят, и в воде отражаются клубки
облаков-нет тут смерти. 27

Moreover, Bitov is portraying an atmosphere which is real to him personally in the Shchuvalov cemetery, Leningrad, where his father was buried in 1977²⁸.

Infant'ev is Bitov's only story where the possibility of life beyond the grave is considered. It is not our opinion that Bitov is a religious man; his concern is merely to expose that wall of rationalisation that Man constructs to simplify his world into easily understandable concepts. In this case, Bitov presents the reader with a normal, average, non-thinking individual who is unable to account for events within the prevailing materialist philosophy of his age. At the end of the story Infant'ev finds that he faces an internal contradiction: he believes, firstly, that there is no such thing as life after death and secondly, that his dead wife is alive and regularly appears to him. The reader is left with Infant'ev's own contradiction to solve, but whereas Infant'ev finds some solution, we are not told what it is:

Да, так я не думал - повторял
Инфантьев. - Я думал, что это такое?
А это оказывается вот что. 29

The story does not categorically propose a religious explanation; such an ambiguity of interpretation has allowed the story to be published on two occasions. But although it appeared on the second as part of Dni cheloveka in 1976, the only comparison that can be drawn between the two stories is in the very theme of mystical communion with the dead which is further developed in Ies.

Footnotes

- 1 R.L.T., 6, (1973), op.cit.
- 2 The editors are K.M. Uspenskaya (Apt.ost.) and S. Shevelev (Dni cheloveka).
- 3 The Moscow Interviews, (1975). This point is not recorded in appendix v.
- 4 Dni cheloveka, p. 190.
- 5 See Appendix ii
- 6 S. Sergeev, (Review) Don, 2, (1969), p. 175.
- 7 A. Marchenko, Yunost', 8, (1969), p. 77.
- 8 Apt.ost., p. 13.
- 9 Ibid., p. 132
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid., p. 133.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid., p. 135.
- 14 Ibid., p. 136.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid., p. 126.
- 17 K. Clarke quoted in E.F.N. Jephcott, "Proust and Rilke: The Literature of Expanded Consciousness", (Chatto and Windus, 1972), p. 11.
- 18 Ibid., p. 258.
- 19 Apt.ost., p. 138.
- 20 Ibid., p. 138.

- 21 Ibid., p. 136.
- 22 Albert Camus, "The Outsider", (Penguin, 1961), p. 64.
- 23 A. Bitov, Bol'shoi shar, (Babushkina piala), p. 107.
- 24 Apt.ost. p. 145.
- 25 Ibid., p. 139.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid., p. 131.
- 28 Letter of 12.8.78, p. 243
- 29 Ibid., p. 146. N.B. In Voskresny den' (1980.) p.222 the word 'Love' (Lyubov') has been added to the story's ending, probably by the editor. This addition suggests a closed ending to the story and veers the reader away from the possibility of a supernatural explanation.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Dni cheloveka: Life in Microcosm

Bitov's major novel of the early period Dni cheloveka spans a total of six years. It was started at the end of 1960 and not completed until 1966. Its publication was no less protracted; it took a further decade for it to appear under the title Rol', roman-punktir, in the collection ironically entitled Dni cheloveka¹, which includes a number of chapters from Pushkinsky dom². Nonetheless, the novel marks the end of an important stage in Bitov's literary development. Dni cheloveka embraces many of the themes and ideas of the writer's other works of prose during this period. As its published sub-title suggests, the novel's progress and linear development resemble a dotted or broken line which continued during most of Bitov's early period unnoticed by the critics and Soviet publishing authorities. Dni cheloveka epitomises that inner search and exploration which characterises the early period, whilst the nature and system of its publication is more akin to that of Pushkinsky dom³.

The story concerns the spiritual and moral development of one man, Aleksei Monakhov, and centres on four significant points in his life from early adolescence to middle-age. The division into these four close and intense studies of his life at various intervals has allowed Bitov to publish each part as a separate story in its own right in the same way as Pushkinsky dom. The first part, Dver', (November 1960), was published in Bol'shoi shar (1963) and Aptekarsky ostrov (1968), while the second part, Sad (1962-3), appeared in Dachnaya mestnost' (1967). Both Dver' and Sad were linked in Obraz zhizni (1972). In this case Dver' is termed the prolog though it retains its own title of Dver'. No separate date is given for Dver',

moreover⁴. The third and fourth parts, Trety rasskaz (1964-66) and Les (1965-66) also appear separately; the former as Obraz⁵ and the latter as Uletayushchy Monakhov⁶. Obraz is published as a rasskaz and Les as a povest'. In the most complete published version, the correct names of each part are given, though there is the surprising and erroneous inclusion of Infant'ev as a fifth part to the novel. In an unpublished letter dated 21st September 1979, which I received during the final stages of the preparation of this thesis, Bitov informed me for the first time that there is a sequel to Les called Vkus. Though presented for publication as part of Dni cheloveka, Vkus was replaced with Infant'ev by the publisher. Unfortunately, at the time this thesis is going to press, no further information is available on the final part of Dni cheloveka, for this reason no analysis or commentary is made of Vkus in this chapter.

Further complications arise over the dates of completion, as Bitov writes in his personal letter to me,

... я переработал „Лес“ очень существенно в 72-м, а „Вкус“ даже ещё позже подвергся такому же переписыванию. 7

The dates '1965, 1972' which are appended to the end of Les confirm Bitov's later revision of Les in the 1970's and its first edition to be in the mid-sixties. However, from the dates given in previous collections, and supported by Bitov's letter of 21.11.79. it is clear that the last two parts of Dni cheloveka (Les and Vkus) were both written in the early and middle sixties and revised in the seventies. Bitov was unable to publish the completed work as a novel and even experienced difficulties and delays in publishing the parts. The appearance of Les was announced on the last page of Zvezda, No. 9, 1974 for a forthcoming issue. Its title was declared as Rol', and it finally appeared as Uletayushchy Monakhov in the August edition of Zvezda two years later. The publication of the fourth

part in a journal preceded the version of the novel in hard-back by only three months, as Dni cheloveka came out in November 1976. However, the number of variations in the text of the later version of Les in Dni cheloveka suggests that changes have taken place since the first completion of the novel in 1966. For the purposes of this thesis, the texts chosen for study are those given by Bitov under the heading, Rassказы i povesti 1961-1966⁸. Bitov confirms that the year 1966 marks the end of his second phase of literary activity. He started writing his major novel Pushkinsky dom in 1964, contrary to the foreword of the Western version which implies the first edition was complete by 1965⁹,

Первые сведения о романе „Пушкинский дом”
проникли к нам из Самиздата в 1965 году. 9

"новый" период намечается уже в 64м/1
вариант "П.Дома" ... /Письмо, 2I.II.79/

On the question of 'genre', Dni cheloveka cannot categorically be classified as a novel. Certainly it is closest to that form and we shall refer to it as such during the course of this chapter. Bitov has a strong aversion to such terms of simplification¹⁰. The work itself can be seen as the author's attempt not only to avoid the official norms of Socialist Realism expected in a roman, but also to break with such traditional forms which he views as an unrealistic vehicle of representation of life¹¹. In Infant'ev Bitov portrays memories of the past as being neither chronological nor clearly observed in all their detail by a recipient. On reflection, Infant'ev remembers only three significant points in time and their associated actions. Bitov carries this notion into the form of Dni cheloveka. Each age of man has its own watershed. Bitov asserts that such a potential turning-point in an individual's life can take place during a very short

period of time. In Dver', the age of the child-adolescent, the action occurs within less than twenty-four hours, a night and a morning. In Sad, the age of adolescent-adult, the events take place over five days from December 29th to January 2nd. In Trety rasskaz, the time sequence is almost identical to Dver', but during a period of early adulthood. Fourthly, Les concerns a man in middle age over a period of five days. There is a deliberate unity established in the structure of the novel; Dver' is juxtaposed with Trety rasskaz and Sad with Les. In the first and third parts action takes place within twenty-four hours, in the second and fourth, over five days.

The storyline principally concerns the development of a boy's love through adolescence to maturity. However, unlike Prizyvnik, where the theme of love is mentioned and not explored beyond Kirill's adolescent thoughts, Bitov carries the theme on in order to study its changing nature in respect of Aleksei Monakhov in each of his four main ages: childhood, youth, adulthood and middle age. The object of Monakhov's love remains the same older woman Asya in the first three parts, though it becomes apparent that love develops into lust in the third and fourth parts of the novel. Dni cheloveka is thus more akin to a saga and effectively marks the progressive "debunking" of the main character. Adulthood and physical maturity bring the will to deceive others and the loss of childhood innocence; the spontaneity of affection and feeling is slowly replaced by the characteristics of poshlost' evident in Lobyshev (Penelopa). The work is significant for its introduction of various sub-themes. Firstly, the problems of adolescence; the generation gap, first love and leaving home are developed more fully than in previous short stories. Secondly, the religious theme introduced in Infant'ev is particularly prevalent during the second part of the novel, Sad, which

allows for a Christian solution to Aleksei's adolescent problems. Les ends on a further insight into the cosmic consciousness of Man through knowledge of death. Bitov thus examines the progression of all the avenues of self-perception open to the individual within the unity and time-scale usual in a roman. The author moves on from the themes of adolescence and childhood in Dni cheloveka, which allows for a greater overall perspective of man's perception of himself in all his ages. The theme of Eternal Nature is developed through the symbols of the garden (Sad) and the forest (Les) and reaches a climax in the fourth part when the themes of cosmic consciousness, Nature and death merge.

The novel is well-structured around the four focal points of the ages of man's inner development. In Dver', the main character is referred to as mal'chik, a boy so infatuated with an older girl that he spends an entire night outside her girl-friend's door, waiting in vain for her return. He misses her whilst on an errand to buy butter for his mother. The presence of the mother in the storyline constitutes the secondary theme. In Sad, the theme of childish infatuation has developed into an uncompromising, though still ingenuous, love. The secondary theme further unfolds into a greater obstacle to the love of the main character for the same older woman, and takes on overtones of the generation conflict. The theme of love itself assumes a universal significance for the hero, now called Aleksei, and is given a religious meaning. Aleksei is on the point of finishing school, but his girlfriend, Asya, is five years older and separated from her husband.

The events in Trety rasskaz are ten years on. Whereas the secondary crisis in Sad revolves around Aleksei's decision to leave home and work for Asya's sake, in Trety rasskaz Aleksei is now called by his surname, Monakhov, and

has already married someone else who is expecting his baby. The universality of love which flows from God in Sad has been replaced by a corrupt and irresponsible sexual desire on the main character's part. Ironically, Monakhov finally achieves his aim in Dver' of gaining entry to Asya's at night with her encouragement. The theme of childhood purity has given way to soulless corruption and degeneration; love becomes lust.

In Les, the theme of lust gives way to death. The religious overtones of Sad re-occur as Monakhov comes to face the forthcoming prospect of his father's death. Moreover, the roles are reversed as Monakhov deceives his second wife in a manner similar to Asya's deception of him. The events of the story are a parody of Sad as Monakhov contemplates the actions of Lenechka, which resembles those of his own youth. The intertwining of the different themes from each stage of the storyline; throws further light on events past and present. The love theme no longer leads to self-perception as in Prizyvnik, though a search for paths to higher consciousness is still apparent. Each of life's ages offers a solution, and each appears correct for a fleeting moment only. The principal themes of love and death are reversed, as the now middle-aged and lecherous hero finally achieves a moment of cosmic consciousness through his father's death. By thus bringing all the major themes into play, Bitov creates a novel which consolidates the searchings of his earlier works. The inter-relationship of Bitov's themes to the various parts of Dni cheloveka as well as to his other stories is apparent only in a close analysis of the novel.

Dver' carries within its very title the obstacle to the search; the door is a symbol of the transition to maturity and understanding of the adult world. The events taking place behind the door are incomprehensible to the boy. All attempts to gain access are closed to him whether directly or

indirectly by telephone. Bitov portrays the child's world of longing and fantasy in Dver' using the stream-of-consciousness technique which draws us close to the inner workings of the boy's mind. The boy's feelings are frank, open and honest; there is a romantic aura to his thoughts unimpeded by the reality of the situation:

Вот он лежит больной и умирает. Бледный, худой. Она находит его наконец. Приходит к нему. Плачет. "Не плачь, я всегда любил тебя. Ты ни в чём не виновата. Она плачет, умоляет: всё будет иначе. - Нет, для меня уже ничего не будет ... " I2

The pace and direction of the narrative resemble Zheny net doma. The boy similarly vacillates between romantic illusion and hate (ya ub'yu ee!)¹³, though the rise and fall of emotional tone suggest the boy's heartfelt and all-consuming love for the girl. Like a gambler, the boy waits intently all night for the girlfriend. He is prepared to scandalise his mother with his absence by inflicting the same experience on his mother that he is suffering himself. The boy is aware he should respond to the situation like a grown-up; he insensitively repudiates his role as a child in front of Asya by rejecting the concern of his family for him:

Ты что, так тут всю ночь и просидел? Что наверно, у тебя дома творится!
-Чепуха! сказал мальчик. I4

The significance of this intense psychological study lies in the theme of deception. The boy is satisfied with Asya's words even though they do not deny his seemingly correct version of the night's events.

Ты там пробыла всю ночь. С этим парнем ...
- Глупый. Просто было поздно, и я осталась ночевать у подруги, понимаешь? А парень этот - её брат. Мы учились вместе. Он уехал этой ночью. Далекo. I5

The boy falsely convinces himself of her sincerity. Bitov presents us with a simple juxtaposition of adult deception with childlike naivety. There is no omniscient narrator to inform us of the objective truth; if the reader were a child he would readily accept Asya's version. Only Bitov's carefully-woven psychological study of Asya suggests an untruth; her failure to deny the events, her reaction on finding him and lack of surprise. Dni cheloveka is a novel of deceit; from this point of innocent childhood in Dver', Aleksei develops the same deceitful characteristics as Asya who remains the same throughout the novel. But as she is viewed purely through Aleksei's eyes, the reader's perception of her increases in proportion to Aleksei's own maturity.

The childlike nervous prose of Dver' gives way to a more moderated, though nonetheless intimate, narrative style in Sad. It is the same boy, Aleksei, still powerfully in love with Asya. But we are given greater insight into the nature of that love in Sad, though it remains essentially the innocent love of subjective illusion. Aleksei has grown six months older since Dver'¹⁶, his knowledge of the world broader, though he has not achieved a level of mature outlook on his love. He continues the line of Bitov's 'exclusive' heroes who live and dwell in their own world; one which is peopled by their images of others. Aleksei does not, however, languish in the enclosed impenetrable world of Lobyshev; the young character still exudes the pure, spontaneous feelings of childhood. The psychological authenticity of Aleksei's portrayal as a child-adolescent is recognised by Vera Panova in her foreword to the first publication of Sad in Dachnaya mestnost' where she points to Bitov's originality and accurate study of human emotions and feelings:

... самонаблюдения Алёши - это самонаблюдение любви, это нарастающая исповедь чувства. I7

Bitov employs the stream-of-consciousness technique in a 'confessional' style which Zolotusky sees as a means to self-perception¹⁸ in itself. Bitov creates the effect of a 'cardiogram' of thoughts¹⁹. Each mechanism of thought behind each action is carefully conveyed step by step:

Он мычал и не мог проснуться. Затем он
мычал и не хотел проснуться. Затем он
мычал и делал вид, что не проснулся. 20

For this reason the Soviet critics are generally kind to Aleksei, as is, indeed, the reader. We are in full understanding of each motive, each thought and each feeling. There is not the same distancing as in Penelopa, for example. The careful analysis of Aleksei's feelings is seen by one critic as virtual research in which the most surprising aspect is the revelation of the mysterious within the ordinary and mundane:

/Сад/... это исследование первого
чувства такого обыкновенного внешне
и такого таинственного изнутри. 21

The theme of love is, indeed, commonplace, but as the most basic of human emotions, it is the most accessible to the readers. Careful observation is paramount, for Aleksei is exposed at the most complex stage of his adolescence, facing pressures from all sides. This is an essential feature of Bitov's prose; he catches his hero at a significant period of his life, usually the most vulnerable.

Aleksei is scrutinized at a time of flux: he is trying to complete his college exams whilst carrying on his passionate relationship with Asya. Events reach a climax at the New Year: Asya wants to live with Aleksei as she is no longer satisfied with their irregular meetings; Aleksei is still living at home under pressure from his parents over his elicit

relationship. The couple meet on wintry evenings in a botanical garden (hence the title) to snatch a few unsatisfactory moments of romance.

Aleksei is forced to deceive his parents again about the nature of his relationship and finds himself in a state of profound introspection due to his love for Asya. It is a love full of doubts and suspicions continuing from childhood memories (Dver'). Aleksei has reached an identity crisis in relations with his mother over Asya. The theme of childhood continues as Asya treats him in the role of a son rather than a lover. Asya's continued relationship with her husband is an aspect of that mysterious adult world that Aleksei does not fully understand; like the 'events' behind the door in Dver'. The symbolic door of entry into adult maturity has opened, but Aleksei can as yet discern little in the darkness within. He attempts to carry on his outer life whilst becoming more and more preoccupied with the inner, into which he sinks at moments of doubt and uncertainty in search of some higher meaning to his suffering.

It is a story of gaining and interpreting new experience, of fathoming that darkness beyond the door. By the time of Trety rasskaz and Les, that initial childlike innocence has all but disappeared. Aleksei's moments of profound insight are due, in part, to a childlike clarity of vision, but with an adultlike power of interpretation. He gradually realises that there is no place for childlike purity and innocence in the adult world.

Integrating successfully into adult society requires playing a certain role; society is a massive open-air theatre. Aleksei feels like an actor, though the only one on stage who has not learnt his lines by heart. By contrast, the others appear to be performing clearly-defined roles perfectly. Aleksei sees his mistake in taking the play for real. This view is similar to Vitya in Bezdel'nik and Holden Caulfield's "phonies" in "Catcher in the Rye".

Yet Aleksei's drama is with himself and he is the leading character. It is his own world which is the play and he himself is powerless in it:

А то, что актёры знают и другую жизнь, кроме спектакля, и только он, один-одинокый он, должен существовать в этом спектакле, как в жизни, было несправедливо. Потому что он ведь разгадал обман ... 22

The narrative style also reflects the theatrical vision in Aleksei's mind.

The dialogue between pages 19 and 23 takes the form of a scene from a play. The part of the narrator is replaced by stage directions:

Он. Завтра же уйду ... Уйду не потому, что ты ... Уйду ...
Она. Милый, ну куда же ты уйдёшь? Зачем, главное? Для меня? А зачем это мне?
И почему ты, собственно, уйдёшь? /Смеется./ 23

The form is designed to illustrate the melodrama between the two lovers.

It adds a touch of irony to the narrative play, releases the tension, reminding the reader that the story is itself a play and that the apparent seriousness has its humorous side. The narrator's acceptance of the theme of theatricality introduces Aleksei's reflections on the nature of his world as a stage on pages 64-65.

Aleksei's dramatic self-questioning does not allow him to see the people around him in an objective light. Such a self-centred, narrow concentration on the hero is typical of Bitov: Sad develops into a subjective monologue between Aleksei and his own inner world. Aleksei's discovery that each individual, including Asya, wears a different mask for each situation undermines his will to act and increases his Hamlet-like existence. Like Sergei in Zhizn' and the heroes of Turgenev, Aleksei suffers from inertia, weakness and inner stress. His conscious realisation of the disappearance of childhood spontaneity and purity of feeling serves to render him more self-conscious and introvert. Bitov's sympathy for his hero does nothing to weaken the starkness of Aleksei's portrayal.

There is nonetheless an element of parody in the description of the hero's self-torment; the emotional tenor of Aleksei's conversations with Asya has the proportions of a Shakespearian tragedy:

— И на юг мы поедem! /Почти со злобой./
Господи, неужели эти деньги ... это такая ерунда! Ну если om только деньги ... Ну я работать пойду ... Ну достану наконец. Я знаю где. И ничего мне не будет. Десять тысяч по-старому — знаю где. И мы уедem. Этого же нам хватит. Даже на несколько месяцев хватит ... Хватит, а? Хватит?!! 24

An element of the burlesque marks these interchanges: the couple intends to run away together to be alone, Aleksei will get money somehow, but Asya remains the voice of realism; he should finish college first and is still a child.

It is on this first day of the New Year period that the characteristics of adult poshlost' set in. In previous stories Bitov examines the concept of poluson as it already exists in adults such as Lobyshev or Infant'ev.

In Sad we see the process of deterioration as it occurs in Aleksei.

Moments of clarity break into his rapidly darkening world when he becomes aware that his once-spontaneous feelings are being blunted:

И почему он воображает так неостро и лениво чувствует, даже когда ему кажется, что остро ... Никакой в нём страстности ... 25

Aleksei's original view of love as a pure force requiring faith falls away. As a child he had believed in it and accepted Asya's words at face value. Aleksei begins to realise the deception perpetrated on him by Asya in a reference to the events of Dver':

Он и тогда ждал часами на лестницах и в подъездах и вроде видел, как Ася уходила с кем-то другим, и вот-вот всё должно было стать ясно ... никогда он так напряженно и маятно не жил, как в то время. 26

In spite of the evidence, Aleksei is unable to accept the responsibility of Asya's relationship. He retreats into his own world where he can refuse to give up his belief in the existence of pure love, but the effect of this act of self-deception is a deadening of the soul and an automaton-type of existence:

... и всё живое тогда помирало в его душе,
а дороже всего было это живое ... он бросал
мысль на полдороге - дальше яма, пропасть,
шагать туда не хотелось, так уже привычен
был механизм этой мысли и механизм её
избегания ... 27

It is this same condition from which most of Bitov's heroes suffer.

Lobyshev had reached this state before Aleksei; existence without thought, feeling or spontaneity of action:

Он ещё подумал, что странно, что такой уже
возникает мотор этих ощущений, что о них
и не думаешь, что они как бы во сне
проходят. 28

Aleksei rapidly takes on the characteristics of the same syndrome; what little action there is springs from the urge to deceive others. Thus Lobyshev deceives the girl about finding employment, whilst Aleksei recognises the need to lie to his parents²⁹. The next stage is the breakdown of objective reality and a consequent loss of clarity:

Сегодня было неприятнее, чем всегда, и
Алексей не мог понять почему. 30

In this dreamlike state, Aleksei steals some bonds from a relative in order to buy Asya a dress. Yet this is not so much an act of deceitfulness towards his family as an attempt to preserve an ideal of love for which no action can be immoral. The negative act in the name of love parodies Raskolnikov's murder of the old pawnbroker in Prestuplenie i nakazanie. It is essentially a crossing of the line of a common moral law to test an

idea. The idea is expressed in the passage Aleksei reads from "Moby Dick"³¹. Aleksei's action constitutes an act of selfishness against others, indicative of his rupture with the communion of mankind. Alienation occurs when part of oneself cuts itself off from its natural place within the self which is in turn part of a greater cosmic unity. The quotation from "Moby Dick" marks an important point of Aleksei's self-perception. If one part of the Self separates by stepping outside of its natural place, it ceases to exist:

... ТОЛЬКО ТОГДА МОЖНО ДО КОНЦА НАСЛАДИТЬСЯ ТЕПЛОМ, КОГДА КАКОЙ-НИБУДЬ НЕБОЛЬШОЙ УЧАСТОК ВАШЕГО ТЕЛА ОСТАЁТСЯ В ХОЛОДЕ, ИБО НЕТ ТАКОГО КАЧЕСТВА В НАШЕМ МИРЕ, КОТОРОЕ ПРОДОЛЖАЛО БЫ СУЩЕСТВОВАТЬ ВНЕ КОНТРАСТА. Ничто не существует само по себе. 32

(My emphasis)

There is a further similarity between Dostoevsky's major theme in Prestuplenie i nakazanie and Bitov's literary analysis of alienation in Dni cheloveka.

Aleksei and Raskolnikov both accept no moral authority higher than their own idea; for Aleksei, it is the childhood vision of love, for Raskolnikov an idea achieved through the rationalisation of life. The symptoms of Raskolnikov's syndrome prior to the murder bear resemblance to Bitov's notion of poluson; a loss of will-power, forgetfulness and failure to gauge time:

Последний же день, так нечаянно наступивший и всё разом порешивший, подействовал на него почти совсем механически ... 33

Raskolnikov suffers for breaking an unwritten moral code inherent within Mankind. He breaks away from this natural communion and finds he cannot exist by himself. Salvation for Raskolnikov comes through love, an eternal force, natural to Man, which is able to resurrect and reintegrate his alienated spiritual self into the overall communion of Man. It is this

resurrection through the power of love that brings the return of "feeling":

... он знал, какую бесконечную любовью искупит он теперь все её страдания ... Он, впрочем, не мог в этот вечер долго и постоянно о чем-нибудь думать ... он ничего бы и не разрешил теперь сознательно; он только чувствовал. Вместо диалектики наступила жизнь, и в сознании должно было выработаться что-то совершенно другое. Под подушкой его лежало евангелие. Он взял её машинально. 34

The reality of life for Dostoevsky and Bitov lies in natural, spontaneous feeling and the suppression of intellectual rationalisation. Bitov's heroes, Aleksei, Sergei, Vitya and Lobyshev suffer in the first instance from their intellectualising selves, alienated from life, closed in on themselves and incapable of genuine feeling. Their inner mental world contrasts starkly with that of the 'travellers' in Bitov's cycle of travel-ogues. They suffer the same lack of will-power, self-doubts and inner torment as Raskolnikov. Aleksei's tenacity of childhood love and his gradual realisation of its divergence from adult reality result in a period of introspection and inner suffering. At moments of outside menace, such as at the New Year's Eve party (when Asya is called a prostitute)³⁵, and when the theft of his aunt's bonds is discovered³⁶. Aleksei reverts inward into an inner world where intrusions of the outer world, such as shouting, are reduced to a meaningless noise (Tatataam-baram-tamtam!)³⁷ or psychedelic experience in the style of Olesha:

Алексею показалось, что все они - странное такое семейство - погрузились в какую-то влагу и там шевелятся и существуют, на дне комнаты-банки. 38

Aleksei turns himself off as though "dead"³⁹. He finds that his life is gradually drifting away unnoticed, he is increasingly described as 'remembering' (vspominal)⁴⁰ rather than doing or acting. Aleksei is unable to reflect

on what is happening at a given moment he has, instead, to think back and reconstitute the events of the day. By the evening of December 31st, Aleksei's growing disorientation is apparent. A period of inner, but artificial, security extends from the party up to the time when Aleksei is on his way home. Events take on a dreamlike quality⁴¹, time ceases to have meaning. The incidents in the botanical garden are significant for Aleksei's relation to 'feeling' when his adult logical mind is no longer present. On entering the garden he experiences (ispytyval)⁴² a tenderness for it, preferring to be there rather than at home out of a sense of 'foreboding' (predchuvstvie)⁴³. Time has no meaning: he feels that thousands of years have passed and climbs into a haystack like a child. But he experiences the childhood of another age with an allusion to reincarnation:

Он вспомнил, вернее, ощутил - ощущение было безусловным и точным, - что уже было так когда-то: и этот стог, и зима, и такие же стояли деревья, и он, маленький мальчик с незнакомым лицом ... Это было словно бы в детстве, но не в этом, а в другом - в одной из его прошлых жизней. Он был ... другим, совсем другим человеком. И тогда это было с ним, этот запах ... в той, другой жизни. 44

Aleksei's perception of a higher reality is achieved gradually, primarily through his own senses. The notion is essentially the same as Raskolnikov's on tol'ko chuvstvoval⁴⁵. In the botanical garden, Aleksei feels the presence of an "eternity"⁴⁶, on previous visits there with Asya it responded to his love, deepened and accentuated it. The garden continues the principal theme of Eternal Nature in Bitov's stories, particularly building upon Sergei's experience in Zhizn'. In the garden Aleksei experiences a pure happiness, but time is the enemy, for it lasts only a short while⁴⁷. The answer to achieving new life is through 'feeling':

Только надо всё время чувствовать
и самому не обрывать. 48

Bitov provides a potential solution to polusion through the notion of intense feeling. In Aleksei's case it is the profound feeling of love. Love is moreover available to all. It is a feeling that exists even for those who do not believe in it, similar to a faith:

... даже в безверии пребывает любовь,
как вера. 49

Unlike Bitov's other heroes, Aleksei's perception of life is further elucidated in quotations from "Moby Dick" and an untitled religious work introduced into the final part of Sad, Vtorogo yanvaryya.

This final part of Sad itself is largely composed of fragments from a religious work that Aleksei previously read as a child. So disconnected are the quotations that their origin is obscure, though the content suggests parts of the Gospels. Though reincarnation is more akin to Buddhism than Christianity, the themes of childhood and love are especially important in the Gospel according to St. John. Comparison can also be made between Aleksei's final search in this book and Raskolnikov reaching out for the New Testament at the end of Prestuplenie i nakazanie.

Bitov's first unpublished version of Sad allows for Aleksei's religious conversion⁵⁰. Apparently, this was cut by the editor for obvious reasons and the dots signify the missing part⁵¹. Aleksei's final acceptance of love as a higher force leads him to recognise the existence of a God as its source:

... /он/ рассуждал о том, откуда же любовь: не от любимой же, такой случайной и крохотной, и не из него же, тоже чрезвычайно небольшого, а если не от неё и не из него, откуда же? 52

In common with Bitov's other stories of this period, Sad ends with a koan, but one which takes more the form of a rhetorical question. Bitov confronts his reader with the question of the existence of God. The religious ending completes an apparent allegory of the Christian story. Moreover, allegory is a common device in the Gospels themselves⁵³. Aleksei sees himself as a Christlike figure who suffers "death" and resurrection. Aleksei sees the people around him acting out premeditated parts following a grand design similar to the Christ's own predestined path. In this vision, he is the unrecognised prince, all others subordinate to him. Like Christ, the Messiah, he sees himself as the uncrowned sovereign (vlastitel') who is powerless and humiliated as the preordained drama proceeds⁵⁴. In a further scene he sees himself in a position to forgive others⁵⁵; forgiveness being the second major principle of Jesus's teaching⁵⁶.

Asya represents Mary Magdalene, condemned by those around her as a prostitute⁵⁷. Whereas Christ was condemned for his love of Man, Aleksei and Asya are taken away for their love of one another:

... много людей по лестнице, поднимались
и ним, за ними. „Вот они!“ - кричал
главный, брали за руки и вели куда-то,
на Голгофу ... 58

The vision is inspired by Nina's treatment of them: she is the Judas and former friend of Asya. The garden completes the allegory; Christ goes to the Garden of Gethsemane where he is betrayed and captured. The garden in both stories marks the point of change and transition from one life to the beginning of another. The Apostle Mark gives prominence to the human emotions and 'feelings' Christ experiences in the garden⁵⁹. It is in the garden that Christ accepts his destiny in a complete self-consecration. Moreover, the principal theme of the Christian story is that Christ treads

the path to wisdom through suffering, a path which ancient Greek thinkers recognised as divinely-appointed for men. Both Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov and Bitov's Aleksei achieve insight through inner torment and the possibility of spiritual resurrection through religious awareness. In addition, Raskolnikov and Aleksei seek their truth in religious books.

The theme of childhood is also integrated into this new religious element in Bitov's search for a Weltanschauung. Aleksei confesses that with growing adult maturity he is less able than a child to understand:

Представление ... что вот тогда он ничего не понимал, а сейчас, поживший, так сказать, и умудренный, все поймет, обернулось досадой: казалось, в детстве он понимал больше. 60

The transition from childhood to adulthood brings a maturity of thought and demand for logic that reject mere feeling and faith which are the preserve of children. Aleksei's words on childhood allude to an essential Christian teaching:

Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein. 61

That other life for Aleksei, the eternal life free from deceptions, can be interpreted as the Christian concept of everlasting life. In the published text Aleksei does not, however, accept the need for belief in God or Christ, or even the notion of religious faith. In reading the religious text with approbation, he is only tentatively accepting one prerequisite of the Christian view of life eternal, namely, that love is of God and we are all as children. Nor can we assume that Bitov himself is a Christian; a number of Soviet writers pursue religious themes in their works without necessarily having religious convictions themselves⁶².

At the end Aleksei is aware of two lives and thus a choice of two paths into adulthood. On the one hand, there is the 'real' life (drugaya zhizn' glavnaya i zhivaya)⁶³, with the leitmotiv of eternal love, Nature, feelings and childhood perception. On the other, there is the adult world of role-playing, deception and somnolent existence (poluson). Though the ending of Sad, with its rhetorical koan, is thus optimistic, Bitov's essential pessimism, due, in part, to his acute understanding of life's complexities, cannot permit the same unconvincing conclusion that Dostoevsky envisages for Raskolnikov in his final resurrection⁶⁴.

Soviet criticism abounds for Sad, whereas fewer than five critics have reviewed Dni cheloveka since its appearance in 1976⁶⁵. Critics frequently allude to the philosophical content of Sad without defining exactly what it is⁶⁶. Love is recognised as the principal theme; though Zolotusky's view is rather too simplistic an interpretation:

Сад только о любви. 67

Zolotusky nonetheless recognises its portrayal of the inexplicability of the spiritual in Man, though no possible Christian connection is ascribed as it would be heretical to do so. Of the five major Soviet critics of Sad, (namely Zolotusky, Anninsky, Gusev, Urban and Solov'ev)⁶⁸, only the latter recognises a possible religious interpretation. However, he qualifies it by saying it is within Aleksei's own mind⁶⁹. The notion of reincarnation is viewed as imagery representing Aleksei's distance from childhood days⁷⁰. Solov'ev's study is the most analytical and fullest of all the five. Whilst recognising both the religious element and Aleksei's final realisation, which he terms 'delight of faith' (vostorg very), no allusion is made either to its allegorical sub-theme of the Christian story, or to its existence as

a novel of five parts. No critic in the West has yet even mentioned either Dni cheloveka or Sad. Deming Brown refers only to Dver' as a short story in which

an infatuated adolescent lingers in a hallway, waiting in vain for a glimpse⁷¹ of the woman who is deceiving him.

At least Brown refers to deception, a major theme of Dni cheloveka that continues remorselessly into the third part, Trety rasskaz. For as Solov'ev pointedly remarks, the final delight of faith for Aleksei is only a fleeting one:

... этот восторг мгновенный, после которого Алексея настигнет ещё горшее и одинокое неверие, и выхода из него ни Алексей, ни Битов не найдут. 72

Solov'ev's view concerns only the sequel to Sad, for Les provides a further solution for Aleksei at the end of the fourth part.

Trety rasskaz indubitably reflects Aleksei's dissipated life in the post-Sad period of adulthood. It is clear that Aleksei is no longer the sensitive, well-meaning young man consciously searching for that other life of pure feeling. We are confronted in the first paragraph with an individual more akin to Lobyshev than to the Aleksei of Sad. Life has become a ritual in which Aleksei performs his new role as a father-to-be. He has seemingly fallen into the very same syndrome of role-play that he despised in Sad. In answer to the questions of others concerning future fatherhood, he unfeelingly responds in an unexpected way:

Он теперь как бы принимал приглашение на некоторый короткий ритуал и воспроизводил на лице ту же мину, которую исполнял вопроситель - родич ли, знакомый: либо достойную, либо хихикающую, - и не чувствовал от напоминаний ни волнения, ни потрясения, ни внезапного осознания, ни помрачения, ни взлёта никакого переживания. 73

In Trety rasskaz, Bitov purposefully catches his hero at the moment of the next major transition in life, the birth of a son, and homes in on the resulting identity crisis. It is as exclusive a study as any of Bitov's stories. Aleksei's wife exists in Trety rasskaz as a mere faceless foil to his thoughts. Between Trety rasskaz and Les she disappears altogether with the baby son in an apparent accident. Aleksei loses the sympathy of the narrator, as is apparent, for example, in the distancing effect of using the surname Monakhov only. In the narrative structure and narrative description, the third part closely resembles Dver', where Aleksei is termed merely Mal'chik. A theme in both first and third parts is waiting for the passage of time, though the emphasis and direction in each story is different. The birth of Monakhov's son is a background plot which rarely intrudes on the main storyline. The character of Trety are the same as Dver', only ten years on. Monakhov meets Asya and attains what he set out to do in Dver': to achieve intimacy with her behind locked doors. Roles are reversed as Asya positively attempts to seduce her former fiance on the night his son is to be born. Despite practical difficulties of nowhere to go (Asya's friend's flat is occupied), Asya and Monakhov surreptitiously enter a nursery where Asya works in the daytime. Their action in coming together is like a recoil from the past. Monakhov finally realises where his thoughtless actions have led him and departs at a given opportunity when a child wakes up. He eventually returns home to find that his wife has given birth to a boy.

The storyline taken by itself suggests a character devoid of sensitivity and moral values. Aleksei Monakhov willingly seeks an affair with his past love at a time when his wife is in hospital expecting their first baby. Without the preceding second part, Sad, it would be hard not to

judge the main character's actions as contemptible, not to mention his moral bankruptcy. In Trety rasskaz and Les, Bitov moves towards a more pessimistic and perhaps worldly-wise view of the individual's self-revelation. The koan, with its promise of reform and regeneration, suffers clear negative consequences for the first time in Bitov's writings. The challenge of self-improvement through self-perception has been cast aside in Trety rasskaz.

Like his classical antecedents Gogol and Dostoevsky, Bitov is unable to plot an individual's course from self-revelation to spiritual resurrection over a period of years. Nonetheless, Aleksei Monakhov's portrayal in Trety rasskaz is brutally realistic and yet not without understanding on the part of the author. The message of Bitov's final work of his early years speaks of his own growing maturity as both man and writer, for he was approaching his thirtieth birthday at this time. His future, more mature works are no longer dominated by a profound concentration on the themes of childhood and adolescence; Aleksei is the last of this series of adolescent heroes. Moreover, in the mid-sixties, Bitov's writings include both young men in their twenties (Sergei) and older ones past their prime (Infant'ev).

The mature changes apparent in Bitov's thinking during the time he wrote Trety rasskaz can be gauged by assessing his traditional themes in this work. Firstly, the concept of the ideal of pure love gives way to a pale facsimile. There is little discourse on the nature of love in Trety rasskaz. The mystery and underlying poetic interpretation of Aleksei's love are no longer apparent. Neither does its natural setting exist. The garden is replaced by the drab urban landscape, Aleksei meets Asya on a bus, for instance. They walk through the town trying to find a place to be together at night. There is an atmosphere of darkness, confusion and shadows that pervade the story. The shadows are images of their past

selves intruding on reality. Their chance meeting after ten years leads to a stark discrepancy in Monakhov's mind between past and present. He becomes disorientated and hypersensitive to himself, especially in his relationship with Asya. Monakhov's immediate perception of Asya, devoid of the mysterious aura of Sad, leads to a feeling of liberation from the past:

И Монахов ощутил освобождение, облегчение,
с него как бы спали цепи, гири насилия
над собой,.. 74

Bitov shows this awakening in Monakhov by the use of minute detail and the stream-of-consciousness technique. Monakhov's burial of past torment within himself with all the pain of separation from Asya had led to the exclusion of sensibility and emotion. The name Monakhov is significant for its religious connotations of monastic self-exile, withdrawal of oneself from the living world of participation. Aleksei's marriage clearly provokes little emotion on his part, except for a pang of conscience at his actions prior to his child's birth⁷⁵.

Asya's return symbolically opens the door to the well of childhood feelings long lost within Monakhov. Aleksei and Monakhov exist side by side as the intrusion of past memories causes a split personality. The 'Aleksei' is still in love, the 'Monakhov' remains emotionless, rational and confused. He begins to see Asya as though her past image were superimposed on her present:

... на секунду примерив прежнее свое лицо,
натянув улыбочку, поспешно, кое-как, так,
что два её лица как бы не совмещались на
какую-то секунду, и на бровь одного
приходился глаз другого, а губы - на одну
щеку. 76

Asya remarks on Monakhov's greying hair and other changes in physical appearance, but her approach does not essentially change from previous stories. She comments on those of Monakhov's actions that confirm her former vision of him and declares he is still a child on a number of occasions (vse takoi zhe rebenok!)⁷⁷. Asya remains the same person in each of the three parts in which she appears, but our knowledge of her expands in proportion to the level of objectivity in Monakhov's relationship with her. In Trety rasskaz, she appears coquettish and unfaithful, deceiving her new fiancé in Monakhov's presence. Her deception of Aleksei during their earlier courtship is apparent in the parallel replay of scenes from Dver' in Trety rasskaz. As Asya takes Monakhov back to her friend's flat she leaves him waiting outside the door. Both Aleksei and Asya attempt to recapture the past by acting out their performances of ten years earlier. Bitov's delicate portrayal of Monakhov's reactions exemplifies the masterful psychological insight that the writer has into the individual psyche. The events of Dver' are deeply buried and forgotten by Monakhov, yet the same urge to smoke and similar sounds on the stairway exactly re-echo the events of over a decade before.

Все ситуации те же. Как оттиски. Точка в точку. Только бледнее. Или как пластинка заскочила. Все то же, только звук с каждым оборотом хуже. Хрипы, трески ... Все то же, только мы уже не те ... 78

The situation and the girl remain unchanged, only Monakhov has ceased to suffer. He is liberated from all emotions, including suffering, but is unable to give up his role as 'Alesha' and continues to obey Asya's commands to follow her. He has abdicated responsibility for his person and drifts along, watching himself respond almost mechanically. The love of Sad is transformed into an automatic sexual desire coupled with curiosity. Body and mind are as disparate selves.

The repetition of the Dver' sequence with its childhood memories leads to a restatement of the theme of childhood which reaches a climax at the end. Monakhov's arrival in the nursery is a symbolic return to childhood. In the last pages childhood sensations become more acute, particularly as Asya opens the door to him:

... ТУТ ИМ СНОВА ОВЛАДЕЛО ДЕТСКОЕ И
РАДОСТНОЕ ЧУВСТВО ОПАСНОСТИ И СТРАХА. 79

All sense of time disappears in this twilight world of childhood. Yet the return is a debacle: it is an unnatural infringement on that other world where Asya takes Monakhov in order to subconsciously restore the conditions of their former relationship. It is not fortuitous that Asya is in charge of a nursery; she had been a mother-figure in Aleksei's past life. The physical conditions and sensations are the same, for Monakhov is later unable to tell whether the events actually happened or not, suggesting the return of childlike fantasy. Asya embraces him like a child in the play-room (kommata igr); a reintroduction of the theme of theatricality from Sad⁸⁰.

However, the restatement of the childhood theme cannot be interpreted as a requiem for lost time and lost sensibilities. One is reminded of the words in the Bible:

Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom
of God as a little child shall in no
wise enter therein. 81

Aleksei Monakhov is reduced to the situation of a small child in a symbolic children's world as though to realise the corruption of his own adult life:

И мы в тиши полураспада 82

На стульях маленьких сидим ... 83

Despite Monakhov's inner awakening and surprise at his presence in the nursery, he remains passive and lacking in will-power. Asya finally asks him to leave when the child wakes up. There appears to be no cure for the poshlost' of passivity and inability to act; Monakhov's only step forward is his renewed ability to analyse himself and to experience forgotten feelings. Trety rasskaz ends with a further koan (Pochemu - syn?)⁸⁴, but notions of resurrection are left to the next part. In their place is the individual's realisation of his changing situation through a sharp, sudden cathartic experience:

Господи! Как мучителен опыт! Не приобретение его, не рождение, нет - сам опыт, его наличие. 85

Although Monakhov leaves before an affair with Asya, it is not due to a decision on his part, but to the timely grace of a child waking up. The child's appearance is symbolic of Monakhov's own child's birth that same night. Moreover, the child's awakening is due to the intrusion of Monakhov and Asya on its own world. Monakhov's disruption symbolises his anachronistic presence in the world of childhood. The child opens the door and so finally unravels the mystery of the closed door in Dver' to reveal the sordid adult world. Alesha is now on the inside, faced with his previous pure and innocent self as a child. In the last words of the third part (Pochemy - syn?)⁸⁶ apart from his changed role, Monakhov is forced to acknowledge his departure from childhood because of the advent of his own son. Monakhov has finally laid the ghost of his childhood memories of Asya. The test of self-improvement and spiritual progress lies in accepting the adult responsibility of choice:

Когда, в детстве, были реальны чувства - не-реальны были люди: они были носители, объекты, они были-образы. Когда опыт придал людям реальность в наших глазах: вот они перед нами, объективные как есть, объемны, без суда, - нереальны стали наши чувства. Теперь чувство - стало образом, образом чувства. Чувства нет, а есть его образ: не любовь - образ любви, не измена - образ измены, образ дружбы, труда, дела и т.д. И человек с опытом стал ещё меньше разбираться в этом мире, чем ребёнок, ещё более запутался в нем из-за нереальности собственных чувств. У него появился выбор там, где раньше чувство не предоставляло выбора: любит - не любит, сделать - не сделать, поступить - не поступить ... И оба варианта, по опыту, вдруг оказались однозначны, равновеликий выбор ... 87

This statement of the theme of Trety rasskaz appears only in the 1976 version of Dni cheloveka. In the Zvezda version of 1973, Bitov's corrected copy sent to us makes no such inclusion. However, Vladimir Solov'ev's study of Bitov's early stories⁷⁷ suggests an awareness of the more complete version as early as 1968:

Потом герой Битова вспомнит про мальчика
- про самого себя, стоящего всю ночь
у дверей. 89

In the 1976 book-version, the passage interrupts the narrative rhythm of Monakhov's thoughts by introducing an omniscient narrator. Solov'ev's prior possession of the more complete manuscript further corroborates the dates of the novel as "1965, 1972" given in the published version of Dni cheloveka in 1976⁹⁰. On the other hand, the passage throws light on the meaning of Trety rasskaz from the words of the author himself. Their addition, probably immediately after writing the first version, underlines the writer's search for a more complex understanding of the human condition. Bitov substantiates this point in his letter of 12.8.78:

... проза ... только тогда проза, когда является для пишущего единственным /или наиболее глубоким и точным/ методом познания реальности /в том числе, того же опыта/. Или я исследую свой опыт инструментом художественной прозы, то есть всё-таки не отражаю, или творю опыт, до сих пор мне неведомый /что пожалуй, лучше всего/. 9I

Bitov's words, both in his letter and in the passage from Trety rasskaz, reveal him as a writer not in the Realist mode. The story does not tell itself but leads through a particular avenue of the writer's own philosophical search. Bitov is nonetheless faithful to the truthfulness of detail. Trety rasskaz is a close analytical study of a man on the eve of his son's birth, but the writer has grown older and matured in outlook. Thus, mere childhood perception of earlier stories is here treated as too narrow an objective of aspiration for the individual. Childhood emotion and feeling must be welded to adult responsibility of action. Trety rasskaz supercedes the major themes of earlier works, including Puteshestvie, where action alone is the panacea to human inertness. Monakhov is capable of action; he effectively breaks into the nursery at night, thus departing from his routine pattern of existence. Such an act is also in pursuit of a childhood yearning, yet no act is good by virtue of merely being an act. Indeed, the value of an act resulting from a choice of actions can be only judged within an external system of ethics. Bitov has yet to probe this question. Monakhov is essentially amoral, and Bitov's previous revelations such as the possibility of a Christian ethic and the sudden 'privileged moment' have no currency in Trety rasskaz. Moreover, the theme of spiritual resurrection through the perception of love is seen to be, at best, of temporary duration, at worst, a subjective illusion based on an act of deception. In Trety rasskaz, Bitov does accept the notion of

conscience in spasmodic references to Aleksei Monakhov's feeling of guilt. In the nursery, the child's disturbance brings him welcome thoughts of being arrested and of the punishment for his guilt. Conscience appears as a potentially strong force for individual renewal at the end. However, Monakhov does not leave of his own accord. Self-analysis and introspection provide Monakhov with an objective view of himself. But like conscience, their effect remains passive, as Monakhov feels only more uncomfortable. Thus, at this stage of the novel, the Hamlet-like syndrome remains unsolved.

The third and fourth parts are unified at the end and beginning by the presence of Monakhov's mother. Her appearance at the end of Trety rasskaz to announce the baby's arrival heralds an important reintroduction of the theme of parenthood, particularly the role of the father, which finally provides a solution to Monakhov's moral bankruptcy. In Dni cheloveka Bitov is struggling with the validity of his own youthful moral formulae for an ageing man. Monakhov is not engaged on a search in Trety rasskaz and Les. The investigation of one's own impulses and character is common during the transitions from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to manhood. But in his portrayal of Monakhov in the second half of Dni cheloveka, Bitov recognises that the possibility of the self-motivated, natural drive to self-knowledge diminishes with age. Both Penelopa and Infant'ev, syn svyashchennika initially provide further examples of this recoil from self-revelation in older people. Penelopa ends on a note of sudden self-awareness, whilst Infant'ev suggests that a solution may lie beyond the grave.

Bitov's doubts about the permanency of a change of heart due to only a moment's insight are reflected in Trety rasskaz and the early parts of Les⁹².

His own maturity allows him to experiment in Dni cheloveka by placing the same man in the same situation of stress at different times of life. In each case the theme is a variant on the man-woman relationship, all outside interferences are kept to a minimum: e.g. the role of friends, relations, outside interests, work or business; and events occur within a short time. There is a unity of structure and theme which is balanced by the parallelism of the first episodes. The role of the main character and the faces of the secondary ones do change. Thus Monakhov's angle of vision alters within each episode with the situation remaining constant. In each case a rendez-vous forms the central pivot of the plot, and deception the thematic core. In parts one and two (Dver' and Sad), Aleksei is the object of deception. In parts three and four he in turn becomes the deceiver. The theme of deception poses Bitov a riddle which continually reoccurs in Dni cheloveka without a convincing solution. Despite a variety of moments of self-revelation (the book in Sad, the nursery scene in Trety rasskaz and the birthday party in Les), Monakhov deceives both his first wife in Trety and his second wife and his parents in Les. Only on a point of further deception does Monakhov face a moment of universal truth at the end of Les. Bitov's own pessimism on the aftermath of such moments earlier in Dni gives us no confidence that a permanent solution has been found, however.

Les follows a complex structure of flashback (parts 1 and 2), the immediate (parts 3 and 4) and the aftermath (part 5). The other major themes of Dni cheloveka are thrown into new light, principally love, choice of action, death and the eternal. Experiences from the past are given a new interpretation and reassembled into a more comprehensive philosophy of life which supercedes as well as unites the ideas in previous stories. For example,

Bitov's open-ended mystical conclusion contains elements of both Zen Buddhism and Slavophilism. Bitov's final solution to the search for the individual's perception of his place in the universe takes greater account of human failing and weakness in the character in Les. The open-endedness of Les reveals Bitov as a writer anxious to point a moral rather by intimation and suggestion than by outright dogmatic statement. Judgement and condemnation of Monakhov's amorality, his sexual lust, selfishness and lack of human concern are little in evidence. However, the human foibles portrayed in Monakhov are universal, and the hero's own rationalisation and justification of acts of dubious morality are seen as one of the highest forms of poshlost'. Bitov's device of exposure has been wrongly interpreted as an attempt to 'rehabilitate' Monakhov by a Soviet Establishment insistent not only on a clearly delineated 'right' and 'wrong', but also on the writer's stated commitment to the 'correct' conclusion:

А. Битову далеко не всегда удаётся отделить себя, повествователя, от героя ... возникает нечто не предусмотренное, видимо, писателем: внутреннее богатство, сообщенное автором Монахову, временами начинает как бы реабилитировать его. 93

Bitov's typically minute and detailed portrayal of Monakhov's thought processes is spasmodically interrupted by the narrator's own comments. The device of narratorial intrusion has three objectives: firstly, to disassociate the pen from the character; secondly, to clarify and explain the characters' actions with an air of objectivity; thirdly, to release the feeling of claustrophobia resulting from an intense study of the character's inner world. The narrator is not omniscient and rarely exposes the fallacy of the hero's thinking; for example, he continues to lend support to Monakhov's illusion of Lenechka's death at the airport⁹⁴. On

other occasions, the narrator qualifies Monakhov's thinking by the insertion of a 'loaded' adverb, e.g. neoriginal'no dumal Monakhov⁹⁵, or the narrator is capable of strongly asserting his own presence and his feigned surprise at an action; he identifies himself with the reader by addressing Monakhov with an air of sarcasm:

Высокая мысль! Так что же ты, Монахов? 96

The narration is not so objective that it allows a false moral impression to arise. Corrections can be added in brackets to demarcate those self-justifications on Monakhov's part that contain an element of self-deception, such as an explanation which is

... лишь непреодолимый довод правого
/не правого!/ сознания и всё! 97

The storyline of Les is as banal as all those of Bitov's inner "journeys". Yet it unifies the outward and inward cycles of stories; the main character flies out to Tashkent on a business-trip. It is the same Monakhov as in Dver', Sad and Trety rasskaz, only ten years on. Now an accomplished engineer 'with grey hair', Monakhov is returning to the town of his childhood to determine the technical reasons for the collapse of a roof which killed two workmen. The first three days are spent in his parents' house, during which time he successfully completes the investigation. With time on his hands he is faced with three choices: firstly, to return home to his new wife (he had divorced the other); secondly, to stay with his parents; or thirdly, to stay with his mistress, Natasha, whom he had abruptly abandoned on his last visit three years before. With tortuous reasoning, Monakhov adopts the latter course, but at Natasha's birthday celebrations finds she is entertaining a young writer and his young friend Lenechka.

The latter, an eighteen-year-old youth, reminds Monakhov of his former self; madly in love with an older woman. Monakhov's expectations of a secret, illicit affair slowly crumble. Although virtually devoid of feeling and the capacity for affection, he takes to Lenechka. Next day, Monakhov leaves for the airport having reassessed his past life in the light of the experience of the previous night. Whilst awaiting take-off, a young man, thought at first to be Lenechka, falls under the propeller-blade and dies before Monakhov's eyes. Monakhov finally arrives home and feels obliged to lie to his wife about his contact with Natasha. Whilst elaborating his story, Monakhov suddenly realises that his father probably died during the night of Natasha's celebrations. He recalls his father's words about the nature of the forest and undergoes a sudden mystical experience of communion with his father's soul.

Both Trety rasskaz and Les continue Bitov's popular theme of a trip into the past. In the former, Monakhov seeks to relive his relationship with Asya after a ten-year separation; in the latter, Asya is replaced by Natasha, though the motive is the same. Monakhov seeks to regain the love and feelings of youth from the time of Sad. The real love of the past continues to elude him, and the Asya and Natasha of the later two parts turn out to be the masked performers acting out the original story of Sad in Monakhov's world of illusion. The mother's role in Sad repeats itself in Les. Monakhov deceives his parents about his mistresses in both cases and has to carry on his courtship outside the parental home prey to pangs of guilt. Both stories cover five days, and include an abortive attempt to seduce the mistress in the middle of this period. As a result of both these meetings, Monakhov achieves a higher level of self-knowledge. Each story ends in a climax of Monakhov's perception of himself as a part of some greater consciousness.

The leitmotif of Nature is represented in the titles of Sad and Ies. Both the garden and the forest play an integral part in the process of cosmic consciousness, though the forest more in the form of an analogy than in its physical presence. Sad and Ies are juxtaposed to Dver' and Trety rasskaz, where the action takes place in a single night. Monakhov increasingly changes from the seeker to the sought with each successive episode. His power to love diminishes proportionally, his role similarly changes from lover to beloved.

The introduction of two new characters in the rendez-vous scene in Ies, Lenechka and Zyablikov, forces Monakhov to re-examine his own part:

Кому же здесь было выступать в роли
Монахова до Монахова - Ленечке, что ли?
Да и Ленечка ... 98

Monakhov's momentary vision of his earlier self in Lenechka is parallel to that of the child's arrival in Trety. Lenechka closely resembles the Aleksei of Sad and thus Monakhov sinks into further self-questioning which finally opens his mind to the perception of a higher universal truth. Firstly, he wonders how he has changed and asks himself questions reminiscent of the Zen technique of earlier stories.

Ишь, расчувствовался, сердечность несуществующую почувал. Сколько раз ещё мне обманываться, что я есть, когда меня нет? Впрочем, с каких это пор меня нет? А - с давних. Боже, что же это за пытка - без любви! 99

The prophetic words of earlier revelations in Sad are fatefully fulfilled in Monakhov's emotional and moral bankruptcy without love:

... если ты ещё живой, то ты ещё и любишь. 100

and

И если я уж так теряю лицо, то чего же жду, если разобраться? Только лжи. Потому что ложь - это именно то, чего хочу я в ту минуту, когда теряю жизнь и лицо. IOI

Monakhov discovers that his power to love and thus his "real" life are lost. His existence without feeling means that for twenty years he has been as though dead. Monakhov's syndrome had been foreseen in the final pages of Sad; he had become that very type of person so despised by Alesha. But the nature of love is essentially the same as in Sad; a capacity within oneself which brings life. Though capable of sexual attraction, Monakhov is unable to feel real love, even for himself:

"Господи! Что же это? Умер я что ли? Что ж это я не люблю никого ... Ни её, ни жену. И себя не люблю. Да ведь и маму тоже!" IO2

Yet Bitov's view of this syndrome in man is not merely confined to the loss of sensitivity and love. Monakhov's character in the first two parts of Les is that of an obviously outwardly respectable, successful and attractive middle-aged man. Bitov's careful portrayal of Monakhov's external actions suggests an egoistic individual, unemotional and detached. Monakhov shows no sympathy for the workers' deaths but revels in his own intellectual superiority¹⁰³. The pointed use of epithets produces a sense of irony at Monakhov's affected actions whilst he discusses the deaths:

Вот он чистой, сухой рукой /длинные пальцы/, легко чуть презрительно раскидывает пасьянс чертежей и докладных,.. IO4

By the use of selected detail and innuendo in the portrayal of Monakhov, Bitov builds a picture of a man removed from reality, avoiding any situation

of stress that might remind him of personal responsibility and conscience. He chooses his mistress because she appears irreproachable (bezuprechnost')¹⁰⁵. He ruthlessly shouts his father down as the latter seeks to communicate on a simple level. His approach is rational and scientific; feelings have disappeared.

Such weaknesses of character fall within the poluson syndrome. Bitov explores this condition in Aleksei Monakhov as it has progressed into middle-age. One of its most striking features is false justification of an action. This is evident in Monakhov's tortuous rationalisation of external events. Monakhov has become the same type of person as Lobyshev.

Bitov's second feature of poluson is developed from the theme of 'choice-of-action', which continues the idea in parts 1 and 2 introduced in Trety rasskaz. Though spontaneous action is the leitmotif of the second Puteshestvie;

Время выдвигает своё слово. И слово
это - поступок. IO6

Bitov seeks to distinguish postupok from its illusory counterpart 'rashness' (oprometchivy postupok)¹⁰⁷. Monakhov's conscious decision to act and choose one of the three possibilities (of either returning home or staying with his parents or with his mistress) does not require the courage of a postupok. The narrator intervenes to dispel any possible interpretation of Monakhov's action as a variant of the stranger's in Puteshestvie k drugu detstva.

Как всякий слабый человек, был он
смел как раз в опрометчивых поступках,
в них не отступал, боясь прослыть
несмелым именно тогда, когда любой
решительный как раз бы и передумал и
отказался с легкостью. IO8

The reader is made aware of each step of Monakhov's reasoning in his fateful decision to go to his mistress. The well-rationalised justification

appears only as another manifestation of self-deception and of Monakhov's loss of touch with absolute moral values. In Part 5 of Les, Monakhov's careful, yet tormented reasoning over whether to confess to his wife forces the reader to share his moral dilemma; the price of Monakhov's honesty could be the loss of his marriage. The narrator's apparent acquiescence leaves the reader to seek his own solution to such a question. Hidden within Monakhov's deception is the key to love, however, for he ultimately prefers deception and a quiet life to taking up the responsibility of love.

Любовь? Какая, к черту, любовь - такое стремление к разрушению?.. Не может Монахов, нет, не может жить в таком пристальном свете. Жизнь не построена так, чтобы знать о другом больше, чем о себе ... IO9

In Les, Bitov portrays love as an integral part of an overall interlocking set of moral absolutes. Love demands truthfulness and freedom from deception. Action requires freedom from the self-deception of one's own desire to rationalise. The depiction of deception in both love and general behaviour makes Bitov's representation of the love theme in Dni cheloveka essentially pessimistic. The final part inexorably fulfils the message of the final two pages of Sad:

Есть любящие и есть любимые. Это не касты ... Каждый кому-то лжёт, а кому-то говорит правду и т.д. IIO

Love is not reciprocated in Dni cheloveka; while Aleksei loves Asya in Dver' and Sad, Asya is unfaithful and her affection for him maternal. In Trety rasskaz, Asya is the same, while Monakhov feels curiosity and lust. In Les, Bitov introduces Lenechka, a younger alter ego, which creates an eternal triangle: Lenechka loves Natasha who loves Monakhov. What little

affection Monakhov feels is towards Lenechka; a form of self-pity towards an image of himself as a young man.

The very act of facing his former self in Lenechka provokes a form of involuntary memory and dream in Monakhov. The process of memory-retrieval is similar to that of Proust; Monakhov consciously remembers only disjointed and fragmentary slices from his past, though his relationship with Asya is frequently brought to mind by the events of the party. Monakhov's sudden fleeting glimpses of the past reveal the true deception practised on him by Asya. Bitov is thus able to throw Monakhov's past and present into light. For the very role he is now playing with Natasha was played by the foreman with Asya long ago. Unbeknown to his conscious self, Monakhov is acting out the story of his own youth. This ironic twist starts the process of Monakhov's stumbling regeneration. Having closed his mind to feeling, he finds himself as though a mindless performer playing alternating roles in the same tragic farce of his own self-deception. It is as if his spiritual development stops in his youth at the end of Sad, and the macabre wheel of his life continues spinning in the same groove, for Monakhov has let go of reality, preferring "sleep" and memory-loss to life.

Bitov introduces memory-loss as a further feature of poluson. It is a conscious attempt to blank out the suffering of the past:

Я ведь ничего не помню - огромный тёмный мешок. Казалось с миновавшим счастьем, а сунул туда наугад руку - такую дрянь вытащил, что больше и не суну, и вспоминать не буду. Так правильнее вудеть, сердечней ...
Ничего не помню. Лицо её не помню. И ведь, действительно, - не помню. Казалось, смерть моя - расстаться с ней, а разрыва не помню,

ни боли, ни трагедии - ничего. Просто должен был умереть, каждую секунду грозила мне гибель, а секунда прошла - я и не заметил. Просто не стала Аси, и всё. Не помню. III

Monakhov's inner lost world is also represented in dreams. This device indicates Monakhov's attempt to distance himself from reality and reduce all unpleasantness to a state of illusion. The dream-like visions of Monakhov's mind provide important references to the emotional state that led to this condition of poluson. They also reintroduce the theme of Asya from Sad. Monakhov's memory of the dream he experiences on separation from Asya is itself dreamt, thereby alluding to the depth of its concealment in his mind. Certain moments in the dream sequence add greatly to our knowledge of Monakhov's original downfall, with its onset of poluson:-

Firstly, the action is as though in a theatre, underlining the deception of Monakhov's relationship with Asya and the role-playing associated with adulthood. The characters in the dream wear masks in an atmosphere of unreality as he searches out Asya. The town is similarly given over to "rehearsals".

Secondly, Monakhov's search epitomises his fruitless quest for the real Asya amongst rows of prostitutes; symbols of illusory love. Thirdly, his final collapse marks his isolation from other people and the symbolic death of himself as an individual capable of feeling and love. He finally awakes, mistaking Lenechka for Natasha, a further symbol of his now illusory world, his living death:

„Вот тогда я умер, когда я не умер,
спокойно успел подумать о н. - Вот тогда
погиб, когда не погиб ...” II2

The loss of the idealized Asya is likened to the process of dying. With the snuffing-out of grief ensues an automaton-type existence. Bitov links the themes of love and death; in Les the latter gradually supplants the former as the key theme. The leitmotif of death runs through Les parallel to that of love in Sad, the parallel themes each end in a moment of cosmic consciousness. Monakhov returns to Tashkent due to the death of two workmen. Natasha refers to him as a 'dead child'¹¹³. At the airport Monakhov recognises a widow in mourning as an acquaintance but she turns out to be the wife of one of the dead men and symbolic of his conscience pursuing him. The only individual for whom Monakhov feels anything, Lenechka, appears to fall under a propeller and die under Monakhov's aeroplane. Lenechka's apparent death is symbolic of Monakhov's own metaphorical death as a young man. Lenechka's death, only later revealed to be illusory, in turn leads to the illusion of Monakhov's own father's death and the climax of the story.

Monakhov's story is a paradigm case of poluson; greatest amongst its characteristics is Man's loss of feeling for the Self, for others and for the universal cosmic life of which he is a part. At the end of Les, Bitov unites the themes of death and guilt. Monakhov feels guilt over Lenechka's apparent death and that of his father. Though neither event occurs in reality, the process of realisation comes through illusion itself, the real currency of Monakhov's mind since his symbolic death. Conscience ultimately leads to responsibility: firstly, the passive responsibility

for an event; secondly, the active responsibility of action. The theme of Bezdel'nik is superceded; Vitya feels responsibility for children like Holden Coulfield, yet for Aleksei Monakhov the actual birth of a child in Trety rasskaz produces only a tremor of conscience and no action. Where introspection leads only to transitory revelation, lasting change of heart and resurrection from the living death of poluson can result only in a deed of great magnitude. The message of Dni cheloveka is that such a deed is total self-sacrifice; the death of one individual to provide for another:

Смерть, которую Монахов так в упор, так сразу, так хорошо забыл, вспыхнула в нем и упала, как звезда за окном, отдав Монахову ту последнюю каплю чужой жизни,.. II4

The ending of Les unites the major themes characterising Bitov's search. Firstly, self-revelation comes through Monakhov's perception of his childhood. He thinks of his father and feels transported to Tashkent, town of his childhood.

Необъяснимый детский ужас охватил его.
... жена и нежно гладила его, как ребёнка.
-Что с тобой, мой маленький?.. - не спрашивала она.
-Как же мы не понимаем, - дрожащим детским голосом, срываясь, говорил Монахов,.. II5

Secondly, within his father's words is the notion of the natural communion of Man (budto my odni takie)¹¹⁶. This links with Aleksei's vision of all people being equally small within the universe (kakie my vse malen'kie)¹¹⁷. The natural link between men is expressed in the analogy of the forest stated in the very first part of Les:

- В лесу, оказывается, не просто много деревьев, а лес это сообщество!...
- Они все корнями связаны, перепутаны и представляют единую систему. Именно-систему. II8

Bitov perceives man's life as a tree growing on the surface, as it stands alone apart from other trees, it appears independent. Yet its roots lie concealed and represent its relations with others. They are invisible, and without them the tree shrivels and dies. Thus, when man ceases to acknowledge his feelings, the roots of his consciousness die, leaving him in an unresponsive state.

The notion of man being linked to others reintroduces a principle of Zen:

The world in which I live is never something which exists independently of my own thoughts and ideas. Rather the world appears unified with my thoughts and ideas. 119

In Zen, all living creatures and all existence live out the power of one great life which is all-pervading¹²⁰. Moreover, when Satori is attained, it is simultaneously with the whole world; all sentient beings, mountains, rivers, trees and grass also attain Buddhahood¹²¹.

Dni cheloveka encompasses different elements of different philosophies; alongside principles of Zen, there are references to Christian symbols and teaching. It is the classic Christian belief that Christ died to atone for man's sins and give life everlasting. So Monakhov's father's action is conceived as Christlike, he dies so his son may have life. This marks a reversal of the Christian symbols of Sad where Aleksei suffers death as a symbolic Christ. Monakhov's role is reversed and he becomes the one who needs life and no longer has it.

In addition, the tree in Les continues an underlying Christian theme introduced in Sad with the Garden of Gethsemane. The 'tree of life' is

a symbol of wisdom and eternal life¹²². Moreover, 'tree of life' can be a generic singular, actually meaning 'trees'¹²³ and is treated as a reward for man of immortality¹²⁴. The title of the work itself, Dni cheloveka, is taken from the Book of Psalms, 103,15:

As for man, his days are as grass:
as a flower of the field, so he
flourisheth. 125

The full script of the verse appears as an epigraph only to the 1976 version of the novel¹²⁶. The biblical simile is transposed into the theme of Bitov's novel. For man's existence is by inference as that of a tree or flower in nature. The significance of the analogy can be taken further; for verse 15 is linked to verse 16 in the Book of Psalms by the theme of the fleeting nature of Man's existence:

For the wind passeth over it, and it
is gone; and the place thereof shall
know it no more. 127

When uprooted from its natural environment, the tree withers and dies. The message of the story is that the individual remains part of Eternal Nature despite his apparent separateness. Like the flower or tree, he draws life through invisible roots which naturally connect up with all other beings. The life-force, like the Buddhist notion of 'reality', sustains Man's inner self; Bitov sees love in its purest form as part of that force. Yet if the individual cuts these invisible links with others, either because the power to feel brings pain and suffering without emotional detachment, or because the individual's rational mind causes him to dismiss abstract phenomena which do not have a proven scientific existence, he too will allow that natural side of his character to die. At this point a condition of living death or what Bitov calls poluson evolves.

Only in Dni cheloveka does Bitov's philosophy of life progress beyond the mere tenets expressed in his earlier works. The latter evolve individual consciousness from various angles merely introducing the concepts of poluson, love as part of a higher force, the koan or the 'privileged moment'. The koan in Dni cheloveka is shown to have a limited effect; it heightens consciousness to the point of either a self-revelation or the mystical experience of a 'privileged moment'. Aleksei Monakhov undergoes a series of koans without lasting change. Furthermore, Bitov's device of placing the question of death in his character's path twice before the final dénouement (the workmen's and the soldier's) fails to jolt Monakhov into a new frame of thinking. Only by introducing the father's death does Bitov finally induce Monakhov into a new perception of life, though the immediate ending still does not give the reader sufficient evidence of the effect of the 'privileged moment' on Monakhov in the long term.

Monakhov's realisation is fourfold: firstly, life is transient (continuing from the earlier death of the soldier); secondly, that he, Monakhov, is responsible, not only for his own life, but for others' lives as well; thirdly, that his father's death assuages his own guilt and gives him life; fourthly, that all beings form an interlocking communion of Man which exists in a mystical union with all those around him for whom he is responsible:

Этот живой ток последних сил немощного отца омыл обызвествленную душу Монахова-сына, и, снова прозрачная, впустила она в себя всю окружившую её боль. Словно взлетел Монахов в погоне за душой отца, и ледяной чистый ветер свистел в очищенном каркасе его души: меж ребрами были видны звезды. Одинок там стало Монахову-младшему и высоко. Впервые не порознь выступили дни и переживания его, а все вместе, как и были они - все вместе, всегда: и вчера и

завтра - как сейчас, в едином пространстве, в одной душе, помещающей в себя все души, как и одно дерево вмещает в себя весь лес, поместивший в себя это дерево ... И мать, и отец, и Наталья, и Ленечка, и та жена, и тот ребёнок, который уже есть, и эта жена, и тот ребёнок, который ещё будет ... I28

Bitov's vision of a mystical union of souls in eternity is not a part of Christianity which teaches that Man achieves everlasting life through Jesus Christ. The God of Sad is not referred to, nor can Bitov be interpreted as a Christian writer, though he uses Christian imagery to explain his characters' mystical revelations.

However, Bitov's vision of Christianity has a Slavophile slant in a number of passages. Firstly, there is the Slavophile belief in a spirit of love which cannot exist beyond hope and faith. Secondly, rationalism for its own sake is condemned. Thirdly, notions of perception and life are linked to faith through thought and feeling:

... кто ищет вне надежды и веры каких-либо иных гарантий для духа любви тот уже рационалист ... Вера не только мыслится и чувствуется, но, так сказать, и мыслится и чувствуется вместе; словом, - она не одно познание, но познание и жизнь. I29

Aleksei's view of love in Sad refers to a similar connection between faith and love:

... - "даже в безверии пребывает любовь, как вера." I30

Monakhov refutes his father's vision of Man's communion with Man in terms of a forest because it sounds 'unscientific' (nenauchno)¹³¹. It appears that the truth lies more with a simple man than one schooled in sophisticated concepts:

Может, я и не настолько квалифицирован,
как ты, - готовно обиделся отец, - но ещё
способен точно передавать смысл ... Главный
смысл ... I32

For the Slavophiles, Man's alienation from the spiritual community of all men was due to an over-abundance of knowledge.

... /раздвоение/ было следствием, так сказать,
невольного соблазна при встрече с богатст-
вами знания, до тех пор нам чуждого. I33

Moreover, the final mystical unity of Man which Monakhov experiences through his father's analogy of the forest resembles Khomyakov's concept of the natural brotherhood of the Russian people¹³⁴. Yet Bitov's ideas merely reflect one or two tenets of Slavophilism: he does not write of the mission of the Russian people; their natural acquisition of truth through a mysterious unity within the Russian Orthodox Church. Whilst aligning himself with the Slavophile view of spiritual degeneration through separation and alienation, Bitov follows an individualist path strewn with questions. Both individualism and questioning are anathema to the Slavophile.

This paradox in Bitov's perception of man marks his originality of thought. His approach is profoundly individualistic; a concentration on one character's

thoughts, feelings and actions. Yet the outcome of this long, intense study of individuals almost leads in Dni cheloveka to a notion of mystical collectivism. In this respect, Bitov's path crosses Dostoevsky's yet again. His portrayal of Monakhov as an example of contemporary poshlost' is more in common with traditions of the Russian classics of the nineteenth century than with those of Soviet twentieth century literature. For behind the unceasing exploration of one man's weaknesses lie the writer's own heartfelt sympathy and responsibility for fellow man. Moreover, the saga of Monakhov reinterprets the razdvoenie of Russian nineteenth century heroes in the alienation of the present day. For the discerning there is moral guidance, though only by implication, at no time is it explicit. On the other hand, the open ending leaves the reader with further untrodden paths to follow; Bitov's search provokes an infinite number of questions religious, moral, philosophical, psychological and the equivocally mystical. Where Bitov's search leads, there his reader's begins.

Footnotes

1 A.G. Bitov, Dni cheloveka, (M.g. 1976).

2 See appendix iii for a breakdown of both Dni cheloveka and Pushkinsky dom.

3 Ibid.

4 A.G. Bitov, Obraz zhizni, (M.g. 1972), p. 70.

5 A.G. Bitov, Obraz, Zvezda, 12, (1973), pp. 135-151.

6 A.G. Bitov, Uletayuashchy Monakhov, Zvezda, 8, (1976), pp. 3-48.

7 Bitov's unpublished private letter of 21.11.79 to S.G.S. Hagen (received December 1979).

8 See appendix vi p. 240

9 A.G. Bitov, Pushkinsky dom, (Ardis / Ann Arbor, 1978), p. 5.

10 See A.G. Bitov, Granitsy zhanra, V.L., 7, (1969), p. 72-76.

11 Ibid.

12 Obraz zhizni, p. 10.

13 Ibid., p. 12.

14 Ibid., p. 13.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., p. 24.

17 Foreword to Dachnaya mestnost', Sov. Ross, (1967), p. 3.

18 I. Zolotussky, Ostriem vnutr', Mosk. kom. (22 Dec. 1967), p. 4.

19 L. Anninsky, Tochka opory, Don, 6, (1968), p. 176.

20 Obraz zhizni, p. 25.

- 21 Zolotussky, op. cit., p. 4.
- 22 Obraz zhizni, p. 65.
- 23 Ibid., p. 20.
- 24 Ibid., p. 23.
- 25 Ibid., p. 24.
- 26 Ibid., p. 24.
- 27 Ibid., p. 25.
- 28 Apt. ost., op. cit., p. 102.
- 29 Obraz zhizni, p. 42.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid., p. 57.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 F.M. Dostoevsky, Sobranie sochinenii, (Khud.lit., M. 1957), vol. 5, p. 77.
- 34 Ibid., p. 573-4.
- 35 Obraz zhizni, p. 49.
- 36 Ibid., pp. 62-64.
- 37 Ibid., p. 49.
- 38 Ibid., p. 63.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid., p. 56.
- 41 Ibid., pp. 52-53.

42 Ibid., p. 52.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., p. 55.

45 Dostoevsky, op. cit.

46 Obraz zhizni, p. 53.

47 Ibid., p. 56.

48 Ibid., p. 61.

49 Ibid., p. 69.

50 The Moscow Interviews, 1975; the point is not specifically made in appendix v.

51 Obraz zhizni, p. 70.

52 Ibid.

53 See H.C. Kee, F.W. Young, "The Living World of the New Testament", (D.L.T., 1960), pp. 114-117).

54 Obraz zhizni, p. 70.

55 Ibid., p. 64.

56 H.C. Kee, F.W. Young, op. cit., p. 132.

57 Obraz zhizni, p. 49.

58 Ibid., p. 52.

59 St Mark 14: 32.42.

60 Obraz zhizni, p. 68.

61 St Luke 18:17.

62 A. Todd, op. cit.

- 63 Obraz zhizhi, p. 66.
- 64 Dostoevsky, op. cit., p. 574.
- 65 See bibliography under "Criticism of Obraz zhizni and later Stories".
- 66 V. Kamyanov, Poetichesky mir prozy, Lit. Ross. (9.8.68), p. 20.
- 67 I. Zolotussky, op.cit.
- 68 See bibliography. pp. 259-260
- 69 V. Solov'ev, Problema talanta, Chapter in A. Urban (ed), Puti k khudozhestvennoi pravde, (S.P. 1968), p. 287.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 Deming Brown (1978), op. cit., p. 192.
- 72 Solov'ev (1968) op. cit., p. 289.
- 73 A.G. Bitov, Obraz, Zvezda, 12, (1973), p. 135.
- 74 Ibid., p. 138.
- 75 Ibid., p. 136.
- 76 Ibid., p. 143.
- 77 Ibid., p. 140.
- 78 Ibid., p. 145.
- 79 Ibid., p. 147
- 80 Ibid., p. 148.
- 81 St.Luke 18:17
- 82 Poluraspada was replaced by "ta-ta-ta-ta-ta" in the Zvezda version.
- 83 Zvezda, 12, (1973) p. 149.

- 84 Ibid., p. 151.
- 85 Ibid., p. 148.
- 86 Ibid., p. 151. Note: the version in Zvezda includes five lines added to the end by the editor which suggest a return of emotions and offset the koan.
- 87 A. Bitov, Dni cheloveka, (M.g. 1976), p. 95.
- 88 V. Solov'ev (1968), op. cit., pp. 284-5.
- 89 Ibid., p. 284.
- 90 Dni cheloveka (1976), p. 176.
- 91 See Appendix vii, p246
- 92 First published as Uletayushchy Monakhov, Zvezda, 8, (1976), pp. 3-48.
- 93 Editorial comment. Literaturnoe obozrenie, 1, (1977), p. 61.
- 94 Zvezda, 8, (1976), p. 40.
- 95 Ibid., p. 36.
- 96 Ibid., p. 42.
- 97 Ibid., p. 10.
- 98 Ibid., p. 36.
- 99 Ibid., p. 30.
- 100 Obraz zhizni, p. 68.
- 101 Ibid., p. 69.
- 102 Zvezda, 8, (1976) p. 26.
- 103 Ibid., p. 10.
- 104 Ibid.

- 105 Ibid., p. 9.
- 106 Puteshestvie, Molodoi Leningrad, (1966), p. 163.
- 107 Ibid., p.8. See also Zvezda, 12, (1973), p. 144.
- 108 Ibid., Molodoi Leningrad (1966), p. 8.
- 109 Zv. 8, (1976) p47. In Les. Bitov portrays love as an integral part.
- 110 Obraz zhizni, pp. 69-70.
- 111 Zvezda, 8, (1976), p. 30.
- 112 Ibid., p. 35.
- 113 Ibid., p. 21.
- 114 Ibid., p. 48.
- 115 Ibid., p. 47.
- 116 Ibid.
- 117 Obraz zhizni, p. 69.
- 118 Zv., 8, (1976), pp. 6-7.
- 119 Kosho Uchiyama Roshi, "Approach to Zen", Japan Publications Inc., (1973), p. 52.
- 120 Ibid., p. 59.
- 121 Ibid.
- 122 Genesis, 3:22.
- 123 Ezekiel, 47:7.
- 124 Revelations, 22:2.
- 125 Holy Bible, Authorised King James Version, Collins, p. 547.
- 126 Dni cheloveka (1976), p. 100.

- 127 Op. cit., Holy Bible, p. 547.
- 128 Zvezda, 8, (1976), p. 48.
- 129 A.S. Khomyakov, Neskol'ko slov po povodu broshyury, G. Lorana, vol. II, p. 59, quoted in Russkie mysliteli o Rossii i chelovechestve, (ed. S. Zhaba), (Y.M.C.A. Paris, 1954), p. 135.
- 130 Obraz zhizni, p. 69.
- 131 Zvezda, 8, (1976), p. 7.
- 132 Ibid.
- 133 Khomyakov, op. cit., p. 38.
- 134 Ibid., pp. 37-38.

CONCLUSION

Although Pushkinsky dom does not come within the scope of this thesis, it nonetheless deserves brief mention as it was begun in November 1964¹.

Moreover, the story of its publication is no less convoluted than that of Dni cheloveka; indeed, while it remains unpublished in the Soviet Union, Western critics are engaged upon an appreciation².

The fact that Bitov appears to have started on his major novel before completing Dni cheloveka raises certain questions about the course of Bitov's literary development in the period 1964-1971 that are important to an understanding of his early period. It is intended in this conclusion to seek a final definition of the nature of Bitov's early period in comparison with the evidence available from the later work, Pushkinsky dom. It is our view that, whereas Bitov's principal aim in his early period was to explore the individual human psyche and define the individual's relationship with the Universe, in his later novel this concept of Man, the individual, is slowly but surely replaced by a literary parody in which he is reduced to an allegorical pastiche of the hero-type of nineteenth century literature. A change of direction in Bitov's approach during the late sixties is evident from the different titles that he gave Pushkinsky dom before its completion:

Роман несколько раз переменял название,
последовательно отражая степень
авторских посягательств ...

- "A la recherche du destin perdu
'Hooligan's Wake'". 3

Although we cannot take the author wholly seriously on this point due to the humour and extent of parody in his novel, the first choice of title still reflects the notion of a search. The parody of Proust's title marks

a new direction towards the literary burlesque and experimentalism in the final form of Pushkinsky dom. It is an immensely amusing anti-novel; it seeks to destroy the boundaries of its genre by a formless structure in which the writer adopts the pose of author, narrator, commentator and audience. The model for the story is a parody of the classical nineteenth century plot; the hero faces death in a duel.

Мы уже рассуждали, что настоящее время
- обязательно смерть героя, поэтому
так уместны трагические концы. В наше
ненастоящее время трагические концы
- неуместны. 4

On the other hand, it is a story of the anachronisms present in the contemporary literary world of the Soviet Union. Bitov is writing about writing and introduces a fresh definition of a contemporary hero and the role of the novel.

Bitov's major work was written over a period of seven years, being completed on October 27th 1971. Thus the early parts of Pushkinsky dom were written before the first edition of Dni cheloveka was completed in 1966. There is evident similarity of form and style between parts of Dni and the first half of Pushkinsky dom. For example, the pattern of Leva's relationship with Faina resembles Aleksei's with Asya as the first of three loves in the shadow of a strong mother:

В первую он был безнадежно влюблен ещё
со школьных лет. Он бегал за ней, она -
от него. Лева даже терял голову и, как
говорила мама, делал массу глупостей. 5

The episodic history of Leva's early life is similar to that of Aleksei's, though it is much fuller in detail and scope; the multiplicity of well-drawn

authentic secondary characters in Pushkinsky dom shows up the limited exclusivity of Aleksei's closed world. A number of chapters are devoted to the portrayal of Uncle Dikens, Mitishat'ev and Faina, for example.

It is the infrequency of the narrator's intrusion in the early parts that further suggests a change of direction. Firstly, the prologue in Pushkinsky dom, Chto delat'? is subtitled, Prolog, ili glava, napisannaya pozzhe ostal'nykh, which suggests that the final published form includes at least one insertion of material written out of sequence with the body of the work. Secondly, the number of epigraphs containing literary allusions greatly increases after the first part of the novel from p. 158. Thirdly, the order of publication of the various chapters as Soviet short stories primarily suggests a chronicle of the Odoevtsev family similar to that of Dni cheloveka. Although such evidence usually has shaky foundations, the absence of innocuous extracts from Bitov's literary commentaries (Kursiv moi - A.B.) in any of the separately published parts still suggests that the concept of the novel as a burlesque came later than 1966.

The first part, Ottsy i deti, written in the mid-sixties, contrasts markedly with the third part; Bedny vsadnik has an appendix subtitled Otnosheniya geroya i avtora and the comic inclusion of the title of a non-existent commentary by the hero himself;

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The tone of the narrator and italicised commentaries increase in irony as the novel reaches its climax near the end:

- Intelligent, so intelligent ... - восхищенно
говорил американец.
... Мы оставим Лёву, подчеркнуто
глубоко вдыхающим невиский нефтяной
воздух. 7

However, the irony of earlier parts remains as a humorous tinge to the portrayal without reducing the individual to a pastiche:

Тут произошла совсем символическая сцена, наполнявшая Лёву окончательно - восторгом. Официантка подошла к ним и сказала, разгибая блокнотик: „Вы, наверно, молодожены?" 8

It is significant that the change of approach particularly occurs after Uncle Dickens's death, which is portrayed in a sympathetic, respectful tone;

Со смертью дяди Диккенса - не стало дяди Диккенса.
И это была утрата. Только теперь можно было себе вполне представить, чем был дядя Диккенс для семейства Одоевцевых и чем оно было и не было - для него. 9

The first part has clear autobiographical overtones in the similarity of Leva's early life with Bitov's. Firstly, there are Bitov's own aristocratic origins on his mother's side (the theme of nobless oblige plays a major part in the plot). Secondly, there are family resemblances; Uncle Dickens and the mother are direct representations of Bitov's own family. There are references to a wartime childhood evacuation¹⁰ and the death of Stalin¹¹. The reminiscences of the past are punctuated by the author's own commentary, significant for its immediacy and topicality. As the story progresses the family becomes less important and the storyline more rooted in the present. Literary allusions become more abundant, culminating in a discourse on 19th and 20th century literature in the appendix to the second part, Professiya geroya (pp. 264 - 284); including Tri proroka, a discourse within a discourse, allegedly written by Leva himself.

It is significant that Soviet publications of extracts include much of the novel up to this point, dated 1970¹². The number of chapters published in

disguise in the Soviet Union has given Bitov the confidence to despatch the complete version to the West for publication. (Although 'Ardis' claim to have possessed the complete manuscript since 1972¹³, this has yet to be proved, as Bitov denied knowledge of this at the Moscow Interviews in 1975 and it is known that another edition, reputedly the first, reached a British University some four years ago. This edition has, as yet, remained unpublished).

Comparisons can be drawn not only between the episodic method and difficulties of publication in the early and later periods but also in a number of common themes. Firstly, there are Leva's amorous encounters. He is a young man, not only similar to Aleksei in Sad, but also to the later version of Monakhov in Trety rasskaz. Leva meets Faina after a number of years and experiences the same feelings as Monakhov: there is a return to previous roles;

... всё вернулось на прежние места:
актеры снова разобрали свои роли, которые
по-прежнему помнили назубок. I4

The same contradictions are present (Vsë lozh', u vsë pravda)¹⁵. Moreover, the character portrayal remains psychologically convincing in both early and later periods.

It is essentially the author's conception or zamysel that changes, for, thematically, both plots lead to death. In the early period, themes like death are studied through the vehicle of literature and fiction. In Pushkinsky dom, Bitov repudiates the very literary conventions by which he used to write. He acts like a playwright who interrupts the performance of his own play with accusations of its misrepresentation of reality, rather like the narrator of Evgenii Onegin. The questioning is thus still apparent, but has little direct relevance for individual self-perception:

Что станет с литературой, если автор
будет в ней поступать, как в жизни
- уже известно: не станет литературы. I6

We need to go to stories like Penelopa and Zhizn' if we are to seek any early parallels with the main concept of Pushkinsky dom. The narrator of Penelopa has much in common with that of the later novel:

Так вот я приступаю к началу рассказа,
и если мне до того уж не стыдно, то меня
охватывает дрожь, потому что я приступаю. I7

The narrator of Pushkinsky dom consistently makes similar intrusions, though they also form a small chapter in their own right:

Мы собирались подробнее рассказать о том,
чему же Лева посвятил себя, какому делу. I8

(Professiya geroya)

Other themes developed from Penelopa are "pomposity is not a measure of epicality"¹⁹ and Odysseus the "swinish hero" (kham-geroi). In particular, Lobyshev's tendency towards schizophrenia ("Lobysheva stalo razdirat' na dve poloviny")²⁰ becomes apparent in Leva's friends, who are effectively externalised poles of his own character, namely Mitishat'ev and Blank.

However, both overt and covert patterns of literary parody reach a high degree of intensity in Pushkinsky dom. Thus the theme of schizophrenia in the latter would appear more as a parody of Dostoevsky's theme than a continuation of one from the Aptekarsky ostrov collection.

Bitov is quick to dismiss the importance of early works; he was dismayed to think that English publishers have progressed little beyond his earliest stories²¹. This approach is progressive in the original meaning of the word and is reflected in the recent declaration in the foreword to the

Metropol' al'manakh:

... this life suffers from something like a chronic ailment that can be defined perhaps as 'hostility to differentness', or more simply as 'a fear of literature'. The dreary inertia that exists in journals and publishing houses is leading to the emergence of an inflated universal feeling of responsibility for 'a piece' of literature that is incapable not only of being what it should be, but even what it was yesterday. This universal 'feeling of responsibility' induces a condition of stagnant quiet panic, a craving to force a literary 'piece' into line. Literature that does not fit the mould is sometimes doomed to years of vagrancy and homelessness. 22

Bitov's novel Pushkinsky dom reflects an attempt at 'differentness', whereas his earlier works fall into the category of literature 'as it was yesterday'. In this respect Bitov's search has changed from one for ideas to one for form.

Firstly, as regards form, in 1964 Bitov recognised the differences between an ocherk, a rasskaz, a povest' and a roman in a questionnaire published in Literaturnaya Rossiya²³. Whereas there is little difference between a rasskaz and a povest'; the rasskaz generally has a single solution (reshenie) and a single setting, (postanovka), the roman should contain a variety of problems, solutions and settings. The difference between these forms lies in their degree of "polyphony"²⁴. On the other hand, the ocherk is a series of impressions, live and striking; valid for the present without a universal message. By such a definition, Bitov's earliest stories are ocherki (the Bol'shoi shar collection) whereas those of the Aptekarsky ostrov cycle are rasskazy.

Bitov's views on form increasingly blur literary boundaries and conventions. In 1964, whilst admitting that povesti may telescope into romany, Bitov states that the novel is a form that does not reflect the Soviet era;

Далеко не все могут набраться спокойствия
и равновесия на большой роман в наше
торопливое и поворотливое время. 25

In Zhizn' (1964), Sergei's view of art is closer to the total "formlessness"
and emancipation from literary conventions evident in Pushkinsky dom:

Освободиться от пут условности, окостенений,
как раз того, что можно назвать формализмом,
освободиться и приблизиться к живой правде --
вот механизм рождения новых форм. 26

Yet the emphasis on the "living truth" rather than on the nature of the
portrayal itself remains apparent not only in Dni cheloveka in 1966 but in
Bitov's article, Pastoral' XX vek in 1967. Bitov extols Matevosyan's prose
for its theme of the

Столкновение живой жизни с мертвой
формой. 27

It is the identical image of the "living" forest from Ies that appears in
Matevosyan's work. The final sentence of the latter reiterates the
significance of this theme for Bitov:

Всё в них по существу жизни, живое ... 28

By contrast, Bitov's assessment of the same writer in 1969 praises the prose
principally for the 'blurring of edges' which reflects the 'boundlessness of
life' (neogranichennost' zhizni)²⁹. For Bitov, the writer should pay little
attention to genre:

... ему необходимо раздвинуть границы
жанра или перешагнуть их. 30

The rasskaz, as an imitation of life, has died, and whatever form conveys
'confession' and fantasy lives on.

In the later period, the representation of life is more important than concepts of life:

Автор терпит неудачу при попытке выразить жизнь, в его произведении появляется вторичность литературных приёмов, возникает иллюзорная действительность, сконструированная априорно и умозрительно. 31

Secondly, as regards idea, Bitov's paths to truth in his early stories reach no more specifically definable goals than a belief in Man's place as a natural part of Nature and the Universe. After 1966, it is as though the exploration of these great questions of life is no longer appropriate for Bitov. Nonetheless, his vision of the individual's 'reality' through self-perception constitutes an alternative philosophical viewpoint to the concept of the post-Chernyshevsky Real'ny chelovek³². Whilst attesting to Man's right and obligation to an individual search, Bitov's quest in his early years fundamentally reveals that life itself is the unifying force with its own laws:

И травинка, и дерево, и смена дня и ночи, и смена времён года, и житие чувства - такие разные вещи имеют между собой при всех различиях, нечто общее, и это общее является основным признаком, качеством и законом каждого из разных предметов и явлений. Это качество и закон - жизнь. 33

- 1 Pushkinsky dom, p. 408.
- 2 See A. Gimein, Nulevoi chas, Kontinent, 20, 1979, pp. 369 - 373.
- 3 Pushkinsky dom, p. 402.
- 4 Ibid., p. 398.
- 5 Ibid., p. 130.
- 6 Ibid., contents page.
- 7 Ibid., p. 395.
- 8 Ibid., p. 168.
- 9 Ibid., p. 107.
- 10 Ibid., p. 20.
- 11 Ibid., p. 156.
- 12 Almost two thirds of the novel have been published. The last third remains virtually unpublished. See appendix iii for the full schema.
- 13 Pushkinsky dom, Foreword.
- 14 Ibid., p. 213.
- 15 Ibid., p. 215.
- 16 Ibid., p. 401.
- 17 Apt.ost. p. 107.
- 18 Pushkinsky dom, p. 264.
- 19 Aptekarsky ostrov, p. 119.
- 20 Ibid., p. 110.
- 21 The Moscow Interviews, p. 244
- 22 Reuter, A.F.P. (23.1.79). Quoted in RFE-RL research report, RL 28/79, p. 2.

- 23 Razgovor idet o rasskaze... Lit.Ross. (21.8.64), pp. 6 - 7.
- 24 Ibid., p. 7.
- 25 Ibid., p. 6.
- 26 Obraz zhizhi, p. 82.
- 27 A.G. Bitov, Pastoral' XX vek, Lit.gaz. 26, 1967, p. 6.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 A.G. Bitov Granitsy zhanra, V.L. 7, 1969, p. 72.
- 30 Ibid., p. 73.
- 31 A.G. Bitov, Gorizontali i vertikali slova, D.N. 9, 1972, p. 261.
- 32 L. Anninsky, Nominal i obespechenie, in A. Lanshchikov (ed.) Zhit' strastyami i ideclami vremeni (1970), p. 163. See also G. Hosking, "The Search for an Image of Man in Contemporary Soviet Fiction" (1975), pp. 349 - 351.
- 33 Lit.gaz., 26, 1967, p. 6.

Appendix i

Andrei Bitov's Early Sketches 1958 - 1961

<u>Original Title</u>	<u>Date of Writing</u>	<u>Date of Publication Published Title where different</u>	<u>Place of Publication or first appearance in print</u>
<u>Babushkina piala</u>	Oct. 1958	1960	1960. 1. <u>Molodoi Leningrad</u> 1963. 2. <u>Bol.shar.S.P., 1963</u>
<u>Fig</u>	Oct. 1959	1960	1960. 1. <u>Mol.Leningrad</u> 1963. 2. <u>Bol.shar</u>
<u>Solntse</u>	March 1959	1963	<u>Bol.shar. S.P. 1963</u>
<u>Inostranny yazyk</u>	Nov. 1959	1960	1960. 1. <u>Mol.Leningrad</u> 1963. 2. <u>Bol.shar</u>
<u>Zheny net doma</u>	March 1960	1963	"
<u>Yubilei'</u>	May 1960	1963	"
<u>Dver'</u>	Nov. 1960		" 1963 <u>Bol.shar.</u> 1968 <u>Apt.ost.</u> 1972 <u>Obraz zhizni</u> 1976 <u>Dni cheloveka</u>
<u>Na praktike</u>	Feb. 1961	July 1962 1962 as <u>Strashnaya sila</u> , 1963	<u>Lening.Pravda 1962</u> <u>Zvezda 8, 1962</u> <u>Bol.shar.1963</u>
<u>Bolshoi shar</u>	Oct.1961	1963	(i) <u>Zvezda, 1, 1963</u> (ii) <u>Bol.shar. 1963</u>

N.B. First part of Dni cheloveka
published separately
1963, 1968, 1972 (as part of
Sad)
1976 (as part of Dni cheloveka)

Appendix ii

Short Stories and Povesti 1961 - 66

<u>Original Title</u>	<u>Date of Writing</u>	<u>Date of Publication and published title where different</u>	<u>Appearance of Publication</u>
<u>No-ga</u>	1962	<u>Pobeda</u> , 1966 <u>No-ga</u> , 1968	<u>Sem'ya i shkola</u> , 3, 1966 <u>Put. k drugu det.</u> Det.Lit. L.1968
<u>Bezdel'nik</u>	1962	<u>Aptekarsky ostrov</u> , 1968	<u>Aptekarsky ostrov</u> , S.P. 1968
<u>Penelopa</u>	1962	<u>Aptekarsky ostrov</u> , 1968	" " "
<u>Sad</u>	1962-3	1965 1968	<u>Mol.L.</u> 1965 <u>Aptekarsky ost.</u> S.P. 1968
		1967 1972	<u>Dachnaya mestnost'</u> S.R. 1967 <u>Obraz zhizni</u> , M.G. 1972
		1976 second part of <u>Dni cheloveka</u>	<u>Dni cheloveka</u> , M.G. 1976
<u>Zhizn' v vetrenuyu pogodu</u>	1963-4	<u>Dachnaya mestnost'</u> 1967 1972 original title	<u>Dachnaya mestnost'</u> Sov.Ross.1967 <u>Obraz zhizni</u> , M.G. 1972
<u>Infant'ev, syn svyashchennika</u>	1961-65	1968 <u>Aptekarsky ostrov</u> 1976 <u>Infant'ev</u>	S.P. 1968 <u>Dni cheloveka</u> , M.G. 1976

Appendix ii - p.2.

<u>Original Title</u>	<u>Date of Writing</u>	<u>Date of Publication and published title where different</u>	<u>Appearance of Publication</u>
<u>Trety rasskaz</u>	1964-66	1973 <u>Obraz</u>	<u>Zvezda, 12, 1973</u>
		1976 <u>Trety rasskaz</u>	<u>Dni cheloveka, M.G. 1976</u>
<u>Les</u>	1965-6 (revised 1972)	1976 <u>Uletayushchy monakhov</u>	<u>Zvezda, 8, 1976</u>
		1976 <u>Les</u>	<u>Dni cheloveka, M.G. 1976</u>
<u>Vkus</u>	1966 (revised post-1972)	Unpublished	none.

Appendix iii

The Novels and povesti of Andrei Bitov, 1960-1972

<u>Original Title</u>	<u>Date of Writing</u>	<u>Form and Date of Publication</u>
<u>Prizyvnik</u>	1959-1961	as <u>Takoe dolgoe detstvo Yunost' 11, 1964</u> book of above title, S.P. 1965 correct title added as sub-title <u>Sem' puteshestvii, S. P. 1976, pp.5-134</u>
<u>Dni cheloveka</u>	<u>Dver'</u> (1960) <u>Sad</u> (1962-3) <u>Trety rasskaz</u> (1964-6) <u>Les</u> (1966) (or <u>Rol'</u>) <u>Vkus</u> (1966)	see Appendix 1 see Appendix 2 as <u>Obraz, Zvez, 12, 1973</u> <u>Zvez, 8, 1976</u> <u>Uletayushchy Monakhov.</u> (Unpublished)
(Roman-punktir) published <u>roman-punktir</u> (1960-1972), <u>Trety rasskaz, Les</u> , M.G. 1976	under title of <u>Rol'</u>	
<u>Pushkinsky dom</u> (1964-1971)	<u>Soldat*</u> <u>Istoriya odnolyuba</u> (<u>Chto bylo, chto est', chto bydet...</u>) <u>Pod znakom Al'biny**</u> <u>Tri proroka***</u> <u>Akhilles i cherepakha</u> <u>Kavaler soldatskogo Georgiya*</u> <u>Nelyubimaya Al'bina**</u> <u>Mif o Mitishat'eva</u> <u>G-zha Bonas'eva (chto bydet...)</u> <u>Professiya yeroya ***</u>	<u>Zv. 7, 1973</u> <u>Avrora, 1, 1975.</u> <u>D.N. 7, 1975</u> <u>V.L. 7, 1976, pp.145-174.</u> <u>L.G. Jan 22, 1975</u> published in <u>Dni cheloveka,</u> M.G. 1976
published complete in West 1978 Ardis/Ann Arbor. 412 pages		

NB: *] same stories under different titles
 **]
 ***]

Pushkinsky domSoviet publications of extracts

<u>Soviet titles and year of publication</u>	<u>Approximate Corresponding page Nos. in 'Ardis' edition</u>	<u>Correct title of chapter or part</u>
<u>Soldat (1973)</u>		
1. p.19	1. pp.31-2	1. <u>Otets</u>
2. <u>Sosed</u> , pp.25-27	2. pp.33-38	2. <u>Otets</u>
3. <u>Kholodny dom</u> pp.27-31	3. pp.39-45	3. <u>Otdel'no ot Dikkensa</u>
4. <u>Ispytanie</u> pp.31-33	4. pp.51-55	4. <u>Otets (prodolzhenie)</u>
5. <u>Pervaya smert'</u> pp.33-4	5. pp.106-108	5. <u>Versiya i variant</u>
6. <u>Proza Dikkensa</u>	6. pp.137-145	6. <u>Dve prozy</u>
<u>Chto bylo, chto est', chto budet (1975)</u>		
7. <u>Chto bylo</u> , pp.25-36	7. pp.155-199	7. <u>Faina Fatalist</u>
8. <u>Pod znakom Al'biny</u> (1975) pp.89-99	8. pp.200-219	8. <u>Al'bina.</u>
<u>Chto bylo, chto est', chto budet</u>		
9. <u>Chto est'</u> pp.36-42	9. pp.225-242	9. <u>Mif o Mitishat'eva</u>
10. <u>Chto budet</u> pp.42-44 (<u>Professiya geroya</u> [Zv.1975]) & <u>Dni cheloveka</u> (1976)	10. pp.256-263	10. <u>G-zha Bonas'eva Chto budet</u>
11. <u>Professiya geroya</u> pp.260-282	11. pp.264-284	
12. <u>Akhilles i cherepakha</u> (L.G. 1975) p.6.	12. pts. from pp.407-8	12. <u>Akhilles i cherepakha</u>

Appendix iv

Andrei Bitov's Parallel Travel Stories, 1960-1973

<u>Original Title</u>	<u>Published Title Date Written</u>	<u>Date of Publication</u>
<u>Puteshestvie molodogo cheloveka</u>	<u>Odna strana (Subtitle: Puteshestvie Borisa Murashova)</u> 1960	1963 <u>Bol.shar, S.P.</u> 1963 1967 <u>Dach.mest.S.R.</u> 1967 1968 <u>Put.k drugu detst.</u> (Det.Lit.1968)
<u>Daleko ot doma</u>	-	1965, 12. <u>Sel'skaya molodezh'</u>
<u>Puteshestvie k drugu detstva (or Nasha biografiya)</u>	1963-4	1966 <u>Mol.Leningrad</u> 1967 <u>Dach.mest.(S.R.1967).</u> 1968 <u>Puteshe.k drugu detstva.(Det.Lit.68.)</u>
<u>Puteshestvie iz Rossii</u>	<u>Uroki Armenii</u> 1967-68	1969.9. <u>Druzhba narodov.</u> 1972. <u>M.G.Obraz zhizni</u> 1974 <u>Ne schitai shagi, putnik! (D.N.1974)</u>
<u>Koleso (or Zapiski novichka)</u>	1969-71	1971.9. <u>Avrora</u> 1972 <u>M.G.Obraz zhizni</u> 1974 <u>Ne schitai shagi, putnik! D.N.1974.</u>
<u>Tri gruzina</u>	<u>Vybor natury</u> 1970-73	1974 <u>D.N.12.</u> 1974 <u>Ne schitai shagi, putnik! D.N.1974</u>
<u>Posledny medved'</u>	1970	1975 <u>Studenchesky meridian, 2, 1975.</u>
<u>Ptitsy, ili novye vedeniya o cheloveke</u>	1971	<u>Avrora, 1, 1976</u> 1976 <u>Dni cheloveka</u>
<u>Provintsiya, ili iznanka... puteshestviya</u>	1973	1976 <u>Sem' puteshestvii, S.P.</u> 1976.

Appendix V

Summary of "The Moscow Interviews", June 1975

(Discussions between A.G. Bitov and S.G.S. Hagen)

Note:

The following appendix is restricted to a summary of the main points from a series of dialogues in Russian between A.G. Bitov and myself. I have not rearranged my notes but virtually kept them in their original order. For this reason they do not form a cohesive whole. A full verbatim transcript of the interviews was never made due to practical difficulties. Therefore the discussions have not been open to any other interpretation than my own. Certain of my own interpretations appear as repetitions in the body of the thesis. Where a clear quotation exists or simply the exact Russian word, this has been made clear by the use of inverted commas for the former and underlining for the latter.

Until 1956 Bitov feels he had no real personality; the years of adolescence had passed unnoticed. In this year Andrei Bitov felt young and very sensitive, having just finished school. Between the ages of nineteen (1956) and twenty-three (1960) he feels his character and personality were formed. The state of being without a personality is reflected in the various characters of his early stories, such as Kirill Kapustin in Prizyvnik. During his adolescence, Bitov later recognised himself to have been in the state of semi-somnolence (poluson).

The Twentieth Party Congress (1956) "played a very important role" in his fate. Firstly, there was the realisation that history was actually taking place before his eyes. He read Halldór Laxness's novel "Atomic Station", saw the Fellini film, "La Strada" and realised the possibility

of art reflecting the here and now. Secondly, he felt compelled to act quickly, to create something beautiful or exciting straightaway so as not to leave the thoughts and experiences of the past unregistered.

He had never considered becoming a professional or even an amateur writer, but when he was approaching twenty he experienced the urge to write, so he joined a literary circle in the Gorny Institut, Leningrad. In order to obtain access to this very close and talented circle of writers he offered his own poor imitations of his brother's poetry. As far as Institute course-work was concerned he never excelled and was soon sent down, but managed to be re-admitted. Bitov drew much inspiration from the literary circle, particularly from the characters involved with it. They were 'alive' (zhivye): and "a live person (zhivoi) expresses live feelings". It is zhivost' which is the antithesis of poluson.

His first two attempts at a short story produced Babushkina piala, which was "an artistic, an aesthetic event". The scenes were chosen with a desire to depict something more than an everyday event. They are still slices of life prompted by emotional urges (po volneniyu). Bitov's grandmother had died in 1955 and the death had grieved him greatly. In trying to remember her, Bitov found he was more aware of her through an aura of feeling and associations; she simply 'had been' (ona byla). This notion of sensation was akin to Japanese poetry, hence the epigraph. Babushkina piala is a stikhovorenie po chuvstvu.

Regarding his narrative method at the time, Bitov selected details to which the reader could respond through his own experience.* The importance of reader-participation cannot be overstated. As regards the autobiographical content, Babushkina piala combines past and present; the war years were past but his father was ill at the time. Nonetheless, the war

* Bitov termed his method: nablyudenie cherez opyt.

years had left a vivid impression. In 1960 Bitov wrote Prizyvnik which reflected what he felt to be his first most disturbing social experience; conscription into the army. It was based on the actual experiences of 1957-8. The title was later to be changed to Takoe dolgoe detstvo by the publisher in order to colour the reader's approach towards the hero. Other changes were made: for example, they cut out the chapter entitled Aspirin in which the hero attempts to be refused entry into the army on medical grounds. This is the story of a young man who simply reacts emotionally; he is devoid of personality. He feels himself to be one of the masses, yet is alienated from them by personality. The only solution to this alienation is for the young man to come out of himself, to step outside in the Dostoevskian sense; only then can he know himself. The story reflects the aimlessness, frustrations and searching apparent after the 1956 revelations. Prizyvnik was Bitov's first attempt at a novel and was intended to capture the spirit and atmosphere of the time.

Nineteen sixty-one was another crucial year in Bitov's development as a writer; the year in which his thoughts change again and he becomes a 'thinking individual for a second time around'. In this year the theme of existence occupied his mind. He wrote a series of stories on the theme because "people are not really thinking". Bitov is gripped by a great idea; the feeling of 'reality' around him. He defines Real'nost' as being present in a moment's awareness, in a moment of complete absorption. His 'reality' includes everything; Real'nost' is everything, is God, is me". Sergei expresses similar thoughts in Dachnaya mestnost'. It is a moment of supreme clarity for the Self; one of harmony with Nature. It is a feeling of totality of Self in Nature (similar to the Zen Buddhist concept of Satori). It is a new method and theory of knowledge (poznanie).

It is his belief that Man develops along a path of consciousness, and ultimately to awareness of the Truth (soznanie istiny) or harmony with the world. "The harmony is that 'I' am the whole world, and the whole world is 'I'".

The stories in the second cycle (Aptekarsky ostrov) ends with a question posed as an "artistic vector" (khudozhestvenny vektor) to alter the course of the story in the right direction. This is, in effect, a koan which means the reader must go his own way. The function of the koan is in its effect on inner life, so that the protagonist makes private, personal contact with real 'nost' for a second at least. Man, as a spiritual being, can find this 'reality' all the time. Ideally, he should keep in contact with it. Those few who can and do, are pure in heart and understanding, like Krishna, or Christ were.

The travel stories, which run parallel to his others, are somewhat of a deception (neverny) and are written for other people. But his mainstream stories are 'truer' (vernee) and are concerned with inner life, with pure exploration or investigation (chisto-issledovatel'skie). In these there is no imitation but a purity of impulse (chistota impul'sa). It is a literature of pure knowledge (chistogo poznaniya). Science rarely contacts real'nost'.

As a professional writer, Bitov has also to write on a lower level as in his travelogues. His belief, however, is that literature should have meaning (po znacheniyu dolzhna rabotat' literatura). Writing is a simple art that everyone should do. It is not a question of a person's age. Each man should search and in the process put his feelings down on paper.

It is strange that people become happier after an unfortunate event or accident, such as the boy who breaks his leg in No-ga. These stories (of

the Aptekarsky ostrov cycle) are an attack on those people who are not developing spiritually. Bitov is not concerned with socio-political problems, but his stories still reflect purely Soviet problems. A child, for example, is nearer to this real'nost', but he, or she, is alive only in one direction and has no awareness (soznaniya net).

In the subject of his stories, Bitov tends to concentrate on a certain milieu, the intelligentsia. He writes about the ills in society; in particular he takes those born as intellectuals but whose soul has not developed; a purely Soviet phenomenon. Bitov has been called "a writer about culture" (pisatel' o kul'ture) but it is the culture of the soul. Bitov believes that in Russia there is a lack of such culture.

The concept of poluson is original and present in most of his stories, Aptekarsky ostrov, Sad, Obraz, Bezdel'nik, Penelopa, Zhizn v vetrenuyu pogodu, Infant'ev. The theme is spiritual immaturity, (dushevnyaya nezrelost'). Earlier it was a study of childhood, rather than children. Penelopa and Bezdel'nik pursue more social themes. The theme of the man-woman relationship is a special variant; love is the first spiritual affair for young teenagers who are "blind souls", such as Kirill in Prizyvnik, for whom love is important. Love for them is the main way of stretching the mind.

The hero of Bezdel'nik tries to help others but is unable to; he cannot analyse himself and suffers from not being self-aware. He is only half-conscious; he has a soul (dusha) but nothing else; he suffers from an inferiority complex but does not realise this. People cannot live by emotion alone. Bitov believes that Russia is no place for soul (dusha).

After the publication of Aptekarsky ostrov in 1968, Bitov experienced some of his hardest years. Nothing was published until 1972. Bitov's own attitude to this kind of system is philosophical, believing that things go in series, good luck followed by bad. He has found himself on the wrong side of the Establishment, for example in 1963. He was arrested for "hooliganism" and struggling with a policeman, because of which his long-awaited entry into the Writers' Union was delayed. As a youth he had roamed the streets in a gang.

But his writing was based on his own experiences as a wayward youth, an intelligent and as a traveller. He had spent his military service in the North, then worked on geological expeditions to the Kola peninsula, Tadzhikistan, Baikal and the Karelian A.S.S.R.

Regarding the literary scene in the early 1960's, there was a return to normal levels, not a reaction, according to Bitov. "When a hungry man is given food, he eats - is this a reaction?" He did not agree with Socialist Realism in much the same way as he disliked Stalinist architecture. But it existed nonetheless: literary works were expected to be optimistic, to have a positive hero and a positive conclusion; themes on prisons, Jews and anything 'bad' were not to be followed. But in the 1970's literary development was kept static. Writers were somehow out of touch with the people (narod) and suffered from a "stop-go" policy in publishing. Young writers were having difficulty getting known. Bitov is apprehensive about the future popularity of his writing in the West and if he is not published there, things might turn out badly.

Regarding genre, Bitov writes novels and like other Soviet writers is given the chance to have his writing published, but only in selected pieces. The notion of self-censorship is certainly valid, but the main changes are

made by the editor. Rather than have nothing published Andrei Bitov opts to have his major novels officially published in the U.S.S.R. in separate pieces without revealing their true form to the authorities. More and more of the original can then be inserted in second and third editions until the entire work is published in one form or another.

There were autobiographical links between the stories and the author, but much was also invented. His stories reflected two aspects of his life; the inner - represented by his 'psychological' stories; and the outer, depicted in his travel stories. They were written parallel. The early stories (Bol'shoi shar and Aptekarsky ostrov cycle) are close to the original with the exception of Strashnaya sila, which suffered from editorial censorship.

Bitov recognises he has a small circle of readers and that many do not understand his writing. Bitov can express himself only purely and simply, his main belief is not to lie or deceive; he is an honest (chestny) writer. Perhaps he is pessimistic, but what can be expected when the entire class of intellectuals has been silenced. Whereas other writers claim they can go straight to the masses in their writing, Andrei Bitov believes he can approach the masses from the standpoint of the individual, for which he has suffered much criticism. Politics do not interest him greatly; he foresees no liberal changes and believes the present system will continue. But he would not call himself a dissident.

When placing his writing in the stream of Russian and Soviet literature, Bitov views himself as a man of the present-day whose culture is in the past. Thus, he has entitled his latest novel Pushkinsky dom. His views were similar to Kazakov's, who continued the traditions of Russian classical literature. Bitov viewed Socialist Realism and the literature of the

twenties as outside the traditional development of Russian literature. In the present-day there was a need to express the times, even when this meant expressing a lack of culture.

Bitov was impressed by the writing of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. He is an avid reader and confesses to have been particularly impressed by Joyce, Platonov, Proust, Mandel'shtam, Zabolotsky and Zoshchenko. Of all writers, Bitov claims to have been particularly influenced for a decade by Nabokov, especially Lolita. Pushkinsky dom was influenced by him. In 1970, Bitov read and was impressed by Kurt Vonnegut Jnr. and Gabriel Garcia Marques, the Colombian writer, whose stories produced that sense of vitality (zhivost').

Bitov has now written two complete novels, Dni cheloveka and his best, Pushkinsky dom.

I. Рассказы и повести 1958 - 61

Рассказы из книги "Большой шар"
Призванный (Такая долгая дорога)

II. Рассказы и повести 1961 - 66

Большой шар
* Во-за (Айтенарский остров)
Бездельник
Пеленга
Низы в ветреную погоду (Далкая местность)
Иванов, сын священника
Дни человека (роман-эпопея) : 1. Дверь
2. Сад
3. Третий рассказ (отрез)
4. Лес (Роль)*
(Улетатоний Монохов)

* ~~Звезда - конец 75 - начало 76~~

↓
Зв. 8.1976

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II. Путешественник. 1960 - 1973

Путешествие молодого человека (Война с Францией)

~~Путешествие~~ Далеко от дома — "Сельская молодежь" №

Путешествие и дружба детства (Наши Гюльзюнд)

Кодесо (Забиски новизна)

Уроки Армении (Путешествие ^{из России} ~~русского~~ ~~национального~~ страны)

Три грузина (Восдор кагурри)

→ Последний медведь

Письма, или новые сведения о человеке *

Провинция, или изгнание путешественника *

*1. "Аврора" — номер 75 — мар. 76

*2. "Дружба народов" № 12 / 75

V Шумякинский дом (Знамен)

1. Содаф - звезда N 7 / 73
2. И царя одноклба, - Альфа N 1 / 75
3. Под знаком Альфы - группа парадов
N 7 / 75
4. Прогрессивный город - звезда - конец года
5. Ахиллес и черепаха - ЛГ # 22 янв. 75

Дорогой Стив!

Рад был получить от тебя вести, что не забываешь меня, что столько замечательных случилось с тобой событий. Однако прошло почти три месяца прежде, чем собрался ответить тебе. Потому что у меня тоже события.

Во-первых, поздравляю тебя с женой и желаю вам обоим счастья. Передай своей жене привет от меня и не забывай, что она красива, хоть и ты красив, и что ты любил ее, хоть и она любит тебя.

Весной у меня стало очень много работы ввиду сильно запущенных дел. А запущены они были, потому что 21 сентября /Богородица/ 1977 г. у Ольги родился сын Иван Битов. Наконец, я слегка поправил дела, отправил их в ссылку в Костромскую губернию, сам отдыхал июль в Болгарии /негодяй!/, а сейчас сам сослал себя к ним, откуда и пишу тебе. Деревня наша немножко дальше, чем Австралия (550 км от Москвы, но без дорог). Прочитай рассказ Василия Белова "За тремя волоками", чтобы понять, что я не шучу про Австралию, ^В ^У ~~на~~ которой ты хоть и не ездил на велосипеде как в Голландию, зато всегда можешь слетать (если наскребешь на билет).

Отдав дань шовинистической гордости немалым пространством (Англия - маленькая страна, помнишь?), попытаюсь ответить на твои вопросы, хотя некоторые из них столь же обширны, как моя страна, что не означает, что мне легче на них ответить.

I. Ранние годы... Отец у меня архитектор, хороший, но не сделавший ~~слишком~~ большой карьеры. (Архитектор у нас чаще инженер по положению.) Я похоронил его на свое сорокалетие в прошлом году на Щуваловском кладбище (описание возьми из "Инфантьева"). Он интеллигент в первом поколении. Мать моя - крист, она из потомственной петербургской интеллигенции. Происхождение мое в точь, как у Мисля Сиягина (повесть Зоценко): "он был сыном дворянки и почетного гражданина". Но, сам понимаешь, в СССР это давно не играет никакой роли и звучит смешно (как у Зоценко). Первые воспоминания связаны с войной, блокадой: зиму 41-42 гг. мы провели в Ленинграде, и лишь весной 42 эвакуировались на Урал к отцу, где ^{он} ~~отец~~ что-то строил. Так что трупы и голод ^(и холода) - есть мои младенческие воспоминания, но, думаю, что здесь я не найду своих истоков как будущий писатель, да и как человек не могу оправдать ни одного из своих недостатков или комплексов так называемым "суровым военным детством" (оно слишком эксплуатировалось писателями моего поколения). Просто я теперь понимаю, что 41 год - это значит "очень давно живу". Мы вернулись в Ленинград осенью 1944 г. и я пошел в первый класс. Про школу ничего чрезвычайного сообщить не могу: обучение было раздельное (мальчики и девочки), годы были суровые (1944-54), жили мы очень небогато. Читал, боролся с первыми позывами плоти, изобрел, сам того не ведая (велосипед, порох) "культуризм" и накачал себе к окончанию школы невероятную по тем годам плоть, которую и расстрачиваю до сего дня. Духом был беден, эмоциями богат. Слава Богу, не испортил себе вкуса чтением плохой литературы: любил классику; у дядьки была хорошая библиотека (а жили мы все вместе - три семьи, объединенные верховной властью бабушки по матери; очень редкая была по структуре семья, она-то и наиболее любопытна для моей биографии, но писать о ней пришлось бы слишком много...)

Первая книга, освоенная мною с восторгом (лет в 10, достаточно поздно), была "Робинзон Крузо" (неадаптированный), затем пошли Тургенев, Пушкин, Лермонтов, Гоголь (и лучше последних трех нет для меня до сих пор писателей). Первая книга, прочитанная мною "по-писательски" (хотя я еще не помышлял о писательстве)*, с тем вкусом к каждому слову, ^сотрым наслаждением стилем, не тем, что, а как написано, был "Шиквинский юдо" (я сдавал выпускные экзамены за школу, дядька уступил мне свой кабинет для подготовки - все это были запретные, краденые, воровские часы чтения, неременное условие "кейфа"). Видишь, первая и еще раз первая книги были английскими, но это "в ранних влияниях" значит еще меньше, чем военное дество (тем более, что я читал их по-русски).

Гораздо важнее было обнаружить, ввиду будущих, еще мне неизвестных занятий литературой, существование "современной" культуры, в которое я, не вдаваясь в анализ, не верил. Для меня литература б ы л а, а потом ее не было. С информацией было туго в годы моей юности. И вот это обнаружение было и ослепительным и случайным: в 1954 у нас перевели роман Лакнеса "Атомная станция", а в 56-м я посмотрел фильм Феллини "Дорога". С этого началось мое новое образование: я допустил для себя саму возможность создавать культуру на основании ^{современного} личного опыта. И поскольку настичь, догнать, восполнить пробел было невозможно (и до сих пор...), то пришлось начать писать самому (это шутка, но это и правда). ^Яписал сначала стихи ^(сначала) не хуже других, но плохие, потому что не принадлежал к этому редчайшему племени, а в октябре 58 г. написал свой первый рассказ "Бабушкина пиала", который вошел потом в первую книжку "Большой шар" (к моему огорченному недоумению из нее до сих пор черпают рассказы для английских антологий...) К тому моменту, как я взялся за прозу, я вторично (считаю войну за первый раз) хлебнул "жизни" (есть еще замечательное слэнговое выражение - поел, понюхал, попробовал "черняшки"), что и пригодилось мне как опыт.

Вот вкратце о "раннем". Тут важно, и это пришло мне в голову в этом письме, что культуру короче было начать делать, чем обретать. Что, чтобы оториентироваться в море пропущенного, надо было самому найти правильные ключи ко всему, чтобы не взламывать, но и не простоять перед дверьми, как раз запертыми к твоему приходу. Я начинал свою прозу, не подозревая об отцах современной прозы - Джойсе, Прусте, Кафке, не говоря о прочих, да и ^осостоянии отечественной прозы я стал иметь представление годы спустя - о ~~Ф~~ Зощенко, Платонове, Тынянове и т.д. Представление о Джойсе я получил через Ш.Андерсона (зато не через Хемингуэя и Фолкнера), а Пруста выращивал из Л.Толстого, Кафку - из Гоголя и Достоевского. Все это я потом прочел, но уже не как новость: я это как бы уже знал. Что говорить, Евангелие я прочитал впервые, уже написав "Сад", "Инфантьева", "Пенелопу". Тут есть серьезнейшая опасность для писательского осуществления - целиком уйти на восполнение культурных "пробелов", дав пройти по своей спине следующему, предшественному "на готовенькое" поколению (так отчасти вышло с Ю.Казаковым), но другого пути у моего поколения не было, а в искусстве, к счастью, подлинность (аутентичность), первозданность, ценится как качество, а не как патент.

У русской литературы это всегда было: она становилась собою (а со стороны глядя - выривалась вперед), как раз когда переставала осознавать ~~какую~~ степень своей отсталости. Догнать - никогда невозможно. Быть - достаточная задача. Доморощенность может обернуться силой. Писатели - все "селф-мэйд".

К культурным обществам не питаю интереса; довольствуюсь жизнью, выпадающей в количестве более, чем достаточным, да страстью "к перемене мест". Из ^{общества} ~~общества~~ я бы примкнул лишь к "экологическому" (я обнаружил существование такой ^{партии} (в Испании), если бы программа ее не была бы очередной душеспасительной болтовней, как это водится в обществах такого рода. "Хобби" у меня были лишь в вышеописанные "ранние" годы. Кроме спорта и культуризма, я в шальные годы увлекался (мне теперь самому трудно поверить) нумизматикой. Но так же, как любовь к литературе, а позднее к кино, переросли из хобби в профессию, так же как запасенное впрок здоровье я потратил на жизнь, так же как автомобиль (у нас он в подавляющем случае хобби, а не средство передвижения) - для меня профессиональное орудие (развозу и ^{за} собираю рукописи), так и эта коллекция монет вдруг обернулась вполне профессиональной стороной (когда я ее продал). Так что нет у меня хобби, к моему сожалению. Я жалею, что у меня нет хорошей "ручной" специальности (больше всего, я завидую плотникам), но и тогда бы я хотел владеть ею на профессиональном уровне, чтобы мочь, скажем, построить себе дом или починить машину или шить джинсы.

И наконец, твои "общие" вопросы, на которые ответить в письме невозможно. Я и так удивляюсь самому себе, что мог написать такое пространное письмо. Оно опять объясняется особым состоянием пространства (деревня Голузино-Ньюкасл-на-Тайне...). Ты говоришь, что одна из важнейших тем твоей диссертации касается САМОСОЗНАНИЯ. Не имел ли ты ввиду САМОСОЗНАНИЕ? Это второе O или эти OO в твоём слове имеют существенное значение. Если ты и впрямь имел ввиду самОсознание, то это относится ко мне больше, чем самОсознание. Мне тогда нравится или этот смысл или эта опечатка (описка). Самосознание - это нечто, что уже есть, остановившееся, в лучшем случае результат процесса. Самоосознание - это процесс, это подвижно, это реально (в зенбуддистском смысле). Мне кажется в первых своих ^{книгах} ~~вещах~~, исключая ученический период "Б.шара" и "Т.долгого детства", - в "Дачной местности" и "Аптекарьском острове" - я занимался именно темой самоосознания или отсутствия его; меня занимал вопрос, как интеллигентный вроде бы человек умудряется избежать столкновения с собственным опытом, каким затейливым способом должно выгнаться его самОсознание, чтобы обойти самОсознание. Что-то в этом роде. Что касается отражения собственного опыта, то я полагал, что прямое отражение опыта никогда не вело к художественному эффекту и попросту малоинтересно (прежде всего, самому автору); проза, в моем представлении, только тогда проза, когда сама является для пишущего единственным (или наиболее глубоким и точным) методом познания реальности (в том числе, того же опыта). Или я исследую свой опыт ин-

струментом художественной прозы, то есть все-таки не отраган, или творю опыт, до сих пор мне неведомый (что, пожалуй, лучше всего).

О роли общества в жизни индивидуума, живущего в обществе, и о том, существует ли оно как единица или как объект чувственного восприятия, сказать в двух словах затрудняюсь: слишком уж ты общо задал эти вопросы. Пожалуй, я об этом романы пишу и то не дохожу до ясности. Однако мне кажется, что лишь единица может стать объектом чувственного восприятия, и если ты общество воспринимаешь чувственно, то оно - единица. (Всё потому трудно тебе ответить, что твоя философская терминология англоязычна - буквально ~~каждый~~ ~~каждый~~ ~~каждый~~ ~~каждый~~ ~~каждый~~ подстроичник мысли на родном языке.)

Вечерет. Гонят коров. День прошел. Хватит.

Желаю тебе и твоей молодой семье всего наилучшего.

12.8.78

Андрей Андреев

Appendix 7

(Translation)

Dear Steve!

I was glad to receive news from you and to hear that you have not forgotten me and that so many remarkable things have happened to you. However, almost three months passed before I found time and energy to reply to you. Because things have been happening to me too!

First of all, congratulations on your marriage and I wish you both happiness. Regards to your wife from me and don't forget that she is beautiful, even if you are handsome, and that you love her even if she loves you.

This spring I had a great deal of work in the form of things I had put off for too long. They had been put off because on 21st of September 1977/Our Lady's Day/Olga gave birth to a son, Ivan Bitov. Eventually I straightened things out a little and sent them into exile to the Kostroma province, while I spent July in Bulgaria/Scoundrel!/but now I've exiled myself there where I'm writing to you from. Our village is a little farther away from Australia (550 km from Moscow, but without roads). Read Vasily Belov's story "The Back of Beyond" (Za tremya volokami) to understand that I'm not joking about Australia where, though you haven't ridden there by bicycle, as you did to Holland, nevertheless you could always fly (if you scrape the ticket money together). Having paid tribute to our chauvinistic pride in broad expanses (England is a small country - remember?) I shall try to reply to your questions, although some of them are as broad as my country; that doesn't mean that it's easier for me to answer them.

1. Early years.

My father was an architect, good, but without making a big career (An architect here is more often an engineer in status.) I buried him last year in Shchuvalov cemetery when I was forty (you can take the description from Infant'ev). He was a first-generation intelligent (i.e. in his family). My mother is a lawyer; she comes from the hereditary Petersburg intelligentsia. My origins are precisely those of Michel Sinyagin (a story by Zoshchenko): "he was the son of a noblewoman and a respected citizen". But, as you know, this has meant nothing in the U.S.S.R. for a long time and sounds funny (as in Zoshchenko). My first memories are linked with the war, the blockade: Winter 1941-2 we spent in Leningrad and only in Spring 1942 were we evacuated to the Urals to where my father was building something. So that my memories in infancy were of corpses, hunger and the cold, but I think that I shall not find my sources as a future writer here, and as a person I am unable to justify any of my failings or complexes as a result of a "grim wartime childhood" (it has been too greatly exploited by writers of my generation). I simply understand now that 1941 means "I've been alive a very long time". We returned to Leningrad in the autumn of 1944 and I went into the first form. I can't really say anything special about school: classes were separate (boys and girls), the years were hard (1944-1954), we lived very modestly. I was reading, struggling with the first stirrings of the flesh, without realising it myself. I invented (bicycle, gun-powder) culturism and in those years leading up to school matriculation I satisfied my unbelievable flesh, which I'm dissipating to this day. I was poor in spirit, rich in emotions. Thank God I did not spoil my taste by reading poor literature. I loved the classics; my uncle had a good library (and we all lived together - 3 families, united by the supreme authority of my maternal grandmother. The family was very unusual

in its structure: it is most interesting for my biography, but one would have to write too much about it). The first book that overwhelmed me with delight (when I was about 10, quite late) was "Robinson Crusoe" (unabridged) - then came Turgenev, Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol (and for me, there have never been any better writers than the last three of these). The first book which I read in a "writerly" way (even though I was still not thinking about writing), with a taste for each word, with an acute enjoyment of the style, with a taste not for "what", but for the "way" it was written, was "The Pickwick Papers". I passed the school matriculation exams, uncle let me have his study for preparation - all these were forbidden, stolen and furtive hours of reading, an absolute condition of the "easy life". You see, the first and again the first books were English, but this means still less in terms of "early influences" than a wartime childhood (all the more so because I read them in Russian).

It was much more important to discover, in view of my future literary activity (as yet unknown to me), the existence of "modern" culture, in which I, without analysing it, didn't believe. Literature for me "was", and then "wasn't". In my adolescent years it was difficult to get information. But one revelation was both dazzling and fortuitous: in 1954 they translated the novel "Atomic Station" by Laxness, and in 1956 I saw Fellini's film "La Strada". My new education began with this: I admitted to myself the possibility of creating a culture on the basis of contemporary and personal experience. And insofar as overtaking, catching up and filling in the gaps was impossible (and still is ...) I had to start writing myself (it is a joke but true). First of all I wrote poetry, no worse than others, but poor because I didn't belong to that most exclusive tribe of poets, but in October 1958 I wrote my first story, Babushkina piiala, which then went into my first book, Bol'shoi shar,

(to my pained bewilderment they are still fishing stories out of it for English anthologies). From the moment I took to prose for the second time (the first occasion I consider to be war) I drank of "life" (there is another scintillating slang word - I took a bite of, sniffed, tried, chernyashki (dirty work), which was a useful experience for me.

In short, that's about the 'early' part. Here it is important, and this has occurred to me in this letter, that it was quicker to begin to make culture than to invent it. That, in order to orientate oneself in the sea of what had been missed out, you yourself had to find the right keys to everything so as not to break in, but also so as not to stand waiting outside the doors, closed just for your arrival. I began my prose without suspecting the existence of the fathers of modern-day prose - Joyce, Proust, Kafka, not to mention others, and I only began to have some idea of the state of Soviet prose years later - Zoshchenko, Platonov, Tynyanov etc. I got some idea of Joyce through Sherell Anderson (consequently not through Hemingway and Faulkner), and I cultivated Proust out of Lev Tolstoy, and Kafka out of Gogol and Dostoevsky. I read all this subsequently, but no longer as something new: it was as if I already knew it. I first read the Gospels, so to say, having already written Sad, Infant'ev and Penelopa. Here is the most serious danger for a writer in realising his aims - to go off beam by filling in cultural "gaps", letting the following generation, which then had it "already made", walk over him (as partly happened with Yury Kazakov). But there was no other way for my generation, and in art, fortunately, genuineness (authenticity), originality is valued as a quality, not as a patent.

This has always been the case in Russian literature: it became itself (looking at it from one point of view it pulled out ahead) just as it was

ceasing to realise the extent of its backwardness. To catch up is never possible. To be is task enough. Being home-grown can turn out to be a strength. Writers are all self-made.

I don't cherish any interest towards cultured societies: I am content with life which is befalling me in more than sufficient quantity and with a passion for "moving around". Of all societies I would attach myself only to the "ecological" (I discovered the existence of such a party in Spain), if its programme were not the usual soul-saving chatter, as happens in societies of this sort. I had hobbies only in the above-mentioned "early" years. Besides sport and culturism, in my schooldays I was keen (I find this hard to believe now) on numismatics. But just as my love for literature, and later for the cinema, grew from a hobby to a profession and just as the health stored up for future use I wasted on life, and just as a car (is a hobby in the overwhelming majority of cases for us and not a means of transport) is for me a professional tool (I deliver and collect my manuscripts), so this collection of coins suddenly revealed a completely professional side (when I sold it). So I haven't any hobbies, to my regret. I am sorry that I haven't a good 'manual' skill (I envy carpenters most of all) but then I would like to possess it on a professional level so as to be able, say, to build myself a house or repair a car or sew jeans.

And finally your 'general' questions, which I can't answer in a letter. I am even now amazed at myself that I could write such a "vast" letter. It can be explained again by the special state of the vast space (from the village of Goluzino to Newcastle upon Tyne ...). You say that one of the most important themes of your dissertation concerns "self-realisation"

(sam00soznaniye). Didn't you have "self-consciousness" (sam0soznaniye) in mind? This second '0' or these '00' in your word are of vital significance. If you really did have self-realisation (sam00soznaniye) in mind, then this relates to me more than self-consciousness. In which case I like either this meaning or this misprint (slip of the pen). Self-consciousness is something which already is, which has come to a stop, at best, the result of a process. Self-realisation is a process, it is not static, it is "real" (in the Zen Buddhist sense). I think that in my first books, with the exception of the 'novice' period of Bol'shoi shar and Takoe dolgoe detstvo; in Dachnaya mestnost' and Aptekarsky ostrov, I was dealing precisely with the theme of self-realisation or its absence; the question that occupied me was how a would-be intellectual contrives to avoid collisions with his own experience, by what ingenious means his self-consciousness must bend in order to avoid self-realisation. Something of this sort.

As for a reflection of one's own experience, I suggested that a direct reflection of experience never led to artistic effect and is simply quite uninteresting (first and foremost for the author himself); prose, in my estimation, is prose only when it is itself the sole (or the deepest and most precise) means for the writer to cognize reality (including the same experience). Or I am researching my experience using the tool of artistic prose, i.e. I am nevertheless not reflecting or I am creating experience which is as yet unknown to me (which is perhaps best of all).

Concerning the role of society in the life of the individual living in society, and concerning whether society exists as a unit or as an object of perception, I would have difficulty in telling you in a couple of

words: you have asked these question in terms which are too general. I would say I write novels about this and even then I do not reach a clear answer on this. However, I believe only a unit can become the object of perception and if you perceive society, then it is a unit. (It is even harder to answer you because your philosophical terminology contains Anglicisms; it is a verbatim translation of a thought in your own language).

Night is falling. They are herding the cattle. The day has passed. It's enough..

I wish you and your young family all the very best.

12.8.78.

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N.B. In the following references I have followed the convention of underlining the names of periodicals, newspapers, Soviet publishers and the titles of books. Common abbreviations are used for journals, newspapers, publishing houses and cities in the Soviet Union. Where an article carries no title, brackets are used instead; e.g. "(Review)".

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